

## OUR OAK WILT EXPERIENCE

This past Spring Linda and I decided to clear brush off our hillside facing the lake, and take some limbs off a large, old oak tree at the water to improve the view. We gave the job to **Roger Bogner's Tree Service**. Mr. Bogner alleged he was a long experienced, knowledgeable tree professional. When asked about any tree diseases, he sloughed the question off, saying he "coats all of his cuts". I requested a heads up when he was going to do the job, and noted we would not want him doing the job when our grand kids were coming to visit on June 10.

Mr. Bogner unexpectedly showed up on June 4, and proceeded to cut on our oak tree. When he was leaving, I asked if he had coated the cuts. He replied he had not, but not to worry, he had done some research, and there was no need. His bill was \$200 over his estimate, but I paid him.

A couple weeks later, our oak tree started losing leaves and we became worried something was wrong. You could just watch the leaves falling off. Ironically, on July 16, 2015 the Ludington Daily News published an article entitled "Oak Wilt a concern". The article all but confirmed our red oak had been exposed to oak wilt by Mr. Bogner. I now knew what to research online, and quickly found a wealth of oak wilt information. Practically every article stressed the **importance of not cutting on oak trees April through July** ! Mr. Bogner had violated the cardinal rule by cutting on June 4. The beetles which spread the spores of the disease on their bodies were very possibly on the open cuts by the time Mr. Bogner descended the tree.

I called Mr. Bogner twice, asking him to meet with me on the matter. He talked nice, said he would meet, but never showed up. He first said it was probably lightning, then talked about cleaning his tools with bleach, then talked about trees dying in his area. He seemed to talk around the subject, and never really referred to oak wilt per se. I later concluded he knew exactly what he was avoiding.

We consulted with the Mason-Lake County Conservation District, and the Mi. St. Extension Office in Scottville. This led to us working with: 1. Josh Shields, Ph.D. Outreach Forester, Manistee and Mason-Lake Conservation Districts, 2. Phillip Kurzeja, DNR Forest Resources Division, and 3. James Scarlata, Consulting Forester. A sample taken from the dying tree and sent to the Mi. State lab confirmed the tree had the oak wilt fungus.

Oak Wilt spreads not only via spores in Summer months, but also via "grafted" root systems with nearby oaks. There is no way to save a tree once infected. Nearby oaks **might** be saved with a fungicide injection. A diseased, dead tree has to be disposed of properly. To date, Linda and I have spent thousands of dollars treating other oaks on our property, and taking down and covering the dead tree with heavy plastic for a year. It has been a very trying experience, and all because of an irresponsible tree service. I believe Mr. Bogner knew about oak wilt, but chose to "roll the dice" just to get the money asap. Had he even said he didn't want to cut until August or later because of oak wilt, we would have readily agreed. Instead he never mentioned the disease, and I believe, deliberately kept us in the dark. Our saga is not over, and may continue for years.

There are many oak trees in our area. I encourage you to share our experience and tell all to not do business with Roger Bogner. There are many oak wilt articles online: I highly encourage you to do the research.

John Ochs