

# Taking care to prevent damage

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Homeowners should also avoid letting ivy or other vines crowd out the stump and climb the tree. Clear away shrubs or vines from the base of the tree and pull down parasitic vines.

John Traverso, certified arborist and owner of Traverso Tree Service in Saranap, recommends a visual inspection to detect potential problems. He warns, however, "Looking for something and having the knowledge to know what you're looking for are two different things."

Included in his visual inspection are the shape of crotches; elongated, poorly tapered branches sticking out of the canopy; heavy leans; cracks in the soil or uplifting and mounding on the backside of a lean; and fungal brackets on the lower trunk.

Traverso recommends periodically measuring the lean of a tree with a level to find out if the angle is getting worse. "Bark compression or folding on the leaning side of the tree along with bark separation on the backside indicates trouble."

Another indication of decay can be holes made by birds. He says, "The birds are making use of an already existing cavity, which means decayed wood already exists inside."

Traverso recommends pruning and/or crown reduction to mitigate some problems. Poorly tapered limbs are highly prone to failure, especially if decay is present.

Fungal growth on trunks and mushrooms around the base of a tree can indicate



A brave soul, in red, climbs the trunk of this rotted pine tree, cutting away branches to prepare to take the tree down.

Photos Pippa Fisher

compromised wood tissue and shouldn't be ignored. This can also be an indication of too much water (e.g.: putting the tree on a lawn watering schedule throughout the summer).

While old, diseased trees may need to be removed, here are some tips for raising a new one:

- 1) Pick a tree appropriate for our conditions.
- 2) Remove decayed trees and roots from the planting site and use composted mulch to top dress. Traverso states, "Healthy raw material such as tree chippings, especially those with leaves and carbon materials mixed, tends to bring to life the process which benefits the soil and trees in the long run."
- 3) Do not water too often. Native trees prefer deep watering during the winter months. If subjected to a dry winter, supplemental irrigation should be applied in February through March for most trees, especially oaks, and not in summer.
- 4) Fertilizing should be performed in the fall or winter so nutrients can be processed and ready for absorption by the roots in the spring.
- 5) Use judicious pruning techniques in young trees to thin, shape and direct growth. Different trees have different demands and proper pruning methods are crucial, especially in the first few years.
- 6) Be mindful of the tree's drip line and allow for drainage. A tree's root structure is generally equal to or well beyond its growth aboveground.

When in doubt, call a certified arborist. Most will give a free estimate.



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