

## Spring Walkabout

The winter snow melt and warmth of sunny spring days encourages many of us to look out of the window and think of the garden. One of the first jobs we often undertake is a “Spring Walkabout” around our property to assess the landscape for the effects of the passing winter. From this, we are generally reminded of all the jobs needing attention in the coming season.

It is particularly important to take a quick assessment of your trees during this walk around. Look at trees young and old for “wear and tear” and note any corrective pruning that may be needed. The absence of leaves gives us an unobstructed view of the tree’s branch structure making it easier to see any broken, hanging, crossing or rubbing branches. Be sure to look carefully along the entire length of the branch for any splits or cracks that may have resulted from snow or ice loading over the winter. It is also a great time to identify any splits that may have formed at the branch unions. Be sure to contact your trusted professional arborist for advice on correcting any problems you may encounter. Tree pruning, particularly at height, is a skilled and potentially dangerous operation.



Dead wood in trees can present a risk to homeowners and their property. Removal of this material will not only make your home a safer place but also allow the trees to ‘seal’ the wound and guard against the entry of decay and future problems.

You may also notice frost cracks on the southern side of the trunks of trees; particularly thin-barked species. Rapid expansion and contraction of water within the wood and bark, particularly under rapidly falling night temperatures, can result in a frost crack. These wounds tend to be repeatedly damaged in successive winters and in spring you may see sap or gummy resin weeping from the crack. You may consider wrapping the trunks of younger trees with burlap over the winter until a rougher bark develops on the tree and also avoid removing too many low branches which help to shade the trunks of trees.



It is also important to look at the base of the tree as well. Look for any signs of root instability or heave. A naturally leaning tree will try to correct itself to a vertical position, but if the trunk and the upper parts of the crown are both leaning there could be a potential problem.

It may be a little early, but as the buds break you may notice branches failing to produce any leaf. This may be due to the effects of the harsh winter winds and exceptionally cold temperatures. Trees that are not native to this geographic area tend to be the most affected. Be aware of your tree species and their preferred hardiness zone. Your local nursery and various online resources can help with these details.

Take a note of trees that are unusually early or late into leaf. This is called plant phenology and the timing of flower, bud and leaf break can have profound effects on the life cycles of dependant native wildlife – both good and bad.

Finally, on the subject of leaf break, to get a heads-up on how wet/dry the coming summer will be use this old adage:

*‘Oak before Ash, we’re in for a splash’, Ash before Oak we’re in for a soak’*

