

# Trees Damaged by Fire

## What Not to Do and What to Do

Guide sheet produced by the Britton Fund Board of Directors

For more information on the Britton Fund, please visit [www.thebrittonfund.org](http://www.thebrittonfund.org)



Southern California's recent devastating fires have destroyed countless homes and businesses. As recovery begins, it's essential to understand the critical role surviving trees play in the environment. Here's a guide on caring for fire-damaged trees:

### What Not to Do

- **Don't Remove Trees Prematurely:**
  - Wait for signs of new growth, which can take weeks for palms and months for other species.
- **Don't Prune Excessively:**
  - Prune only hazardous branches initially and avoid unnecessary cutting.
- **Don't Fertilize Immediately:**
  - Avoid fertilizing fire-damaged trees; let regeneration happen naturally.
  - Base fertilizer applications on soil tests and arborist recommendations after recovery.
- **Don't Allow Soil Compaction:**
  - Prevent vehicle traffic over root zones to maintain soil aeration and health.

### What to Do

- **Inspect and Assess:**
  - Hire a **qualified, ISA Certified Arborist** to assess tree health and structural integrity. To find an ISA Certified Arborist in your area, visit [www.treesaregood.org/findanarborist](http://www.treesaregood.org/findanarborist)
  - Remove only branches that pose hazards (e.g., broken limbs).
- **Understand Tree Recovery:**
  - **Conifers** (e.g., pines, junipers): Typically do not produce new shoots.
  - **Broadleaf trees:** May grow new foliage from dormant buds in bark or roots.
  - **Palm trees:** Can recover if trunks aren't severely damaged.
  - Allow trees time to recover and show new growth before considering removal.
- **Water the Soil:**
  - Apply consistent watering to encourage recovery.
  - Address hydrophobic (water-repelling) soil by lightly raking the surface without damaging roots.
  - Space watering sessions to allow soil to dry slightly between applications.
  - Check soil moisture with a coring probe, shovel, or moisture meter.
- **Use Mulch:**
  - Spread wood chip mulch under trees to reduce erosion, retain moisture, and protect soil from the sun.
- **Monitor New Growth:**
  - Watch for new shoots on branches or at the trunk base (stump sprouts).
  - Retain and nurture healthy basal shoots as needed.
  - Consult an arborist to determine pruning strategies and branch retention.
- **Protect the Root Zone:**
  - Erect temporary fencing to prevent heavy equipment from compacting the soil.
  - Use a layer of wood chips topped with plywood to protect roots in unavoidable traffic areas.
  - After cleanup, retain mulch for moisture retention and erosion control.
- **Palm Tree Care:**
  - Allow palms to regenerate leaves from the "heart bud" in the trunk's center.
  - Remove dead leaves only after recovery starts.
  - Use a high-pressure hose to clean blackened tissue, if necessary.

## Economic and Environmental Benefits of Trees



- **Environmental Benefits:**

- Reduce Radiational Heat: Trees provide shade, lowering temperatures and combating urban heat islands.
- Air Quality: New foliage reduces airborne pollutants.
- Water Management: Roots minimize soil erosion, and foliage reduces stormwater runoff.

- **Economic Benefits:**

- Energy Savings: Shaded homes require less cooling, reducing energy bills.
- Property Value: Mature, healthy trees increase property value significantly.
- Long-term Cost Savings: Healthy trees reduce expenses associated with erosion control, storm-water management, and extreme heat mitigation.

## Why Save Fire-Damaged Trees?

- **Aesthetic and Emotional Value:**

- Trees enhance landscapes and symbolize resilience and hope.

By giving fire-damaged trees the proper care and time, consulting qualified professionals, and understanding their economic and environmental benefits, you can ensure their recovery and preserve their critical role in your property and the community.

## Important Links

- **Western Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture**  
[www.wcisa.net](http://www.wcisa.net)
- **The Britton Fund**  
[www.thebrittonfund.org](http://www.thebrittonfund.org)
- **California Urban Forests Council**  
[www.caufc.org](http://www.caufc.org)
- **California ReLeaf**  
[www.californiareleaf.org](http://www.californiareleaf.org)
- **International Society of Arboriculture**  
[www.isa-arbor.com](http://www.isa-arbor.com)
- **Trees Are Good**  
[www.treesaregood.org](http://www.treesaregood.org)

### Find an Arborist

The Find an Arborist tool can help you locate an arborist in your area. ISA Certified Arborists® are held to a Code of Ethics and are encouraged to follow industry standards.



## About the Britton Fund

Established in 2006, The Britton Fund is a 501(c)(3), nonprofit organization that raises private and public philanthropy to support science-based research and educational opportunities for arborists and those working in the tree care industry in the west.

We create and enable knowledge by raising financial support for research and education to promote excellence and advancement in the field of arboriculture for the public good.

**Together, we care for trees.**