

Problem: Bleeding Cankers



Host Plants: Numerous shade trees but the problem is most common on pin oaks, willows, cottonwoods, and honeylocust, but other species may show similar symptoms

Description:

The bleeding may be located anywhere on the trunk, but it is often associated with bark crevices or branch crotches. A dark brown to black, foul-smelling liquid oozes from the bark. In some cases, foamy liquid may froth from the wound for several days. In some cases, the bleeding areas of bark will die, and a canker will form. These cankers typically are active for only a short period and do not often kill the tree. Don't confuse these bleeding cankers with wetwood. Wetwood also results in the bleeding of foul-smelling liquid from open wounds on many deciduous trees. However, wetwood is a result of colonization of the wood by bacterial organisms, whereas bleeding cankers are primarily a problem of the bark and cambium.

We really don't have a good understanding of why and how bleeding cankers develop. Certain fungal pathogens can cause a bleeding or weeping canker. For example, the *Cytospora* fungus is a common cause of cankers on willows and cottonwood and in certain cases can result in a bleeding area. Similarly, the *Botryosphaeria* fungus can cause bleeding cankers on a number of trees including sweetgum. However, many of the foamy-type cankers that we see early in the growing season appear to be associated with bacterial and not fungal infections. The nature of the bacterial infections is still unclear. In some cases they may be associated with insect wounds or other physical bark damage, but in other cases they are not.

Recommendations:

Control of these bleeding cankers is difficult. Since we often don't understand what causes them, it's hard to develop an effective management strategy. Chemical applications to the trunk to suppress active cankers are ineffective. In most cases, these cankers persist for only one growing season and often don't kill the tree. It may be best to do nothing; let the tree seal the wound on its own. Some people prefer to scribe around and remove the bleeding bark in an effort to dry out the damaged area. There really isn't much evidence this helps. Bark removal will do more damage than good if done improperly.

References:

1. [Bleeding Cankers on Tree Trunks](#), University of Illinois Extension, Home, Yard & Garden Pest Newsletter, June 14, 2007
2. [Phytophthora Bleeding Canker](#), University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Landscape, Nursery & Urban Forestry Program

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