First Choice Tree Care, Inc.

Branching Out

Winter 2017

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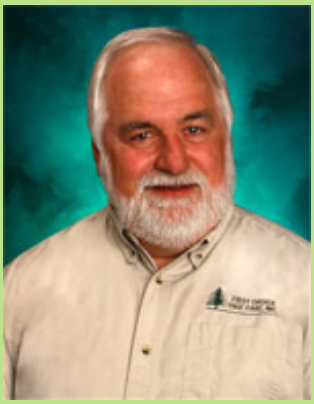
In This Issue

Featured Tree: Canaan Fir

Counting down the days to spring!



This year winter seems to come and go. Following heavy snowfalls earlier this season, many of us in Wisconsin were lucky with minimal snow and much warmer than usual temperatures. In Milwaukee, we experienced our warmest February ever, while March started with a snow storm. This changing weather confuses your plants into thinking that it's time to grow, and in the following week, that it's time to be dormant. Occasionally, wildly fluctuating temperatures can cause plant damage. We'll just have to wait to see if this changing weather will affect plants this year.

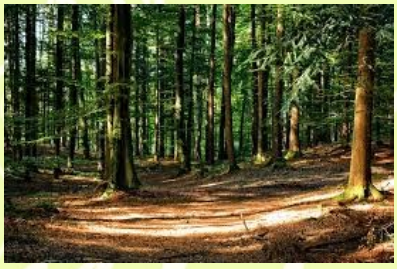
In this issue of Branching Out, we discuss winter inspection of your trees for potential problems. We will also examine how construction not only affects your morning commute, but also the health of your trees.

Best wishes,

Ken Ottman, Owner, First Choice Tree Care

Even though the holidays have come and gone, Christmas trees are still on my mind. I wanted to feature the Canaan Fir, one of the most popular trees during the holiday season. The Canaan fir makes an outstanding landscape specimen. The dark green to bluish green color of the Canaan Fir adds to its beautiful fullness and shape. This medium-sized tree can reach 50 feet tall and 15 feet wide and was originally found in the Canaan Valley in West Virginia. The tree transplants well, is relatively fast growing and responds well to fertilization. The tree also tolerates a wide range of soil pH, from acid to alkaline soils, and adapts well to wet or dry soil. With its wide tolerance for different growing conditions, this evergreen tree can now be found throughout the Northern United States from the East to West coasts.

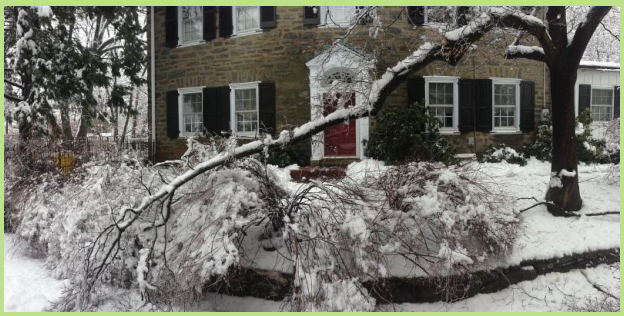
Tree Quote



"The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness."
John Muir

Winter Inspection of your Trees for Problems

Inspecting your trees for potential problems can save you a lot of time, money and headaches. Winter snow and ice may have put more weight on branches causing damage, while high winds may have torn the branches away from your tree. The dormant season is the best time to check your trees for potential structural problems as the trees are bare, making weaknesses easier to identify. Follow the steps below to ensure you catch all the hazards before it's too late!

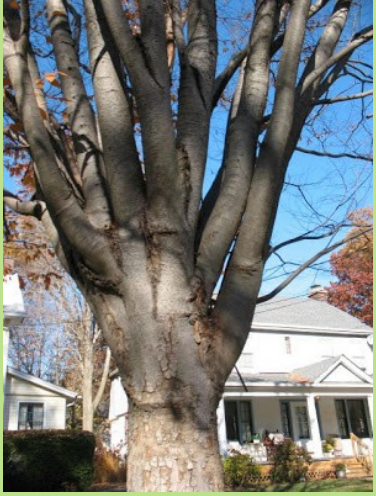


- Look for branches with a poor narrow branching angle. Very 'upright growing branches' may be poorly attached to the trunk, forming cracks between the trunk and branch. Check for cracks or splinters near the branch union as these branches are likely to break away from the tree.
- Compare your tree to other mature trees of like species. Are the branches of your tree too crowded? Do they rub other branches? Do some of the branches compete with one another for the same space? Are any of the branches dead or do they appear unhealthy? If so, pruning is in order.

An example of a properly branched mature tree is pictured below. Does your tree look like this?

Or does your tree have crowded branching, like the image below? If so, contact First Choice Tree Care to discuss pruning.

Contact Us
info@firstchoicetreecare.com
www.firstchoicetreecare.com
800-342-9498



- Assess the overall shape of your tree to determine if it is properly 'balanced" or shaped to your liking.
- Assess the stability of trees with multiple trunks by looking for U-shaped connections. U-shaped connections are generally strong, while very tight V-shaped connections are weak and may cause the tree to split.
- Look for small holes in the bark or loosened bark. These symptoms may indicate insect or disease problems. Identifying these pest problems now will help to prepare a maintenance plan for trees this spring or summer.

These proactive care tips will keep your trees healthy all year long!

