

Preparing your landscape for hurricanes
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The 2005 hurricane season brought four hurricanes near the Florida Keys. Since then, there have been no significant hurricanes in our area. During the past year, our landscape trees and palms have faced environmental stresses (drought conditions, improper pruning, and lack of fertilization) and biological stresses (insect infestations and diseases). These problems can weaken our landscape plants and make them more vulnerable to hurricane force winds and storm surges.

The question to ask is your landscape capable of surviving this year's hurricane season?

Now is the time to examine the trees and palms surrounding your home. Look at them from the crown to the root flare/root initiation zone.

- Is the bark sloughing off from the trunk? Is the palm trunk size decreasing?
- Are any trees or palms leaning towards your house?
- Look up in the tree with 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 in past hurricanes?
- Are any plant nutritional problems present, such as yellow or brown leaves?
- Are there signs of insect problems: sticky honeydew, sooty mold, ants, or insects on the underside of leaves or on branches?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then it may be prudent to identify and control nutritional and insect problems. Prune, stake, or remove your tree depending on its condition and possible targets the tree can hit.

For any tree branches above your head or you have to stand on a ladder to prune with a chainsaw, you should hire a professional certified arborist. Look for someone who is ISA (International Society of Arboriculture) certified, licensed and insured as required by your city or Monroe County regulations. Check the local yellow pages or the ISA website (<http://www.floridaisa.org/>) for a listing of certified arborists in your area. Ask

your friends and neighbors who they use to do their tree work and if they are satisfied with the work performed. 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, Marathon, Islamorada, and unincorporated Monroe County, may have tree ordinances that mandate prior permission for tree removals or pruning, even those located on private property. Tree trimming ordinances are designed to protect our trees from indiscriminate tree removals and improper pruning practices (hat racking) that can harm the tree and make it a target for landing on your personal property. Contact your local government office to determine if any tree removal or pruning regulations are in place.

For the newly planted landscape, things to keep in mind include the following (for more detailed information) visit at: <http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/summaryplanting.shtml>

- Dig a shallow planting hole that is 2 to 3 times as wide as the original plant container and find the point where the top-most root emerges from the trunk, which is buried in the root ball, then remove enough soil so that root is preferably at the soil surface or at least within the top two inches.
- Use the native soil taken from the hole (remove the larger rocks) 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, if the plant is still under warranty.
- 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.ufl.edu/woody/staking.shtml>

For more information about trees and hurricanes for preparation for hurricane season and what to do with your landscape plants after the storm passed, go the following website: <http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/treesandhurricanes>.

Additional information is available from University of Florida/Monroe County Extension Services, 1100 Simonton Street, Suite 2-260, Key West, FL, 33040; phone: 292-4501; fax: 292-4415; e-mail: monroe@ifas.ufl.edu; website: <http://monroe.ifas.ufl.edu>.