

Tips on Trees and Landscaping

DID YOU KNOW?

- Well-landscaped yards with mature, healthy trees and attractive shrubbery contribute significantly to a home's real estate value.
- Large, broken branches should be pruned back cleanly to the next largest limb or the trunk. Tree wounds heal better naturally, without a coating of paint or salve.
- Environmental stresses cause many tree health problems. Temperature extremes, drying winds, poor soil and root conditions, damage from lawn mowers/weed whips and the addition or removal of cover/fill over root systems can predispose trees to secondary insect and disease attack.
- Tree decline is a condition that gradually worsens over a 3 to 10 year period. Signs include sparse foliage that often drops early, very slow growth, and the death of some of the outer or top branches.
- Roots of trees can extend out from the trunk a distance equal to several times the height of the tree. Some strong herbicides can be picked up by trees a good distance from where they are applied, and even small quantities can cause substantial tree injury or death. Avoid using strong herbicides in areas that have valuable trees; even if a tree is not close by, a tree's roots may be present. Also, avoid using herbicides on a windy day. They can drift through the air and injure trees quite far from where they were applied.

WHY MATURE TREES DIE

What causes older, well-established trees to die? Essentially, they run out of energy.

As trees age and mature, their massive size and structural complexity demand more energy, but large trees have less energy stored for emergencies. As environmental or pest problems occur, energy demands increase, reserves are depleted, and decline begins.

Mature trees have less ability to tolerate change and adapt to stress. Maintaining stable environmental conditions around mature trees is vital to their continued health. Protect root areas by not digging, grading or adding soil in the root area; doing so can disrupt the exchange of soil oxygen and carbon dioxide, create moisture problems or damage roots. Maintain mulch to conserve soil moisture and avoid soil compaction problems. Protect the crown of the tree. Avoid heavy pruning except to remove dead or diseased branches, and make sure that any pruning is done correctly. Manage pests regularly, using conservative pest management practices.

Mature trees are not only beautiful, they are valuable assets from a monetary standpoint, help cool our homes and residential areas, reduce water runoff and soil erosion, and generally improve our environment.

*Tree tips culled from the Clemson University and University of Nebraska's Extension Services web sites.

TREE PESTS

Do you know the difference between gypsy moth caterpillars and Eastern tent caterpillars?

Both insects hatch in the spring and feed until they spin their cocoons. Although both types of caterpillars are about 2 inches long with light brown hairs, there are differences in appearance. The gypsy moth caterpillar has five pairs of blue spots followed by six pairs of red spots down its back. The Eastern tent caterpillar has a black and white stripe down the middle of its back, with pale blue oval spots along each side.

Each summer, gypsy moths hide their eggs on the bottoms of oak tree branches and under outdoor furniture. The gypsy moth caterpillar usually emerges in late May or early June – hiding during the day and feeding at night. It can strip oak branches bare in no time at all and has been known to kill trees throughout extended geographic areas.

Tent caterpillars are day feeders, so you are more likely to see them on the tree if you look. You'll see their distinctive white tents in the forks of trees beginning in early spring. They favor wild and ornamental cherry trees, pecans, beech and willow trees, and cause less damage than gypsy moths.

For information on how to deal with these pests, contact an arborist or the local extension service