



ICE STORM FACT SHEET

Norfolk County Forestry Division
519-426-5999

Source: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

Please remember, trees are extremely resilient. The damaged trees you see around you may not need to be cut down completely. This ice storm has occurred during the trees dormant season. Although you don't normally rush out to prune a tree in the middle of winter, it is one of the best times. Don't be too hasty with a death sentence for even severely damaged trees. It takes no time at all to kill a large tree with a sharp saw, but it can take a lifetime to replace it. If you make the wrong call and a tree continues to decline over the next year, it can always be taken down later. Before cutting down a damaged tree, consider the following:

1. Safety first. Extreme care should be taken when working or walking around damaged trees, especially in these icy conditions. There are professionals that are able to help if you are not trained or comfortable doing the job yourself.

Trees should first be assessed for actual damage. Have a good look at the main branches and see how much damage they have suffered. Generally, conifers will be in better shape than hardwoods. If the tree has many branches caught in the crown, or another tree is leaning on it, BE CAREFUL. These could fall at any time. If the tree is close to overhead lines, do not approach it. Professionals are better able to deal with these situations.

2. Many of the branches that have been broken off by the ice will have sharp daggers left behind instead of even surfaces. It is important that they are cut so water does not accumulate leading to future disease.

Proper pruning cuts are made at a node, the point at which one branch or twig attaches to another. This may mean cutting the branch off close to, but not flush with, the stem of the tree. Try not to leave a long broken stub. Look for the collar of the branch. This is the raised ring of protective tissue circling the branch where it meets the main stem. Trim the branch back to this area.

The easiest way to trim a large branch is to make three cuts. First, make a 5 -10 cm. cut from underneath the branch. Next, make a cut from the top, about 10 - 20 cm. out from the first cut. Continue cutting until the branch falls. Finally, remove the stub to the collar, leaving a smooth surface where rain cannot accumulate.

Make sure your tools are sharp. Ripping the bark causes unnecessary damage. Hand pruners, pole pruners, lopping shears, pruning saws and chainsaws can all be sharpened. If you intend to use a chainsaw on your property for the first time proper training is critical. Have an expert do it for you or take the time to learn.

DO NOT COVER THE CUT.

The tree will seal its own wound with 'woundwood'.

3. A young spruce tree, less than 3 metres in height, that has had the top sheared off may, over time, recover. Each tree must be assessed. Spruce have a dominant bud that will take over and, eventually, become the top of the tree. Corrective pruning may be required a year down the road, but, for now, unless it poses a danger, it can be watched.

A pine tree grows in whorls. If the tree is 3 metres or less in height, one of the branches in the top whorl will become the dominant branch and soon outgrow the others. This will become apparent over the next growing season. To maintain the form of the tree, the other side branches can be trimmed off, leaving one that must take the lead. It can be tied in an upright manner to help it along.

4. Trees that are bent over with their tops frozen into the ground may recover. Caution must be taken if you try to knock the ice off the branches. They may break. If the tree can easily be freed from the ground, a pole or cane can be tied to the tree to help it stay upright. Be careful not to add extra weight to an already stressed tree. In the spring, when the frost is out of the ground, a support or guy wire can be attached to help the tree.

*For more information on **How to Prune Trees** – a link from the USDA Forest Service Publication has been provided on this website.*

Norfolk County acknowledges gratefully the expertise provided in the consolidation of this resource information from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and the United States Department of Agriculture ~ Forest Service.

The information contained in this fact sheet is provided only as a guide and landowners are encouraged to seek professional assistance if they should need further guidance.