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My Ash Tree is Dead... Now What Do I Do?

More than 20 million ash trees have been killed by the emerald ash borer so far in southeastern Michigan. Consequently, many homeowners are left wondering what to do with the dead and dying trees in their yards. Though the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) has implemented quarantine restrictions on the movement of ash wood in many areas throughout Michigan, many value-added options are available to homeowners who wish to utilize the wood from their trees. As you continue to care for your landscape in the future, remember that the utilization tips outlined below are also applicable to a variety of other tree species.

First, realize that the quarantine does not require you to remove your dead or dying ash tree.

If your dead tree is located in a yard or along a street, it will likely pose a hazard over time and should be removed immediately. However, if one of your dead trees is within a woodlot, it is much less likely to pose a danger to you or your family. If left standing, these trees can provide valuable habitat for wildlife. Standing dead trees are an integral component of a healthy ecosystem, creating nesting sites for birds, sheltered cavities for mammals and structure for a variety of other organisms. Safety, however, should be your top priority — if you think that the tree could be a hazard for you or others, be safe and remove it.

If you plan to remove your tree, hire a reliable, insured, licensed arborist/tree service company.

You may wish to hire a tree removal company on your own. Joining with your neighbors to hire a single company for a large group of local tree removals may also allow you to benefit from bulk purchasing prices.

Before hiring a company, be sure to obtain:

- Estimates from multiple companies.
- Proof of insurance.
- Written estimates of cost.
- Written agreement on disposal/site cleanup requirements.
- References.

For a list of local arborists or for tips on how to select a tree service company, please contact your county Michigan State University Extension office.
More information can also be found at:
http://www.emeraldashborer.info/files/arborist.pdf

Emerald Ash Borer

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If you choose to remove your tree, the wood does not have to go to waste. There are several ways that you can recover some of the value in this resource and put the wood to good use around your home.

If you plan to use the wood from your tree, you should consider a few things first:

- Do you have a specific need for this wood?
- Does your tree have a valuable sawlog worth milling into lumber?
  - Is the tree at least 12 inches in diameter?
  - Is the base of the trunk at least 6 feet long and clear of branches, cracks, rot or other defects?
  - Has the tree been dead for only one year?
- Do you have the room to store this material and the ability to handle the product appropriately (by drying lumber, etc.)?
- Have you communicated your plans to your tree removal company? A tree must be cut down carefully to preserve its value. Also, many tree services may charge less if they do not have to dispose of your tree.

By utilizing wood from trees that need to be removed instead of buying other wood products, you can reduce waste and help to conserve forest resources. Here are examples of some of the ways homeowners can use their landscape trees:

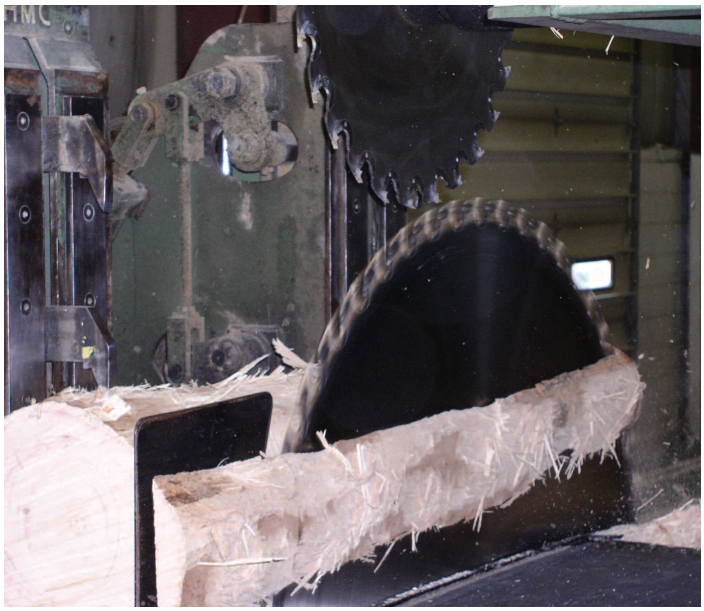
- **Lumber:** Many local mill operators can bring a portable sawmill directly to your home, allowing your removed trees to be converted into lumber that you can use for a variety of projects. Milling is especially suited to trees killed by the emerald ash borer because the insect does not damage the interior portion of the wood when it kills the tree. Ash wood has many redeeming qualities and often makes a good substitute for oak. It can be made into many beautiful and durable products, including furniture, flooring, paneling and molding.

