Illinois Trees

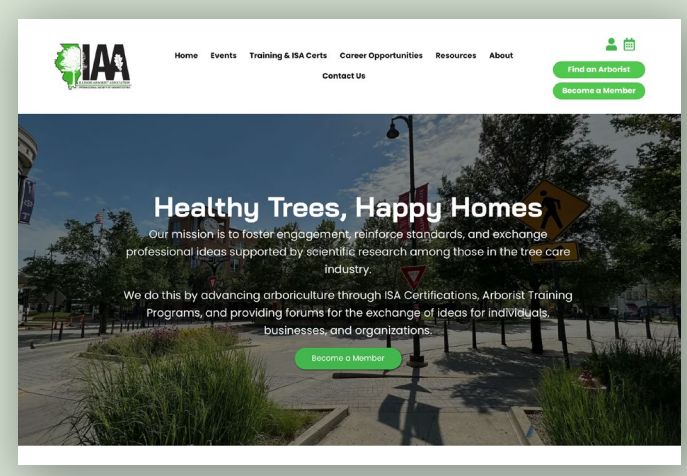
A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE ILLINOIS ARBORIST ASSOCIATION

SPRING 2026
VOLUME 46

Table of Contents

Mission Statement

"Foster engagement, reinforce standards and exchange professional ideas supported by scientific research among those in the tree care industry."



ILLINOIS ARBORIST ASSOCIATION

Visit the IAA Website

for updates on events, certification classes, and important issues impacting our industry.

IAA Board of Directors

President
Joe Hansen
Village of Wilmette
847-853-7622

President Elect
Paul Filary
Kramer Tree Specialists
630-293-5444

Vice President
Michael Collins
Village of Riverside
708-243-4335

Past President
Eric Hendrickson
Village of Lombard
630-620-5470

Executive Director
April Toney
Illinois Arborist Assoc.
877-617-8887

ISA CoR Representative
Aaron Schulz
Oak Bros Tree Care
815-674-4058

Municipal Director
Greg Soltwisch
Village of Downers Grove
630-434-5475

Municipal Director
Sarah Christensen
Village of Bartlett
630-837-0800

Utility Director
Eric Francke
Davey Resource Group, Inc.
224-760-6631

Commercial Director
Kevin Halbert
Winkler Tree & Lawn Care
708-945-5656

Commercial Director
Brianna White
Emerald Tree Care, LLC
630-480-4090

Industrial Director
Rob Baughman
Arborjet/Ecologel
847-456-1756

Research Director
Chad Rigsby
The Morton Arboretum
630-719-5769

Treasurer
Mark Bluhm
Lutheran Legacy Foundation
618-791-9038

Program Director
Melissa Custic
Landscape Illinois
630-472-2851

Finance & Marketing
Alexis Toney
Illinois Arborist Association
815-355-2745

Newsletter Editor/Designer
Amy Martin
Kane County Forest Preserve
Contact Here



Editor's Note

Spring is in the air! As you navigate your increasingly busy season in a commercial, municipal or educational setting, remember to "operate with intention" as IAA President, Joe Hansen has mentioned. Thinking, planning and having intentionality can help mitigate possible mistakes or issues that could arise with your crew.

Please investigate the articles in this issue that feature information about working wisely, how to understand the oak death spiral, best practices for pruning codominant leaders and details on upcoming events for our arborist community.

Have a safe, productive and fun spring season!

We would love your input as members. Contributions, questions or comments about this publication can be made by contacting me, Amy Martin, at this link.

DEAR Illinois Arborists,

Spring is upon us, which means we are ramping up for another busy year. The days are getting longer, the phones are starting to ring more consistently, and job sites are becoming more active. Before we fully accelerate into the season, this is a good time to take a brief breath and reset our mindset. A strong start to spring often sets the tone for the entire year.

Many of us have not been operating at the same pace we were just a few months ago. Winter work can be steady, but it is often different in rhythm and intensity. As workloads increase, there can be a natural tendency to jump back in at full speed: climbing faster, moving between cuts quicker, scheduling tighter, pushing harder. That sudden shift can lead to small oversights. And in our profession, small oversights can become injuries, equipment damage, property loss, and unnecessary stress.

> "When we operate with intention, we reduce mistakes, protect our bodies, and preserve our mental resilience."

Instead of sprinting into the coming months, we should aim to be more like the turtle who is steady, deliberate, and consistent. This does not mean slowing productivity or lowering standards. It simply means starting at a sustainable pace that allows our bodies and minds to readjust. Climbing, rigging, operating equipment, diagnosing tree risks, these tasks require precision, strength, coordination, and focus. Mental sharpness returns more reliably when we give it space to do so.

Take a few extra moments at the start of the day to inspect equipment thoroughly. Stretch before climbing. Review job hazards with intention, not just routine. Confirm communication signals. Check your footing. Hydrate. These small habits create a buffer between routine work and preventable incidents.

