

Treeways

2018 - 7

When a Tree Dies, Opportunity Arises

In a forest when an ancient tree falls it creates opportunities. Other younger trees, shrubs, ferns, forbs, and their insect and microorganism allies immediately begin to use the open spaces, nutrients and light that have become available. The newly opened spaces are filled with rampant new life and a succession of ecological communities begins.

When a mature forest is lost to a tornado, straight-line winds, insect, disease, or clear cutting the same process starts but on a larger scale. Mother Nature's processes are infinitely scalable. A devastated area may take 100 or more years to return naturally to a condition that to human eyes looks like undisturbed forest. The reality is that it would take more like 500+ years of undisturbed growth and successional change to get back to where it was before the disturbance. This is "tree time".

On our individual properties trees die and trees are regularly removed for a variety of reasons. Replacement trees are often not planted. This is certainly OK however we can, as owners, use these opportunities to improve and redirect our woodlands environment toward a planned vision. Pathways, viewing vistas, meditation benches and new trees of diverse species can become part of our ecological havens. Few of us have even 50 years to experience or to create our landscape visions once we develop one and none of us has the 500+ years it takes for nature to return a damaged or devastated forest to a "pristine" untouched condition. Implementing a transition plan can move the new forest succession process along much more quickly and in a direction that we prefer. We will likely not end up with what Mother Nature would have developed, but we can still create something wonderful in the time we have.

I believe everyone has a responsibility to try to leave the world a better place than when we were born. We all have different abilities and gifts that can make our community and neighborhoods better and we should use them. Let me encourage you to make your places and spaces better this year and into the future.

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