

## Don't prune oak April through July

As spring approaches, a homeowner should stop pruning oak trees. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources advises to avoid pruning oak April through July (April, May, June, and July) in the urban setting. This is particularly important in order to protect your oak trees from being infected with oak wilt.

Oak wilt is a serious disease of oak, caused by the fungus, *Ceratocystis fagacearum*. The fungus attacks water and nutrient conducting channels in the trees and induces the plugging of these channels. Leaves of infected trees will wilt and fall prematurely, and the trees will die. Every year, thousands of oak trees in forests, woodlots, and urban settings are killed by this disease. Oak wilt is most common in the southern 2/3 of Wisconsin.

Oak wilt spreads from diseased to healthy trees by insect vectors and through connected root system. Fungal mats are formed under the bark of a tree that was killed by oak wilt within a year after the tree died, commonly in the spring. Small sap beetles (Coleoptera: Nitidulidae) are attracted to the sweet odor emitted from the mats. The disease is transmitted when the beetles that are contaminated with oak wilt spores later fly to a fresh wound of a healthy tree. The beetle that transmits oak wilt disease is not capable of creating a wound by itself. Thus, it is very important to avoid pruning or injuring oak trees during high risk periods.

Some of you may remember specific dates - April 15 to July 1, as the high risk period. Recently it was decided that the non-pruning period would be expanded and include only months. The change reflects recent temperature increase observed in Wisconsin and results from new research studies about oak wilt. For example, a 10-year average of April maximum daily temperature was the highest during the recent 10 years (1997-2006) in all of the six major weather stations (Green Bay, La Crosse, Madison, Milwaukee, Rhinelander, Wausau) throughout the state, compared to those of previous decades (1967-1976, 1977-1986, 1987-1996). Recent research studies conducted in Minnesota provided new information about the seasonal flight dynamics of the two principal vectors of oak wilt (*Colopterus truncatus* and *Carpophilus sayi*).

The dates were reviewed as part of the process of developing new state-wide guidelines for timber harvest activities in oak stands in Wisconsin. The new oak harvest guidelines specify April 15 to July 15 for north of tension zone and April 1 to July 15 for south of tension zone as high risk periods. Although guidelines that separate the state in two categories can be useful in the forest setting, a message that includes two sets of dates may be confusing to the general public. You already have many numbers that you need to remember in everyday life, including your home and work phone numbers, your social security number, a pass code for ATM, and so on. Thus, the new message for oak non-pruning periods in the urban setting include only months, no dates. It is scientifically sound and hopefully, easy to remember.

Don't prune or wound oak trees April through July, or to October to take a cautious approach. In some years, spring comes much earlier than we expect. If daytime temperatures begin to reach the 50F degree mark, stop pruning oak, even if it's still the middle of March. Some municipalities may have their own oak pruning guidelines. For more information about oak wilt

biology and management, please visit the Wisconsin DNR's Forestry Web pages at <http://www.dnr.wi.gov>.

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