Storm season can cause damage to trees

Anyone who has lived in Oklahoma through a late winter and spring storm season can attest to the damage that can occur to trees in high winds, tornadoes and ice storms. Large branches are quite heavy and significant damage can be caused by a limb that is felled during a spring storm.

The falling branch pulls the bark and splinters the wood down the trunk of the tree, leaving a very large wound. However, it isn’t just limbs falling in a storm that can cause damage. Branches that are improperly pruned can cause similar damage to the tree. To avoid this, use the three-cut pruning method.

The main objective of the three-cut method is to remove the bulk of the weight of the branch before making the final cut, in an effort to prevent the heavy branch from tearing the bark down along the trunk. To do this, start by making an undercut along the underside of the branch about one foot away from the trunk. This cut only needs to pass about 1/3 of the way through the branch. This creates a stopping point in case the bark begins to tear when removing the bulk of the branch. If the bark does begin to tear, it will stop at the undercut.

The second cut is made further out on the limb from the first cut, about 4 inches. This cut is made all the way through the limb from the top toward the bottom and is used to remove the bulk of the branch.

The third and final cut removes the remaining stub and should be a clean cut to promote proper sealing of the wound. The cut is made near the base of the limb just outside the branch collar, the area where the branch attaches to the trunk or a larger limb. This area is identified by wrinkling or rippling of the bark. It is this branch collar that wards off decay organisms and helps the tree to seal. Cutting too close to the trunk, or flush with the trunk, makes a larger wound and removes the important collar tissue that speeds recovery. Also, avoid leaving a stub, which encourages decay organisms to move into the tree. A properly cut branch will seal itself naturally, without the need for wound dressing.

For more information on pruning, see Fact Sheet HLA-6409 Pruning Ornamental Trees, Shrubs, and Vines at https://okla.st/2utQT3T.

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