Tree Myths & Facts

Simplified
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Outline

1. Oak Wilt
2. Pruning
3. Fertilization
4. Diagnosing Disorders
5. Watering
6. Managing Soil and Stormwater
You can identify oak wilt from foliar symptoms. Pattern of spread is the only reliable way to identify oak wilt.
Your trees will get oak wilt if you prune them in the spring. Failing to prune your trees when they need it, will greatly increases your risk to oak wilt. Even if it’s spring time.
Treating your trees and trenching can solve your oak wilt problems.

Trees process the chemicals out of their system but the disease still stays in the roots. Roots will re-graft across trenches.
Nitidulid beetles are the main way oak wilt spreads.

Over 95% of oak wilt transmission takes place between interconnected root grafts.

Above ground transmission is very complex.
Tree Pruning
Time of Year matters.

Our seasons are poorly defined. There are pros and cons to different seasons. You should prune as soon as you realize it needs to be done.
Pruning away sucker growth allows energy to flow into the upper canopy of the tree.

Sucker growth has leaves, which make energy, not consume it. The inner canopy foliage is a critical contributor to the health of trees.
Tree wound dressings are good. Arboriculture 101 says that wound dressings are bad. We only paint wounds on oak trees because Agrilife says it will reduce oak wilt.
You should cut out all rubbing limbs on oak trees.

It’s only a threat to the tree if rubbing is causing a wound. Don’t massacre your tree’s canopy if there is no exposed wound.
Tree Fertilization & Composting
Trees don’t need fertilizer because they’ve been doing fine without it.

Urban and suburban landscapes vary greatly from native settings. Nutrient cycles are almost completely disrupted. Not dead does not equal healthy.
Soil testing is required for proper use of fertilizers.  

Nutrient cycling in the soil is complicated. Seasonal biorhythms are very important. I believe soil analysis can be very misleading.
You need a complete blend of fertilizers. Anecdotal evidence tells me that we should only be supplementing N. I do not visually see benefits from P & K.
Conventional fertilizers are bad for the environment. Probably so when applied at recommended rates.

Humic acid and mycorrhizae improve tree response with significantly reduced N rates.
You should compost and mulch instead of fertilizing. 

Compost is way better than fertilizer. Composting and fertilizing together is AMAZING!
Diagnosing Tree Disorders
You can diagnose a sick tree from foliar symptoms.

NO WAY.

Tree health and seasonal influence will impact symptom expression. The same disorder can have different symptoms in trees.
“My tree was fine last week and yesterday it started looking terrible.”

90% of tree disorders take time to show visual impacts.

90% of the tree fatalities I see come from combined stress factors, not just one thing.
You can send a tissue sample to a lab and get a rock solid answer.

FACT

MYTH

False negatives.
False positives.
Shipping risks.
Contaminated samples.
If there is no disease.
 Decay fungi don’t culture.
I’ll figure out what disease or bug is the problem so I’ll know what chemical to use.

Figuring out the secondary intruder doesn’t really solve your problem. You need to address underlying stressors.
Watering Trees
Soaker hoses work.

Maybe if you left them on for a week straight. They don’t let enough volume through for a tree.
You should water at the edge of the canopy.

A hula-hoop of water around the tree will dry super quick and not soak in well. Put all your water in one spot and saturate the largest area possible close to the tree.
Don’t let water touch the trunk.

It could be a concern in limited situations but don’t turn off your sprinklers or limit your efforts if water accidentally hits the trunk.
Random or periodic water supplements are helpful. Consistency is what matters.
Managing Soil & Stormwater
I have to live with the soil I have.  

Well, kinda.  

You be surprised how fast soil can build up with regular top dressings with soil, compost and mulch.
People are giving this enough attention.

A bio swale can do a better job keeping soil moist than some irrigation systems.
Questions?