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Why Are Leaves Still Hanging On My Trees?

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A weekly question/answer column

Why Are Leaves Still Hanging On My Trees?

Mike Kuhns answers:*

Many trees still have green leaves clinging to them in spite of freezing temperatures and heavy snowfall. The combination of cold temperatures and shortened day length usually signals the leaves to change color and drop. But this year, with our unusually warm autumn temperatures, many trees didn't get the message and still have leaves clinging. Also, most of the trees we grow are not native to our climate and react differently to the cold this time of year. Continued cold temperatures, however, will soon force the leaves to turn color or dry up and fall.

- Branches that break due to heavy snowfall are a concern in winter weather. Carefully remove broken limbs caught in trees. If the limbs are not within reach or are very large, hire an arborist to remove them for you. Contact your local power company if any of the limbs are near power lines. These can pose a dangerous threat since electricity can be conducted through the branches.
- Shaking snow off branches usually is not needed after leaves have fallen. The recent heavy storm was unusual because leaf-covered branches held much more snow than normal, causing them to bend and break. In such an emergency, use a stick or pipe to gently shake the snow off branches that seem to be excessively loaded. Don't stand directly under branches while shaking them in case they break.
- If a branch has broken and pruning becomes necessary, cut off most of the branch weight near the break, then go back down the affected branch to another good branch and cut off the stub without cutting into the swollen branch base. Wounds caused by bark tearing should be left alone to heal without using wound dressings.

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