

Stonegate E-Mail News of 7-27-06

Tree-Lovers' Special Edition

Monsoons are here and it looks like a fairly active season this year. That's good news – and bad. With more water will come more damage: more trees down causing damage to walls and roofs, and debris all over the place.

How can you make sure that the trees on your property will stand up to the storms? There are ways of improving your trees' chances of survival:

1. Trim your trees. Sure, they look great when they're dense and bushy. But that also offers more wind resistance when the monsoon storms roll in. Prune the tree (especially if it's mesquite) to allow air to flow through. Gardeners call this "lacing" the tree or "airing it out."
While you're at it, check to ensure that there are no encroachments. A tree that overhangs the sidewalk must not be allowed to pose an obstacle for walkers. Stonegate requires at least 8 feet of headroom above the sidewalk. If your tree overhangs the street – well it must either be high enough to allow a very large truck to pass without touching or be trimmed back.
Encroachments over neighbors' yards are often bones of contention and can spoil an otherwise excellent relationship. Talk to your neighbors. They might be okay with the overhang. Or not. But if the Community Association gets a call, you'll get a letter requiring you to trim it – and a fine if you don't.
2. If you're purchasing new trees, they should be staked for a minimum of one year, with stakes on either side. It's important that the tie not choke the trunk, or restrict movement entirely. The stakes should gradually be removed after a year or eighteen months, depending on the ground and the type of tree.
3. Watering right can be the difference between the tree that breaks and the tree that survives. The irrigation installed on a new tree should be a dual drip system. Our soils tend toward hard clays and caliches. The rate of water delivery should be individually set, according to the type of tree and soil conditions. But as the tree matures, the irrigation must be moved farther and farther from the trunk to encourage the roots outward. This may have to be done more than just once a year. Most experts recommend that mesquite trees be weaned from irrigation by the end of the second year.

Palm trees are sometimes overlooked, though they really shouldn't be. Actually, they're easy until they get tall enough to require professional trimming. Your low-growing palm can be trimmed using a special long-handled saw available at Home Depot and similar stores. Trim the fruit and the outermost set of leaves. Don't put it off. The beards you see on palms in California are havens for really nasty insects, and in the monsoon winds they will shed enough debris to jeopardize your good relationship with the neighbors.

If you don't have a regular landscaper, the SOS program will send a Stonegate landscape worker out to trim your tree, provided it's not seriously overgrown. (SOS does not do tall palms.) Call Dolly at (480) 391-9760 to arrange it. But if trimming has been neglected for a while, you need to call a certified arborist, who can be found in the Yellow Pages.