

Dead Oak Tree of Pinehurst Rd, Canyon

Sudden Oak Death Hitting Our Trees

By Chris Lavin
Contributing Writer

A shadow is slowly passing over the Lamorinda area in the shape of a sickle: Sudden Oak Death Syndrome is descending on the oaks of our region.

It is not too late, however, to do something about it.

“There are some experts who are saying that this disease will kill 98 percent of the coastal live oaks in Contra Costa County in the next 20 years,” said Jonathan Goodwin, a Canyon resident who has been trumpeting the word for the past year, advocating prevention.

Tanoaks and white oaks are also particularly prone to infection. Some trees in the EBMUD watershed areas in Contra Costa have already been infected, providing host trees for the spread of the disease.

Sudden Oak Death is caused by a parasitic pathogen with the name of *phytophthora ramorum*, which unfortunately can hitch a ride on particles of fog – an impossible traveler to block. The burning of diseased oaks can also spread the disease, or the delivery of an infected wood pile can carry the germs into the surrounding vegetation.

Bay laurels, camellia bushes and rhododendrons host the disease, as well, although they are not killed by it.

While dying oaks have not been ubiquitous in the Lamorinda area, more and more trees are being infected – a sign that there will likely be more to come, said Robert Scudder, of the San Francisco Professional Gardeners’ Organization.

“I’m sure it will come,” said Kenny Murakami, longtime owner and

manager of the Moraga Garden Center, about the disease in Contra Costa County. “It’s already here.”

Murakami recommends spraying healthy oaks with a dose of Agri-Fos, originally used as a fertilizer but which turned out to have the added benefit of preventing Sudden Oak Death in trees to which it had been applied. The Agri-Fos solution should be pumped and sprayed onto the trunk of the tree, from the ground up to about 8’. “Now is the time to do it,” Murakami said. “Now, and again in October. It’s a twice-a-year process.”

And there is one drawback. “It’s expensive,” Murakami said. A half-gallon of Agri-Fos goes for about \$60, and while it must be diluted with water, the entire gallon should be used soon after it is mixed, so if you have neighbors with oak trees, collaboration might be in order. However, since the cost of removing a dead tree can run up to several thousands of dollars depending on its size and location, prevention seems to be the more economical approach. Murakami is working on a quantity order for the preventive Agri-Fos solution to reduce the price to consumers.

Scudder said detecting oaks that are already diseased is difficult. One sure way to tell if your oak is doomed is to look for red-brown or amber ooze seeping out from seemingly healthy bark close to the soil line. Another sign is cankers that bleed a dark reddish discharge.

Scudder also emphasized that finding an arborist that will know your property is key to keeping it healthy.

“You have to have someone who knows your trees,” he said.

Good web sites to check out:

www.suddenoakdeath.org, sponsored by UC California Berkeley
www.sfpga.org – The Bob Scudder site that will lead you to everything.



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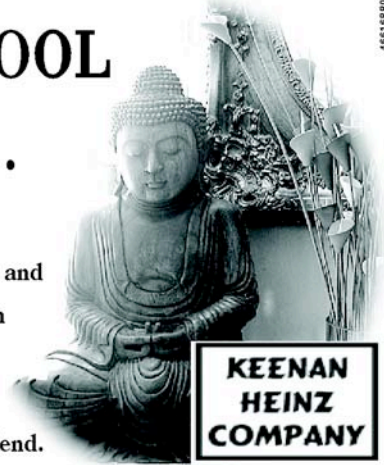


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