Equally important is taking care of yourself mentally. The busy season can bring pressure with tight schedules, client expectations, weather windows, and administrative demands. Stress accumulates quietly if we do not acknowledge it. If you feel rushed, distracted, or fatigued, that is not a weakness, it is a signal. Communicate with your crew. Look out for one another the same way you look out for hazards in the canopy.

When we operate with intention, we reduce mistakes, protect our bodies, and preserve our mental resilience. That approach better serves our clients and residents, who expect professionalism and expertise. It better serves our families and friends, who expect us home safe at the end of each day. And most importantly, it serves ourselves, our health, our longevity in this profession, and the pride in the work we do.

As we step into the season ahead, let's commit to consistency over urgency, preparation over reaction, and awareness over complacency. The work will be there. The key is ensuring that we are mentally focused, physically prepared, and steady enough to meet it safely and successfully.

Joe Hansen, *IAA President*

IAA Spring Event Calendar

APRIL	Event	Location
20-21	Adv. Training - MRS Climbing	Lincoln Park Zoo
29	ISA Certification Exams	Lombard, IL
29-30	TRAQ	Zion, IL
MAY	**Event**	**Location**
6	SIU Forestry Field Days	Makanda, IL
12	ISA Certification Exams	Zion, IL
14	UCFF - Municipal Resources Toolkit	Lombard, IL
28	ISA Certification Exams	Lombard, IL
JUNE	**Event**	**Location**
6	Illinois Tree Climbing Championship	Naperville, IL
9	ISA Certification Exams	Zion, IL
17	TRAQ	Arlington Heights, IL
25	ISA Certification Exams	Lombard, IL
27	Advanced Training: Tree Diseases	Cantigny Park

Get the links to sign up at IAA's website here

Saving *the* Oaks

BREAKING THE DEATH SPIRAL & WHAT ARBORISTS CAN DO

WRITTEN BY ALEXIS FAIBLE, *RAINBOW COMPANIES*

Across North America and beyond, mature oak trees are dying at an alarming rate. Rather than a single cause, this decline results from a compounding set of stressors called the "oak death spiral."

Understanding the root causes of the spiral, solutions available to arborists, and how to communicate services to your customers is essential for preserving oaks and building an effective Plant Healthcare (PHC) program.

Oaks Are Important: The Keystone Role of Quercus

Oaks (genus Quercus) are ecological and cultural powerhouses.

Ecological and Biodiversity Anchor

Oaks are keystone species in many ecosystems, supporting more biodiversity than almost any other tree.

- Oaks host over 950 species of caterpillars, which are essential food sources for birds. Removing an oak negatively impacts the whole food web.
- Oaks form critical relationships with mycorrhizal fungi, which are vital for nutrient and water absorption.
- Acorns are a vital food source for nearly 100 animal species, including deer, squirrels, turkeys, and bears.

History, Lore, and Economic Value

Oaks have been integral to human civilization for millennia, serving as living monuments and critical resources.

- The oak symbolizes strength and longevity in many cultures and is the national tree of 15 countries including the USA.
- Oak timber is prized for its durability and is used in construction, flooring, barrels for aging wine and spirits.
- Most wine bottle corks come from the bark of a species of oaks known as the cork oak. In fact, the word cork is derived from Quercus.

Losing a legacy oak means losing an entire ecosystem, an iconic symbol of history, and value for the property owner—a loss arborists can help prevent.

The Mechanics of the Oak Death Spiral

The oak death spiral is a process of chronic decline: initial stresses weaken the tree, allowing secondary pests and diseases to cause rapid mortality.

The death spiral involves three categories of stress factors:

Predisposing Factors (Chronic Stressors)

These long-term factors lower the tree's ability to defend itself.

- Aging: As oaks mature, their defenses decline.
- Site: Urban environments mean challenges like poor drainage, pH, and soil volume.
- Poor adaptation: Many oaks are not suited to current conditions; an issue worsened by climate change.

Inciting Factors (Acute Stressors)
Short-term events trigger rapid decline.

- Weather Extremes (Climate Stress)
- Droughts: Water deficits impair photosynthesis, damage roots, and drain energy reserves.
- Floods: Saturated soils suffocate roots, causing symptoms similar to drought.
- Temperature extremes: Late frosts or heat waves shock the tree.
- Anthropogenic Trauma
- Construction: Root cutting and soil compaction reduce water and nutrient uptake.
- Defoliation: Insects like the spongy moth force oaks to use energy on regrowth, leaving them depleted.

Contributing Factors (The Finishers)
Compromised oaks become targets for pests and diseases that are usually not lethal to healthy trees.

