



Ice Storms

What is an ice storm?

An ice storm is defined as 0.25 inch or more of freezing rain which sticks to surfaces such as buildings, wires, pavements and trees

What causes an ice storm?

A warm front moves in during winter weather causing rain to freeze as it moves through the colder air beneath

Why does the ice damage trees?

The accumulation of ice can increase the weight of the tree by more than 30 times. This leads to extra stress on areas with decay, cracks, broken bark and broken branches

Are there tree forms that are more susceptible to ice damage?

Yes. Trees that have a great deal of surface area from fine, branching twigs or have a broad canopy are more susceptible.

Are there tree forms that are less susceptible to ice damage?

Yes. Trees with a coarse branching pattern, pyramidal form, and columnar forms are less susceptible to damage.

Is there a time of year when ice storms cause more damage compared to other times of the year?

Yes. Ice storms that occur in fall prior to leaf drop or spring just before leafing out cause the most damage.

Are there tree species that are more easily damaged by ice?

Yes. Norway maple and Bradford or Callery pears are more easily damaged by ice.

Will wind make the damage of the ice storm worse?

Yes. Wind will place more stress on trees already overloaded with weight from the ice.

Can anything be done preventatively to lessen the damage from an ice storm?

Yes. Prune weak, dead or decayed branches. If tree species more easily damaged by ice are near buildings, try to prune branches that may fail if loaded with ice or remove trees that are in poor health. Diversify the landscape. Plant shrubs, which tend to be bowed but not broken, by ice. If installing young trees, prune them correctly from the beginning to foster less damage during an ice storm.

Should I try to remove the ice?

It is best to let nature take its course and let the ice melt off naturally.

What is the best way to deal with ice damaged trees that are not a direct hazard to property or people?

Do nothing for a time. Trees may be capable of forming new branches where old ones were lost to ice---but this may take 2-3 years.

Can I guess whether a tree will live or die following ice storm damage?

The greater the crown damage or loss, the less likely the tree will survive, with younger trees more likely to survive than older trees.

Are branches with bark inclusions more likely to break during ice storms?

Yes. Branches or forks with bark inclusions are weaker and more likely to break during ice storms. Decay in combination with included bark creates a worse case scenario.