

TREE DISEASE GUIDE

Get a grip on what's plaguing your tree with our visual overview of common tree diseases. (Most likely, it's a fungi)

Read up on treatment and control methods for tree diseases so that you can gain the upper hand in the situation.

What Causes Tree Diseases?

Witnessing the slow death of a beloved tree is sad for any homeowner or hobbyist. Trees can acquire disease and get sick, just like people and animals do. Fungi are to blame for most tree diseases, though bacteria and other pathogens also cause problems. The specific organisms that your tree is susceptible to will depend on your geographic location and other conditions. Prevention is usually the best way to manage tree diseases.

The good news is, tree diseases don't have to be a death sentence if they are stopped in time. Many diseases can be treated as soon as the bacterial or fungal culprit is identified. For serious cases, you should hire a professional to treat the tree or, if it's too late, have it removed from your landscape.



Typical Timeline of a Fungal Tree Disease

Fungi are to blame for most tree diseases. No matter the species, fungal activity usually follows the same pattern:

1. The tree is dealt a wound through pruning, heavy winds, a lawn mower mishap, sidewalk excavation, or other activity. The fungus enters the wound and causes a discoloration of the wood. (Sometimes, a fungus directly rots the tree's roots, without entering through a wound.)
2. Enzymes produced by the fungus eat the tree's wood.
3. Interior wood on the trunk or limbs lose strength. Limbs die, and small twigs and branches litter the ground beneath the tree.
4. The fungus begins to reproduce by forming a mushroom, conk, or shelf-like structure on the limbs, trunk, or root flares of the tree.
5. Fungi are to blame for most tree diseases. No matter the species, fungal activity usually follows the same pattern: Larger limbs die. If it's suffering from root rot, the entire tree may fall over in a windstorm.

Common Tree Diseases in Pennsylvania

Deciduous Tree Diseases

Deciduous trees, those that lose their leaves seasonally, can develop to leaf spot diseases. Leaf spot tree diseases debilitate trees and shrubs by interrupting photosynthesis, the process by which plants create energy that sustains growth and defense systems and affects survival.

Anthracnose – Anthracnose is caused by a group of fungus species. In Pennsylvania, it most often affects ash, oak, sycamore, maple and dogwood trees. Symptoms include leaf spots, blotches or distortion, especially along leaf veins, defoliation, shoot blight, twig cankers and dieback. Usually, anthracnose does not cause long-term damage. But repeated infections can hurt the tree and leave it vulnerable to secondary issues.

Bark and Trunk Diseases

Beech bark disease happens when the beech scale insect, *Cryptococcus fagisuga*, feeds on a beech tree and creates a wound in the bark, and then a fungal pathogen, *Nectria coccinea*, infects the wound and produces spores there. An early sign is a visible infection on the tree's bark that resembles a reddish-brown, oozing wound. Other symptoms include small, sparse, yellowed foliage, and a thin, weak crown.

Thousand Cankers Disease – Like beech bark disease, the thousand cankers disease is caused by a bug/fungus double whammy. A tiny bark beetle creates galleries and tunnels beneath the bark of walnuts and paves the way for a fungal infection and cankers. The disease's three primary symptoms are dead branches, many small cankers on branches and the trunk, and evidence of beetles. The bark surface may not seem affected, or a dark amber stain or cracking of the bark may appear directly above a canker.

Black Knot – Black knot is a disfiguring and ultimately deadly disease caused by the fungus *Apiosporina morbosa*. Fruit trees are at greatest risk. Its trademark bulbous black masses on tree branches are most startling to see in winter when no leaves remain to hide the infection.

Root Diseases

Root Rot – Armillaria root rot is a fungal disease affecting hundreds of species of woody and herbaceous plants, particularly oak and dogwood trees. It's most common when soil remains wet for too long. Symptoms may not be evident right away. The tree may decline gradually over a few years. Leaves often turn a dull green, yellow, red, or purple as they wilt, and the bark of infected trees can appear darkened around the soil line. Peel away some bark, and you should see red-brown discoloration underneath.

Evergreen Diseases

Needle Cast – A group of fungi are to blame for this severe evergreen disease. The lower, interior branches are the first to show infection. Sick needles will look purple to yellow before browning and dying. Symptoms will gradually progress from the base up to the crown of the tree, and from the interior to outer stems. The disease is deadliest for young trees.

Pine Wilt – A disease deadly for non-native pines, including the Scots and Austrian pines. It's caused by a microscopic pinewood nematode. Needles on infected trees turn yellow, then brown, and branch by branch, the tree dies. Unlike needle diseases, pine wilt usually progresses from top to bottom of the tree.



Treating and Preventing Tree Diseases

There is almost always more than one way to treat a tree disease, and it helps to know the pros and cons of each. Sometimes, even when chemical treatments are the best answer, you've got several choices on which to use. Schedule an appointment with a professional tree service to get recommendations on appropriate treatment. In the meantime, protect your trees from infection by educating yourself on the common types of problems in your geographic location. Purchase and plant trees that are resistant to your area's problematic agricultural diseases. And as always, practice good tree care maintenance. Regularly monitor the tree's fertilizer, light, soil, and watering conditions, and you will help keep disease at bay.

Ask the Experts about Tree Diseases

If you have any questions about how to preserve the vitality of your property, or you want help bringing your beloved tree back to its full glory, contact Elite Tree Service at [phone].



About Elite Tree Care

Elite Tree Care, LLC is family owned and operated. A close-knit team of professional members of the International Society of Arboriculture, PA Certified and Licensed Applicators and with over 30 years of experience, Elite Tree Care has grown into one of the most well-respected tree care services in the Southeast Pennsylvania Region.

At Elite we are committed to continuing education and state of the art equipment to provide expert care for the trees and shrubs on your property. Guided by the belief that good service means respect for the customer as well as the tree, Elite Tree Care is a client-focused company striving to provide excellent service and develop long-term relationships within the community.

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