



South Dakota  
Department of Agriculture  
**Division of Resource Conservation & Forestry**

## First Aid for Storm-Damaged Trees

by  
Rick Mayko, Community Forester

South Dakota landscapes are subject to a wide array of weather extremes. Those extremes include severe storms that can occur any time of the year. For example, Sioux Falls experienced an ice storm and snowstorm in April 2013 that caused considerable damage and loss of all species and sizes of trees. In June, the Watertown/Clear Lake/Lake Norden areas suffered tree damage due to straight line winds associated with severe thunderstorms. In prior years, communities such as Flandreau, Parker, Parkston, and Webster have experienced severe storms that have caused various levels of tree damage.



In this two part series, we will look at what you can do when a storm ravages your tree, your town, your community any time of year. In Part 1, we will take a look at assessing the damage and what decisions you need to take about your trees. In Part 2, we will show you how to apply the “first aid.”



### Let us look at what you should do after the storm:

- Look around and assess the damage.
- Approach damaged trees with extreme caution!
- Stay far away from downed power, telephone, or cable lines and call 911 or the local utility company. Fence lines can be charged too!
- Hanging branches still attached to a tree or limbs on a home or a car requires special professional care. **Do not remove them yourself!**



### What questions should you ask yourself when assessing tree damage:

- Is the tree healthy and vigorous?
- If limbs are broken, how small or big are they?
- Is the leader damaged /broken or totally missing?
- Does the tree have at least 50% or more of its crown left?
- Are the branch wounds large or small?
- Can the remaining branches serve as new structure for the tree?
- Is the tree a desired species for its location?



Once you have answered these questions, you now have to make a decision as to what to do with the tree. **Do you:**

- Keep It?
- Wait and See.
- Say Goodbye!

Let's look at what you need to know in order to put the tree into one of those three categories.



**If you are keeping it**, then the damage is slight with small branches broken and minor torn bark. Prune and repair the branches and help start the healing process. Young trees are more resilient than older trees when it comes to damage. Be sure the tree's structure is still good with an intact leader. Older trees are ok with one damaged limb as long as it is removed at the trunk. Monitor the tree for any insect or disease problems.



(Illustrations of trees with low level of damage to its canopy)



**If you are waiting and seeing**, then you believe its borderline tree and not in a hurry to remove it. Prune carefully the broken branches and give the tree time to recover. Do not prune too much. An arborist may be needed to access the damage and prune the tree. Do not do it alone. Some damage may be hidden or too close to call so contact an arborist.



(Illustrations of trees with a medium level of damage to its canopy)



**If you are saying goodbye**, then the tree is not savable or is not worth saving. Disease, a split trunk, 50% or more of the crown gone are just some of the reasons for removing a tree. Trees need leaves to make food for them and if they are gone, the tree cannot function very well and it will decline and then die. A split tree will reveal its inner core and it may be decayed or weak. Its water and nutrient systems are damaged. The tree will not survive.



(Illustrations of trees with a high level or damage to its canopy)

## **You Decide...Keep It/Wait and See/Say Goodbye**





Portions of text and illustrations used with permission by the Arbor Day Foundation, Nebraska City, NE-Copy write 2010