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Nurturing Trees & Plants

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME OF YEAR TO PRUNE MY LIVE OAKS?

Introduction

You might've passed a sign on the road that warns not to prune Oak trees from February through June. Or maybe you've run across some blogs or articles that say the same thing. Plenty of tree care professionals even warn against trimming oak trees all summer long. There's a good reason for all the warnings, but there are also some things you should know in case your Live Oak trees need to be pruned and can't wait until later in the year. Below is everything you need to know about pruning your Live Oak trees and why tree health care professionals suggest waiting until the right time of the year to do so.

What's all the fuss about?

All the warnings are a vascular wilt pathogen called Oak Wilt that attacks all types of Oak trees of Texas, especially Red Oaks and Live Oaks. What is Oak Wilt? It's a deadly fungus that invades and cripples a tree's water-conducting systems, killing it in a matter of weeks. There aren't Oak Wilt treatments available to cure an Oak tree once it has been infected, so the best approach is Oak Wilt prevention. That brings us to why it's important to avoid pruning during certain times of the year.

Why can't I prune my Live Oak trees during the spring?

When a tree is infected with Oak Wilt, it produces fungal spores that smell sweet and attract the sap-sucking Nitidulid beetle. The beetles feed on sap from fresh wounds in the tree made from pruning, storm damage, or other injuries, and the spores attach to their bodies. When they fly from tree to tree, feeding on open wounds, they spread the fungus. Nitidulid beetle activity and the production of Oak Wilt spores peak during the spring, so that's why tree care professionals warn that you should avoid pruning your trees during that time. It's the number one thing you can do to prevent the spread of Oak Wilt disease.

What if my Live Oak tree is otherwise healthy?

Unfortunately, Oak Wilt can infect any susceptible Oaktree, no matter its age or health. And if your tree becomes infected with Oak Wilt, it will probably need to be removed to prevent the spread of infection to nearby trees.

What kind of pruning are we talking about here?

Like all trees, Live Oak trees need to be routinely trimmed and pruned to remain strong and healthy. A newly planted Live Oak tree shouldn't be trimmed until it's at least a few years old. Once it's established, regular pruning will need to be maintained to achieve structural strength and integrity. The best time to prune a tree to develop the correct structure is during its juvenile stage. This needs to be done in a very particular way, so we highly suggest allowing a certified arborist who understands proper structural pruning and other healthy pruning techniques to handle this tricky practice. Once a Live Oak tree reaches its mature stage, it only needs to be pruned every three to five years. For this kind of routine Oak tree trimming and pruning, the best time to prune is in the fall or winter. However, there are cases when it's better to go ahead and prune Oak trees, even during peak Oak Wilt season.

When is it OK to prune my Live Oak trees during the spring?

Although routine Oak tree pruning should be avoided during the spring, there are times when it's necessary to prune your Live Oak trees during Oak Wilt Season. In cases when adverse weather conditions have damaged branches — for example, if your tree was damaged during the winter storm we had in February — you should prune your Oak trees as soon as possible. There's no need to wait until later in the year because damaged trees are already at risk. It's better to let a professional tree doctor tend to your Oak tree's wounds so that the wounds can be protected and begin to heal. There might also be cases when the tree needs to be pruned because its branches are scraping the roof or walls of a house. Any cracked, broken, or rubbing limbs should be pruned.

How do I prune my Live Oak trees?

The first thing you should do is call a tree care professional. Pruning Oak trees is something you shouldn't handle yourself, especially if your tree is in any way damaged. Damage can weaken the tree's structural integrity and make it a serious safety hazard to both you and any nearby buildings. Professional tree surgeons will have the tools, knowledge, and experience necessary to skillfully remove branches or entire trees from your property without causing harm or further damage. When you prune your Live Oak trees, the cut should be protected with wound paint. Using wound paint with an asphalt or latex base creates a protective barrier between the fresh cut and the sap-feeding insects. A tree care professional will apply the paint in a thin layer immediately after the wound is created. This should be applied no matter the size of the cut, and it should be applied to all wounds on all Oaks year-round.

What are some signs and symptoms of Oak Wilt I should be aware of?

Fungal spore mats are the first symptom to appear, but they grow under the bark and are rarely visible or noticeable. You might notice the activity of the Nitidulid Beetles, but more than likely, you won't notice anything until your Live Oak tree starts to show external signs of wilt. Leaf symptoms on Live Oaks are more distinct to Oak Wilt than those of Red Oak trees. You'll notice yellowing and then browning leaves at the top of your trees. The individual leaves will begin to brown at the margin toward the end of the leaf and then progress down the margin to the stem. As the leaves brown, they will fall from the tree and litter the ground. Because other Oaktree diseases cause similar symptoms, the best thing you can do if you notice any of these signs is contact a certified arborist as soon as possible to assess your tree.

TreeNewal can handle all your Live Oak health care needs.

If you have questions about pruning your Live Oak trees or if you think your tree might be sick or dying from Oak Wilt, work with a professional tree care company like TreeNewal that has ISA Certified Arborists with official Oak Wilt Qualifications who have specialized training in the identification, prevention, and treatment of Oak Wilt disease. TreeNewal is a certified arborist tree service with the tools and knowledge to perform the safe branch and tree removal techniques, including disposing of diseased materials and performing other preventative measures to stop further spread of Oak Wilt. TreeNewal offers a full range of expert tree care services, including emergency tree trimming and pruning during Oak Wilt. We care deeply about tree health care and protecting your trees from disease, pests, fungus, and any other ailments. For more information, go to our website at treenewal.com. To set up an appointment, call us at **(817) 349-7754**.

To learn more about When Is the Best Time of Year to Prune My Live Oaks?, call our Argyle and Southlake-based teams at **(817) 349-7754**

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