- Invasive insects like borers, scales, and beetles attack stressed oaks, causing rapid dieback.
- Fungal and bacterial diseases invade declining oaks, including oak wilt, root rot, anthracnose, and others.

How Arborists Can Intervene: The PHC Solution
Long-term oak preservation requires a proactive Plant Healthcare (PHC) approach. A tiered "good, better, best" system lets arborists tailor interventions to each situation, the condition of the tree, and the client's needs.

The PHC Intervention Tiers

Good: Immediate Issue Management

This tier addresses visible problems to stabilize the tree and prevent rapid decline.

- Identify and treat specific pests or diseases with targeted, timed interventions for maximum efficacy and minimal impact.
- Use proper mulching (2-4 inches, away from the trunk) and deep, infrequent watering to promote root health and moisture retention.

Better: Enhancing Tree Health

This tier strengthens the tree's defenses and overall vigor for greater resilience.

All "Good" interventions, plus:

- Plant Growth Regulators (PGRs): Suppress canopy growth so the tree can invest energy in roots and reserves, increasing stress tolerance.
- Fertilization: Diagnose nutrient deficiencies and use targeted, slow-release fertilizers to correct them and boost defenses.

Best: Long-term System and Soil Health

This tier prioritizes soil health as the gold standard for preserving legacy oaks.

All "Better" interventions, plus:

- Strategic soil amendments: Add beneficial fungi, organic matter, or minerals to boost soil life and nutrient uptake.
- Soil remediation: Use methods like vertical mulching or subsurface aeration to improve soil structure and gas exchange.
- Soil decompaction: Use air-spade technology to relieve compaction and restore healthy soil structure.

Conclusion
The fate of our legacy oaks rests largely in the hands of arborists. The challenges are formidable: a changing climate, unsustainable urban environments, and an array of opportunistic pests and diseases. However, the oak death spiral is not a terminal diagnosis.

By following the "good, better, best" approach, arborists can successfully intervene to interrupt the spiral, revitalize tree health, and restore the natural defense systems of these magnificent keystone species. Oak trees are a critical part of our history and culture. By establishing a proactive PHC program for your clients, you will not only secure the future of the great oak but also position yourself as an essential steward of our most


OAKS NEED YOU
Oaks play a vital role in every ecosystem they inhabit, including our urban forests.
Yet across the country they're stressed by climate shifts, pests, and neglect. Many problems are treatable if action is taken early.
Find diagnostic tools and expert advice you can share with your customers at **TreesNeedYou.com**.
Together we can re-root the future of oaks.
Rainbow™ ecoscience
SCAN TO LEARN MORE

IAA Tour des Trees 2026

Members of the Illinois Arborist Association are gearing up to ride in this year's Tour des Trees, a long-standing cycling event that raises critical support for the TREE Fund's research, education, and urban forestry programs. By participating, our riders help advance scientific studies that improve tree health, strengthen community forestry efforts, and support the next generation of arboriculture professionals.

My own journey into arboriculture began with the Tour des Trees. As a student, it was through this event that I was first exposed to the industry. TREE Fund not only sparked my interest in trees, but also supported my academic career as a scholarship recipient. As a long-time participant, often riding alongside my father, it is an honor to bring things full circle and help support future generations of aspiring arborists.

This year, the ride is especially meaningful as it has become a true family affair: my husband (Billy Volchko) will be joining the crew as a bike mechanic, and my son will proudly serve as our full-time cowbell ringer (ensuring morale stays high from start to finish)!

You can help our team make an even bigger impact! Donations directly support TREE Fund grants and scholarships, and every contribution—large or small—helps grow healthier, more resilient forests and urban canopies across the country.

If you'd like to support the riders or learn more about the cause, visit the "Team Illinois Chapter" fundraising page on TREE Fund's Tour des Trees fundraising website!

How much pruning IS REQUIRED TO ADEQUATELY SUBORDINATE A codominant leader?

WRITTEN BY: CHAD M. RIGSBY, RESEARCH SCIENTIST TREE BIOCHEMISTRY AND PHYSIOLOGY BARTLETT TREE RESEARCH LABORATORIES

Codominant branches (or "leaders") are stems of similar size (i.e., aspect ratio close to 1:1 or "100%") and originate at the same union. Research has shown that these are relatively weak attachments that fail more readily than branches with more favorable aspect ratios (i.e., < 1:2 or < 50%) and are attached at relatively more perpendicular angles (i.e., around 90° angle). Even more problematic, codominant branches have a high likelihood of developing included bark, which further weakens the union and increases the likelihood of failure. Certain tree species are prone to developing codominant branches. Species with a decurrent growth form such as oaks and hickory can form codominant branches, but opposite-branched species such as maples almost always form them.

