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## **Tree Care – One Year Later**

Here we are one year after the 2009 ice storm and we are still working on repairing much of the damage it caused. When we look out at a grove of trees we can see the broken limbs in the outer canopy and in some cases more than half the tree is displaced. We have lost many trees in the southeast that were majestic or that had been a fixture in our communities for decades. One question that is asked is did we do enough in 2009 to prevent further loss?

Many people in the community spent hours helping to trim trees and shrubs last spring. At the time we were focused on safety and removing what was most dangerous to the community. Now is a good time, before the leaves start to grow, to reassess the damage done to plants in your yard? Much as you did last year you will want to check your trees and shrubs for cracks in branches and for limbs that are not attached. Check to see if buds are forming on stems and branches. If the rest of the plant has produced buds and there is a branch that has no buds then this branch is likely dead or dying. If you have a group of the same plants that are budding out but one is not, then the plant without buds is likely dead. Monitor your plants closely and remove dead limbs or branches as you realize their location.

Pruning should be done when the danger of freezing has past. At this point you would be safe to prune. Remember to remove branch stubs when pruning. These stubs will allow rot and decay to move into the center of the tree and weaken it further.

The pruning that was done quickly in 2009 was done for safety reasons and not necessarily for the health of your trees. Assess the overall health of a tree that was severely damaged. If there are suckers and waterspouts then trim those off. If you pruned a tree after the storm in 2009 then do not trim off more than dead material or suckers this year. Your trees are still stressed due to the amount of living tissue that was lost after the storm. Your trees are still recovering and will need as much help from you as they can get so they can recover. Make sure you give them proper nutrition and make sure they are not left without moisture if we have weeks without rain.

As you assess the health of your plants keep in mind that there are many out there that will still die from the damage they received in 2009. Trees will often continue to leaf out for a few years after a natural event such as the ice storm. What may really be happening is a slow decline of the plant each successive year until it uses up any stored energy and finely dies. Keep an eye out for weak or dead limbs and cracks in branches, indications of decline.

If your tree is on the path of decline, and ultimately death, you may also notice more disease issues. As trees become weak, insects will begin to invade and may bring in other bacteria that can further weaken your plants. Dogwoods are one example that you can easily monitor as their size is often small enough for you to notice any disease issue or dead limbs. Watch for holes in the bark that indicate borer activity or spots on leaves indicating fungus. Diseases may not be a definitive answer that the plant is dying but it is undoubtedly an indication of weakness.

*Helpful Publication:* Ron Wolford. How to care for ice damaged trees. [www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/icedamage](http://www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/icedamage). University of Illinois extension. 2009; Dr. Douglas F Welsh. Assessing Ice Damage to Tree. Horticulture Update. Extension Horticulture, Texas Agricultural Extension Service. Texas A & M University System. March 2001.

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