

Miami-Dade County Environment

Hurricane Preparation

Hurricane season concerns all South Florida residents. Among the many things we should be aware of, there are some things you should know about how hurricanes affect trees. We may not be able to control how strong or when a hurricane or big storm will hit, but there is one thing we can do...be prepared!

The [right tree in the right place \(/environment/tips-right-tree.asp\)](/environment/tips-right-tree.asp) may actually help protect your property from strong winds by acting as a buffer, and with proper maintenance that tree may be able to survive the storm, as strong as ever.

In the instance that your tree is blown over or uprooted during the storm, there are also steps you can take to repair the damage and make sure that tree lives to see another day.

Getting ready before the storm

- Read [Things You Should Know about Trees and Hurricanes](/environment/library/reports/trees-hurricanes.pdf)  (</environment/library/reports/trees-hurricanes.pdf>)

Properly pruning trees before a storm can actually increase the possibility that they will break or fall more easily during the storm. The large amounts of fallen and damaged trees usually seen after a storm are a result of improper cutting or pruning of trees. People think that by doing this they will reduce the risk of destruction, but the fact is when a tree is improperly cut its branches are even more vulnerable to strong winds.

The new branch attachment becomes weak, making the tree more likely to break apart which can damage property. Miami-Dade County, other local organizations and experts recommend that you prepare several months prior to hurricane season by doing the following:

- If you must prune trees, do so during the tree species dormant season or during early Spring.
- Make sure the lawn care worker/tree trimmer is a certified arborist. Ask to see their registration/license and insurance. Get a quote in writing.
- Never "top" or "hatrack" any tree. "Hatracking" is the term used for when a tree is cut or chopped so badly that it is left with few or no leaves on the branches (please see the following pictures of trees that have been hatracked).
- Do not remove more than 25% of the tree canopy (the branches and leaves of the tree).
- Do not cut the tree root system.
- Remove mainly the interior branches. This will thin the canopy of the tree and allow the winds to pass through it more easily.
- Make sure to correctly dispose of all tree cuttings since branches and stumps left out in the open can become projectiles during a storm.
- You can even schedule two [bulky waste pickups \(http://www.miamidade.gov/solidwaste/bulky-waste.asp\)](http://www.miamidade.gov/solidwaste/bulky-waste.asp) from the Department of Public Works and Waste Management. The Department allows the collection of up to 25 cubic yards of trash (1 truck load), twice per fiscal year (October 1 – September 30). Additional pickups may be scheduled for \$21 per cubic yard (\$525 per truck load).
 - Tree limbs must be no more than five feet in length. This service is not available to customers in the City of Sweetwater. For more information, please call Miami-Dade County's Customer Service line at 3-1-1 or the Department of Public Works and Waste Management at 305-468-5900. Be sure to call with enough advance notice to ensure they are able to accommodate your pickup long before a storm arrives.

If residents follow these easy tips, the impact from tree damage during a storm can be reduced. Remember: it is very important for residents not to over-prune trees. This ultimately weakens the new growth and creates a potentially more dangerous condition. It is a violation of Chapter 24 of the Miami-Dade County Code to hatrack or excessively prune trees.

A permit is required prior to removing or relocating trees. Many municipalities have additional regulations. Residents can obtain more information by calling 3-1-1 or the Regulatory and Economic Resources Department at 305-372-6574.

After the storm

- Read [Assessing Damage and Restoring Trees After a Hurricane](/environment/library/reports/trees-damage-assess.pdf)  (</environment/library/reports/trees-damage-assess.pdf>)

A hurricane doesn't have to mean the end of your trees

It seems that people's first reaction to the ravages of a major storm event is to crank up the chainsaws and carve up the fallen trees. In many instances, it is necessary to cut these trees in other cases the trees can be saved.

Since a well-cared-for tree is one of the best ways to protect your home from storm damage, saving as many trees as possible is to your benefit. Here are some simple guidelines for a post-storm tree clearing and salvage:

- First, survey the area for downed power lines. Notify Florida Power & Light at 305-442-8770 as soon as possible and be sure to keep yourself and everyone else at a safe distance from any broken power lines.
- Next, cut any downed trees or branches blocking major roadways in order to help clear a path for emergency vehicles, utility trucks, and other heavy machinery.
- The third priority is to survey your property and remove trees or branches that are blocking access to your home. Only cut trees on your neighbor's property if they ask for your assistance.
- Next cut any leaning or split trees that have HIGH probability of falling and causing additional damage to lives or property.
- Now remove trees that are blocking access to utility poles or boxes. Remember that the wires may be live, so do not attempt to remove trees leaning on power lines.

A partially uprooted tree can be saved by digging out the roots and standing the tree back upright. Big trees may need a come-along or backhoe to pull the tree back up.

If no equipment is available, water the roots of the tree regularly and cover the roots with soil, mulch, or even a tarp. The tree may need to be pruned before standing back up.

If no leafy canopy remains on the tree after standing in place, paint the trunk of the tree with a light-colored latex paint to keep the bark from sunburning (yes, trees can get sunburned too). Support the tree with tie-downs or solid supports until the roots have a chance to grow back.

For more information, contact the Urban Tree Program at 305-372-6574.

Tips for up-righting small fallen trees

Young trees planted within the last few years that have not yet established wide root systems are most susceptible to toppling over in hurricane-force winds. But downed trees aren't necessarily a total loss. Many, particularly those under 16 feet in height, can be re-set after the storm passes, but homeowners should take precautions and know when to call in experts. If a tree in your yard blows over in a hurricane:

- Assess potential danger in approaching a fallen tree, looking for downed wires or limbs in overhead wires. Stay away and report any hazardous conditions.
- Remove only those limbs that are blocking access to your home or vehicle or are posing an immediate danger to people or property.
- Cover and shade the exposed rootball with burlap, old sheets, towels or several layers of newspaper and wet down thoroughly. Do not use plastic. Cover the exposed trunk and branches to prevent sun-scalding. Keep the rootball wet (for up to several weeks) while you take care of more pressing post-storm recovery activities.
- To re-set a tree, dig out a wide area on the rootball side of the tree. Protect the trunk with a cushion of towels or soft material, and pull the tree back upright into the hole. Make sure it is straight and level, sitting no higher or lower than its original grade. Fill in with half the original soil, water thoroughly to remove air pockets, then finish filling in. Water thoroughly. Do not stake the tree unless it cannot stand by itself.
- Cover the entire area under the tree with 4 to 6 inches of organic mulch, like chipped wood, and keep it watered thoroughly for the next 6 months, through the entire winter dry season. Treat it like a newly-transplanted tree, which it is.
- Broken or damaged branches should be removed by making a clean cut just outside the juncture of trunk and the branch. Some branches can be cut out for structural stability or appearance, but the remaining branches should not be shortened or sheared.

Homeowners should be wary of post-storm chainsaw amateurs who offer to top your tree or remove it hastily. If the tree is too heavy to pull up by hand and if you're tempted to hitch it to a car to pull up, it's probably too big to re-set safely by yourself and you should call in a certified arborist.

Qualified arborists can show proof of insurance for workers compensation, comprehensive and liability, and membership in professional organizations such as Florida Arborist Association, the National Arborist Association, the International Society of Arboriculture, or the American Society of Consulting Arborists. For a list of certified arborists, call the Miami-Dade County Cooperative Extension Service at 305-248-3311 ext. 228.

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