

## Assessing and Dealing with Snow Storm Damage on Trees

By Kirsten Ann Conrad, Extension Agent. ANR

There has been astounding damage to trees and shrubs in this week's snowfall. Trees and shrubs broken under the weight of snow and ice will need to have damaged wood carefully removed. Expect to see damage on broad leaved and coniferous evergreens like magnolia, pine, cypress, hemlock, cedar, camellia, rhododendron and others. Herbaceous plants under the snow will be fine as will most of our trees, but homeowners are advised to remove as much snow as possible from the limbs of trees and shrubs that are holding this snow. Carefully remove snow from branches until limb can be gently lifted and shaken. Do not attempt to pull branches out from under heavy accumulations of snow.

Broken branches should be pruned away to remove jagged, torn limbs as soon as the snow has melted and damage can be assessed. Where branches have broken close to a trunk, use thinning cuts to remove broken limbs back to the branch collar at the trunk. In situations where only the branch ends have broken, limbs can be cut back to a side branch that is no smaller than 1/3 of the diameter of the broken limb. The side branch will become the new leader. 'Holes' that are opened in the canopy will spur new growth in response to increased light exposure and in some cases, will 'fill' with new growth within a couple of years.

Where branches have ripped away bark from the trunk of the trees, you may be able to make a clean cut of the torn bark and broken branch and see if the cambium layer will produce new growth to cover the wound, but in severe cases, a new cut of the branch or trunk will be needed below the level of the damaged bark. Home landscape gardeners should exercise caution when pruning away damaged trees and exercise extreme care when removing branches that may be hung up or still attached in the tree. Use of power equipment such as chain saws by non-professionals should only be attempted while standing on the ground.

Virginia Tech's guides to pruning deciduous and evergreen woody shrubs and trees can be found here along with pruning calendars that provide optimal times for pruning specific plants. [https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/tags.resource.html/pubs\\_ext\\_vt\\_edu:trees-shrubs-groundcovers](https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/tags.resource.html/pubs_ext_vt_edu:trees-shrubs-groundcovers). In all cases, no treatment of any kind is needed for helping trees recover from broken branches other than the making of clean cuts with sharp tools.

Concerns about safety and stability of large trees should be directed at an International Society of Arboriculture ([www.mac-isa.org](http://www.mac-isa.org)) certified arborist. Their list of certified arborists can be found at the Find and Arborist feature on : [www.goodtreecare.com](http://www.goodtreecare.com) and at [www.treesaregood.org](http://www.treesaregood.org)

Virginia Cooperative Extension will offer pruning classes at the end of February and throughout the spring as well as advice about tree selection and disease. Pre-recorded classes on pruning and other subjects are available at the Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia website ([www.mgnv.org](http://www.mgnv.org)). Questions about pruning and other plant care can be addressed to our Extension Master Gardener Help Desk via email to [mgarlalex@gmail.com](mailto:mgarlalex@gmail.com) or by phone at 703 228 6414

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Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia: [www.mgnv.org](http://www.mgnv.org)

Arlington Regional Master Naturalists: [www.armn.org](http://www.armn.org)

Soil Test Kits are available in the Teaching Garden at the rear of the Fairlington Community Center and at Greenstreet Garden Center at Quaker Lane./Braddock St. as well as other locations listed at MGNV.org