

# Tree damage from ice storms will take months to repair

By JAMES E. GUYETTE

The ice from this past winter's ice storms in the Northeast and New England is gone, and left in its wake a strong demand for arborists and for landscape companies experienced in tree work. Experts, however, are advising tree and landscape workers to not to take a slash-and-burn approach.

"Many trees may look like a total loss; however, many are only slightly damaged and can recover," says Chuck Gadzik, Maine Forest Service Director.

"For many of the trees that are damaged, simple pruning, if done correctly, is all that is required to bring them back around to health," says Sven Svenson, a nursery crops researcher at Oregon State University's North Willamette Research and Extension Center. "In many cases, severely damaged trees have already been removed and homeowners are looking at replacements."

Dr. Alex Shigo, a New Hampshire-based tree scientist, urges landscape managers to resist customers' urges to have trees cut down, when, in fact, they may be healthy or capable of complete recovery.

"The very people who moved here for the trees get excited and they may over-cut," Shigo notes, pointing out

that for rural residents a downed powerline usually means that the pump on the well won't work. "It's amazing how people adjust their thinking about trees when they can't flush for a second day."

"Property owners should not be in too much of a hurry to remove all damaged trees because many of them can be restored," according to Robert A. Bartlett Jr., president of Bartlett Tree Experts.

"This is usually much less expensive than removal and replacement—if you can get suitable replacements due to the huge demand that will be placed on local nurseries. Avoid going far afield for replacement trees and shrubs because many will not survive the rigors of a northern winter, with or without severe storms. Native stock has a much better chance than exotics from somewhere else."

Bartlett believes that clients need to realize that salvageable plants already on site can save many years of waiting for a replacement to reach the size and beauty of the original, as well as saving on the purchase price of the replacement.

Many species, such as oak,

red maple, ash and sycamore, usually respond well to corrective pruning and other procedures used to restore them. However, for all tree species, the age, health, growing conditions, and the final appearance must be considered when determining the

tation, especially in areas already under economic stress.

In regions where people have the funds to hire professional tree care, work may be available for skilled arborists. The important word here is skilled, says Lidie. This type of endeavor requires a thor-



suitability of a tree for corrective pruning and care.

"It is important to remember that damaged trees and shrubs are under stress and will attract harmful pests and disease organisms," according to Bartlett.

In New England, "For the next seven to ten years they'll still be doing some corrective pruning," predicts Steve Lidie, owner of the Arbour Barber Co. of Shortsville, N.Y. During the winter he went north to assist aid efforts and found much devas-

**Experts are advising tree and landscape workers to avoid a 'slash-and-burn' approach to correct ice damage to trees.**

ough knowledge of tree biology. In some storm-ravaged neighborhoods everybody is a tree expert, and for the most part "they're out of their league—most of them don't know what they're doing to the tree."

"People have planted things that may be colorful, cheap, and fast growing, but they have no strength," says Bob

Obermire, supervisor of the Oregon Department of Agriculture's Nursery and Christmas Tree Program. "The branches are often brittle and they hold their leaves late into the winter. The leaves then get icy and that causes problems. If you have one of these types of trees near a power line, you can kiss your power good-bye during an ice storm."

Certain species of trees do hold up better to winter's fury than others. However, every individual tree is different, says Svenson, who adds that if the tree was planted in a poor location, was unhealthy, has not been properly pruned, or was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, it could end up being severely damaged during an ice storm.

"Even the most storm resistant plant will succumb if it is in a particularly bad location," says Svenson. "It may make it through the worst storm one year, but another storm another year that isn't quite as bad could completely wipe

out the tree just because of the wind direction and other weather related things."

In general, Svenson says conifers are more resistant to ice storm damage than deciduous hardwood trees. But even with the conifers, there are differences.

"Firs and spruces are generally less damaged than pine trees would be," he says.

"When you move into deciduous trees, oaks, black walnuts, hickories—those trees that have harder wood and broadly spread branching habits rather than very narrow branching—will be more resistant to both wind and ice damage."

It is logical that the harder the wood, the better it holds up. As a rule, fast growing trees, like poplars, silver maple or willow, have weak, brittle wood that is easily damaged in storms.

"If you think through the process, you want a tree growing as healthy as it can but not too fast," says Svenson. Svenson lists most oaks,

hickories, some of the maples, and ginkgos as generally more resistant to damage in ice storms. European birches, Siberian elms, Bradford pears, and many silver maples are generally more susceptible to ice damage.

### Prune ahead

That was a key lesson learned by Maine businessman Norman S. Elvin, president of G&E Roofing Co. Inc. of Augusta. From now on he's going to stick with a correct pruning program around the G&E headquarters. Critical utility lines were ripped off the building by falling tree limbs, which short circuited the enterprise's nerve center. Lack of power hung up the phone system and made the company's computer worthless. Even a portable generator couldn't coax a dial tone out of the downed landline.

Adds Gadzik, "I can't stress enough the importance of people using common sense and proper safety and business procedures when re-

moving hazard trees."

In the affected regions, opportunities exist for interested tree businesses. "The established tree industry in that area is going to do quite well," says Lidie. For companies wishing to help out, preparation is an important step. "There are a number of things to consider before crossing state lines to somebody else's turf," he cautions.

In addition to having a handle on all the local rules and regulations, an out-of-towner may be burdened by not having a dumpsite available that handles yard waste. Thus Lidie recommends that traveling companies align themselves with established local enterprises before heading north.

