

Flood Recovery for Home Landscaping

By Cynthia Haynes, ISU Extension consumer horticulture specialist

There are no easy answers to restoring landscapes – soil, trees, shrubs, sod – after being covered by flood waters for several months. There are several things to consider when beginning the process of recovering landscapes.

Trees and shrubs

Some trees like River Birch, Boxelder, and Red Maple may survive periods of flooding with little or no intervention. Other species of trees are likely to die outright or decline over the next few years. The full extent of the damage may not be known until next year and if a tree leafs out in the spring. In fact, there will probably be some trees and shrubs that decline over the next few years and some trees that will slowly recover over the next few years. Please check out a link to [*Understanding the Effects of Flooding on Trees*](#) from ISU Extension for more information.

Clean up of the additional debris and soil that may cover the ground and roots is essential for most trees and shrubs that manage to survive, especially if large amounts of soil have been deposited. While this sounds simple, it normally is much more complicated and difficult to implement. Damaging the roots (which may be been damaged greatly by flooding) with heavy equipment can create more stresses for trees and shrubs. In some cases, consulting and hiring professional arborists and landscapers are your best option. Ultimately whether a plant survives depends on the amount of water, the tolerance to waterlogged/flooded soils of each plant species, and how long the flooding lasts.

The first concern in cleaning up areas with flood damaged trees is often if the trees have become a hazard or safety concern. Trees that are potential hazards should be pruned or removed - or a certified arborist should be consulted at the very least. But don't be too hasty with the chainsaw - as some trees that may look dead now could leaf out next spring. Flood damage doesn't always end when the water recedes. Additional problems with disease and insects may continue to damage some plants for years to come.

Perennials and lawns

It is unlikely that many perennials and Kentucky bluegrass will survive in areas that have been underwater for long periods, therefore, they will probably need to be replaced. If the water only lasted a few days or a couple of weeks, some perennials and bluegrass may emerge and recover quickly.

Vegetable gardens

Another issue homeowners may encounter is flooding damage to vegetable gardens. If some of the gardens managed to survive after flooding, there may be some food safety concerns with the produce. The ISU Extension publication, [*Garden Produce in Floods*](#), covers food safety concerns of flooded vegetable gardens.