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**“Tree Issues, Oak Wilt and Ball Moss”**

Recent media coverage indicates that oak wilt is actively spreading in a number of infection centers throughout the region.

Oak wilt is a fungal disease that attacks the vascular system of live and red oak species. In unusual cases, white oaks may also catch the disease.

Oak wilt is spread when sap beetles travel from a fungal mat on an infected red oak to a fresh wound on a live or red oak. The primary preventive action is to paint all wounds immediately after they are made by pruning or caused by lawnmower hits or wind breaks.

The chance of infections is greatly reduced if you prune oaks in the coldest part of the winter or the hottest part of the summer, but it is best to paint the wounds 12 months of the year.

If you have oaks, keep a spray can of pruning paint on hand. In an emergency, even latex paint brushed on the wound will protect it. The key is that the paint must be applied immediately. The wounded tree is susceptible within the first five days of when the wound occurs.

Do not consider a tree maintenance company that does not automatically provide wound painting in their pruning price estimate.

Preventing oak wilt is certainly easier, and much less expensive, than curing it after infection has occurred. In live oaks, the disease spreads 100-200 feet per year from an infected tree through the interconnected roots of the adjacent live oaks. This characteristic of the disease means that your neighbors must also protect their trees if yours are going to be safe.

The spread can only be stopped by natural breaks in the root grafts or by trenching. An expensive, pressurized propiconazole fungicide treatment by a certified applicator will protect individual trees in the disease path, but this does not stop the spread.

Live oaks with oak wilt will die section by section in a pattern known as “flagging.” The leaves also show a distinctive symptom where the tissue surrounding the veins is yellow or red. Most other live oak problems show the color in between the veins.

For photos of this symptom and other information on oak wilt, visit the Texas A&M Forest Service website at [Texasoakwilt.org](http://texasoakwilt.org/).

Oak wilt is a serious threat to our oak trees, but ball moss is not. Ball moss is an epiphyte, which means it makes its living from the air. It lives on leafless or declining live oak branches in the interior of live oaks, where it is sheltered and the humidity is relatively high. The ball moss is not a parasite; it can even live on fences and power lines.

The branches in the interior of oak trees decline, not because of ball moss, but because of shading. To retain their leaves, live oak branches must receive enough sun to convert CO2 and other nutrients to starches and sugars through photosynthesis. The horizontal declining and dead live oak branches are an ideal place for ball moss seed to land and grow. The plants do not penetrate the live oak branch to intercept nutrients from the tree’s vascular system.

The best thing to do with your ball moss is to enjoy it as a unique part of Central Texas plant life. If it is not attractive to you, however, you can scrape it off with a long pole. There is also an opportunity every spring when ball moss is susceptible to spraying with copper hydroxide — Kocide. Enlist the help of a contractor with a powerful spray rig just before the live oak leaves drop in February or March.

**“Garden Tasks”**

We are now in the hot part of the summer, a good time to prune oaks, if necessary. Even at this time of the year it is a good idea to paint the wounds immediately after the cuts are made. The paint prevents oak wilt infection.

Control fire ants with a bait such as Conserve or Amdro. Follow the labeled instructions.

Crape Myrtles make a great addition to the landscape for summer color. Select the flower color and size that fits the space you have available. Most nurseries have a chart to review color and size characteristics.

Open up webworm nests with a long cane pole. Wasps, birds and sun will reduce the caterpillar population.