Repairing Ornamental Plants and Trees from Storm Damage

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Summer waves of storms that sweep through the area often leave plants and trees bent and broken; others are just jagged stumps. Much of this is temporary, but some damage is permanent. The water will drain and gullies gouged out by the rain can be filled, but the loss of large branches and whole mature plants and trees will take many years to replace, if ever.

If you experienced damage to plants or trees in your yard, the first thing you probably want to do is to clean up and assess the damage. Give your attention first to safety and address issues where power lines or people may be in danger of downed branches or trees. If power lines are involved, only your utility company should handle those. Serious damage to trees where more than one-third of the tree is lost or very large sections of the bark are torn away will probably result in the death of the tree and it should be removed. In other cases, small broken branches and small areas of torn bark can be do-it-yourself repairs. You simply need to prune the rough edges where branches have been broken, neatly trim the jagged edges of the open bark with a sharp knife to promote uniform healing, and clean-rake the yard of shredded plant material.

Expect to see the tear holes and shreds on leaves still on the trees and shrubs in the months to come. This will not self-repair and in some cases, the tree will continue to shed these damaged leaves as they grow new leaves as replacements. This is normal and woody plants have adapted to these conditions. Smaller plants and shrubs can be pruned to remove the damaged branches and leaves – up to one-third of the plant can be safely removed. Some shrubs can withstand a periodic “rejuvenation” cut following severe damage, but not many and not often.

Broken branches and blown over trees should be removed. If you have large, broken branches, you will want to prune the jagged part of the branch back to an undamaged part to prevent further breakage and promote healing. Wounds with jagged edges are harboring places for insects and disease.

It is important to note that some plants and trees may have an existing fungus or disease. Therefore, it is very important to clean your cutting and pruning tools between plants with a quarter cup of chlorine bleach in a gallon of water as a dip, or wipe thoroughly with a sanitizing cleaning product containing chlorine bleach.

For more information, please contact the local K-State Research and Extension Office. K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.