More Information on Oak Wilt

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Trees infected by oak wilt show some distinctive symptoms. On live oaks, sections on separate branches die. The pattern is called “flagging”.

The leaves that begin falling from the “flags” will often also have a distinctive pattern. The areas adjacent to the veins will be colored red, orange, or yellow to make a skeleton pattern on the leaf.

This symptom is different from the typical pattern on disease or stress affected leaves where discoloring develops between the veins. The only other stress that produces the oak wilt skeleton symptom is a lightning strike. To view photos of the distinctive oak wilt symptom on live oak leaves visit the Texas Forest Service Oak Wilt website. The site also reviews the treatment options that were discussed in last week’s article; fungicide transfusions with Alamo fungicide by certified applicators, and trenching to break the root connections on interconnected live oak trees.

Within a few months to as long as a year the flagged areas on an infected live oak will spread until the whole tree is dead. Red oaks that die from oak wilt brown all at once, and so quickly, that all the leaves hang on the tree. In last week’s article we discussed preventing oak wilt’s spread by painting wounds on susceptible live and red oaks immediately after they occur. Another way to prevent the spread of oak wilt is through appropriate management of firewood.

A fungal mat formed on oak wilt killed red oak trees harvested as firewood can be a source of new infections. To follow are some tactics to consider with firewood to help protect your neighborhood from oak wilt.

1. If you have a choice, obtain firewood that has dried (seasoned) for one summer since being cut-up. Recognize seasoned firewood by the cracks and splits that are present at the cut ends of the firewood pieces.
2. All of the Texas oaks make excellent firewood so if the firewood is not seasoned and you can distinguish between red oak and other sources of firewood, select the other sources.
3. Use up any new firewood obtained for the year before the arrival of spring. The fungal mats that produce the infection spores form when temperatures moderate in the spring.
4. If any firewood of unknown variety or age remains when spring arrives cover it in clear plastic. The plastic, if effectively sealed, prevents the sap beetles from reaching the fungal mat and the heat trapped by the plastic contributes to drying the wood.