"If you don't know somebody up there I'd start out making some calls to the larger companies," Lidie says. You can say, "If you're swamped we'll give you a percentage off the top" for customer referrals. **LM**

## TO REDUCE STORM AND ICE DAMAGE

Following these steps will not guarantee that your trees won't suffer storm or ice damage but it can increase the odds of tree survival and reduce the possibility of breakage and damage to the tree. However, it is also important to remember to identify any potential targets that could be damaged and consider those in any treatment decision.

• **Plan Ahead** - When selecting trees to plant choose trees which have strong wood and good growing habits. Some of the trees that appear to be more resistant to ice damage include: sweetgum, arborvitae or white cedar, bald cypress, black walnut, hemlock, ginkgo, Kentucky coffee tree, swamp white oak and white oak.<sup>1</sup>

• **Proper Pruning** - This does not mean topping a tree in order to remove branches that could break nor removing most

of the canopy but, instead, thinning the canopy to allow wind to blow through the crown and removing dead, dying branches and branches with weak attachments and included bark. This reduces the possibility of breakage by removing limbs with a predictable potential for failure.

• **Cabling and Bracing** - This can be considered for trees which have landscape value to the owner (private, public, facility, golf course etc.). Candidates for this treatment may include larger trees which have characteristics which indicate failure potential, including brittle wood, co-dominant stems, major forks and/or narrow forks. The installation of cables and/or braces provides additional support to the tree structures.

<sup>1</sup> R.J. HAUER, M.C. HRUSKA AND J.O. DAWSON. 1994. *TREES AND ICE STORMS*, SPECIAL PUB 94-1, DEPT OF FOR., UNIV. OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA.

## Gore: EPA to work with Ag Dept. on FQPA of '96

### WASHINGTON, D.C.

A memorandum from Vice President Al Gore gives professional pesticide-user industries hope that the U.S. EPA will not soon be banning organophosphate pesticides.

Gore on April 11 sent a memorandum to EPA Administrator Carol M. Browner and Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman telling them to work together to implement the Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA) of 1996. The memo stressed that one of the purposes of the Act is to protect children's health, but it also urged the EPA to base any decisions it makes on pesticides on sound science. The EPA claims that low-level exposure to organophosphate pesticides could affect brain development in a fetus or young child.

Gore, in his memo, set out four principles for EPA to use in reaching its decisions:

- ▶ that they be based on

sound science,

- ▶ that farmers and other affected people be aware every step of the way,

- ▶ that there be a transition period and alternatives made available if any chemicals are banned,

- ▶ and that the public be consulted.

Gore's action appeared to be in response to mounting pressure from farm and food groups fearful that the EPA would ban that particular class of pesticides.

RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment), which represents speciality pesticide suppliers and end-users, welcomed Gore's directive. RISE said it was "encouraged about the Administration's call for broad stakeholder participation. We believe that broad and balanced participation is key to full and fair implementation of FQPA."

## El Niño sows questions on seed crop, prices

The El Niño may affect both the availability of certain varieties of turfseed and the cost of bringing it to market.

Wet weather this winter and early spring in California, some of the Southwest and also parts of Florida delayed landscape projects. Meanwhile, spring's early arrival in most of the rest of the country caused landscape managers to struggle with the workload, particularly mowing.

"Now they're worried about how to keep it mowed, not when to seed it," says Tom Stanley at Turf-Seed Inc., in Oregon. "It's been too wet to get the equipment on."

The outlook this spring was for stable seed prices, says Stanley. The crop seemed to be in good shape. But other factors could surface as the season progresses. For instance, there's some concern that the crop will mature too soon.

"An early harvest is not necessarily a good harvest," reports Jack Zimmer of Seed Specialists in Coeur d' Alene, ID. "We need some drying to bring this crop around."

"The crop is maturing earlier than it has in previous years," adds John Cochran at Turf Merchants Inc. (TMI), Tangent, OR. "You can't really tell yet but there's an old saying, 'An early crop is a light crop.'"

"Many fields are in an advanced state of growth due to the warm, wet weather," adds TMI's Steve Tubbs. "This puts the crop on track to be earlier than normal, which historically has meant a light crop."

Turf seed producers say the coming several weeks hold the key to this year's crop. And, perhaps, to prices.

"Commodity prices are affected by speculation of what the demand will be, the actual demand, and unforeseen pressures such as drought or a poor crop. Since seed production is tied to weather, level of demand for a particular species or cultivar, acreage available for harvest and the clairvoyance of the growers, it's a risky business," says a spokesperson for the Albright Seed Company, Camarillo, CA.

Because of The El Niño it seems to be even riskier in 1998.

*James E. Guyette*

## Handheld gasoline powered equipment outlook for 1998 foresees just modest sales increases

The Portable Power Equipment Manufacturers Association, a 19-member trade association, has released shipping information for 1997. Based on shipments of equipment for 1997, shipping demands for 1998 have been estimated.

Equipment	Units Shipped 1997	Change from 1996	Estimated Increase for 1998
Chain Saws	2,172,800	◊ 5.4%	◊ 1.5%
Trimmers/Brush Cutters	3,684,000	◊ 3.7%	◊ 3.0%
Hand Held Blowers	1,196,900	◊ 2.3%	◊ 2.0%
Backpack Blowers	188,000	◊ 7.0%	◊ 4.5%
Hedge Trimmers	276,000	◊ 18.5%	◊ 2.5%
Cut Off Saws	97,3000	◊ 12.5%	◊ 2.0%
Stick Edgers	47,000	◊ 14.5%	◊ 3.0%