



Stephen & Kristin Pategas

in the garden by Stephen and Kristin Pategas

All photography by Stephen G. Pategas/Hortus Oasis

When The Winds Come Calling – Preparing For A Hurricane

Hurricanes that impacted Central Florida in 2004 and 2017 along with year-round storms with high winds call for due diligence in the landscape. Proper preparation to prevent or minimize damage includes having proper supplies on hand and specific procedures performed. Preparation efforts are best determined by the anticipated wind speeds. Given the unpredictability of a hurricane's path, it is best to assume the worst-case scenario. Use the start of hurricane season on May 1st as the deadline for completion. Supplies to have on hand include rope, sandbags, ground stakes, hand truck, and storage bins.

Well ahead of the of hurricane season, start preparations by having an arborist assess the condition of trees on and near the property. Proper trimming or removal can help eliminate catastrophic consequences from falling trees and major limbs. Plan ahead since tree removal

permits are required. Remove vines from trees since they increase wind load and add stress. Palm fronds and tree branches can cause damage, so trim them away from structures. The feather-like (pinnate) palm fronds can be shortened without having to remove the whole frond. Do not have palms trimmed with "hurricane cuts" which is unhealthy for the palm. Instead, maintain green fronds at the horizontal level of 9:00 and 3:00.

Large shrubs also benefit from pruning to reduce bulk. By keeping trees and plants pruned regularly there is less chance the wind will damage them. Prune well before a storm so there is time for yard waste disposal. Yard waste bins should be empty prior to a storm event since they will be needed following high winds.

Many arches and arbors are not well anchored into the ground. Improve their stability by tying them to pipes driven into the ground alongside the structure's posts. Trim back vines to reduce wind load. To provide additional support attach ropes to the structure and to ground stakes (beware of underground utilities including irrigation) or sand bags.

Winds may topple planted containers, especially if they have large plants in them. Lay them down on their sides or use a hand truck to move them into a protected space or against walls away

from doors or low windows. Alternatively, ropes stretched over the containers and tied to sandbags or stakes in the ground may be used to anchor them in place.

Inspect the garden for ornaments and hanging baskets on walls or fences, in trees, and hanging from eaves. Remove anything not securely fastened. Collect small ornaments and place them in bins. To make it easier to determine the previous locations of items removed, photograph the garden from all angles before beginning preparations. If an insurance policy covers damage to the garden, these images are useful for filing a claim.

Sandbags are useful for directing water away from areas that may be scoured with rushing stormwater. Also use them at the base of birdbaths or containers where plants won't be damaged by the sandbags. If bags are on plants, remove the bags as soon as the winds have receded, and it is safe to venture outside. Homemade sandbags can be created from empty soil bags filled with soil or gravel, or use unopened bags of potting mix or concrete blocks.

Other tips include installing a rain barrel to have a source of water to flush toilets in case the water system is compromised, turning off the irrigation system, and removing or securing the rain shut-off sensor.

Start *now* with proper preparation to minimize or eliminate future damage and reduce emotional stress.



At left: Remove weak trees and limbs year-round. Center: A homemade sandbag and a concrete block tied to a rope anchors a container. Right: Carefully lay top heavy containers down onto the ground.

