

# Trees

## One of the Most Valuable Assets on Your Property

by Reeve Hobbie

Our beautiful homes with their mature trees around the Balcones Village/Spicewood neighborhood make our hundreds of properties visually very appealing. Now I want you to imagine driving around our streets without seeing any trees around our homes. The appeal of our neighborhood would be lost without those natural beauties!

My point is that trees are a major asset to our homesteads and we shouldn't take them for granted. Sure, you put fertilizer down on your lawn and irrigate the grass to keep it green, but what are you doing for your trees? Are you hoping they might just get some of what you give your lawn? And what about those "extras" growing in your trees?

Because Trees is such an enormous subject, I have decided to lead you to the internet about selecting trees, proper planting, care and pruning guidelines. (Look for the suggestions at the end of this article.) There are dozens of books out there too on the trees of Central Texas and many address these same subjects.

In this article, I'm going to concentrate on tree maladies that I see around our neighborhood. I'll share the dangers of a parasite, epiphyte, and disease that everyone needs to know about. I'll offer some background, suggestions and solutions.

**Mistletoe** is an evergreen parasite with tiny, smooth, green leaves and white berries that can be found growing predominantly on oak, elm and hackberry trees. Technically it's a hemi-parasite which means it both penetrates and takes water, nutrients and minerals from its host tree, but it also can grow on its own. Birds and squirrels spread mistletoe by transporting seeds from tree to tree as they forage for food, perch or nest. Trees that are already weakened or stressed are most affected by mistletoe. Mistletoe also happens to be poisonous to humans.

The best time to remove mistletoe is during the winter months when it's easy to spot and before the flush of new spring leaves appear. If out of your own reach, hire a certified arborist to remove it. Then, after removal, follow up with fertilization of the trees affected to replenish nutrients.



Mistletoe (green) & Ball Moss (gray) weakening a neighbor's tree

**Ball Moss** is an epiphytic bromeliad that is a seed-producing, gray air plant. It may be found growing in oaks, crape myrtles, vitex and other trees. It is not a true moss and it is not a parasite that feeds on trees. Rather it uses tree branches for support while absorbing water and nutrients from the air. When the tufts become extremely dense (as seen in this picture), they stress the tree by shading limbs that may be developing buds and leaves and therefore restricts that area for new growth.

A moderate to heavy ball moss infestation, that I see a lot of around our neighborhood, warrants removal. High pressure water jetting is one home remedy to knock them out. Another is a concoction of baking soda and water application (look up the proportions) that soaks the tufts. The ball moss will eventually die and drop out of the infested tree. There are commercial fungicides too. Lastly, a certified arborists can perform the eradication for you. Whatever way you choose, the preferred time to remove ball moss is late winter into early spring.

**Oak Wilt** is just one of many fungal diseases that can attack our trees, and the one most threatening to us in Northwest Austin. It's more than a wilt. It's a killer. It can kill whole groves of oaks, not only yours, but your neighbor's next door to you and across the street. Nearly all oaks (red, live and some whites) are susceptible to this vascular fungal disease.

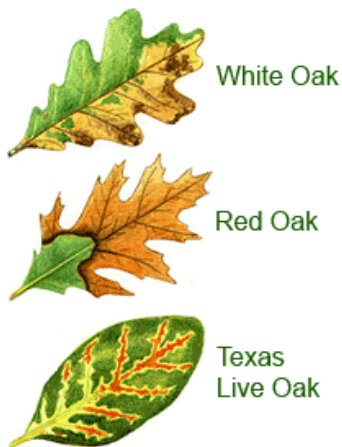
Disease transmission can happen several ways. Oaks can receive the killer fungus spores transported by sap or bark beetles that come from the fungal mat of an infected tree many blocks away from you. The beetles are attracted by the smell of fresh sap from an open cut or wound on your oak. Once your tree is infected, the vascular system rapidly spreads the killer disease from tree to tree through root crossings/grafts. The third way oak wilt spreads is when you bring home unseasoned oak firewood that may have the fungus. Don't import recently cut logs from an unknown source. There may be a reason that that particular oak became firewood.



Oak Wilt spreading through oak trees just off Millwright Parkway

Please only prune oak trees in the hottest or coldest times of the year. **Do NOT prune oak trees between February 1 and June 30.** This is only a five month block of time. When it is an okay time to prune oaks, disinfect saws and pruning blades. Paint the cuts on oaks **IMMEDIATELY** after each cut. The beetles can smell new oak sap in no time at all.

Should you or your neighbor detect oak wilt (browning of leaves, veinal chlorosis, leaf drop) other than the typical effects of drought, contact the BV/S HOA immediately as treatment should be sought. Time has told us that trenching and/or fungicidal injections may stop the invasion.



Please take mistletoe, ball moss and oak wilt seriously. Without healthy trees, we cannot keep our neighborhood looking beautiful or hold onto the great values of our homes.

**Tree Resources** as promised. I recommend for selecting, planting, caring, pruning and learning more about trees that you make an internet search of the following: [www.texastreeplanting.tamu.edu](http://www.texastreeplanting.tamu.edu) or [www.tfsweb.tamu.edu/arborday/planting](http://www.tfsweb.tamu.edu/arborday/planting). Be sure to include Central Texas, Texas A&M (tamu), Tree Folks, or Travis County Master Gardeners in any tree information searches. There is so much information available, but be sure you are seeking local advice. Same goes for books that you may pick up.

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## Lawns

The next article I plan to write for the BV/S HOA website will be about lawn care. As a preview, I'll advise you right now that you should **NOT apply fertilizer until April 15**. A pre-emergent weed killer application in January is okay, but not fertilizer. I'll tell you in March why you should hold off on the fertilizer until April.