

Archive for August, 2011

Diagnosing Problems

Saturday, August 13th, 2011

Trees, like people, sometimes develop (a) condition(s) that we do not welcome. Many times, the condition is something minor, and will go away, or diminish, on it's own due to the tree's own inherent ability to deal with the problem. Sort of like a minor cold in humans. However, sometimes the condition is more serious and requires more stringent action on our part. Following, are a few tips to help in diagnosing problems with your valuable trees.

1. Be sure it's really a problem. Most problems in urban trees are the result of insect and/or disease attacks, construction damage, or storms. Physical damage is fairly easy to notice, while insect/disease problems may be harder to ascertain. Since it is almost impossible to identify all pest symptoms and what to do about them, the best thing one can do is to know enough about pests to narrow down the possibilities (e.g. is it an insect, or disease? is it attacking the trunk, leaves, twigs? when does it occur? spring, summer, fall? etc.), then know where to find more detailed help from experts. I once had an uncle call on me to come and look at the "growths" on his white pine trees. I came, I looked and could see no problems on his healthy pines. I asked him to point out the growths and he directed me to the tops of the 20 year old trees where cones were first starting to form. His trees had never produced cones before and he thought the young, greenish cones were some kind of "growth" that might harm the trees. Needless to say, I was able to assure him that the cones were, indeed, a growth, but was something that was natural and not harmful. He felt a little silly, but was relieved to learn a little more about tree phenology. Learning more about what a particular species "normal" growth habit looks like, will help one determine when something doesn't look right (normal).
2. Practice preventive care. Maintaining a healthy individual through proper pruning, mulching, protection from mowers, nails, swings, etc., plus having the right species in the right place, is the best "ounce" of prevention a tree can receive. If a tree starts out in a bad situation, it's not likely to get better as time passes.
3. Narrow down the cause of a problem as much as possible before calling for help. Is the cause natural in nature? Insects and diseases are the prime example of natural causes, but also look for other causes such as: soil that is too dry or too wet, fertility that is deficient in some element, lightning, rodent or nematode damage, deer damage, etc. If natural causes are not evident, then human causes such as air pollution, gas line leaks, deicing salt, soil compaction, weed whip damage, vandalism, etc. may be the culprit. Be sure to look at the site for damage vectors rather than just deciding that the damage to the tree must be due to an insect or disease. Sometimes the insect or disease is simply a secondary attacker after the tree has been harmed by something else.
4. Once you've exhausted your store of knowledge and narrowed the problem as much as you can, the next step is to call on an expert to diagnose the actual cause and prescribe the solution. Urban and consulting foresters, certified arborists and nurserymen, and master gardeners may be the best sources of help in your area. Informational bulletins may also be of great assistance, and are available from several sources (e.g. University of Missouri Extension, Missouri Department of Conservation, Local NRCS offices, and municipal tree boards or city foresters).

Don't let a tree problem languish beyond what your valuable asset can handle on it's own. We wouldn't do that with a sore on a toe that just doesn't want to heal, so we shouldn't let our tree(s) suffer through a persistent problem on it's own either. Good luck.

Trees And Utility Lines

Wednesday, August 24th, 2011

Many folks are beginning to notice the utility line maintenance crews getting into the fall and winter line maintenance work. They see the crews (mostly contractors) removing limbs, branches, and sometimes most of the tree in what seems to them a nonsensical and/or destructive manner. They complain and blame the utility companies for doing damage to what they consider to be their valuable trees; even though the trees may actually be growing within the right of way granted in a utility easement. In reality, a utility company would have every right to remove any and all trees that are within the easement area. However, they try not to take this approach unless it's absolutely necessary to meet federal and state requirements for line maintenance standards. The companies, who get the blame and bad PR, are only trying to comply with what the regulators require them to do; while trying to satisfy customers as much as possible.

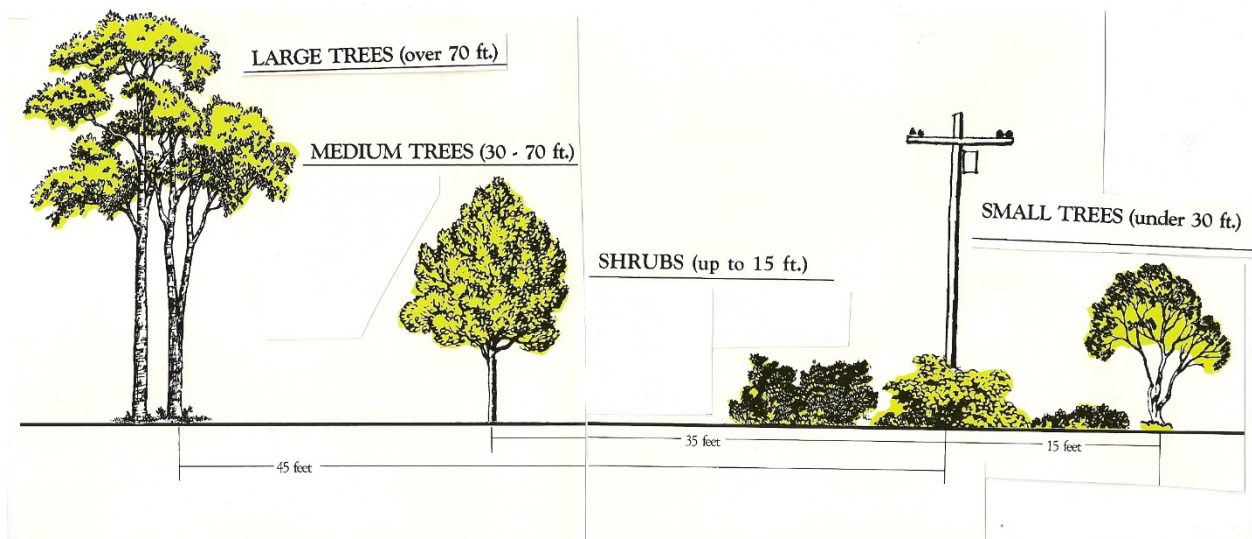
It would be better for trees, electric lines, and customers if trees were not planted near or under electric lines. This would be a permanent solution to avoid conflicts and prevent bad relations. If trees are wanted, only low-growing, compact species/varieties should be planted. When large-maturing trees are planted under the lines, pruning is the only alternative to assure a safe and reliable supply of electric power to all customers.

