

Hypoxylon Canker and Stressed Oaks



It has been an almost daily event for me over these last thirty-three years to visit a site and then, after inspecting the trees there, step back to give the owner a quick overview of what I saw and what I think. And it is not uncommon at all to report that evidence of Hypoxylon Canker is present on one or more of his oaks. "Hypoxylon what?" he'll say and then frowning his brow, ask "What does that mean? Is it bad?"

Hypoxylon Canker (*Hypoxylon atropunctatum* and other spp.) is usually a secondary complicating issue that appears on and in trees made susceptible through stress, trunk and branch wounding and significant grade changes. And at the time of this writing, one of the very significant sources of stress for our trees is the drought condition we endured through the last part of this summer. This naturally leads us back to the topic of supplemental watering that is so necessary during most summers and the discussion of the *how-to's* that appeared in my last newsletter.

One unnecessary source of trunk wounding is seen all too often in the improper use of climbing spurs during pruning operations. Climbing spurs as used in tree care are justified only in the case of tree removals or in emer-

gency rescue situations.

The photograph in this article shows the usually gray or black surfaces of the reproductive spores of Hypoxylon Canker. These spores are spread by means of rainwater running over the surface and can also be windblown to nearby trees where infection can occur again. Establishment of the disease in a tree system results in rapid tissue drying and yellowing and dying of leaves.



Because this fungal disease is so contagious, it is important to quickly identify infected areas and remove them before spreading can occur. Prevention is always best and is accomplished by encouraging optimum tree health, which

in turn (and as with many things) amounts to a higher resistance against invading organisms. Avoiding piling fill dirt around trees is another way to possibly sidestep this problem.

Hypoxylon Canker can also be found on other species as well but it is on our oaks that we encounter this nemesis most often in the Mid-South area. Maybe that is in part because we are blessed with so many of these sturdy and valuable giants spreading their shady canopies over the places we live.

Tree Issues Above and On the Ground



After living in the areas of Memphis and Shelby County for even just a short time it is almost impossible not to notice that red oaks are the undisputed signature tree for our region. Sometimes it seems that nearly everybody here that has a tree *at all* has an oak tree. As trees go, oaks are strong, long-lived, and beautiful. As they grow larger they can often be a prime contributor to curb appeal, site amenity, and resale values. Rightly placed, their expansive shade canopies can as well, year after year, provide significant economic savings on utility bills. In short, they can be an asset on several levels.

However, as time goes by and these oaks

increase in size, they can also become simultaneously problematic in a couple of ways. Above the ground their expanding scaffolds and horizontal limb structures can become a safety hazard to property. This may require periodic pruning and weight reduction. For tree owners, these operations are a normal maintenance item that usually occurs on a three to five year cycle.



A second issue can arise when large oaks have been growing up near walks, driveways, and footings. The clay nature of our soil and the consequent tendency for large roots to grow near or

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at the surface . . . and to grow toward moist soil areas . . . can cause hard surface disturbances and damage that can be unsightly, a nuisance and worse case, unsafe.

The photo in this article clearly shows one example of this. Over the years I have received many calls from folks who report having trouble getting in and out of their drive because of concrete slabs pushed out of level by large misbehaving tree roots. Or calls from others who regularly trip on up-lifted sidewalk sections. Or calls from homeowners who fear that roots from a nearby tree – usually an oak – will crack their house footing.

In the case of the last situation . . . cracked footings . . . it is not likely that tree roots will do this sort of damage if . . . big *IF* here . . . the areas under the house are and have been historically dry. In that case, roots will typically turn to run parallel to footings in order to stay in rain-watered soil. How-

Alternative Ways To Skin A Cat



I was driving back from a property inspection the other day in an East Memphis neighborhood when I came upon the horrific sight pictured at right. It jolted me. My first thought was to wonder why anyone would knowingly authorize such a blatant crime against their own self interest and against an oak that has been years developing into the asset that now provides amenity and economic value for the property. But then “knowingly” may be a word that does not apply at all. And of course in this case I did not have opportunity to speak with the owner or anyone else to get the details and to fully understand the pressingly necessary need to dig that trench. I can imagine that sewer issues . . . and other issues . . . can indeed be pressing issues. But I also wondered if all the options for repair had really been explored before the fact . . . or had even been presented. When this photo was made not only had this oak been seriously jeopardized in its ability to survive, but the massive loss of mechanical anchorage now greatly elevates its potential for blowing down in a storm.

Far too often I have stood in amazement, listening while a contractor who evidently had only one habitual way of doing things, stood and proclaimed to his potential client that this or that procedure that he was recommending had never hurt any tree nearby *his* work. During such proclamations I have to wonder if that contractor ever gets back to take a look one or two years later. And even if he does, whether he puts two and two together.

