Anchor, Save Bent Trees

Ice storms can leave trees bent, broken and toppled. But that doesn't always mean they're lost, say University of Georgia Cooperative Extension experts.

If an uprooted tree is small enough to lift back in place, do so before the root ball dries out. Trim broken roots and excavate the hole under the root ball before you begin tugging. As the tree becomes vertical the root ball needs to settle back into its former home without obstacles.

Then use strong rope, or wire tied to sturdy stakes, to hold the tree in place until the roots get anchored again. (If you use wire, pad it thickly where it touches the trunk.)

The old trick of using a short piece of water hose to pad the wire is better than nothing. But UGA experts say wide nylon strapping is much less likely to harm the tree's trunk.

The roots under the root ball, although you can't see them, may have snapped when they were bent at such an acute angle. For this reason, plan to water your uprighted tree as if it were newly planted. Pay special attention to its needs in July and August.

If the tree is too large to upright, cut it up and use it for firewood.

If the damaged tree is an evergreen, such as magnolia or holly, it may wilt due to root loss. UGA horticulturists say wait several days to see if wilting occurs. If it does, prune back the canopy by one third to compensate for the loss of roots.

If your trees suffered broken branches, they need first aid fast. Clean up wounds on trees and shrubs left from broken branches by making a smooth cut back to the main trunk or main branch. UGA experts say it's not necessary to use a pruning paint on the wounds.

Fortunately, ice does little damage to leaves.

Source: Gary Wade, University of Georgia College of Agricultural & Environmental Sciences Cooperative Extension