Stump removal following taking down trees

Trees are a wonderful addition to a landscape. They provide shade in the heat of the summer, and strong limbs can hold a child’s swing for hours of fun. However, due to disease or wind/ice storms, sometimes trees must be removed, leaving an unsightly stump.

Removing a stump typically isn’t fast, easy or inexpensive, but following are a few ways to tackle the task.

**Chippers/stump grinders** – This is the easiest and safest way to remove a tree stump. Although it can be expensive, it’s a relatively quick process. Many tree services have a machine that removes the stump. Homeowners also may be able to rent a grinder.

**Rotting** – Homeowners who aren’t in a hurry and don’t mind the look of the stump in the landscape, can simply let it rot. This is the least expensive method of stump removal. Rotting or decaying of wood is done by plant organisms called fungi. Fungi don’t possess chlorophyll and must get their food from other sources such as wood stumps. Cut the stump as close to ground level as possible and keep it moist and covered in sod. Drill several large holes in the stump to expose more wood to fungi. Homeowners can add fertilizer, especially nitrogen, to speed the decay process.

**Grubbing** – Although it is a quick removal, it is also the most labor intensive. Trees smaller than 14 inches in diameter aren’t too hard to remove. Trees larger than that can be quite difficult. Start by digging a trench around the stump about 1 to 2 feet deep. Sever the lateral roots. On tap-rooted trees, pry the stump to one side, cut the taproot and drag it out of the hole. For larger diameter trees, it’s helpful to leave the stump about 4 to 6 feet tall so it can be used as a lever to break the stump free from the ground. Be very careful when pulling on the stump with a chain or similar device.

**Burning** – Some towns and cities have made burning stumps illegal. Check with fire officials in your area to see what restrictions may be in place. Many Oklahoma counties have been under a burn ban so this option may not be possible at this time. If burning is allowed, survey the area around the stump to determine if it’s safe. Don’t burn near buildings or other flammable materials. A stump fire can burn for a week or more, so a trench or fire line around the stump could be needed.

**Chemical burning** – This method isn’t recommended because of the potential hazard, prohibitive cost and strict regulations. Tests conducted several years ago showed chemical burning failed to give satisfactory results. Chemical removers have also been found to be ineffective.
**Wildlife and decorative approaches** – A dead tree provides food and shelter for wildlife. Insect larvae live under the bark and in the soft wood, creating a smorgasbord for birds. Leaving the stump in the ground is always an option. You can place potted plants around the stump. The stump can also be turned into a fairy house. There are many design ideas available online. However, if the tree died due to a serious disease, it’s recommended to remove it from the ground as soon as possible to help prevent the spread of disease. Don’t place a new tree in the same spot.

**Prevent sprouting** – Even after being cut, some stumps may sprout, which can slow the rotting process. To prevent this from happening, apply an appropriate herbicide to the freshly cut stump within 24 hours of cutting.