



Repairing Ice or Snow Damaged Trees

Once the snow and ice melt away, it's time to check the damage in your home landscape.

Most ice damage occurs when winds rise before ice melts. Sometimes, however, the ice accumulation is heavy enough to break tree branches.

To prevent ice damage to trees or shrubs, try to remove ice before winds cause major damage. Do not try to break ice off branches. Connect a garden hose to the hot water faucet to melt the ice. Be careful, however, not to scald or burn the plant with excess hot water.

If branches have been badly damaged, remove or repair them as suggested below.

Heavy accumulations of wet snow can also cause damage to trees and shrubs. Evergreens and weak-wooded trees are more susceptible to snow damage than deciduous and hardwood trees.

Snow damage is also more common to shrubs than to trees, since snow depth often equals or exceeds shrub height. Evergreen shrubs are more easily damaged than deciduous shrubs because there is more foliage surface for snow accumulation.

To remove heavy snow accumulation, tap the branches lightly with a broom soon after the snow falls, or as it accumulates. If snow has melted and refrozen, do not use this procedure, since you could break the branches. To remove frozen snow, spray the shrubs with a hose connected to the hot water faucet, using caution against plant burn.

Shrubs may also be damaged when snow from walks or drives is piled onto them, or when salt is used for snow removal along drives, walks and streets. With a hose, wash off shrubs that have been splashed with salt from streets.

Often, snow damage to evergreens is not apparent until the following spring, since a broken branch will retain its green color until warm weather. Many owners wrongly blame this damage on insects, disease or other problems.

Before removing broken branches from a tree, first determine whether the tree can be repaired, or if it should be removed completely. If the main trunk is completely broken or if the tree is uprooted, it should be removed.

Most broken branches can be either repaired or pruned. Some branches broken at a crotch can be lifted into place, then bolted and cabled. This should be done immediately after the damage. If the exposed parts dry out or are left until spring, the wound probably will not heal.

To remove broken branches, first cut the broken branch back to the nearest branch or to the tree trunk. Remove large branches with three cuts. This will prevent splintering and peeling of the bark on the main trunk. Make the first cut upward from the bottom of the branch about 12 inches from the next branch. Cut about halfway through the branch, or until the saw begins to pitch. Make the second cut five or six inches further out, and continue cutting until the branch falls. With a third cut, remove the stub cleanly without peeling.