So the other day, after pulling over to the curb and reaching for my camera, I got out and got a close look at the massive amount of root severance that had taken place. The trench

ever, a periodic inspection of the veneers around the building perimeter and footing can discover new hairline cracks long before they become a structural problem.

For walks and driveways that have sustained root damage, it is often preferable to use creative patching versus cutting out large percentages of a tree’s feeder system and then repouring or repaving a new surface. Aside from potential major tree damage, the same wet soil area beyond the drive or walk will only incite the advance of new roots and ultimately, a repeat performance. While ramped patches may not offer the very best in aesthetic appearance, choice of that option *can be huge* in keeping a major feature in optimum condition.

The question always comes up: “Well then, how many roots can I cut?” And the correct answer in most cases is “. . . as few as possible and preferably none.” Except in extreme cases, most folks can execute a neat repair, alleviate much of their complaint and come out miles ahead.

As I was getting back into my car to drive away the backhoe operator returned from his lunch break in his (intentionally unidentified here) service truck. Suddenly I found myself resisting the strong urge to get back out and walk over to offer a friendly no-charge lecture on tree anatomy and function. I did not do that, but I knew that this photo (one of four that I made) had to go into this newsletter. It had to because such as this still happens in your neighborhood, and in mine.

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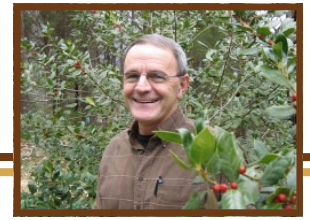


Okay, sometimes there may be no option or alternative to such radical damage. But very often there is. So if you ever come to the point where digging close to a large important tree seems to be imperative, talk to someone first about alternative ways to skin a cat. You might ask about boring as an alternative to trenching. Or ask about re-routing a new line as opposed to repairing the old one. Ask what options there may be to severing tree roots in a particular space or along a particular line. You may be very glad you did.

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From My Journal: Calendars and The Stuff On Them



It seems that we may have at last emerged from the traumatizing drought and record heat that characterized the month of August for us this year. It's time again to update my calendar for the months ahead. On each month page is that familiar seven part horizontal space set right there in front of me that represents one week of my life. The usual stuff is there; appointments with clients about tree issues or problems. There's a doctor's checkup next month and a date for having my teeth cleaned. Oil change reminder and on and on, *ad infinitum*. But as I scan the blocks this time several things seem to be forced to the front of my mind. One is a bit startling while the other is very pleasant to contemplate.

Yes it is startling to realize that I may have fallen back into that chronic habit of blowing past those pages, all those horizontal blocks of weeks. It's so easy to take them for granted, just as if there was to be a continuing and infinite number of them. But even before I passed my 63rd birthday this past June, at some level I became aware that I had already filled in and checked off and stacked into the closet archive the large majority of my calendar blocks. What would I find written there on all of those now-archived blocks? And what would I not? I could not even remember, or even pretend to. And that was a serious caution for me to take some increased care with how I chose to fill in the remaining spaces. My father used to recite a little quip that at the time I paid very little attention to: "Don't waste time," he said, "because it's the stuff that life is made of."

And then there was that other thing as I scanned those calendar pages, that other *pleasant* contemplation. Over this past Labor Day weekend we flew to St. Augustine Florida, said to be the oldest city in the U.S. We went there to attend

the wedding of my niece, my younger brother's daughter, who is now a doctor in nearby Jacksonville. Just a few months before I had missed the wedding of her brother, my nephew, due to a recent surgery and my consequent inability to travel. So when I saw them at the wedding I apologized to Josh and his new wife again and of course they understood. But it was still one of those one-time never-to-be-repeated events . . .and I'd missed it.

St. Augustine is a fascinating place, full of history, and Elizabeth's wedding was in several ways reminiscent of the weddings of my own three daughters. Daughters "One" and "Two" have since made me a grandfather six times. Daughter "Three", now with her husband in Johannesburg, South Africa, is living a life of adventure like she always dreamed of when she was a kid and talking about what she wanted to do.

In those days and even before, when our girls were small and all of them still at home, my wife and I prayed for their lives and for their future husbands that we then could not and did not know; could not even imagine. Yet now what we see is an amazing confirmation to us that God *does* answer prayer.

Several of those week blocks on an upcoming page are now excitedly marked in exuberant red as the time I get to fly . . . for the first time in my life . . .

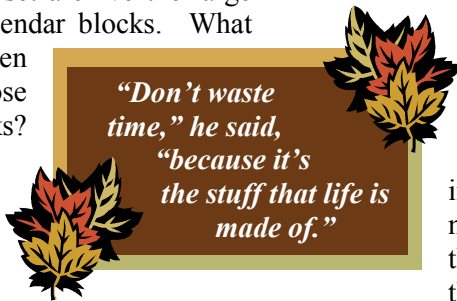
to South Africa to visit Bekah and Matt. Wow! What a trip, what a celebration that will be for us! And in the meantime, thanks to the technological computer age that we live in today, my wife and I are able to actually see them live on our computer screen while we hold long conversations with them way over there near the southern tip of Africa. Skype is a wonderful thing. I am ceaselessly amazed.

