

Watch Out For Oak Wilt!

Oaks are beloved in summer for their ample shade, but currently they are under threat by an invasive fungus known as Oak Wilt. This infection shows up as a sort of “vascular disease” of Oak trees, with fungal growth taking over the sapwood. This prevents water from getting up to the leaves, causing a wilted appearance, and can quickly kill a fully grown tree. These symptoms show up throughout the summer, so now is the time to watch out for sickly Oak trees. Finding out where Oak Wilt is spreading is the first step in protecting this precious resource.

There are a few things to look out for when figuring out if your Oaks are at risk. Firstly, look for trees that have been recently damaged. This can be from natural causes like lightning strikes, windstorms or falling trees, or it can be from human activity such as tree pruning near power lines, roadside accidents, or lawnmower scrapes. These injuries on Oak trees are the initial source of Oak Wilt infections, as insects that carry the spores are attracted to the pheromones given off by wounded trees. Oak Wilt can also be spotted by looking at the health of nearby trees. When Oak Wilt gets into an Oak tree, it can spread through the roots to surrounding trees through connected root tissue. This kind of spread makes it so there are “pockets” of infection in a woodlot, with the trees that have been dead longest in the center, with sickly trees surrounding it. Unfortunately, symptoms alone cannot confirm the presence of Oak Wilt, the only way to know for sure is to find the spore mats that the fungus produces. These spore mats are found underneath the bark, and cause cracks on the outside of the tree.

Early detection and rapid response to this disease is key to protecting your woods! Currently, there is no known cure for the disease, but there are actions you can take to prevent it from spreading further. The most effective method is to remove the infected trees, and cut it's roots so that it cannot spread to nearby trees. The earlier you find an infection, the fewer trees need to be removed and the less disruptive the root pruning will be. If you notice the symptoms, but are not completely sure that it is Oak Wilt, there is another way to identify the disease. A live branch sample from a symptomatic tree can be sent into MSU's Plant Pathology laboratory to see if they can get a culture of the fungus to grow. This can provide a definitive answer to whether the disease affecting your tree is Oak Wilt.

If you need help with your Oak trees, there are resources available to you. Through the Forestry Assistance Program, your local Conservation District has a forester on staff to help. District Forester Ben Savoie has been trained in identifying Oak Wilt, has tools available to take branch samples, and can refer you to local professionals to help keep your woods protected. Landowners in Barry, Allegan, and Ottawa county can set up a free on-site assessment by calling 269-908-4134, or sending them an email at ben.savoie@macd.org.



This Month by the numbers:

Site Visits - 7

Site Visit Acreage - 230

Private Sector Referrals - 5

Public Sector Referrals - 5

Media Occurrences - 4

Open Referrals:

08-21-22

35 Acres of mixed oak forest in Castleton Township, Barry County. Looking for forester to write FMP for Qualified Forest Program. Mainly interested in promoting game habitat, particularly Turkey and White Tailed Deer.

