

Prevention best defense against oak wilt

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Hundreds of trees in Central Texas will die this year, all because of a fungus. It's called oak wilt disease and forestry experts are educating the public to help prevent this disease from spreading.

You might not notice at first glance, but if you look closer at some trees, you can see brown leaves and bare branches – all signs of oak wilt disease.

Texas A&M plant pathology professor David Appel says, "It's a disease of the live oak caused by a fungus, which has literally killed millions of trees in Texas since it was first discovered in Texas in the 60s."

The fungus is spread from oak tree to oak tree by a beetle during the spring and summer months. One beetle can infect hundreds of trees. It's also spread through the root system. So even a tree as far as 150 feet away can contract the disease.

Bell County Extension Agent Dirk Aaron says, "The disease can't be done away with, no matter what anybody says. Suppression is the key."

Aaron says most infected trees will die, but there are ways to prevent the disease from spreading, like injecting it with fungicide. While it can cost hundreds -- even thousands of dollars -- he says it's important to protect the trees.

"Land values sometimes isn't just the land and the beautiful nature of the house," he says. "It's the oak trees in our area."

Tree experts hope by educating the public about oak wilt disease, they can ensure our oak trees will be around for years to come.

For more information on oak wilt disease and how to contact a tree expert, visit texasoakwilt.org