

Treeways

2020 -2

Making Lemonade When You Lose Your Ash

EAB was confirmed in Sunfish Lake in 2017 and those infestations likely began during 2014 or earlier. At this point, only special or legacy ash trees warrant special attention in the form of chemical insecticides. Some of our neighbors are treating individual trees effectively but if you have not started a protective insecticide program yet, it may be too late. Call your City Forester if you have questions or if you would like a recommendation.

A new opening in your forest whether from storm, construction, insects, or disease is an opportunity though it may not seem that way at the time. It is an opportunity for change, for transition, for improvement and you can guide your landscape environment toward your own bit of heaven on earth. When an ancient tree or trees fall, other younger trees, shrubs, ferns, forbs, plus their insect and microbial allies immediately begin to use the newly opened spaces. Undisturbed, rampant new forest life begins a successional process that may in 100 years begin to look like an undisturbed forest. The reality is that it takes 500+ years of undisturbed growth and successional change for a forest to return to a “pristine” condition. Few of us have more than 50 years to realize our landscape vision once we have the dream and none of us has the 100+ years of “tree time” to get even part way there. We can however implement a transition plan to move the succession process along much more quickly and in a direction that we prefer. We can work toward something wonderful in the time available.

When my wife, Jeannine, and I moved to Sunfish Lake we had 32 large, mature green ash trees – none that were special, legacy or impressive in any way. We were never going to treat any of them with insecticide to save them so they were going to end up dying sooner rather than later due to emerald ash borer infestations. We knew that we would lose them. Over the last ten years we have removed 21 of them and replaced them with a wide selection of maples, elms, oaks, hackberry, evergreens and other regionally adapted species. Some of these new trees are 20+ feet tall now and are dynamically contributing to the beauty of our personal ecoscape. With some initial planning, losing our ash trees has not been a bad experience, on the contrary, it is a good thing and now we have a more resilient woodland with greater diversity, beauty and interest.

When you lose parts of your woodland to EAB, wind, renovation or construction make lemonade by improving your property with new trees that are better and more beautiful. Later 2020 Treeways writings will address recommendations for trees and shrubs for specific tasks – screening, color, flowering, winter interest, etc.