

Caring for Hurricane Damaged Plants



Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Though the Tallahassee area has been relatively fortunate through the recent hurricanes, we still have sustained some plant damage.

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September 19, 2004

Hurricane damaged plants should be cared for as soon as possible. Small trees and shrubs, particularly those uprooted or damaged, should be securely staked in their original positions. In some cases, root systems are exposed and it is very important that they be protected from drying out. Place soil, moist burlap sacks or moist sphagnum moss on the exposed roots until plants can be reset at ground level.

Even trees and shrubs that remain upright following a hurricane have been tossed back and forth, creating a hollowing of the soil around their major support roots. Where this has occurred, add soil and water to eliminate air pockets around roots.

Broken branches should be sawed or pruned from trees and shrubs. Always make clean, even cuts and remove only those that are damaged. Cut branches back to major limbs or the main trunk, cutting just outside of the branch collar.

Clear the lawn by removing fallen leaves, silt, mud and other debris. If left on for too long the grass can be smothered or made more susceptible to disease. Grasses and other plants that have been under water should resume growth once the water is drained away.

All plants that have been exposed to salt water should be irrigated with fresh water as soon as possible. Apply more water, and water more frequently than under normal conditions. Do not wait until symptoms of salt damage appear before beginning this procedure.

Plants that have been damaged will need careful attention through the spring. During periods of drought, damaged plants will need mulching and extra water.

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There is plenty of other information for those who have experienced hurricane damage. The University of Florida 's Disaster Handbook is available online at <http://disaster.ifas.ufl.edu> This is a comprehensive document that provides detailed information on all aspects of hurricane preparedness and recovery.

As residents begin to recover from the hurricane, injuries from chain saws and misuse of other equipment are common. In fact, three deaths occurred during Hurricane Charley, due to carbon monoxide poisoning when generators were operated indoors. To learn about avoiding accidents go to the University of Florida 's Agricultural Safety Web site at www.flagsafe.ufl.edu

More plant related information can be obtained by contacting your local Extension office or landscape maintenance professional. For specific pruning recommendations go to <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/MG/MG08700.pdf> This document is entitled "Pruning Landscape Trees and Shrubs." For more local gardening information, go to your local Extension website at <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>

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