

## **Some trees are fried eggs**

Have you ever tried to “unfry” an egg? It can’t be done. Once the egg is fried, it’s irreversible. Most people can understand this while they may not understand why a tree “suddenly” died. Some trees are “fried eggs”.

It’s not uncommon for a tree to suddenly turn brown during this time of year. These trees stand out because their leaves become brown during a time of year when they are supposed to be green. Other surrounding trees of the same species will still be green. So the brown tree stands out. It’s no wonder the tree’s owner becomes concerned.

Some tree research conducted about thirty years ago may help explain this problem. This research demonstrated that at least fifty percent of a tree’s root system will be nonfunctioning or dead before the tree exhibits aboveground evidence that it has a problem. So by the time a person notices the problem it’s too late.

When you see a tree that appears to suddenly die, you are usually dealing with a tree that has had problems for quite some time - sometimes months or even years prior to the tree’s death.

Homeowners sometimes call and make a statement such as, “all the leaves on my tree suddenly turned brown but are still hanging on the tree and are firmly attached.” I usually respond by telling the caller that this is an indication of severe root injury. Usually a combination of factors over a long period of time caused extensive root injury. The tree had been functioning with a weakened, smaller root system. The extended hot weather ends up being the “straw that breaks the camel’s back” for the already stressed/weakened tree.

Some common causes for lethal root injury in trees include construction damage, floods, drought, hurricanes and herbicide injury (many trees are damaged by “weed and feed” products). It may be a combination of several factors that ultimately results in the tree’s demise. Vascular diseases and insects may be involved, also. But they are usually secondary. There is usually nothing that can be done to correct this kind of injury, though. These types of problems are prevented, not cured.

The initial damage could have been caused years prior to the tree’s leaves suddenly turning brown. Based on my experience, trees in this category usually do not recover. Homeowners want me to tell them that there is a product at some garden supply store that they can purchase and apply to the dying or dead tree to result in the tree’s recovery. But instead I have to tell them about the fried egg example.

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