

# 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 at the surface . . . and to grow toward moist