When we come back from Africa, my pages will tell me that it is

almost time to fly down to Austin, Texas. There I will participate in the third reunion of the BBOB (Bainbridge Band of Brothers). That's a very-glad-to-be-back-together group of old Marines who once upon a time were in school together in Maryland, ostensibly preparing themselves to become Midshipmen at the U.S. Naval Academy. Some went on to graduation and commissioning and some did not, but there was a strange ineffable bond formed among that raucous aggregation that endures still to this day. Even with our very diverse stories and life paths we now, thanks to email, remain in almost constant touch with each other and have mutually pledged to reunite annually to the last man standing.

However, for decades and until about four years ago we were largely disconnected and lost to each other. Since our fortuitous reconnection and through a subsequent and continuing flurry of email repartee' I learned, among many other things, about our maybe not so strange mutual haunting over the years by a Lee Teter painting entitled "Reflections." It hangs on a chosen wall in the homes or offices of a number of us and serves as one more reminder of our unique kinship. My wife asked me once why those guys meant so much to me, why we are willing to go to so much trouble for each other. And I figured out the answer: after all these years, we're still family.

And so, mixed up with all the everyday and ordinary things in our lives and on our calendars are also set in there a few jewels. They are very special shimmering things that for each of us, for our own reasons, are extraordinary. We need to keep those marked in red and underscored so they will not be forgotten. All too often and even when we may not think so, they will turn out to be one-time events or opportunities. There's seldom a "rewind" button and those calendar pages are not endless.





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Did You Know. . . .



. . . that the American Chestnut (*Castanea dentata*), once called the “King of the Forest” and the “Redwood of the East”, may be coming back after a far-too-long absence from our shrinking natural areas and landscapes. It took a fungal pathogen called Chestnut Blight less than fifty years to reduce this ubiquitous national treasure to an arboricultural nonentity. Once upon a time this hardwood giant dominated the eastern forests from mid-coastal Maine west to Indiana and southward to north Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi. The wood of this native tree was strong, naturally resistant to decay and is easy to work with. Today young chestnut sprouts can be found in the wild up to shrub size because it is a vigorous sprouter and because the pathogen is not soil borne. Is it too much to imagine that once again *chestnuts may roast on an open fire?*



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. . . that while it is not necessarily a proof of the much-debated *global warming premise*, the National Arbor Day Foundation has released a revised (2006) Hardiness Zones Map that is a general guide for average annual low temperatures and for plant tolerance to these regional averages. The new map indicates a general warming trend and has consequently moved the Memphis area from a zone 7 to a zone 8.



Home (Edgar A. Guest, 1881-1959)



*It takes a heap o' livin' in a house t' make it home, A heap o' sun an' shadder, an' ye sometimes have t' roam
 Afore ye really 'preciate the things ye lef' behind, An' hunger fer 'em somehow, with 'em allus on yer mind.
 It don't make any differunce how rich ye get t' be, How much yer chairs an' tables cost,
 how great yer luxury; It ain't home t' ye, though it be the palace of a king until
 somehow yer soul is sort o' wrapped round everything.*

*Home ain't a place that gold can buy or get up in a minute; Afore it's home there's got t' be a heap o' livin' in it;
 Within the walls there's got t' be some babies born, and then Right there ye've got t' bring 'em up t' women good,
 an' men; And gradjerly, as time goes on, ye find ye wouldn't part With anything they ever used --
 they've grown into yer heart: The old high chairs, the play-things, too, the little shoes they wore
 Ye hoard; an' if ye could ye'd keep the thumb marks on the door.*

*Ye've got t' weep t' make it home, ye've got t' sit an' sigh an' watch beside a loved one's bed,
 an' know that Death is nigh; An' in the stillness o' the night t' see Death's angel come,
 An' close the eyes o' her that smiled, an' leave her sweet voice dumb. Fer these are scenes that grip the heart,
 an' when yer tears are dried, Ye find the home is dearer than it was, an' sanctified; An' tuggin' at
 ye always are the pleasant memories O' her that was an' is no more -- ye can't escape from these.*

*Ye've got t' sing an' dance fer years, ye've got t' romp an' play, An' learn t' love the things ye have by usin' 'em each day;
 Even the roses 'round the porch must blossom year by year Afore they 'come a part o' ye, suggestin' someone dear
 Who used t' love 'em long ago, an' trained 'em jes' t' run The way they do, so's they would get the early mornin' sun;
 Ye've got t' love each brick an' stone from cellar up t' dome: It takes a heap o' livin' in a house t' make it home.*