

Preparing your landscape for hurricanes
By Kim Gabel, Environmental Horticulture agent
University of Florida/IFAS/Monroe County Extension

The 2005 hurricane season brought four hurricanes near to the Florida Keys. The winds uprooted trees or caused trees to lean, split main branches that had tight V crotches, snapped tree branches, and stripped the leaves off our landscapes plants up to four times or the tree showed no visible effects from the storms. Besides the wind landscapes throughout the Keys were flooded by storm surge that left behind a salty soil and no rain to wash the salt out.

If your landscape weathered last year's hurricanes the question to ask yourself: Can my landscape survive this year's hurricane season?

Now is the time to examine the trees surrounding your home. Look at the whole tree from the crown to the root flare.

- Is the bark sloughing off from the trunk?
- Are any trees leaning towards your house?
- Look up in the tree canopy, use your binoculars: Do you notice any broken branches that have turned brown? If the tree has started to put out new leaves closely examine if the branch tips are brown and the bark is separating from the wood?
- Do any trees have tight V crotches on the main trunk or rubbing branches?
- Did the tree get uprooted?

If you answered yes to any of these, then it may be prudent to prune, stake or remove your tree depending on the tree's condition and possible targets the tree can hit.

For any tree branches above your head or that you have to stand on a ladder with a chain saw to prune that is a job for a professional tree trimmer. Look for someone who is ISA (International

Society of Arboriculture) certified and licensed appropriate in Monroe County or your city. Check the local yellow pages or the ISA website (www.isa-arbor.com) for a listing of certified arborists in your area. Get three bids, so you have a better understanding of the job's cost, the amount of tree work to be done and how the debris will be removed from your property.

Remember that some communities in the Keys, such as the City of Key West, have tree ordinances that mandate prior permission for tree removals, even those located on private property. Tree trimming ordinances are designed to protect our trees from improper pruning practices and indiscriminate tree removals. But if the tree is deemed to be hazardous it can be removed after approval from your local City Tree Commission or Monroe County Biologist.

Or if you have recently replanted your landscape the question to ask: Can my landscape stand up to this year's storms?

For the newly replanted landscape things to keep in mind are:

- Dig a proper planting hole that is 2 to 3 times as wide as the original pot and plant no deeper than the top root flare
- Use the native soil taken from the hole and mix no more than 40% with a moist peat moss, or professional potting mix
- Make sure the root ball is not kinked or girdled, if so prune out the problem or return to the garden center for a replacement
- Stake the tree with a tripod mesh straps or dowels. The key is to allow the tree to bend in the wind to develop taper, not be rigid and inflexible. <http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/planting/staking.htm>

For more information about tree care and maintenance, go to the following website: <http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/Maturetreecare/index.htm>