

Managing Oak Wilt in New York State

Town participation in oak wilt detection and management helps DEC control the disease. For example, offering a separate pick-up in protective zones for oak wood collection, so that it is kept apart from regular yard waste pick-up; or chipping and properly disposing of infected oak wood once the infected trees have been cut down. Towns can also help disseminate information about oak wilt to residents through their websites, letters and social media updates to increase public awareness and detection of the disease.

One way the disease is spread is by beetles that are attracted to the spore-producing structures of the oak wilt fungus and sap from oak tree wounds. Trees are removed over winter to ensure these structures cannot form on infected trees. Towns can help slow the spread of oak wilt by waiting to prune their oaks until October – February, when the beetles that spread oak wilt are not actively feeding, flying and visiting healthy trees. Pruning will not protect oaks, but pruning during the correct time will reduce the chance of beetles spreading the disease.

Other than from ill-timed pruning, wounding occurs from damage caused by construction or storms. Wounds should be covered with wound dressing, a barrier to those insects, if they occur during the growing season.

Oak wilt is a tree disease that is caused by the fungus *Ceratocystis fagacearum*. This fungus grows in the water-conducting vessels of host trees, plugging them and preventing water transport. As water movement within the tree is slowed, the leaves wilt and drop off, and the tree rapidly dies. All oaks infected with oak wilt will eventually die of the disease. Oak wilt was initially detected in Glenville, Schenectady County in 2008. In the fall of 2016, it was confirmed in the borough of Brooklyn, Kings County and in the towns of Canandaigua, Ontario County, and Islip, Riverhead and Southold, in Suffolk County. From January – March 2017, 19 trees were removed from these areas.

Oak wilt is considered one of the most important tree diseases in the eastern United States. It can kill some oaks in as little as two to six weeks. If oak wilt spreads, thousands of oaks could die in New York each year. Loss of oak trees could lead to decreased property values, less money spent within towns, less money saved in heating/cooling costs, quality of life impacts for residents that lose trees and loss of wildlife habitat. Proactive response and prevention of oak wilt through partnerships can help lessen the costs incurred from inevitable hazard tree removals, along with replanting efforts needed in the future.

If you're aware of any oak tree in your community suddenly losing its leaves over the summer months, NYSDEC asks the public to report any occurrences to the Forest Health Information Line toll-free at 1-866-640-0652. Further printed materials and answers to questions about oak wilt will be offered by Jennifer Kotary of NYSDEC at 518-410-6360. □