

# Don't Let Oak Wilt, Wilt the Forest or Your Hunting Habitat!

An insidious disease is killing *mitigomizh* (oaks) from Texas to Minnesota and east to New York. Oak wilt (OW for short) is caused by the fungus *Ceratocystis fagacearum*. This fungus infiltrates oak trees, clogging the tree's water conducting system and causing the leaves to develop brown blotches and drop in summer. Red oaks are most susceptible to OW and are almost always killed. White oaks are much more resistant but can still die from OW.



AL Dept. of Conservation and Natural Resources



J. O'Brien, USFS, Bugwood.org UGA5055016

Brown, wilted leaves on recently healthy oak trees in mid-summer are a sure indication of oak wilt. Red oaks usually die from the top down. This northern red oak will probably be dead by fall.

Infested northern pin oak leaves.



SCG, GLIFWC

"These are not the brown, dry leaves of autumn [but] partially green to bronze-green and not completely dry"  
- Wisconsin DNR Forest Pathologist Kyoko Scanlon.

## RED AND BLACK OAKS

(*Quercus* subgenus *Erythrobalanus*)



Northern red oak



Pin or scrub oak

Red and black oaks are easily recognized by their pointed, bristle tipped leaf lobes. Their bark is often smooth when young but deeply furrowed with age. Their acorns ripen the second year, leaving them attached to the year-old twigs below the leaves.

## WHITE OAKS

*Quercus* subgenus *Quercus*



Bur oak



White oak

White oaks have rounded lobes without bristles. The mature bark is scaly or papery, and rarely deeply furrowed. The acorns ripen in their first growing season, and so are located among the leaves.

**Oak wilt infestations can be controlled and even eradicated, as long as people don't move infested logs and firewood to new sites.**

Red and black oaks often form root grafts with the same or closely related species. Grafts between white oaks are less common.



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OW has more than one trick up its sleeve. In the fall or spring after OW kills a red oak, it produces fungal pads under the bark, breaking it open. Sap beetles feed on these pads and spread the spores to damaged oaks. That's why it's so important to not damage oaks from April through July, and to not move firewood!

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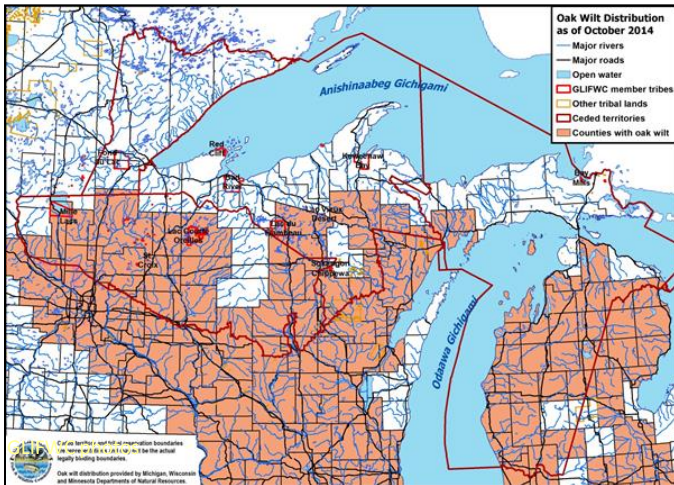
Michigan DNR forestry crew using a vibratory plow with a 5-ft blade to cut the root network around an oak wilt infestation. The red oak trees must then be cut and debarked to prevent spores from being produced.



J. O'Brien, USFS, Bugwood.org

UGA5039095

Expanding pockets of dead oak trees are typical of oak wilt infestations, as the fungus spreads from tree to tree through root grafts.



Counties having at least one oak wilt infestation. Oak wilt is widespread and locally common in Lower Michigan, southern Wisconsin and the Twin Cities region of Minnesota, but still uncommon and local north of these areas. (Compiled from MI, WI and MN DNR data)



D. W. French, Univ. of MN, Bugwood.org

The word is getting out! Damaging healthy oak trees between April 1 and August 1 can spread OW.

**You can help! Report suspected oak wilt infestations to tribal, state or federal natural resource agencies. Or contact:**

**Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission**  
**PO Box 9, 72682 Maple Street**  
**Odanah, WI 54861**  
**715-682-6619**  
[www.glifwc.org](http://www.glifwc.org)

