

What's the deal with Oak Wilt and Dutch Elm disease?

Dutch Elm disease and Oak Wilt are both wilt diseases that affect their prospective tree species. They are both deadly and both can be found in Mahtomedi. Trees that have these diseases are classified as infectious trees and are regulated by ordinance in the City of Mahtomedi. During the peak summer months June thru August a city tree inspector is looking at public and private trees within the city. Elm trees that are exhibiting the symptoms of Dutch Elm Disease are marked and notices are sent to the land owner detailing the necessary steps to be taken. When oaks are being inspected, care is taken to identify what species of oak the trees are and what family (white oak or red oak family) they belong to.

Red oaks exhibiting the symptoms of oak wilt are marked and notices are mailed to the property owners. White oaks that are showing the symptoms are not marked as they develop no oak wilt fruiting bodies, so they are not contagious and are not regulated by ordinance.

As above mentioned, both Dutch Elm Disease and Oak Wilt are wilt diseases. They are fungal in nature and are classified as wilts due to their mode of action in trees. Wilt diseases typically start in a portion of the tree (in the roots or in the canopy of the tree) then spread over time thru the vascular system of the tree. An infected tree will begin wilting at the top of the tree and spread downward as the effects of the disease become wide spread. This wilting is due to the tree's own efforts to stop the spread of the disease within the vascular system. The "plumbing" of the tree becomes plugged by the tree's production of defensive compounds. Oak wilt in Red Oaks and Dutch elm disease in elms causes a very rapid decline in the tree usually causing death of the trees in a matter of weeks. Both diseases can be spread overland by insect vectors and by root grafting by trees of the same species. These diseases can be spread fairly quickly over large areas and threaten all of the Oaks and Elms within our forest community.

Infected elms that are marked are required to be removed within 20 days' notice, while marked red oaks are to be removed October thru March with a deadline of February 1st of the following year. Diseased wood from the removals of either type of tree may not be stored in Mahtomedi unless specific measures are taken to prevent the spread of the disease. These measures are outlined in the posting "Disposal and storage of Wood from Diseased Elms and Red/pin Oaks". This document is available at city hall and on the city website. Also available on the web site is the USDA pamphlet "How to identify, prevent and control Oak Wilt".

Property owners that are concerned about protecting their oaks and elms are encouraged to engage professional help from an arborist to discuss options for injecting, root severing by vibratory plowing and targeted removals of trees. Please contact the City Forester at 651-747-3736 with any other questions.