

Friday's Feature

By

Theresa Friday

March 24, 2009

Prepare the landscape for hurricane season

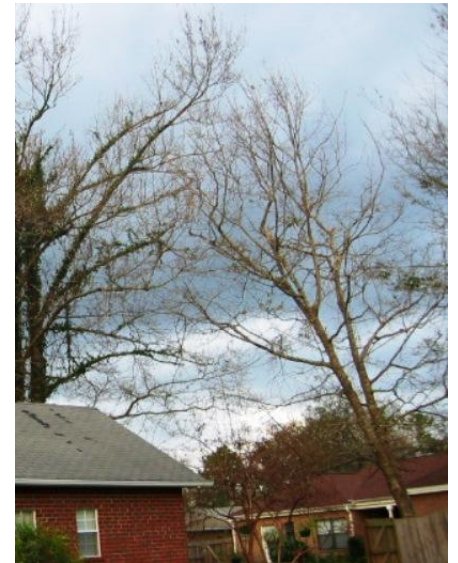
Florida's hurricane season begins June 1, so now is the time to survey your landscape and identify potential hazards.

It is extremely important to check your trees early. Determine now if they need to be trimmed or taken out.

Consider removing trees with trunks that show significant decay and threaten a home or other important structure. Trees that are leaning significantly also should be evaluated for possible removal.

Remember that large trees can impact more than just your property, so you should consider how your trees might affect neighboring properties as well as your own.

Be sure to look for branches that hang over the house near the roof. Although the branches may not be touching the roof under normal conditions, the high winds of violent storms or hurricanes can cause trees to bend and branches to flail around considerably. Since that could cause extensive damage to the roof, such branches generally should be removed.



It's best to have this kind of work done by a professional – a licensed arborist – who has the training and tools to do it right. You may be able to do some smaller jobs yourself, but taking out big trees or trimming larger branches probably should be left to the professionals.

For more information on how to manage your trees to make them more wind resistant, contact your local Extension Service or visit <http://treesandhurricanes.ifas.ufl.edu/managing.html>.

While those are some of the things to do well before a storm, you also need to take action in your lawn and landscape if a storm is approaching. Add the following items to your hurricane preparation plan.

- Secure loose objects in the landscape. Look around your grounds for container plants, hanging

baskets, tools, lawn furniture (including porch swings), toys, bicycles, bird feeders, wind chimes, barbecue grills, playhouses and doghouses.

- Pesticides and motor fuels should be stored in areas that are secure and higher than potential flood waters. These products can be hazardous if flood waters spread them through your home or garage.
- If you have a vegetable garden, harvest all vegetables that you can before a storm hits to get them out of harm's way. There will likely be little left if high winds occur. Produce covered by flood water will have to be discarded.
- Aquatic gardens also need some attention if a storm is approaching. Aquatic plants in pots are often set on bricks, cinder blocks and other supports to boost them to the proper level in the pond. These potted plants should all be set on the bottom of the pond until the hurricane passes. You also may want to consider bringing valuable fish, such as expensive koi, inside in a large bucket of water dipped from the pond to protect them.
- Fountains should be turned off and secured, and electrical cords should be unplugged, rolled up and secured.
- If preparing to evacuate and time permits, be sure to water your indoor plants before you leave.

Keep in mind you won't have time to focus on your landscape once a hurricane warning is announced, and you certainly won't have time for it if evacuations are called for, so prepare your landscape now for the hurricane season.

Theresa Friday is the Environmental Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

For additional information on County Extension Services and other articles of interest go to <http://santarosa.ifas.ufl.edu>.

###