

## **Recovery after the winter**

I am surely glad to see the signs of spring around me! This past winter was very emotional and trying. Many times I wished I would be able to help my clients better. It was because the weather was extreme and destructive week after week and I had to deal with the aftermath almost all the time.

I saw a house (rather what was left of it) under seven large Douglas firs. I once received a call from a man in tears because he and his pregnant wife were sitting in a house with a 90' tall tree leaning on it. Overall I had calls daily from people with tree emergencies. I wished I could help with just a magic trick, but solving a tree emergency usually is more complicated than just a trick.

I saw bluffs failing in many places this winter once again. Homes and the people in them were getting closer and closer to the edge and not with their willing. Solving drainage issues is also very complicated, especially during the rainy period.

Many of these situations could have been prevented however, and depending on what we do this summer, we will have a worse or better winter.

The most important thing is to take an inventory of the trees, bluffs, banks or other slopes on the site and their conditions. If any corrective measure is needed to stabilize the trees or the site, summer and early fall is the time to do it.

Paying attention to trees is very important. I talked about protecting them before and during construction in previous articles. Spending the extra time and money to do so will save much more for any homeowner later on. Watching trees in winds is one good way to see what condition they are in. Some obvious signs of potential failure are if for example a tree does not swing and circle in a balanced pattern but rather just moves as a pendulum or none at all. Extensive pitching or sapping may be or may not be a sign of trouble, but should be looked at more closely. Cracks in the ground around a tree can be signs of serious trouble as well as cavities in the tree.

Sites that lost trees this winter could benefit from replacement plantings. Trees are very important for a multitude of reasons. They use water and in very large amounts! They can absorb thousands of gallons a day out of the ground. Of course larger trees use much more than little baby trees and replanting usually means planting a small tree where a huge one was before, but if the replacement is at least 6-8' tall and has a healthy rootball, it will still help removing water from the soil right away and increasingly as the years go by. Trees offer other benefits as well, such as natural air-conditioning, keeping the air cooler on hot summer days and breaking or reducing the force of winds in the winter. Trees provide habitat to wildlife and as their roots penetrate the soil, they are effective erosion controls.

Erosion control is increasingly important with our recent wild and rainy winter patterns. The dryer months are ideal to map out the drainage system of a property, examine and test the pipes to flush out blockages and repair or replace sections if needed. Drainage systems came a long way in the last few years and the new techniques are longer lasting, more effective and easier to maintain. Taking notes now, while the signs of problem areas are still visible is a good idea. Where does water collect? Do puddles form frequently on

rainy days in areas? Did any plant die suddenly? These maybe signs of a failing drainage system. Drainage that is not functioning properly can jeopardize the stability of bluffs, banks and foundations.

To stabilize problem areas a good solution is planting appropriate plant material. The exact make up of a planting plan should be site specific, but in general, native plants are the best to use. Trees are important part of the palette. View should certainly be considered, however view can be enhanced by adding the right tree to it. Unbroken view sometimes ends up as a backdrop; our visual attention almost does not even notice it after a while. If a tree is in the picture or a few trees are framing it, our brain picks up the picture more often, so we tend to pay more attention to a view that in fact has a focal point or frame around it.

Trees and soils are interdependent and they need each other to exist. Good soil means healthy trees and in return healthy trees mean stabile ground. And stable ground with healthy trees mean better winters for all of us.

Author is Zsofia Pasztor, a Certified Arborist, Certified Horticulturist, Landscape Designer, Installation and Management Specialist, and can be reached at 425-210-5541.