

AVOID TREE TRUNK INJECTION UNLESS JUSTIFIED

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Trunk injections are one method for treating trees for certain issues. Unfortunately, trunk injection may be used when not needed, leading to unnecessary tree damage that can shorten a tree's life.

Trunk injections will effectively control some pests and treat iron chlorosis when used correctly. They can also result in less pesticide being used and lowered contact of nontargets, like beneficial insects.

Trunk injections also have drawbacks. For this reason, trees should not be injected unless there is a justifiable reason for doing so. Injecting a tree is not equivalent to people receiving an injection.

Most injections are applied by drilling holes into the trunk. A healthy tree will seal or compartmentalize these wounds, but the wounds remain dead tissue. Previously drilled holes cannot be re-drilled and injected into. Repeated drilling eventually creates numerous areas of dead wood that negatively impact a tree.

Injection wounds open the trunk to insect pests and decay fungi. Drilling may also break through internal barriers within the trunk the tree has created to wall off decay. Decay may then spread within the tree or from the inside out through injection wounds.

The pesticide being injected into the tree can also cause internal damage that accumulates over years of repeated injections and potentially kill a tree, even if the pest is controlled.

When trunk injections are used for a justifiable reason, trees should not be retreated until the injection wounds close over. And remember, the wound has sealed but remains in the wood. Tree wounds do not heal like wounds on our own skin. This is why lumber has knots.

One reason to use trunk injection is to treat iron chlorosis. If a tree needs treatment, the leaves will be pale green or yellow. Trunk injections are often used on pin oak and silver maple to treat for chlorosis, but if the leaves are green, there is no reason to inject and create permanent wounds.

Treatment for borers is another reason to use trunk injections. But unless a tree has a borer issue, it should not be injected. In the case of emerald ash borer, injection is recommended only for healthy ash trees with good structure in key locations, and once the borer has been found within 15 miles of a tree. It was found in Columbus in August of 2021.

In some cases, trunk injection can be the best treatment to use, despite the damage it does to a tree. But do not agree to have a tree injected unless there is a justifiable reason for doing so.

If trunk injection is recommended, ask what the tree is being treated for and why trunk injection is the best choice. Ask if there are other less invasive and damaging methods to use. Ask what is being injected into the tree and what potential risks are associated with the product.

If trunk injection appears to be the best choice, make sure the person injecting the tree has experience and uses the correct equipment for the product. For example, injection treatments that use small, shallow holes and smaller amounts of product are less damaging; and even more effective.

Inspect injection wounds and ask that additional trunk injections not be done until the wounds have closed completely.

If you need assistance in identifying a tree problem, I can be reached at kfeehan2@unl.edu or 402-564-4901.