Aside from installing hardware, such as cable systems, reducing the likelihood of failure is achieved via pruning with the goal of "subordinating" the codominant leader(s). The idea is that removing photosynthetic area on these leaders will reduce their growth rate compared to the competing leader, allowing that lead (the one left unpruned) to assume dominance. But one question that we in the arboricultural community need more clarity on is how much photosynthetic area do we need to remove to allow this process to happen? In other words, what dosage of pruning is required to achieve this goal?

Andrew Loyd and colleagues from the Bartlett Tree Research Laboratories set out to get at this question. The research team utilized 'October Glory' red maples (Acer rubrum) trees at their research facility in Charlotte, NC with codominant leaders. The team broke 56 trees into one of five treatments: unpruned (controls), low, moderate, and high severity reduction cuts, or a complete removal cut. The single reduction cut was made at a lateral branch on the leader to be suppressed that corresponded to roughly 25%, 50%, and 75% the diameter at the point of attachment. For example, if the diameter of the leader at the point of attachment was 10 inches, the single reduction cut was made at approximately 2.5, 5.0, and 7.5 inches for low, moderate, and high severity treatments, respectively. The complete removal cut was made at the point of attachment for the codominant leader. Among many other measurements, the researchers quantified the diameters of the codominant branches to calculate changes in branch aspect ratios over time.

(Continued on next page)

stem was not statistically smaller than the aspect ratio pre-treatment.

This study looked at many other aspects of pruning dose such as client aesthetic rating, wound wood formation and wound closure, sprout formation, and more. But as far as the central question regarding how much we need to prune to truly subordinate codominant branches, it appears at least for fast-growing trees such as red maples, larger pruning doses around the 75% reduction mark are able to alter aspect ratios. Smaller pruning doses do not appear to adequately subordinate these branches in fast-growing trees. The entire study can be found in Arboriculture & Urban Forestry.

"Among many other measurements, the researchers quantified the diameters of the codominant branches to calculate changes in branch aspect ratios over time."

The research team found that low severity (i.e., 25% reduction cut) did nothing to reduce the diameter growth, but the moderate and high severity (i.e., 50% and 75% reduction cuts) were both able to significantly slow diameter growth of the subordinated stem the first year after pruning. However, by the second year after pruning, the diameter growth on trees with the moderate severity cut was no longer significantly reduced, but the diameter growth of the high severity cut stem continued to be significantly slowed by the cut. By the third year after pruning, no treatment had slowed diameter growth of the subordinated stem. Ultimately, of these three reduction severity treatments, only the high severity treatment was able to cause a significant decrease in aspect ratio. Even the aspect ratio of the moderately subordinated

ILLINOIS ARBORIST ASSOCIATION
INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF ARBORICULTURE

ILLINOIS TREE CLIMBING CHAMPIONSHIP

JUNE 6TH & JUNE 7TH, 2026

Greene Valley Forest Preserve
Naperville, IL

The Illinois Arborist Association is excited to offer the 2026 ArborMaster® TCC Champion Prize Package at this year's Tree Climbing Championship (TCC). This package is designed to help equip & prepare TCC the champion for the ISA International Tree Climbing Championship (ITCC).

ArborMaster®

BUCK TREE
BUCKINGHAM MFG

Silky

YALE CORDAGE

LOGGER
ADVANCE YOUR GUARD

OREGON®

greenworks COMMERCIAL

DGP

ALSO A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR TCC EVENT SPONSOR!

THE MULCH CENTER

FRESH FROM THE GRIND

MULCH • SOIL • COMPOST

***THANK YOU* ARBORISTS**

FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT.

CALL TO ORDER

847-459-7200

mulchcenter.com

THE MULCH CENTER

VIEW OUR PRICING HERE:

INTREN

is proud to support the

Illinois Arborists Association

INTREN

a MasTec company

An award-winning Utility & Vegetation Management Solutions Provider

Union, IL | 815.923.2300 | **INTREN.com**

NMSDC
National Minority
Development Cou

New fund through TREE Fund

Norm Hall Memorial Fund for Education and Training

Established by the Illinois Arborists Association, to honor the memory of Norm Hall. The purpose of this program is to provide financial support to provide an annual grant to reduce participant fees for a hand-on, experiential training session in Norm's name.

Thank you

TREE FUND
Cultivating Innovation

+

IAA
ILLINOIS ARBORIST ASSOCIATION
INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF ARBORICULTURE

to all that have donated to this fund so far!

For more information on TREE Fund's grant and scholarship programs plus our free webinar series and the Tour des Trees, visit **treefund.org**

$50,000 GOAL by 2029

Scan for info and to donate.

Illinois Trees

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE ILLINOIS ARBORIST ASSOCIATION

SPRING 2026

ISSUE 1
VOLUME 46

ILLINOIS ARBORIST ASSOCIATION
P.O. BOX 860
ANTIOCH, IL 60002

877.617.8887
WWW.ILLINOISARBORIST.ORG