

# Oak Wilt in the Denton County

Written by Scott Geer, ISA Board Certified Master Arborist

Recent news cast in the DFW area have generated unnecessary fear in Denton County about the Oak Wilt disease. There are pockets of Oak Wilt in Dallas and Tarrant Counties, but **there are no reported or verifiable incidents of this disease in Denton County.** Tree Shepherds arborists have not seen a case of it and have no reports from other arborists of its occurrence in Denton County.

This a sigh of relief for owners and stewards of Live Oaks and Red Oaks in Denton County. However, if it gets to Denton County, the disease can be controlled and prevented from spreading to surrounding trees. Tree Shepherds ISA Certified Arborists can diagnose and provide guidance for treatment and prevention.

Oak Wilt is a vascular wilt disease caused by a fungus (*Bretziella fagacearum*). The disease will kill a Red Oak (Shumard and Texas Oaks) quickly, while in Live Oaks, the process can take 2-3 years. It is a primary pathogen, meaning that it will attack healthy trees as well as those trees under stress from other factors.

However, it is not fast spreading and it can be controlled once it is identified. Denton County is dominated by Post Oaks, which are a white oak. The white oak group is very resistant to the disease. With the wide planting of non-native Live Oaks and Shumard Oaks in Denton County, the disease may show up in the county, but so far it has not.

Here are the symptoms to look for:

- 1) A general decline of the tree, especially Live Oaks. In Red Oaks, the disease progresses rapidly and usually the tree dies before the disease is noticed or identified.
- 2) Leaves with veinal necrosis. The veins of the leaves will be brown while the interveinal tissues remain green.
- 3) Bark may slough off revealing a large fungal mat under the bark.

The only sure way to know if a tree is infected is for the Texas A&M Plant Pathology Lab to test sample tissue for the disease. The lab has very specific instructions on obtaining tissue samples and mailing them to the lab. Tree Shepherds arborists are trained in identifying the disease in the field and collecting lab samples for lab verification.

The disease biology and methods of infection and spread are beyond the scope of this article. Please contact Tree Shepherds for assessment and advice if Oak Wilt is suspected

in your trees. The disease can be stopped if caught early enough and kept from spreading to other trees.



Leaves of Live Oak  
infected with Oak Wilt



Oak Wilt fungal mat under red oak bark