

**Some Drake Elms Having Problems**  
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Drake or lacebark elms are very popular landscape trees in our area. Their fast growth, good form and attractive bark make them very desirable for many areas. Unfortunately, I and many other tree care professionals and homeowners, have noticed many of these trees dying this spring. Usually we first see bark splitting, and then we see whole sections, or the entire tree, die.

A few weeks ago, we had two specialists from the Florida Division of Forestry, Dr. Ed Barnard and Dr. Bud Mayfield, give a lecture here on tree diseases and insects in our area. Many of us in the audience asked them what was going on with the Drake elms. Dr. Barnard informed us that he was seeing the same problem in Gainesville with Drake elms. He told us a complicated story which involves two key points: injury and disease. An injury is often an entry point for a pathogen which causes disease. The disease then can kill sections of a tree, or all of a tree.

Drake elms are from both temperate and subtropical regions of the Orient. The ones from the subtropical regions are more susceptible to freeze damage. Indeed, I have observed cold damage on Drake elms in the past here in Tallahassee. Dr. Barnard also told us that this thin-barked species of tree is vulnerable to sunburn too. Finally, occasionally there is tip dieback caused by a twig borer that, as its name implies, bores into twigs. These aforementioned damages all provide entry points through the bark for pathogens to enter. Most often the pathogen that is causing the damage we see is a fungus with the long name called *Botryosphaeria*. The fungus is quite common and is not new to our area. Unfortunately it gets the upper hand with Drake elms when they become stressed. Then the trees often die slowly, a branch or two at a time, sometimes eventually dying completely.

What can we do about the problems? For existing trees, maintain them with proper amounts of water, and mulch them. Healthy vigorous trees are less susceptible to this fungus. If you find dieback from the fungus on a branch, prune out the branch and destroy the branch. Try to prune your Drake elm during dry weather. Wet weather is more favorable for spreading the fungus. Also, avoid wounding the trees. The disease organism can enter mechanical injuries from lawnmowers and weed eaters too.

For the future, I recommend that we plant trees less susceptible to this damage than Drake elms. Two excellent trees are the Eastern hophornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*) and the American hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*), both small-to medium-sized trees. The American hornbeam or musclewood tree has bark that is tight, thin, smooth, and bluish-gray. The trunk often looks like it has ripply muscles. Both trees have a nice yellow fall color and have few insect and disease problems. Like the Drake elm, these trees are good to plant on smaller lots where they won't outgrow their space.

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