Cleaning up after the ice storm

Much of Oklahoma experienced an ice storm of epic proportions recently. It’s likely homeowners and business still are cleaning up tree limbs and debris. While ice storms aren’t new to the state, the timing of this latest weather event was unusual.

Many trees suffered extensive damage because the leaves were still on the trees when the ice storm occurred. Most neighborhoods will be hearing chainsaw activity for a while until the mess on the ground is cleared. However, surveying the damage to the trees themselves is important. Although the ice now is long gone, the damage remains.

Before firing up the chainsaw or calling a tree service, take time to step back and survey the situation. Contact an arborist who can help identify if a tree cannot be saved due to extensive damage. Unless the trees are small, and limbs can easily be reached without getting on a ladder, it is best to contact a tree care professional; choose a company that is certified by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) and carries proper insurance.

If you observe branches from your trees hanging over power lines, leave them alone and contact your utility company. This is a dangerous situation and homeowners are not advised to try to cut down these limbs. It is a job for professionals.

Broken limbs that aren’t in danger of power lines or those that are blocking the driveway can be removed now. Don’t worry about making exact cuts at this time. The goal right now is to simply get the limbs down so they can be cut up later.

Safety is a must anytime you’re working with a chainsaw. Wear protective equipment, including eye protection such as goggles or a face shield, leather gloves, a long-sleeved shirt, pants, sturdy boots or shoes and a hard hat. Even after the storm during cleanup, limbs easily can fall from the trees. It’s important to be protected.

In the event the state experiences another ice storm, contact the power company if icy limbs are weighted down under power lines. When the ice melts, these limbs can snap back up and come into contact with electrical lines. The power lines are probably coated in ice, too, and being hit by branches springing back up could snap the line and result in power outages.

Limbs that aren’t broken, but just bending under the weight of the ice, also should be left alone. Allow the ice to melt and fall off naturally rather than trying to knock it off. Knocking it off may
further damage the limbs by breaking off buds. Young branches and shoots are very pliable and will spring back to place as the season progresses.

Most trees are quite durable and even if they receive some damage due to ice, they will recover by producing new growth in the spring. For more information on correct pruning techniques, visit the Oklahoma State University Extension website.

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