

Tree Troubles Tough To Treat

RUTGERS, N.J. — When county residents bring samples from trees that are in trouble to the Extension Center we may or may not be able to pinpoint the cause. If a disease or insect is affecting the foliage or twigs, we can usually identify it and make a recommendation on what to do about it. Often the recommendation is simply reassurance that the problem is not serious and not a threat to the life of the tree.

But tree troubles are often far more complex than simple disease or insect damage to foliage. Many problems are not related to diseases or insects at all. Conditions affecting the roots and trunk can not be detected examining a small branch or leaf sample. Trees that are in trouble and are valuable in the landscape or may present a hazard in the landscape will generally need to be evaluated on site by trained arborists or other tree care specialists.

Extension would ask the following questions when trying to assess possible causes of tree problems. If you have trees that are not healthy — general lack of vigor, small leaves, leaves off color, limbs dying are some typical symptoms — ask yourself these same questions.

Is the tree recently transplanted? It may take up to several years for a large transplant to become reestablished and during this time water is critical. Drought can stress well-established trees and new trees are even more vulnerable.

Is the tree on a newly developed site? Unfortunately, new home builders and buyers may pay a premium for wooded lots not knowing how the mature trees were cared for during construction. Trees in new developments may decline over many years and finally die because of construction damage.

Has the soil level around the tree been changed within the last several years? Most potentially devastating are additions of soil over the root area of trees. As little as two inches or heavy soil has been known to kill sensitive trees.

Has the tree been subject to drought within recent years? Most of us would answer yes to this question. Cycles of drought and wet over the last decade are certainly taking their toll throughout the region.

Is the tree in an area of poor water drainage? Have any recent changes in the general area possibly affected the run off or water table in the area? Areas of known poor drainage limit the varieties of trees that are suitable. Changes in water conditions in the soil can drastically affect the root health of sensitive trees.

Might the tree have girdling root? Maples are most subject to this condition in which a root or

root strangles other roots or the trunk. Girdling roots may or may not be visible. Diagnosing and correcting girdling root is a job for trained tree specialists.

This list of possible causes of tree troubles could go on and on. Some others: septic tank near tree, lightning strike, gas line, leak, herbicides, air pollution, and weed wackers and mowers. Also, wires, cords, etc. around trunk, temperature extremes, tree is of borderline hardiness, road salt, soil compac-

tion from people or vehicles, improper planting, and excessive fertilizer.

Diagnosing tree problems is challenging. When a tree has been under stress from any of the above causes, secondary disease and insect may be present, compounding the difficulty of making a diagnosis. At that point, no definitive diagnosis may be possible, no "cure" available or feasible, and no certain prognosis given.



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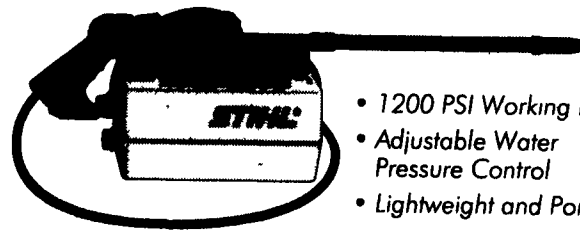
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