



Contributed

This leaf shows the symptoms of oak wilt, turning brown at the edges before progressing inward. The fatal fungal disease has been reported in oak trees in Canada's Niagara Region, with the very real possibility it could spread to Niagara County.

## Oak Wilt a threat to Niagara

Fatal fungal disease  
reported in Central  
New York, Niagara  
Region of Canada

**ROBERT GREENAN**  
ROBERT.GREENAN@  
NIAGARA-GAZETTE.COM

The next potential threat facing Niagara County's trees could make the jump from across the border.

Trees in Canada's Niagara Region have been infected with oak wilt, a fungal disease that means certain death for those infected.

Sap beetles carry the disease, which interferes with the oak tree's circulatory system. It can also spread through the interconnected root systems of trees.

There is no known cure with red and pin oak trees dying within weeks of infection. White oaks may show greater resistance to oak wilt.

In New York state, there have already been reports of oak wilt in the counties of Oswego, Ontario, Yates, Stuben, Tioga, Saratoga, Schenectady as well as the New York City area. The state DEC has emergency orders in place in Yates and Ontario counties to stop its spread.

Twenty states stretching from New York to Texas and South Dakota have reported infections, killing millions of trees in the Midwest.

Lee Simonson, owner of the Lewiston business Saving Oaks, said that no infections have been detected in Niagara County yet. Thousands of ash trees in the county have died over the past few years from emerald ash borers.

"Unless precautions are taken, people, businesses, and local governments will be spending millions of dollars removing dead trees," Simonson said. "Our mission is simple: protect our trees, keep oak wilt out of our region, and promote a healthy biodiverse ecosystem."

Symptoms of infection include leaves falling from trees prematurely, colored brown with no signs of color on the tips and outer edges and vertical cracked bark that emits a fruity smell.

The most effective prevention method is getting trees vaccinated with preventative fungicide, which can only be done with state-licensed applicators. They should be vaccinated every two to three years until the threat has passed.

Other tips for preventing oak wilt from spreading in the area include:

- Do not prune or trim oak trees until late summer or fall. If they have to be pruned, the wound should be covered in a prune sealer or latex paint. Sap beetles can smell freshly exposed food from miles away.

- Do not purchase firewood imported from other counties or states. While oak wilt cannot be transmitted by burning infected firewood, fungal mats can form on unseasoned red oak wood.