

National Arborist Association

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Pruning at the Wrong Time Can Damage Oaks

Pruning is the single best “investment” a property owner or community can make to ensure the survival and lengthen the life-span of their trees. However the timing of that pruning needs to be considered. According to Robert Rouse, staff arborist for the National Arborist Association (NAA), “Most trees can be pruned safely at any time of the year, however, for a few species of trees, pruning must be timed correctly to avoid spreading diseases.”

For example, oak trees in the eastern half of the United States are susceptible to a disease called oak wilt. The disease is spread from tree to tree by the roots of adjacent oak trees or by picnic beetles that feed on the sap of trees. The disease is serious for white and red oaks in the upper mid-west and live oaks in Texas.

In spring and early summer picnic beetles can spread the oak wilt fungus from diseased oaks to pruning wounds of healthy oaks. The beetles feed on the sap produced by the pruning wounds. They land on the pruning cuts, and in that way spread the fungus. It is the fungus that damages the tree, not the beetles. The beetles themselves are not a pest of the oak trees and are unable to cause damage themselves. Because of this fact, the beetles are incapable of spreading the disease unless the tree is already wounded.

To limit the spread of oak wilt in upper mid-western states, professional arborist will avoid pruning from *[fill in start date for your area]* to *[fill in end date for your area]*, taking into account variations in weather from year to year. If pruning must be done during this period, such as when a hazardous limb must be removed or a tree is otherwise wounded, such as a broken limb in a wind storm, the wound should be painted with a non-toxic tree wound paint. Wound painting is usually not recommended by professional arborists, but in this case it might help prevent the spread of the oak wilt fungus, so an exception is made. There is no need to paint oak wounds for protection against oak wilt during the winter months.

Oak wilt kills red and white oaks differently. In red oaks the disease can wilt and even kill the tree in a matter of weeks. The leaves die from the tip to the base, and the whole tree dies back from the top to the ground. In white oaks the disease works slowly. An infected white oak can live for years. The disease kills branches one at a time. The leaf discoloration resembles autumn colors.

When oak wilt is detected, the professional arborist may recommend a number of remedies depending on the individual situation. Trenching to cut root grafts from infected oaks to adjacent oaks is usually performed. Injectable fungicides might help control oak wilt in newly-infected white oaks and can be useful as a preventative treatment. Infected oaks must be disposed of properly to limit the spread of oak wilt.

If you suspect oak wilt, consult a professional arborist for expert advice. To find an NAA-member tree care company in your area call the NAA at 1-800-733-2622 or visit our web-site at www.natlarb.com

