

# Plant Recovery

By Felder Rushing

Hold on to your jasmine, because in spite of the frozen havoc in the northern half of the state, not all is lost in this year's cold-ravaged Mississippi gardens. Many of us are in the midst of a real disaster, and will deal with it as best we can, but there are hopeful surprises already returning to landscapes zapped by woeiful winter weather.

No question, crushing ice storms, tornadoes, and hurricanes turn otherwise healthy pines, oaks, towering crape myrtles, and naturally brittle pecan trees into ragged horticultural revenants.

While consulting with fellow arborists on what is happening in the northern half of the state, we understand the losses, and the effort, expenses, and emotions. And time it takes to recover.

But before getting into dealing with the damage, a calm bit of solid advice to folks with devastated landscapes: Truth is, there is little we need to do, at least for now. Take stock, then a few deep breaths, and allow yourself and community time to work through this. After clearing enough to get you and property safe, take a wait-and-see approach, resist the impulse to rush out and do something; other than emergency removals, there is no urgent reason to prune broken trees and shrubs.

Important tip: This experienced tree consultant, along with fellow trained arborists, urge you to not grab at straws when it comes to having professional tree work done, especially if your homeowner insurance may be involved. Though busy, the good guys - the ones who can show you their re-

quired license and, crucially, insurance - can get to you. But a slew of poorly trained and uninsured fly-by-night truck crews are already starting to roam neighborhoods and can end up costing you far more than you might think you are saving. Happens all the time. Bottom line: If they can't show you proof of insurance, they don't have it.

That said, as we have seen countless times after wind and ice storms, even severely damaged trees which we think are doomed can survive for many years, sprouting new growth in the spring. At most they may need a bit of cleaning up to remove badly damaged stuff or make smoother cuts that heal faster, but there is no rush on this. Getting past immediate safety concerns, broken trees and shrubs can be pruned in the spring or summer.

Worst of all, and what horticulturists dread the most, is how sudden deep freezes kill the living, sap-pumping, green tissue just under the bark of some plants, causing even older stems and woody trunks to split wide open. We see this often with pittosporum, Japanese maples, sweet olive, star/confederate jasmine, and evergreen azaleas. Check down low for this, and, harsh as it seems, prune below the splits.

My advice for now is simple: If you haven't already chopped dead-looking stuff to smithereens, don't. At least not just yet. Clean fallen stuff and make plans to remove, as best you can, broken branches this spring or summer. Make neat rows and piles which may become plantable areas.

# CONSERVATION CORNER

## The Friendship Oak

by James L. Cummins

There are many historical, fascinating things to see and read about in the state of Mississippi. There are those that are well-known such as the Elvis Presley Birthplace and Museum, Beauvoir, St. Mary Basilica, Eudora Welty House and Garden, and the Natchez Trace Parkway. But there is a maybe less known, but just as interesting historical landmark known as the Friendship Oak, which is an impressive, 537-year-old southern live oak (Quercus virginiana) located on the University of South Mississippi's Gulf Park Campus in Long Beach, Mississippi.

Dating back to 1487, and officially named Friendship Oak, this tree is considered to be the oldest living tree in Mississippi. Over that time, the Friendship Oak has survived several severe hurricanes, including Hurricane Camille and Hurricane Katrina.

The Friendship Oak is located on the front lawn of the university's campus and is identified by several informative markers, such as

Create a trendy and convenient "stumpery." Where possible, leave dead trees as wildlife condo "snags."

Meanwhile, in the next three or four weeks go ahead and prune roses, hydrangeas, figs, and other summer blooming shrubs like normal; remove brown palm fronds. Then look for silver linings - the bees that come out every mild winter day and enjoy ever-cheery (and cold hardy) daffodils, painted arums, violets, and even dandelions.

And remind yourself that gardening is not just about maintaining a static landscape; it is moving on while coaxing forth brighter new days.

the one that speaks of the massive size of the tree. The average length of Friendship Oak's remarkable downward sweeping limbs is 60 to 66 feet from the trunk which has an unbelievable circumference of nearly 20 feet!

Another of the signs explains the meaning behind the Friendship Oak's name, suggesting that the name came about because those who enter the shade of its branches will remain friends for all their lives. Yet another sign reveals what the oldest tree in Mississippi would say about her life if she could talk:

I was a sapling when Columbus sailed into the Caribbean and was fully grown by Napoleon's reign. I am now over five centuries old. I have sheltered Indians, pirates, and college students. I am called Friendship Oak. Those who enter my shadow are supposed to remain friends through all their lifetime no matter where fate may take them in after years. There is not an alumna of Gulf Park College who does not possess, tucked away somewhere among her keepsakes and treasure, a twig, a leaf, or an acorn that came out of my heart. The stairs and platform allow me to invite visitors into my branches without disturbing my leafage. Welcome friends.

While Friendship Oak is known as the oldest tree in the state, the State of Mississippi has many forests where you can view oak trees and other trees and native plants. Some such viewing places include Sky Lake Wildlife Management Area, The Petrified Forest, The Forests of Mississippi's Piney Woods, and The Homochitto National Forest. You can also drive down one of Mississippi's Tunnel of Trees such as the one found on a country road, just off Interstate 20



between Edwards and Bolton, Mississippi, or the Oak Alley Plantation, famous for its quarter-mile tunnel of twenty-eight 200- to 250-year-old oak trees.

Between the historical significance, the welcoming atmosphere, and the majestic beauty, Friendship Oak is definitely worth a visit if you ever find yourself in Long

Beach, Mississippi. James L. Cummins is executive director of Wildlife Mississippi, a non-profit, conservation organization founded to conserve, restore, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plant resources throughout Mississippi. Their web site is www.wildlifemiss.org.

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