  Portable sawmill operations generally charge by the hour or by the total board feet of lumber produced. Lists of local sawmill operations can be obtained at your county MSU Extension office or from your county's Conservation District forester.

- **Landscaping materials:** Dead landscape trees can still bring beauty and structure to your yard. You can easily have them milled to become landscape timbers or chip them to create mulch or compost for gardening and home landscaping projects.
- **Art and furniture:** If the tree has special significance for your family, you may want to consider hiring a woodworker or chainsaw carver to create a piece of art or furniture from the wood. Many people, devastated by the death of a beloved landscape tree, have managed to create treasured family heirlooms in this way. Organizations such as the Michigan Association of Woodturners, the United Chainsaw Carvers Guild or the Michigan Woodworkers' Guild can be good resources for finding a suitable craftsperson.
- **Firewood:** Wood from trees killed by the emerald ash borer can still be used for firewood at the location where the trees were removed. However, this firewood should not be transported to other locations. For more information about the laws and quarantine regarding firewood movement, please contact your county MSU Extension office.

If you do not need the wood at your home, here are some ways that you can economically dispose of the materials without contributing to the spread of the emerald ash borer:

- Sell your ash wood to a reputable industry. If you (and your neighbors) have a significant number of trees, you may be able to sell the logs to a sawmill or other industry. Be sure to get a signed statement from the buyer that all wood will be handled in a way consistent with the MDA quarantine regulations.
- Dispose of your tree at a local wood disposal site. Many communities have publicly or privately run wood collection yards available. Wood dropped at these yards is generally recycled into mulch, fuel or firewood; in some cases, it is even milled into lumber. Fees for wood disposal vary by site and by the condition of the wood (chips vs. logs, etc.). A list of some available yards can be found at: **www.michigan.gov/eab**. Click on "I think I have a tree...," and follow the links.



- Provide materials to local woodworkers. Many craftspeople enjoy using removed street and yard trees for their specialty projects. Again, if you find someone interested in buying your wood, be sure that he/she will respect quarantine regulations.
- Donate the wood. Your wood could make a difference in your own community. You may want to ask your local schools, parks or community organizations (Habitat for Humanity, scouting groups, nature centers, etc.) if they have need for raw materials for picnic tables, park benches, renovation or construction programs, or other projects.

Whatever you choose to do with your dead ash trees, be sure that NO ASH WOOD LEAVES THE QUARANTINE AREA!

You have the power to be a major player in the emerald ash borer eradication efforts. By not allowing any infested wood to leave the quarantined region, you are helping the state with the most difficult part of the battle.

"Under the quarantine, it is illegal to move ash trees, branches, lumber with bark attached, wood chips larger than 1 inch, and any deciduous firewood from designated areas. Additionally, the movement of all ash nursery stock

is prohibited within, into and from the entire Lower Peninsula," says the Michigan Department of Agriculture. More information about current quarantined areas and regulations can be found at the MDA Web site (**www.michigan.gov/mda** — click on "Emerald Ash Borer" in the "Quick Links" section) or obtained by calling your county MSU Extension office.

For more information about successful urban wood recycling and utilization programs, please see the following resources:

The Southeast Michigan Resource Conservation and Development Council's Ash Utilization Options Project Web site: **www.semircd.org/ash**.

Bratkovich, Stephen M. 2001. *Utilizing Municipal Trees: Ideas From Across the Country*. NA-TP-06-01. Newtown Square, Pa.: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northern Area State and Private Forestry. Online at: **http://www.treesearch.fs.fed.us/pubs/viewpub.jsp?index=11059**.

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Sherrill, Sam. 2003. *Harvesting Urban Timber: A Complete Guide*. Fresno, Calif.: Linden Publishing. Online at: **http://www.harvestingurbantimber.com/**.

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