



Backyard Wisdom • April 2016

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Interview with an Oak Tree

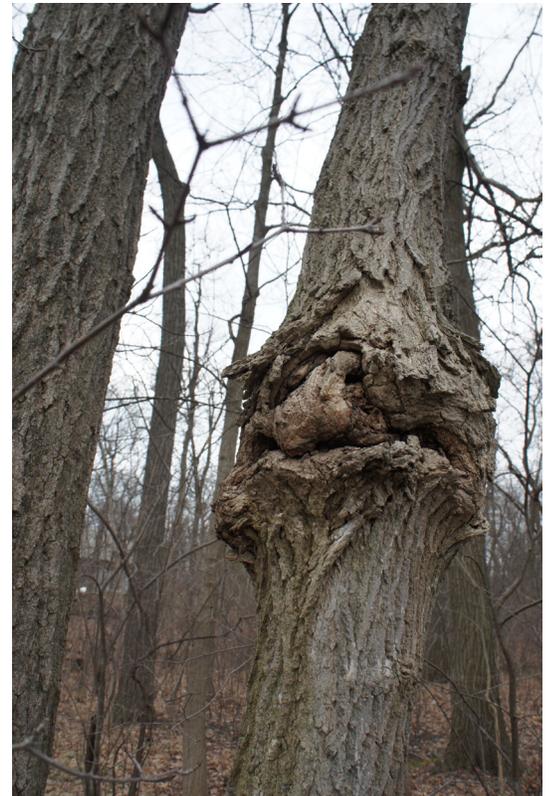
This month I'm privileged to speak with Mr. Oak, who lives in a ravine along Sheridan Road in Highland Park, IL.

Gil: It's nice to see you again Mr. Oak. Thank you for talking with us.

Mr Oak: Well I'm glad to. I watch the cars and people go by, always in a hurry and I wish they would stop and say Hi i to me. I have a lot of things I could teach them not the least of which is to slow down and enjoy my shade once in a while.

Gil: There are a lot of beautiful trees in the village, in fact Highland Park is a TREE CITY USA! That means that the village holds trees in high esteem but you say few people slow down and talk to you? What would you like to tell them? I mean besides, slow down.

Mr Oak: I really liked what Ms. Maple said last month about mulching tree roots way out to our drip line (branch spread). That really helps us fight off diseases and insects. Now would you like to know how to make tree care much less worry-some?



Mr. Oak; Photos by Lesley Bruce Smith



Oak leaf withharmless nipple gall

Gil: Of course! Say on.

Mr. Oak: Now, I know this goes against human conventional wisdom but I'm telling you not to get upset about a few holes or spots on your tree leaves. We have a saying in the forest. **"A few spots is better than none. A few holes is more healthy than none."** What we mean by that is, trees give and we take. A few spots or holes is a healthy sign. If there were no insects to eat our leaves there would be no birds to eat those insects and the population of insects would soar out of control and consume the forest. In fact we can sustain up to 40% leaf defoliation with out harming our performance a bit. How 'bout them apples? (That's a little tree humor.)



Gil: That is unconventional, but what about ugly brown spots? Aren't they a symptom of disease that will soon get out of control?

Mr Oak: Sorry to say this, but we trees have been around since way before you humans. Do you think we don't have ways of dealing with a few spots? Insect and disease attacks will trigger our immune responses to limit or repel attackers just as they do in your species.

Gil: Yes but...

Mr Oak: ...And let me add that spraying the heck out of your trees to try to keep them perfect and pristine actually limits our defenses and makes the disease or insect stronger because they develop resistance to your sprays, unless of course they're organic.



Oak leaves with harmless holes

Gil: We're just trying to help...

Mr Oak: We trees really do appreciate the attention. We love it when you notice our lovely branches and verdant foliage. Trees and humans benefit from mutual appreciation. You need a certified arborist who knows how to keep trees healthy on your property. What I'm trying to tell you is to relax and don't get all carried away with a few spots or holes in our leaves. We don't.

Gil: Thanks. That helps.

Mr Oak: We trees have another saying. It sounds like a nursery rhyme for saplings but, **"We share the sunshine"**. It means we cooperate with every living thing around us and they in turn share our sunshine and contribute to our well being. We're glad to share the sunshine with you humans too.

Gil: I can't think of a better way to end the interview. Thanks for the talk Mr Oak.

Mr. Oak: I'll be here any time.