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RICHARD MICHAEL PRUITT/Staff Photographer

A close inspection of trees in your landscape, looking for signs of weakness and trouble spots before severe storms take their toll, can prevent extensive and expensive damage from high winds.

CHORES

Tackle tree problems before storms hit

By **RICK ROSEN**
Staff Writer
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Drive around after a particularly vicious spring storm, and you'll likely see tree limbs lying on the ground. You may even see entire trees that high wind has uprooted.

It's too late when a storm hits to protect your tree. But there are clues to look for beforehand that could tell you whether your tree has an Achilles limb.

Certified arborist Harold Spiegel of Preservation Tree Service says a dense canopy of leaves and branches can create a "wind sail effect." The "sail" catches the wind, putting pressure on limbs and making breakage more likely. A clue: If no grass grows under your tree, your canopy might be too dense. Pruning, done correctly, can alleviate the problem.

Steve Houser of Arborological Services, also a certified arborist, says some trees have a weak branching habit. Branches grow out from the trunk close together, usually at about 5 feet to 6 feet high. As they grow, the limbs push on one another and can cause cracks. Both arborists cited Bradford pears as examples of trees prone to weak structure. Mr. Spiegel adds American elms, silver maples, mulberries and other softwood trees to the list.

Tree forks also can indicate whether your tree has a problem. U-shaped forks are inherently stronger than V-shaped ones, Mr. Houser notes. Arborists can use cables to try to strengthen limbs with weak forks. The cables make limbs move as one unit in high wind, minimizing the chance of breakage.

Fungus and rot

Another potential problem: fungus, including mushrooms, growing on the trunk or base of the tree. This indicates the roots are rotting, which means the tree is more likely to topple over.

Mr. Spiegel says hackberry trees can get a charcoal-like fungus on their base.

A fungus called ganoderma is common in red oaks, cedar elm, pecan, live oak, pears

and photinia. Mr. Houser says ganoderma gets into the root system where roots have been cut and invades the vascular system.

Roots also can rot when the root flare, the juncture where the vertical trunk fans out, is covered with soil, mulch or ground cover. Arborists can expose the root flare to take care of this problem.

Watch for signs that wood is deteriorating. "Weeping," such as sap coming down the trunk, or major cavities in the trunks are indicators.

Preventive pruning

To prevent a long, heavy limb from breaking off, Mr. Houser says reducing weight on the ends is vital. Limbs of fruit and nut trees, such as pecans and live oaks, are particularly at risk because of the weight of crop.

Proper pruning reduces the chance of breakage. Homeowners can generally trim small broken limbs. But for larger limbs, arborists usually are called in. Not only do they cut off the broken limb, their goal also is to get the tree limbs in balance. An unbalanced tree is prone to further breakage problems.

Mr. Houser adds that reducing a dense canopy is important, but be sure not to open up the interior of the tree too much. It's a common misperception that you should strip off lateral growth along long limbs; doing so can leave too much weight on the tips of trees.

During a tour of Fair Park, Mr. Spiegel points out an old live oak whose limbs are stretching for sunlight. Its growth on limbs close to the trunk died out because of the heavy shade cast by other trees. An arborist would likely cut off part of the end of the limb to reduce the chance of breaking, as well as thin out the canopy.

Though broken limbs are the primary casualty from storms, hail also can damage trees, creating holes for insects to enter.

Unfortunately, there is not much you can do to safeguard your tree from hail. But putting your tree in balance can save it from other hazards.

Trumpet vine must be dug out

How can I remove the roots of a trumpet vine? It has taken over a lot of my garden, and I don't know how to get it out without ruining other plants and shrubs.

E.B., Dallas

There is only one solution: Dig it out. Neither organic sprays nor chemicals will kill the trumpet vine without hurting other plants.

I hung cards containing trichogramma wasp eggs on my pecan tree, but within hours ants were eating the eggs. How can I keep the ants away?

K.H., Dallas

Apply petroleum jelly to the pin or nail holding the card to prevent the ants from crawling across it to the eggs.

A successful release of trichogramma wasps requires fire ants to be controlled first. Use orange oil drenches, beneficial nematodes, dry molasses or products containing spinosad. (See Resources to obtain instructions.)

Every year, I do large plantings of impatiens. They're great early in the season, but they get spindly, lose their leaves and flower less profusely as the weeks go by. I fertilize them regularly. How can I keep impatiens looking great all season?

N.G., Dallas

The most significant thing you can do to improve the performance of annuals is to prepare the planting beds with organic amendments (compost, lava sand, horticultural cornmeal, greensand, dry molasses and expanded shale) and an organic fertilizer that contains mycorrhizal fungi. These beneficial microbes cause plants to produce larger root systems. When roots are covered in mycorrhizal fungi, they are more efficient at pulling in water and nutrients, which helps the plants last longer.

I'd like to get rid of leftover lawn and garden chemicals. It seems illogical to give them to someone else to use, and disposing of them in the trash or sewer is wrong. What should I do?

Y.S., Plano

Most cities have a service that helps residents dispose of unwanted household and garden chemicals. Some

ORGANIC ANSWERS



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cities have year-round programs, and others schedule occasional collection days. Contact Plano's Environmental Waste Services at 972-769-4150 for specific instructions.

I convinced a friend who raises horses near Burleson to go organic. However, clover with yellow flowers is taking over part of his 7-acre pasture, and he would like to kill it before it goes to seed. He has sprayed it with 20 percent vinegar, but it seems to regrow in the same spot. It is OK for the horses to eat a little of the clover, but too much of it can cause colic. Any suggestions?

M.M., Arlington

Aerating the soil and adding lots of dry molasses and compost will stimulate

the growth of other grasses and forbs, which will crowd out the clover. Crabgrass Killer by MegaGro (www.megagro.com) is an effective commercial organic product.

I have noticed that some orange oil is lighter in color than others. Does this have to do with the strength of the orange oil, or do manufacturers add color to make it appear more orange?

M.M., Fort Worth

Color is added to orange oil and d-limonene. The natural color is clear to light yellow. The color tends to vary from batch to batch of orange oil, so most companies add color to make it orange.

Resources

ONLINE: www.dirtdoctor.com for free organic-program handouts

RADIO: KSKY-AM (660), Saturday 11 a.m.-noon and Sunday 8-11 a.m. www.ksky.com.

MAIL: P.O. Box 140650, Dallas, TX 75214

GARDENING FOOL



MARIANA GREENE
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The Gardening Fool column will return next week.

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