



NEWS: TFS Urges Caution When Selecting and Transporting Oak Firewood

AUSTIN Re-release October 10, 2008 – The Texas Forest Service (TFS) is encouraging Texans to be careful when collecting firewood at this time of year. Transporting and storing diseased wood is a known means of spreading the devastating oak wilt fungus to previously uninfected neighborhoods. Firewood cut from oak wilt-infected red oaks can harbor spores of the fungus *Ceratocystis fagacearum*. Insects may then carry these spores to fresh wounds of nearby oak trees, possibly creating a new group of diseased trees.

Measures used to safeguard against disease spread from firewood include:

- **Select well-seasoned firewood.** Wood that was cut to length prior to the onset of the previous summer will typically have loose bark and cracked ends. Avoid oak wood that appears unseasoned, that may have tight bark and cut ends which show no cracks or signs of aging. The extreme heat and drying of a full Texas summer effectively destroys the fungus in cut firewood.
- **Destroy diseased red oaks.** A knowledgeable arborist or forester should diagnose red oaks (i.e., Spanish, Texas red, blackjack or shumard oak) that die rapidly (2-3 weeks) or in groups (2 or more trees over several years) for oak wilt. Trees suspected to have died recently from oak wilt should be destroyed by burning, burying or chipping. The heat of a fire destroys the fungus and the smoke emitted poses no threat to healthy trees. When red oaks die of oak wilt they may produce fungal mats. These spore-producing structures, which have never been detected on diseased live oaks, emit a fruity aroma that attracts insects. Sap feeding beetles, known as nitidulids, are the principal carriers of the disease-causing spores.
- **Safely store unknown sources of firewood.** If the oak wood comes from an unknown source and it is not well seasoned, cover the woodpile with a clear piece of plastic. Burying the edges of the plastic will prevent the entry or exit of insects that might have been attracted to diseased wood and fungal mats.
- **Avoid wounding oaks during vulnerable seasons.** The general recommendation is to avoid injuries to oaks from February through June. The best times for pruning of oaks are during the heat of summer (minimal spore production) or the cold of winter (minimal insect activity).
- **Paint all oak wounds including pruning cuts.** Throughout the year, immediately apply a thin coat of paint to all fresh pruning wounds and other injuries that expose the inner bark or sapwood of oaks. This prevents contaminated sap beetles from infecting the wound with oak wilt spores. Acceptable products for this job include pruning and latex paints, often available from hardware and discount stores in an easily applied aerosol form.

Oak firewood is an important commodity to Texans, whether it's used for firing up the barbecue pit or for warming up the home on a cold winter's day. By selecting well-seasoned, disease-free firewood and by following other disease prevention guidelines, homeowners are taking the correct steps to prevent a new oak wilt disease outbreak in their neighborhood. Visit www.texasoakwilt.org or <http://texasforestservicetamu.edu/forest/oakwilt/default.asp> for more information.