

## Dealing With Wind Damaged Trees

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

A week ago we had an evening thunderstorm blow through the region with some pretty gusty winds. Fortunately it wasn't as intense or last as long as the derecho that walloped Iowa, but there was still some tree damage from this event. It doesn't matter whether it is minor or major tree damage or whether it is from wind or ice or even auto accidents, homeowners need to understand a few things about how a tree deals with damage and what they should or shouldn't do when they encounter tree damage on their property.

When people experience a cut or a scrape on their skin, it quickly scabs over and eventually the skin regenerates underneath that scab. The skin replaces itself and is thereby "healed", often with no evidence of the injury. Trees don't "heal" like that. When a branch is ripped off by wind, ice or accident, you have torn bark often exposing bare wood underneath. If it is during the growing season the injury will trigger several responses.

First of all the tree will try to compartmentalize the injured area. It tries to wall off injured and possibly infected wood so that any decay organisms will be confined to the injured area so the decay organisms don't spread throughout the tree. Different tree species differ in how well they do this. In general trees can compartmentalized damage across the width of the tree very effectively but are far less effective in stopping the spread up and down in the tree. When a tree is cut down you can often see the evidence of this damage and compartmentalization.

The compartmentalization occurs fairly quickly. The next step takes longer. Where the bark was torn away, or even split or killed by a freeze or sunscald, the tree, at the edge of the still living bark, starts to develop what is known as callus tissue. When a small branch is properly cut off a tree the injury heals over because of callus tissue. You can see this on many trees that have been pruned. Callus tissue is often darker in color than the normal bark and over time slowly covers the outer surface of the wound, sometimes even closing over cavities or hollow spots.

What you really need to be aware of is that there is nothing you can do to hurry any of these processes. After the damage occurs, you, or a certified arborist, should clean up any damage that leaves stubs or broken limbs. Cut these back to the next largest limb when possible as this is where callus tissue will develop. When pruning after wind or ice damage, do not tackle big limbs high in a tree. Let professionals with bucket trucks or safety equipment do this. Be wary of limbs that have broken off and are still hanging in trees. These are called "widow makers" for a reason!

Under NO circumstances should a tree ever be topped, which is removal of all branches down to a few big stubs. This is never an accepted pruning practice and starts a slow decline and death of the tree. The resulting growth that develops following topping is only attached to the bark so it has no strength associated with it and ultimately breaks out even easier in the next storm.

Likewise never use asphalt based pruning sealers. These products actually inhabit and slow down the actual healing process making it harder for callus tissue to form. If you feel like you need to do something you can get some neutral color exterior latex (not oil based) paint and paint the parts of the tree that were exposed during the injury. The paint may help reduce infection by decay organisms and at the very least they will make the injured part of the tree be less noticeable. Tree damage can be traumatic to the homeowner but don't make it worse for the tree by doing the wrong thing!