Trees have an uncanny ability to recover from storm damage. Oftentimes, storms leave trees looking bare and deflated, but these looks can be deceiving.

Can My Tree be Saved?

Ask yourself these questions before you assume your storm-damaged tree can't be saved:

Other than the storm damage, is the tree basically healthy and vigorous?
If the tree is basically healthy, is not creating a hazard and did not suffer major structural damage, it generally will recover if first aid measures are applied immediately after the storm.

Are major limbs broken?
The larger a broken limb is, the harder it will be for the tree to recover from the damage. If a majority of the main branches are gone, the tree may have little chance of surviving.

Has the leader (main upward-trending branch) been lost?
In species where a leader is important to upward growth or desirable appearance, it may be a judgment call. The tree may live without its leader, but at best would be a stunted or deformed version of its former self.

Is at least 50 percent of the tree's crown (branches and leaves) still intact?
This is a good rule of thumb for tree survivability. A tree with less than half its branches remaining may not be able to produce enough foliage to nourish the tree through another season.

How big are the wounds where branches have been broken or bark has been damaged?
The larger the wound is in relation to the size of the limb, the less likely it is to heal, leaving the tree vulnerable to disease and pests. However, a two- to three-inch wound on a 12-inch diameter limb will seal over with new bark within a couple of years.

Are there remaining branches that can form a new branch structure?
The remaining limbs will grow more vigorously as the tree tries to replace its missing foliage. Look to see if branches are in places that can eventually fill out the tree's appearance.

Is the tree of a desirable species for its location?
If the tree is in the wrong location (such as a potentially tall tree beneath a power line) or an undesirable species for the property (messy fruit, etc.), then it may be best to remove it now.

What if my tree has significant bark loss?
Bark loss should be addressed immediately. Immediately wrap with roofing felt or burlap to keep moist. See http://bit.ly/2wIdSVP. This may require a professional arborist to address the needs of the tree.

Is there a significant lean or root plate lifting?
Greater than 30° lean or lifted roots increase the risk of failure; it may be best to remove it now.

What Next?

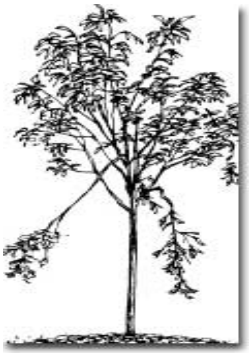
Now that you've assessed your tree, what category does it fall into? In general, the answer as to what to do about a particular tree will fall into one of three categories:
1 - Is it a keeper?
2 - Should you wait and see if it will recover?
3 - Or is it already time to say goodbye?

1- It's a Keeper

If damage is relatively slight, you can prune broken branches, repair torn bark or rough edges around the wounds and let the tree begin to repair itself.

An Easy Call:
A mature shade tree can usually survive the loss of one major limb. The broken branch should be pruned back to the trunk. In the months to follow, large wounds should be closely monitored for signs of decay.

Minor Damage:
Although the tree has been damaged, enough strong limbs may remain on a basically healthy tree to make saving it possible.



Too Young to Die:
Young trees (less than 4”} can sustain quite a bit of damage and still recover quickly. If the leader is intact and the structure for future branching remains, remove the broken branches and let the tree close over the wounds and recover itself. However, during a hot, dry summer, an uprooted tree can die within just a day or two. If the uprooted tree is deciduous and had shed its leaves, it can last longer. But if the uprooted tree didn't suffer severe damage, had less than 30% exposed roots, is small enough to replant correctly, and receives adequate water, it has a good chance of surviving.

2- Wait and See

If a valuable tree appears to be a borderline case, resist the temptation to rush through the process and just cut the tree down. Remember, time is on your side. Carefully prune broken branches and then give the tree some time to recover. A final decision can be made later with the expert advice from an arborist.

Easy Does It:
Resist the temptation to prune too heavily. Remember that the tree will need all the foliage it can produce in order to make it through the next growing season. Remove only the damaged limbs, wait and see what happens.

Hold Off:
A healthy mature tree can recover even when several major limbs are damaged. With large trees, a professional arborist should be brought in to assess damage in a borderline situation, and to safely accomplish needed pruning and branch removal.

3 - Say Goodbye

Some trees simply can't be saved or they're not worth saving. If the tree already has been weakened by disease, if the trunk is split or more than 50 percent of its leaves are gone, then the tree likely won't make it.

Tree Tragedy:
This otherwise healthy young tree has lost too much of its crown—the leafy head that is vital for survival. Only a few branches are remaining. It will probably not be able to grow enough new branches and leaves to provide needed nourishment and will never be able to regain its former beautiful shape.

Hopeless Case:
About all that's left of this tree is its trunk. The few remaining branches can't provide enough foliage to enable the tree to make it through another growing season.

Farewell to a Friend:
A rotten inner core in the trunk or a structural weakness in branching patterns can cause a split trunk—the tree equivalent of a heart attack. The wounds are too large to ever mend, and the tree has lost its sap lifeline between roots and leaves. This tree is all but dead.

Some of your trees may have damage that's too close to call. Or you may have hidden damage. In these cases, a tree professional may be needed to help you decide what to do. Don't hire just anyone who shows up at your door after a storm; look for ISA Certified Arborists. A listing of certified arborists can be found at ***https://www.treesaregood.org/***. Additional information on conserving and managing Texas' trees and forests can be found at Texas A&M Forest Service ***https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/***.

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