



TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE

What's Wrong With My Tree?

During their lifespan trees are susceptible to many health issues from environmental stress, pathogens and diseases. Bark peeling, early leaf drop, and die back in areas of the tree's crown are a few symptoms indicating a stress or health issue with your tree.

While peeling bark may be a symptom of something ailing your tree, this may not be the case all of the time. Some trees, such as river birch, maples, and shagbark hickory not only exhibit **naturally peeling bark**; this is often a desirable trait in these species. When in doubt, seek the advice of a certified arborist.

Hypoxylon canker and **boring insects** are two common causes of peeling bark. Hypoxylon canker is a rather common fungus that causes bark to fall off and collect around the base of the tree. While hypoxylon isn't treatable, it's generally a secondary pathogen effecting already weakened trees. Boring insects, like the southern pine beetle, feed and make their homes inside of trees. This disrupts the trees vascular system and leads towards declining health. However, as in the case of hypoxylon, these are usually "secondary invaders" attacking already sick or stressed trees.



Hypoxylon Canker



Sunscald



Attractive, natural bark peeling of River Birch

Environmental conditions can also cause peeling and splitting bark. Within a tree there are tubular pathways which transport water called xylem and phloem. This makes up the tree's vascular system. Under normal circumstances, in healthy trees, the vascular system is able to expand and contract when the water within it freezes and thaws. However, trees with previous damage and wounds can experience **frost crack** during the freeze-thaw cycle, particularly when it happens very rapidly.

Sunscald occurs when dormant cells in the vascular system reactivate during a warming period. After reactivating, these cells lose some of their cold hardiness. When temperatures fall below freezing again during nighttime, these cells can experience significant injury. This is particularly prevalent on the south facing side of the tree.



Frost Crack