

Assessing tree health and condition can prove beneficial

A tree assessment can be a valuable tool for trees of all ages. By assessment, I mean taking the time to look carefully at the tree and note any needs or concerns that are associated with it. These concerns include, but are not limited to, stability, dead or broken limbs, proximity to power lines, insect or disease pests, trunk damage, trunk flare, stakes or wire.

Leaning or pushing on the trunk, at a height of about 5 to 6 feet, can determine the stability of a tree. The tree should not sway or move when pushed. The soil around the trunk should not move as this is an indication of root rot or rodent damage. Don't try this for the first two years, as it will take a tree that long to become established. After the first few years it should be well-rooted and firmly set in the ground.

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Dead or broken limbs should be removed for several reasons. They can become a hazard if they fall on a home, car or even a person below. They also serve as points of entry for pests that can harm the tree. Broken or dead limbs should be pruned close to the next live limb or bud. Pruning cuts should be smooth to help promote healing.

Trees should not be allowed to grow near power or other utility lines. Directional pruning can be utilized to prevent this. Simply look for a branch or bud going in the desired direction away from the power line and make a cut to that branch or bud. This

will effectively change the direction which the tree is growing. Any pruning that must be done near a power line should be done by the power company. They should perform this type of pruning free of charge, but may not do other types of shaping that could be needed at that time.

Damage from certain insects may be simply cosmetic, such as the gall-forming damage that occurs from certain mites and other types of sucking insects. Damage from trunk boring insects is always cause for alarm. Trunk borers can inflict severe injury in a relatively short time and controls should be put into place as soon as possible. Diseases are often more difficult to determine. They are generally slow-moving with the exception of a few. Suspicious wood should be closely examined to determine if a disease is present and some type of control is warranted.

Trunk damage is often associated with weed whacking activity. String trimmers have been the demise of many a tree over the years. Keep string trimmers away from the trunk to prevent injury. Trunk damage can take a number of years to heal depending on the extent of the damage. There is little that can be done to promote healing where the trunk has been damaged. No sealers, paints or treatments are recommended.

A healthy tree will flare at the bottom before it enters the ground. This flare is normal as it provides added support and anchorage. A tree with no flare (straight trunk) may have problems

underground. Planting too deeply will hide the trunk flare and not allow for normal growth. Another cause for no trunk flare or a flattening on one side of the trunk, could be a root crossing over the crown. If caught early crossing roots can be removed, however if this is not taken care of early enough it can cause irreversible damage.

Trees often come from the nursery with a small-diameter nursery stake to give support and protection in the nursery. This is a temporary stake that should be removed once the tree is planted. Other stakes may be driven in on two or three sides of the tree with wire used to hold it in place. Tree staking is intended to give support for a maximum of one to two years.

They are of greatest importance in windy sites and on tall trees. If not removed at the proper time, the stake and wire can prove fatal for the tree, particularly if the wire is left on and begins to girdle the trunk.

A tree assessment can best be performed by a certified tree arborist. They can give you a written assessment of each tree in the landscape. This is helpful for making decisions regarding the immediate needs of the tree as well as those that may arise in the future.

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<http://www.agriculture.purdue.edu/fnr/html/ugrad/UrbFor/TreeRisk.pdf>

extension article on pruning:
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG087>

learning about trees:
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG089>