Why Prune my Trees?

The pruning of your trees is one of the best ways to assure tree health, but it can be very complex. To better understand the reasons behind pruning, we look to the forest to see the natural process.
In a wooded forest setting, shade and competition between trees cause limbs to die and be shed from the tree. As a result, poor branch structure is reduced by limb death. In the woods, because of the competition for light and space, **most** trees die well before reaching maturity. Surviving trees have tall straight trunks with branches growing mainly at the top of the tree. These surviving trees may live for hundreds of years.
When a tree grows in the 'open', such as in your yard, conditions are much different from those experienced in forests. First and foremost, we don't want most of our yard trees to die before they mature. Unlike forest trees, your yard trees are surrounded by light. Branches grow low on the trunk and thrive because photosynthesis is enhanced by light. In fact, these urban trees often have too many poorly structured branches 'bunched' along the tree trunk, which can cause future damage to the tree when not properly pruned. In yards, large limbs typically do not die and fall off the main trunk like they do in forests, but rather grow and coalesce around the trunk, killing the main central stem of the tree.

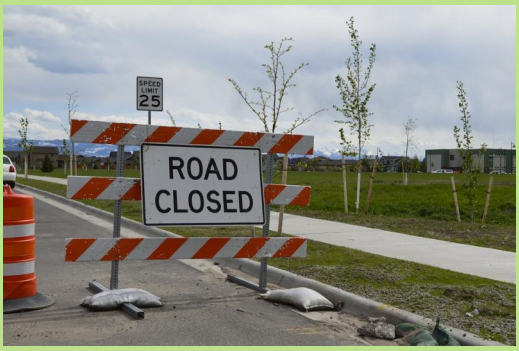
For urban trees, pruning is necessary and must be done for a variety of reasons:

1. To remove structurally weak and/or dead and diseased branches
2. To favor the development of the strongest branches
3. To enhance tree structure by properly spacing the branches along the main tree trunk
4. To improve the flow of air through the tree's crown

While pruning may seem simple, there is both an art and a scientific basis for how it is done. Improper pruning is the quickest and surest way to ruin an otherwise beautiful tree.

Because this is a complex subject with many variables, including safety, we highly suggest that pruning be performed by a knowledgeable and Certified arborist. If you choose to learn how to do effective pruning on your own, our suggestion is to research good techniques. There are several excellent books written on the subject.

How Construction Affects your Trees



Construction is all too common in Wisconsin, especially for those who travel our state and federal highway systems. When your road rage heightens, remember you aren't the only one affected by the construction. Trees can be damaged or killed by many different construction activities.

Some trees are injured by obvious reasons, such as broken branches or torn bark from machinery. These open wounds allow insects and diseases to enter the tree and cause future issues for the plant.

Even though you can't see the damage, tree roots are also impacted by construction and can result in injured or even dead trees. About 90 percent of a tree's roots are in the top three feet of soil and can extend outward more than twice the height of the tree.

Three ways roots can be impacted by construction include:

- **Soil compaction** is the number one way construction can damage trees. Trees thrive on loose soil that contains lots of pore space. Proper pore space facilitates the movement of water, nutrients and especially oxygen within the soil. With heavy machinery driving over the soil, it becomes compacted causing pore space to be reduced. This compaction reduces the oxygen within the soil and causes water to move less freely. The result of compaction is slow tree death from suffocation or drowning.
- **Improper disposal of materials** can also lead to tree damage. Chemicals from spills and construction debris can seep into the

soil, killing roots.

- **Grade changes and excavations of soil** can also impact trees. Adding large amounts of soil or removing it can affect the health of trees. When adding large amounts of soil, the soil becomes compacted and reduces the ability for atmospheric oxygen to permeate down to the buried roots. Removing soil physically damages and/or disrupts the tree's roots causing the decline and/or death of the tree.

Construction damage may not appear for up to seven or more years after the damage is done. The first signs of damage are stress related, usually wilted leaves and/or drooping branches. With major damage, large limbs begin to die back, (sometimes called stag-horning). In fact, when stag-horning occurs, our first suspicion is root loss or damage. Some trees show signs of distress by turning into its fall colors early in the season and by prematurely dropping their leaves. The tree's annual twig and diameter growth may also begin to slow. If any of these symptoms occur, be sure to contact First Choice Tree Care to discuss your options.

With construction activity not slowing down anytime soon, it is best to be prepared. Be sure to follow these steps to create a successful landscape plan and ensure your trees remain healthy.

- Contact us at First Choice Tree Care to help develop a preservation plan.
- Mark the construction zone boundaries. By marking where the construction will be taking place, you will be able to determine which trees to monitor.
- Inventory your trees. Be sure to record where your trees are located and their size and health.
- Select the trees to be saved, and protect them. Fence off a generous area around each tree to protect it from compaction and direct equipment damage.
- Prominently mark those trees that are to be removed, if any.
- Provide specific entrance and exit routes for construction equipment. Use common routes for all equipment, mark and/or fence off the routes, and limit vehicles to these specified routes.
- Provide for a single utility access route (common trenches). If possible, work with the construction engineer on a common path to avoid any damage to the trees.
- Build penalties for damage to your trees into your construction contract.
- Prepare your trees for construction. Boost your trees health by regularly watering and fertilizing the soil. It is also best to layer wood chips at least six inches thick around the base of the tree