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Oak wilt

Loading a customer reminded me of a valuable lesson concerning oaks. One of the trees was a Pin oak which I carefully plucked from its drip line so as to not injure it in any way. Land managing our property up north one year I happened to injure a valued Red oak early in the spring. The consequences were evident. By August that tree was in decline and on its way to the wood pile. Through my own lack of understanding of oak wilt I had started a tree's decline and possibly surrounding oaks as well.



This particular disease as any other can be avoided successfully with prevention practices. Wilt is most common in Red, Pin and Black oaks. White oaks can be more resistant because the disease progresses at a much slower rate. The easiest way to avoid wilt is to not prune or injure these oaks from April 15 through July 15th. A fungus among oaks block the tree's water conducting system. Once injured the tree creates resins and gums in reaction which also plugs it's ability to distribute water through itself. The disease is spread by sap-eating beetles which feast on the wound for hours then travel to neighboring oaks. Transporting cut oak wood can spread this scenario just as easily from spore pads under the bark used by insects. Sound familiar?

Treatment options include removing the tree from surrounding healthy ones, but remaining roots can still spread the fungus from grafted root systems of same specie oaks. Severing root systems with heavy trenching to arrest the fungus movement seems too costly and too invasive. Licensed application if not done just before or after injury/pruning limits the effectiveness. Watching how and when you work with oaks is the easiest and best prevention.

[DNR advises caution to prevent spread of oak wilt disease](#)

[Oak wilt in Michigan PDF](#)



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