Mistletoe:

As deciduous trees shed their golden leaves in the fall, an unsightly parasite becomes visible. Broadleaf mistletoe, a parasitic evergreen, is known to be common in our area. And with most trees currently in dormancy, now is the time to remove the mistletoe.

The life cycle of the mistletoe is simple. After a seed is deposited into a crack in the bark of a tree, a root-like anchoring known as haustoria begins to seep down into the tree’s tissue. Once established, the mistletoe plant slowly begins to grow, using water and minerals supplied by the host tree. Through a slow process usually spanning a couple years, the mistletoe grows to maturity. At maturity, the parasite begins to produce either pollen or seed, depending on if the plant is male or female. Soon small sticky white seeds form in clusters along the plant, attracting birds to the scene. As the birds consume them, the seeds are transported to many other trees in the area, allowing the entire cycle to start over.

Although most healthy trees can safely withstand one or two small mistletoe plants, the parasite can mean stunted growth or death for others. Most of the mistletoe that grows in our area resides in larger trees, in which birds are more likely to perch. However, all trees are susceptible to a certain degree. To protect your trees from this sometimes lethal parasite, many options exist.

The most common method of ridding trees of mistletoe is pruning. By pruning out the branches infected with mistletoe, the entire parasite can be quickly removed from the tree. However, the removing of *only* the mistletoe will not remove the parasite permanently. The haustoria imbedded in the tree can easily sprout more mistletoe.

Two outdated methods of removing mistletoe are to spray the plant with chemicals or to wrap the mistletoe in black polyethylene. However, both methods are basically ineffective.

The most effective method is to remove the mistletoe and fertilize the tree for three successive years. Accelerated growth from the fertilizer begins to form reaction wood over the cut mistletoe. After two to three seasons of treatment, the reaction wood traps the entire organism in the tree itself.

A Certified Arborist can always be of assistance when dealing with troublesome mistletoe. Just give us a call.

Shawn Brown

New Leaf Tree Care

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