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Tree Root Damage from Lawn Mowers *Don't Create a Tree Hazard*

Columbus, Ohio (April 24, 2019) –

Many landscaped properties have turf-grass that is often located near the roots of valuable trees. Roots of trees provide the functions of anchorage, energy storage and absorption of water and nutrients. Most roots of trees are located in the top 12-18" of the landscape and often rise to the surface and can be seen. Many cases these surface roots are subject to injuries caused by lawn mowers, weed-trimmers, bed edging devices, and other mechanical devices. Exposed roots are in danger from lawn mowers that run over them and slice off their bark (see Photograph 1). The wounds expose the tree to infection and rot.



Photograph 1 (Source Mark Webber-2018)

Tree Roots are Defended by Bark

The site of injury is often the root flare of the tree. The root flare area is where the tree meets the turf and gets in the path of the mower or trimmer. The root flare and its connected roots are like the rest of the trunk, they are protected by bark which guards a very important plant transport system just behind the woody bark layer. In many cases, tree roots and flares that have been compromised by devices like lawn mowers become defective and form a disease called a butt rot or a root rot pathogen. Butt rot or a root rot pathogen can invade a susceptible tree through wounds. If invasion and subsequent rotting occur in the wood at the base of the tree, the tree may become a hazard. Both rots may be caused by the same fungus, and several different species can attack tree roots and butts.

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Any damage to this transport system can affect tree health, and the tree could die and become a hazard.

Avoiding Disaster

The injuries sustained by tree roots by these types of incidents often cause unneeded wounds that will result in the tree root becoming decayed and rotting. Often tree's that have been frequently exposed to repetitive root injury will decline and become hazards and will likely fail under normal weather conditions. Here is are some useful tips to follow when managing tree roots that have emerged from the lawn:

- ✓ Don't hit or cut above ground roots with mowers/trenchers/weed-whackers/edger's and carefully hand trim so that the tree root is not cut or damaged.
- ✓ Physically remove the turf and plant a shade tolerant plant.
- ✓ Physically remove turf or prevent grass and weeds from growing at the base of the tree out to the tree's outer drip-line.
- ✓ Lay-down newspapers in the area under the tree. At the same time place organic mulch to the depth 2-3 inches. Be sure not to pile mulch against the tree's trunk and leave a space of 12-18" from where the mulch and the tree trunk.
- ✓ Spray herbicides to eliminate vegetation around the base of the tree to decrease mowing maintenance costs. Be sure to use care when applying herbicides around trees. Carefully follow label directions.
- ✓ Add a mulch ring, when possible, to help reduce the competition for water and nutrients. Mulch or other ground coverings reduce mowing requirements in the landscape. Add a 2" to 3" layer of mulch on the root zone of the tree to provide an attractive and healthy environment for the tree to grow. This also provides a guard to keep equipment away from the tree. Be sure not to pile mulch against the tree's trunk and leave a space of 12-18" from where the mulch and the tree trunk.

Visit Trees4Ohio.org to learn more about the importance of proper tree care.

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ABOUT US: The mission of the Ohio Chapter International Society of Arboriculture is to advance responsible tree care practices through research, technology, and education while promoting the benefits of trees. Visit us at: www.ohiochapterisa.org.

INTERVIEW AN ISA CERTIFIED ARBORIST: Please contact the Ohio Chapter ISA if you are interested in interviewing a local certified arborist.