

### **A Life Preserver for Drowning Trees**

Are your trees drowning? Too much water sitting at the base of a tree can cause myriad problems. A traditional life preserver might not be the answer for these leafy giants, but a little knowledge – and knowing where to seek assistance – can help trees survive spring thaw.

Too much water can be as bad for trees as too little water. While some trees are suited to survive occasional floods, most are not. In addition, as a tree becomes older, its ability to adapt to abrupt environmental changes decrease.

“Trees must maintain a proper water balance,” says Tchukki Andersen, staff arborist with the Tree Care Industry Association. “Although most trees can withstand moisture conditions from very dry to very wet for short periods of time, continued extremes can cause serious problems, depending on the tree species. Some species – such as some oaks, pines, and junipers – have adapted to survive drier conditions. Trees that grow along rivers (such as willows, poplars, cottonwoods and sycamores) and trees that grow in or around swamps and ponds (such as red maples, gums and pond cypress) can also grow in wet conditions. Flood injury occurs when soil becomes saturated with water. There doesn’t need to be an actual flood to cause flood injury.

#### **Symptoms of flood injury, in the order that they develop on the foliage, are:**

- Slight wilting or drooping of the foliage;
- Yellowing and browning (necrosis) of leaf edges;
- Browning in the center of the leaf.

The symptoms usually start at the top of the tree or on the ends of branches, and spread throughout the entire crown. The symptoms are often more severe on the side of the tree facing the prevailing winds.

#### **What to do:**

The best prevention for this problem is to avoid planting flood-intolerant trees in areas that are frequently flooded. There are a variety of wetland trees and shrubs that can be planted instead. There are not many practical short-term solutions other than improving drainage. Whenever changes in drainage are made, the impact to all the affected landscape and landscape plants needs to be considered. Avoid creating problems for flood-tolerant plants by providing drainage for intolerant plants.

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Partially Reprinted from Tree Care Industry Magazine