

Avoiding tree damage during home construction

Injury to trees during the construction of a home is difficult or impossible to correct after the fact. And, it can take months to years for impacted trees to succumb to the damage that occurs during the construction process.

In today's article, University of Georgia Extension Tree Specialist Dr. Kim Coder and I, provide advice on how to avoid tree damage that too often happens during the construction of a home.

The most important step you can take is to hire a professional arborist to assess a construction situation early in the process. An arborist can work with you and your builder to determine which trees can be saved and how to protect your trees during each phase of construction.

Trees can be damaged in a variety of ways during the construction process. Construction equipment can injure trees by breaking branches or tearing bark and wounding the trunk. Also, the digging and trenching necessary to construct a house can cause root damage. The severing of a major root can cause a loss of five to twenty percent of a tree's root system. When significant digging and trenching occurs, there is an increased chance of a tree falling over.

Ninety percent of a tree's roots that take up water and minerals are in the upper twelve inches of soil. Piling soil over these roots will smother them. And the heavy equipment used in construction compacts the soil, which can severely reduce oxygen levels essential to the growth and function of these roots.

The ability to repair construction damage to trees is limited. The single most important action homeowners can take is to set up construction fences around all trees they want to protect.

These fences should be placed as far away from the trees as possible, in order to protect the root systems. As a general guideline, allow one foot of space from the trunk for each inch of trunk diameter.

Instruct construction personnel to keep the fenced area clear of building materials, waste and excess soil. No trenching or other soil disturbances should be allowed in the fenced areas.

Most likely your trees will require several years to adjust to the shock and environmental changes induced during construction. Post-construction trees are more prone to health problems such as disease and insect infestation. By talking with an arborist, you can create a plan for continued maintenance during this critical time.

A list of Certified Arborists, as well as other helpful information can be obtained at the International Society of Arboriculture website at www.isa-arbor.com.

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