

Preparing Trees for the 2009 Hurricane Season

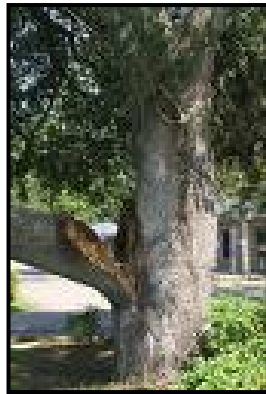
THERE ARE A NUMBER OF STEPS YOU CAN TAKE NOW TO REDUCE THE IMPACT ON TREES AND LANDSCAPES THIS HURRICANE SEASON.



Tree Trunk Branch Structure

- Topping a tree is dangerous and should never be done. Topping or “hat-racking” is the term used to describe over-pruning a tree by cutting it so badly that it is left with few or no leaves on the branches. When topped, the wood inside the cut branch begins to decay which leads to internal rot and a dangerous situation. The sprouts which grow in response to topping are not well secured to the topped branch and they can easily split as they grow larger. To avoid this, always prune a branch back to a living branch crotch.

- A tree with multiple trunks becomes hazardous to people and property as the tree grows larger. Never allow trees to grow with multiple upright leaders. A branch growing in an upright manner parallel to the trunk becomes a second trunk. These trees may look handsome when young but can split during a storm or with age. In trees with a single trunk, be sure the main branches form an angle with the trunk of 40 degrees or more.



- Tree roots should not be damaged. Root pruning and digging around tree roots makes the tree more likely to fall during a storm. Also, root injuries increase the occurrence of plant disease. When planting, the top of the root system should be a little higher than the surrounding soil level.
- Buy good quality trees and trees that are adapted to central Florida. Buy “Florida Fancy” or “Grade #1” trees whenever possible. These trees have one trunk and need little additional training to form a good quality tree. Pasco County is in USDA Zone 9. Buy trees that thrive in this zone.

- The best time to train trees is when they are young. Not only are the branches easier to reach, but the resulting wound will be much smaller and “heal” more quickly.
- Choose trees that suit the site. Know the mature height and width of the tree. Large trees need a large rooting zone. Tree roots extend several times the diameter of the canopy. If the planting area is small, choose a tree species that naturally stays small. Avoid planting trees near septic systems, pools, sidewalks, driveways, utility lines, and buildings. Tree trunks and roots expand in girth as they age.

Pruning

- Never cut a branch completely flush with the trunk. Always cut just outside of the branch collar which is located at the base of every branch. This collar is sometimes seen as a swelling where the branch meets the trunk. When pruning in this manner it may appear as though a small stub is left on the trunk. However, properly done, this technique removes the branch but does not injure the trunk.
- Avoid removing branches that are more than two inches in diameter unless they are obstructing traffic, pedestrians or are hazardous. The larger the pruning wound, the slower it will callus over (plants don’t heal—they seal). An open wound is an avenue for disease and insect infestation.
- Wound dressings and pruning paints do not prevent wood rot. Since they provide no benefit to the tree—save your money.

Palms

- Don’t “hurricane prune” palms. Palms are well-suited to weather wind storms. Removing fronds can be detrimental to the palm. Even dying leaves benefit the palm nutritionally and should not be removed until completely brown. Remove only large palm seeds before hurricane season.

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