

Snow damage tips from Meadows Farms

At a glance, the heavy, wet snow from yesterday's storm appears to have damaged trees and shrubs significantly, perhaps more so than the storms of last winter. In particular, there seems to be more damage to deciduous trees, those that drop their leaves for the winter.

In my own garden I see numerous broken branches where wet snow accumulated and branches bent to the breaking point. The snow from January and February 2010 was much lighter, and most injury was to evergreens rather than deciduous trees.

Here are a few tips to minimize damage to your trees and shrubs, and in the next days I'll follow up with tips on repairing broken branches.

1. First, be safe. At the edge of my garden are mature maples and poplars, and though entire trees have not fallen, there are numerous large branches littering the ground, and others that are tangled with other branches that could fall at any moment. There is no amount of damage to ornamental trees that justifies risking your personal safety.
2. My neighbor's large, twenty year old maple split near the base, with half of the tree toppling onto a large dogwood. The maple is beyond repair, but the half that fell onto the dogwood must be carefully removed to minimize damage. My neighbor is competent using a chainsaw, but this is not a task for everyone.
3. Most damage is already done. I took a quick run through my garden carefully knocking the snow off my prized Japanese maples with a long handled steel leaf rake, but I don't think that I was accomplishing much. I saw large broken branches on Japanese maples and redbuds, but this injury occurred overnight, and there's probably no reason to bother at this point.
4. If you want to knock the snow off your trees and evergreens it is important to do it carefully, so that you don't inflict further damage. By gently lifting or shaking branches with a long handled tool much snow will fall through and lighten the load. Too much force might break branches that would spring back without damage once the snow melts.
5. Temperatures are rising, and the snow is melting, so the weight on trees and evergreens might be lessened significantly in another day or two. In last year's snow the huge accumulations bent branches for weeks, so that once the snow melted branches were bent permanently. With much less snow from this storm, it is likely that damage to bent branches will be much less severe. If you decide to venture out to brush snow from your evergreens, do so gently so that branches are not broken.

For a few of my evergreens that were tilting under the snow's weight I was able to dislodge the heaviest accumulations by pushing the branches up from the underside. If the snow melts in the next few days this will have been wasted effort, so there is not an immediate necessity to clear the snow from evergreens or deciduous trees.

In the next several days the extent of damage will be more readily apparent, and I'll do my best to give the most horticulturally sound, practical advice for protecting your landscape. So as not to pester you with too frequent emails, further updates will be found on my personal blog Ramblin' through Dave's Garden.

On the blog I will address issues relating to pruning and repairing snow damage, and much of this information can be found in archived blog entries from February 2010. Through the blog I will answer any questions, or you can send an email through Meadows Farms' website.

Be safe. Don't overdo it. Last year, when it appeared that the garden would be a disaster, I was confident that the damage would be less than it initially appeared, and by late in April the injury was hardly apparent.

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