

City of Austin Urban Forestry Board Recommendation on Oak Pruning and Oak Wilt

Current research supports that more than 95% of the spread of oak wilt occurs underground via roots (Juzwik '83). However, aboveground infection can also occur through open wounds on trees. Wounding mechanisms can include wind, hail, vehicle damage, construction activity, squirrel activity, bird activity, or tree pruning. Some research indicates that this type of spread can be minimized by taking extra precautions when pruning oak trees, especially when climatic conditions are most conducive to the movement of the disease spores. In central Texas, these climatic conditions are most likely to occur during the spring.

Temperature is the primary factor in spreading the disease aboveground, therefore, pruning recommendations based on calendar dates are, at best, educated assumptions. It is inevitable that some trees may require care during “non-recommended” pruning times. For this reason, when oak pruning is done during these times, it should only be performed by people fully trained and experienced in proper oak wilt pruning precaution techniques. These techniques include sanitizing tools between properties, making proper pruning cuts, and immediately covering any wounds with a thin coating of low toxicity wound paint. If you are unsure about how to do this, you should consult a Texas Oak Wilt Certified Arborist.

Passed 6-0 by the Urban Forestry Board, April 21, 2010, and recommended for adoption to the city Planning and Development Department.