

MiSustainable Holland

About this series

The MiSustainable Holland column is a collection of community voices sharing updates about local sustainability initiatives.

This Week's Sustainability Framework Theme:

Community Knowledge: The collective knowledge and energy of the community is an incredible resource that must be channeled to where it is needed.

Don't 'fall' behind: It's a great season for tree care

By Ryan Bose
Bartlett Tree Experts

With fall approaching, most folks on the lakeshore will rake up their leaves and try to snuggle in before the icy winds come blowing, often forgetting about their trees until spring. But, if that sounds like you, you might be missing a great opportunity to protect your green assets.

Fall is a brilliant time to prepare trees ahead of winter storms. It is important to reach out to a certified arborist in the fall with any concerns about the trees within your landscape. A certified arborist can proactively treat trees, taking steps now that will help keep your trees healthy, safe, and beautiful.

Why now? At this time of year, as trees begin to lose their leaves, a savvy arborist can note patterns that are not always obvious to a homeowner. Is it normal for my maple to start losing leaves in August, or is there a problem with the roots? Your arborist can do lab testing and tell you for sure. Are there defects high above the ground that could cause that branch to break? Time to have a professional take a peek!

People often are surprised when I, as an arborist, explain that we prune trees all year round, even in the winter. It's usually best for the trees to have pruning done in the winter. It's like a natural anesthesia; dead, weakly-attached, or rubbing/crossing limbs can be safely removed while a tree is dormant.

In fact, some trees like oaks can only safely be pruned in the winter. Many areas along the lakeshore are starting to experience oak wilt disease at an alarming rate. Oak wilt is a fungus that is spread by beetles during the summer months. It can rapidly kill oaks and then spread through the root system to other trees for years if it gets established. Saving your oak pruning for the winter is the best way to avoid this nightmare.

It's often easier to see what we are doing in the winter too. Arborists can better see defects that might need cables or bracing rods to add strength. We can also better see the structure of tree limbs when the leaves are off, allowing us to shape the growth into the strongest form by knowing where and how to cut.

Another hard-learned lesson along the lake is about our soil. It's no surprise that most soil here is sandy, but what most folks don't realize is that sand means low levels of organic matter, which can make trees perform poorly.

Routine soil testing also shows us that soil PH levels, that might be comfy for turf, can be harmful to trees. Prescription-based soil and root care this time of year can add needed nutrients and significantly lengthen tree life and help prevent disease and pests.

If we make the root system strong now, trees can better take care of themselves in the spring. So, before you go into hibernation mode, check with an arborist if you have any questions so you don't "fall" behind this season.

- *Ryan Bose began his career as an arborist over 20 years ago with Bartlett Tree Expert, which has offices in Zeeland and Grand Rapids. He has been caring for Holland area trees as a certified arborist since 2007.*