

## Storms and Trees

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For the Evansville Courier and Press, 4/14/2017

Over the past couple of weeks, we've had a lot of heavy weather. We had monsoons dump between 5 and 7 inches of rain overnight. A few days later, straight-line winds and potential tornadoes ripped through the tristate. As a result, we saw many damaged and destroyed trees, including a number that were completely uprooted.

The wind stripped large limbs off of trees. Many of these destroyed limbs were the results of regrowth after topping, a very damaging and improper method of "pruning." Topping results in internal wood decay, which weakens the limb and makes it more prone to failure. When caring for your trees, never top them!

What was startling was the number of trees that completely blew over. Startling, but expected. Tree roots help hold a tree upright. They are able to do this because of friction between the roots and the soil particles. In dry conditions, the soil particles act like trillions of tiny hands, holding onto the roots and keeping them (and the rest of the tree) in place. However, when the soil is saturated, it becomes very slick. Friction is reduced, just like a speeding car finds out when the driver jumps on the brakes. When the strong winds hit, there was little to hold the trees up.

After a storm, examine your trees to determine if they can be salvaged. Be sure to stay away from downed trees that are tangled in utility wires! You never know if the wires are live, or if a cable line is touching an energized power line somewhere up the road. Wait until your local power company has sent a crew out to repair the lines before getting close to the tree or beginning repairs.

Broken limbs should be pruned off as soon as possible. Do not climb a tree to remove broken limbs yourself! If a tree company cannot get to you right away, then cordon off the yard where the limb may fall, so that kids, visitors, or vehicles don't get squashed when the limb gives way. Stubs left from breakage should be pruned back to the trunk as soon as the emergency is over. If the stubs are allowed to remain, they become a site for wood decay organisms to enter the tree and begin to cause wood rot.

Trees that begin leaning after a storm can be very dangerous. In many cases, roots on the opposite side of the lean have snapped. If you notice the soil opposite the lean is mounding up, or the soil is cracking on that side, this tree is in the process of falling. Contact a tree company have it removed immediately.

Small trees that are leaning, especially with the mounded soil, also have experienced root damage. Resist the urge to try to straighten the tree up and stake it in place. It will take many years for the tree to regrow the broken roots, and there's no way your staking system can support that tree through the next storm.

For more information on storms and trees, please contact the Purdue Extension Service at 812-435-5287.