

# Oak Wilt – Information and Prevention

## What is Oak Wilt?

Oak Wilt, caused by the fungus *Ceratocystis fagacearum*, is the most destructive disease affecting live oaks and red oaks in Central Texas. Most of the tree mortality results from tree to-tree spread of the pathogen through interconnected or grafted root systems, once an oak wilt center becomes established. New infection centers begin when beetles carry oak wilt fungal spores from infected red oaks to fresh, open wounds on healthy oaks. Wounds include any damage caused by wind, hail, vehicles, construction, squirrels, birds or pruning. Research has shown that both oak wilt fungal mats on infected red oaks and insects that carry oak wilt spores are most prevalent in the spring.

**If untreated, oak wilt can decimate oak populations and tree canopies.**

## How does Oak Wilt spread?

Oak Wilt spreads through two primary methods

1. **Spreading through spores:** During the spring, the oak wilt fungus forms special spore-producing structures called fungal mats on red oaks. Mats form underneath the bark of diseased red oaks. The fungal mats apply pressure under the bark causing a tiny crack to form. When a nitidulid beetle feeds on an oak wilt fungal mat or tree sap, spores of the oak wilt fungus will cling to the body of the beetle. If a beetle contaminated with oak wilt spores lands on a fresh wound on a healthy oak, then that tree can become infected. Once established, the fungus moves from one tree to the next through common or grafted roots.
2. **Spreading through roots:** Live oaks commonly form root sprouts which allow a number of trees to share a common root system. A tight group or grove of these trees is often called a live oak mott. If oak wilt infects one of the trees in the mott, the disease quickly spreads through the common root system to adjacent trees and an oak wilt infection center begins to develop.



Live oak leaves showing oak wilt symptom veinal necrosis

**Consult a Certified Arborist, forester, or State Forest Official for information regarding diagnosis and treatment of Oak Wilt.**  
Use caution to prevent fraudulent information, diagnosis, and treatments.

## How can we prevent Oak Wilt infections?

**The most effective way to halt the spread of oak wilt is through prevention measures.**

**Reduce the risk of oak wilt spread when pruning:**

- Prune trees during the “less risk” periods of temperatures under 40 degrees or over 95 degrees.
- Always paint fresh wounds on oaks immediately with wound dressing or latex paint. Wounds can occur from trimming, pruning, tree removal, construction, or other disturbances.
- Clean all pruning tools with antiseptic between trees and sites.
- If possible, avoid pruning or removing trees during the spring (February 1 through June 30), when the beetles that spread the disease are most active.
- Debris from diseased trees should be immediately chipped, burned, or buried.

Regardless of the reasons or time of year, proper pruning techniques should be used. These techniques include making proper pruning cuts and avoiding injurious practices such as topping or excessive crown thinning.

**Reduce the risk of oak wilt spread from Firewood:**

- Do not bring any firewood into the area from unknown sources.
- Do not bring “green” firewood into the area.

All firewood (whether from a known outside source or local) should be stored under clear plastic to trap and kill spore-carrying beetles (black or dark plastic does not work because they can see pinpricks in the plastic and escape).

## Is there a treatment or cure for Oak Wilt?

**There is no known cure for Oak Wilt.** Once infected, there are two main courses of treatment. It is recommended that both treatment measures be carried out by a trained professional.

1. Trenching – Stopping the spread through the roots
2. Fungicide treatment

## Where can I get more information?

Texas Forest Service: 512-339-4589, <http://texasforestservicetamu.edu/main/article.aspx?id=1260>

Texas Oak Wilt Information Partnership: [www.texasoakwilt.org](http://www.texasoakwilt.org)

**To report a case of Oak Wilt, please call the City of Marble Falls Development Department: 830-798-7069.**