

Well, wasn't that quite the November we had? Here are a few winter plant care tips.

If any trees on your property snapped off in the snow cleanly cut off the damaged area of the tree. If it's a side shoot or branch make sure you cut on the outside of the branch collar. The collar is an area of packed cells right next to the trunk of the tree. Usually you can run your hand around this area and feel that it's a bit thicker than the branch. Cut on the outside (not tree side) of this area. The bundle of cells found in the thicker section will begin making bark to close over the wound left from the cutting.

If your tree broke off near the top or any section of the main trunk you'll want to use a pruning saw (on smaller trees) or a chain saw and cut off the damaged section. Cut on a diagonal so water will run off and not pool there causing rot down through the tree. When trees snap off at the top, the new growth will be in multiples. Eventually you'll need to remove some of these multiple tops, but for a while you'll watch to see how the new growth looks before deciding which section to remove in the future.

Small trees uprooted during the wettest part of the storm can sometimes be dug back into the ground, staked for about six months for support and will continue to grow. Small trees with broken tops or branches still attached to the tree can sometimes be repaired. If you have any questions about your trees call the Extension Office at 360-337-7157 and we'll provide a list of certified arborists who will come inspect your tree, offering advice.

Mature hydrangeas took a big hit in November. Usually the papery dead flowers add winter interest, but now they're an unflattering dark brown. Hydrangea stems and branches are all droopy. Do not cut down all the stems, unless you want your hydrangea to be bloomless this summer. Give yourself permission to cut off the flower heads, and only the flower heads (not the whole stems). If any stems are broken you could trim them off at the spot where they've broken off, but leave the rest of the stems on the plant for winter protection. You'll prune in early spring.

This same advice applies to all your other plants. Sometimes a plant looks completely crisped and quite pathetically dead. Be patient, in spring and summer it may resurrect and become a lively healthy plant again. New growth often occurs from the base of plants so don't remove dead plants quite yet. Sadly some plants really have passed away during this not so friendly weather, but wait until spring or summer to be sure. Leaving the damaged parts intact actually offers winter protection from future winter damage.

If you have outside plants in containers continue watering them, especially those under the eaves of houses or in a dry area. (Disconnect your garden hose from the faucet each time though.) It's a good idea to group containerized plants together in one place. Place this grouping in a sheltered area where they still receive plenty of light but are away from wind and too much chill. Dried tree leaves, placed on the soil of containerized plants add protection. Fir twigs and small branches (with foliage intact) placed lightly over plants give protection too.