

My Ash Trees Are Dying...What Do I Do?

An Ohio Homeowners Guide

Millions of ash (*Fraxinus* spp.) trees have been killed by the emerald ash borer (EAB), with every ash tree in North America at risk. As a result, many homeowners are left wondering what to do with the dead and dying trees in their yards and landscapes. Though the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has implemented quarantine restrictions on the movement of ash wood and all non-coniferous firewood, there are options available to homeowners who wish to utilize the wood from their trees impacted by the EAB. As residents care for landscapes in the future, utilization tips outlined in this fact sheet 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. Be aware that some communities have adopted legislation that if a tree on private property is deemed a threat to the right of way or public safety, property owners are required to remove the hazardous tree(s).

Photo by Ken Chamberlain



Infested ash trees pose a danger in many Ohio communities.

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.

If you need to hire a company to remove a dead or dying ash tree, consider the following:

- **Seek written estimates from multiple companies.**
- **Ask to see proof of insurance and workers' compensation.**
If the company lacks either, and there is an accident while work is done on your property, you could be liable.
- **Ask for written agreement on disposal and site cleanup requirements.**
Expectations should be clearly described. Cost could be potentially reduced if the company gets the tree on the ground but does not remove the wood from the site.
- **Request references from the company.**
Follow up on the references. Are the company's clients satisfied with the work performed?



Joining with your neighbors to hire a single company to remove a larger number of ash trees in close proximity, may allow you to benefit from bulk purchasing prices. Also, ash trees that are dead dry out very quickly, become brittle and can be more dangerous to remove (and often have a higher price tag) than ash trees that are still showing signs of life.

A list of certified arborists can be found on the International Society of Arboriculture's website at <http://treesaregood.org>. Website visitors are able to search for professional arborists by city, state, and/or zip code. OSU Extension fact sheet HYG 1032, "How to Hire an Arborist," is another resource available online at <http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/1000/1032.html> or at your local OSU Extension office.

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 six feet long and clear of branches, cracks, rot or other defects?
 - Has the tree been dead for less than one year?

- Do you have the room to store this material and the ability to handle the product appropriately (i.e., 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 be used for a variety of projects. Milling is especially suited to trees killed by EAB because the insect does not damage the interior portion of the wood. 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 local OSU Extension office, or on the Ohio Woodland Steward's website at <http://woodlandstewards.osu.edu/articles/files/CstmSawmill.pdf>.

- **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.



Urban trees require careful removal.



Ash logs and branches can be hauled away for various uses.



Ash wood can be turned into railroad ties, such as this one certified by APHIS.

- **Art and furniture:** If the tree has special significance to 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 American Association of Woodturners, the United Chainsaw Carvers Guild or the Woodworkers' Guild of America can be good resources for finding a suitable craftsman.
- **Firewood:** Wood from trees killed by EAB can still be used for firewood. Moving this wood can further spread the pest, so it should not be transported outside the local area. For more information about laws and quarantines regarding firewood movement, contact the Ohio Department of Agriculture.

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 emerald ash borer:

- Sell your ash wood to a reputable company. If you (and your neighbors) have a significant number of trees, you may be able to sell the logs to a sawmill or other forest products-type business. Be sure to get a signed statement from the buyer that all wood will be handled in a way consistent with 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.).

- 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 you are not responsible for spreading EAB farther and faster than it would through natural spread.

Ohioans have the power to be major players in slowing the spread of emerald ash borer, specifically by avoiding artificial movement. By not allowing any infested wood to leave the area or the quarantined region, you are helping the state and the nation with the most difficult part of the battle. Under a federal quarantine, "it is illegal to move ash trees, branches, lumber with bark attached, wood chips larger than 1 inch, and any deciduous firewood outside the state of Ohio." Although this quarantine does not restrict movement of ash materials within the state, it is important to realize that EAB populations across the Ohio are not equal, and by moving infested materials, you are speeding up the spread of this destructive pest. Additionally, firewood and similar plant materials do have the potential to spread other invasive species. Purchasing firewood in the area where you will be using it is a responsible practice and can protect the natural resources that we all enjoy while being outdoors.

Photo by Cathy Herms



Ash logs can be milled on site using a portable sawmill.

Photo by Amy Stone



Picnic bench made from ash wood as part of the Ohio Department of Agriculture's EAB display.

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.

www.semircd.org/ash

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Photo by Amy Stone



Ash logs can be turned into mulch.

Photo by Amy Stone



Ash trees make great firewood.

Photo by Steve Cothrel



Skill and creativity can turn a dead ash tree into art.