

Hurricane Season: Look Up Before the Storm

Experts at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Prediction Center are projecting that the Atlantic hurricane season will be near normal this year, as the calming effects of El Niño continue to develop. But scientists say the season's quiet start does not guarantee quiet times ahead. The season is entering its historical peak period when most storms form.

"While this hurricane season has gotten off to quiet start, it's critical that the American people are prepared in case a hurricane strikes," said Commerce Secretary Gary Locke. With the hurricane season upon us, NOAA recommends those in hurricane-prone regions to begin their preparation plans.

What plans should prudent consumers take with the trees in their landscape?

Hurricanes and violent storms

"It is important that people who live in East and Gulf coastal areas be prepared," says Tchukki Andersen, staff arborist with the Tree Care Industry Association. "Even people in the upper Midwest should heed the warning. Right now, get your trees as ready as they can be to survive a major storm. Don't wait until the storm is headed your way."

One of the greatest dangers to life and property during hurricanes is posed by falling trees and limbs.

"Growing trees will 'catch' more wind and become heavier, so they are prone to increased mechanical stresses, increasing the chances of failure," explains Andersen. "Preparing trees for a natural disaster is a must and should be done well in advance of the storm season. To help ease these dangers, have a professional arborist evaluate your trees. Doing this will help you determine potential weaknesses and dangers."

Look at your trees for the following warning signs:

- Wires in contact with tree branches. Trees may become energized when they are contacted by electric wires.
- Dead or partially attached limbs hung up in the higher branches that could fall and cause damage or injury.
- Cracked stems and branch forks that could cause catastrophic failure of a tree section.
- Hollow or decayed areas on the trunk or main limbs, or mushrooms growing from the bark that indicate a decayed and weakened stem.
- Peeling bark or gapping wounds in the trunk also indicate structural weakness.
- Fallen or uprooted trees putting pressure on other trees beneath them.
- Tight, V-shaped forks, which are much more prone to failure than open U-shaped ones.
- Heaving soil at the tree base is a potential indicator of an unsound root system.

Remember, too, that a tree is a living thing, and its integrity and stability change over time, so don't assume that a tree that has survived 10 severe storms will necessarily survive an eleventh.

Find a professional

A professional arborist can assess your landscape and work with you to determine the safest course of action. Contact the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA), a 71-year-old public and professional resource on trees and arboriculture. It has more than 2,000 member companies who recognize stringent safety and performance standards and who are required to carry liability insurance. TCIA also has the nation's only Accreditation program that helps consumers find tree care companies that have been inspected and accredited based on: adherence to industry standards for quality and safety; maintenance of trained, professional staff; and dedication to ethics and quality in business practices. An easy way to find a tree care service provider in your area is to use the "Locate Your Local TCIA Member Companies" program. You can use this service by calling 1-800-733-2622 or by doing a ZIP code search at www.treecaretips.org.

Editors: If you would like additional information or digital photos, please contact editor@tcia.org.