

This column features questions from readers submitted via the website. To submit a question to Small Acre Sam, visit **BarnyardsandBackyards.com**. If your question is featured, you will receive a free one-year subscription to *Barnyards & Backyards!*



ask Sam

question

Dear Sam,

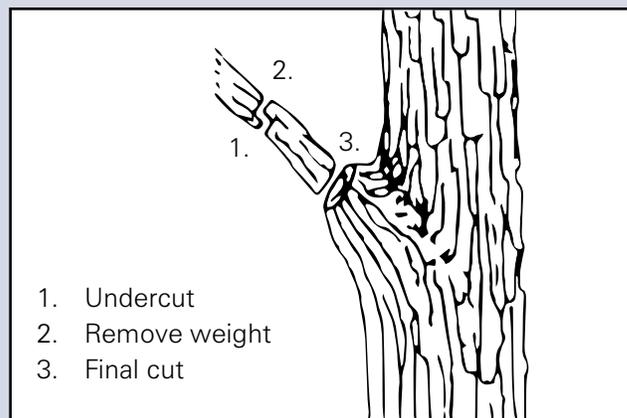
Several of my trees were damaged in the big, wet snowstorm that hit Sundance in early October. What should I do? – *George, Sundance*

Dear George,

You and your family's safety is the first priority when evaluating storm-damaged trees to determine a course of action. Focus on any large trees with visible damage close to your house. Arborists with the proper equipment and know-how can evaluate the trees and determine the damage – especially in the upper portions of the tree where it's difficult to examine the tree from the ground. Often, extensive damage to the trunk and larger branches can severely compromise structural integrity. If so, large limbs or the entire tree may require removal. Make sure to hire an International Society of Arboriculture-certified arborist who is fully insured for property damage, personal liability, and workers compensation.

Once the hazard trees have been addressed, evaluate outlying trees. Homeowners may be able to prune their own damaged trees in some cases. You could tackle the work yourself if the trees are small and all broken branches can be reached with a 6-foot ladder. However, an arborist is the safest bet and will likely be more thorough and proficient.

Here are the basics if you decide to prune the trees: Broken branches or stubs should be pruned back to the trunk or a lateral branch that is at least one-third the diameter of the branch being removed. Pruning cuts made back to the trunk should be outside the branch collar and branch bark ridge – never make cuts flush to the trunk! When making a cut to remove a heavy limb, use the three-cut method to prevent the weight of the limb from tearing or stripping off the bark down the trunk.



1. Cut part way through the branch from beneath at a point about a foot from the trunk.
2. Make a second cut on the top of the branch, several inches out from the first cut. This should allow the limb to break off from its own weight and fall to the ground.
3. Complete the job by making a final cut next to the trunk just outside the branch collar, with the lower edge farther away from the trunk than at the top.

At what point are you better off cutting the tree down rather than pruning? For smaller trees that pose no hazards, determine the extent of the damage to the main trunk. A general rule is if over half the diameter of the trunk has been compromised, then the tree will likely never fully recover and will likely develop decay and eventually fail.

Your trees are valuable to you and your community. This snowstorm has shown us how delicate trees are in the face of Mother Nature. To learn more about caring for your trees after a storm, go to the Arbor Day Foundation's website on storm recovery at <http://www.arborday.org/media/stormrecovery/>

– *Sam*

answer