

19 - How to Protect a Garden from Hurricane Damage

Hurricanes, the most powerful storms on Earth, are vast engines of wind and rain. As a storm reaches shore, the surge of huge waves causes flooding in every direction. Salt spray whipped up by the wind can be felt as far as 50 miles inland. Wind gusts also sand blast homes and plants.

Most importantly be prepared, especially if you have large trees with broken or dead branches. Trees close to homes, buildings, and power lines can cause serious damage. Seek out a certified arborist in your area to handle trees that pose the most immediate danger. These certified professionals can be located through the International Society of Arboriculture Web site: <http://www.isa.org>

Prior to storms, remove all free-standing outdoor furniture and lightweight plantings in containers as the winds can turn them into dangerous weapons.

After storm damage it may be possible to save some trees with living branches so wait before you prune. Cover exposed roots and keep them damp. You may be able to save partially uprooted plants even after some days or weeks. If formerly shaded plants are now burning in sun, provide temporary shelter.

Windborne salt spray damages foliage, producing symptoms of scorching and burning. As soils become inundated with salt water, salt-sensitive plant root hairs absorb water and the accumulated salts destroy plant cells. Too much salt will remove moisture from the leaves in a process called exmosis. It will be helpful to rinse off foliage with water to remove salt water residue and lessen the probability of scorching.

Perhaps the best defense is offense—establish windbreaks with wall, fences, and hedge plantings. Choose more plants that are salt-tolerant especially those with tough, waxy leaves and grey, woolly foliage.

* For additional design solutions and salt-tolerant plant lists, please refer to Fact Sheet #15, *Coastal Gardening in the New York Region*.