In my experience, most of us Americans like one thing more than our beloved trees: ELECTRICITY! When we flip the switch, we expect the lights to come on; storm or no storm.

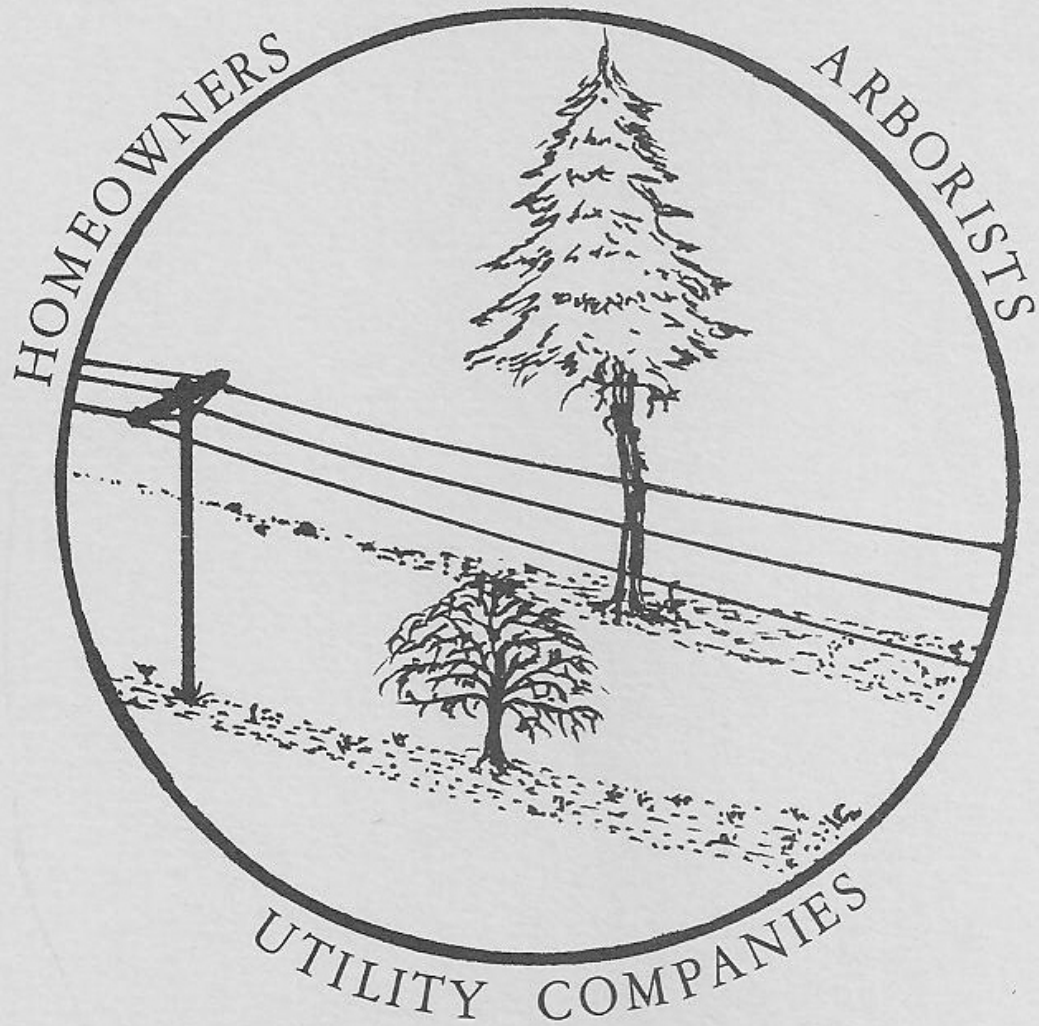
The best solution, of course, is to plant the right tree in the right place, so future conflicts will be minimized or avoided altogether. Depicted below is a schematic that provides guidelines for planting trees near power lines.

EXAMPLES OF PLANTINGS THAT PROVIDE SAFE SPACING

FROM OVERHEAD OR UNDERGROUND UTILITIES



TREES AND ELECTRIC UTILITY LINES
CAN EXIST TOGETHER



IF WE ALL WORK TOGETHER