

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

More than 40 million ash trees have been killed by the emerald ash borer (EAB) so far in midwestern and eastern states. Consequently, many homeowners are left wondering what to do with the dead and dying trees in their yards. The United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Plant Protection and Quarantine (USDA-APHIS-PPQ) has implemented quarantine restrictions for interstate movement of ash wood. Though the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA) has implemented quarantine restrictions on the movement of ash wood out of several counties in Pennsylvania, 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 may also be 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.



**Emerald
Ash Borer**

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

Federal and state regulatory agencies have developed compliance agreements to help mitigate the risk of moving the EAB. Companies under compliance agreements are certified and can help communities and homeowners insure proper disposal of ash wood.

Contact a PDA regional office for information on these compliance agreements.

As another option, 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, and
- References.

For a list of local arborists or for tips on how to select a

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tree service company, please contact your local county Penn State University Cooperative Extension office.

More information can also be found at:
www.paemeraldashborer.psu.edu

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. A list of local sawmill operations may be obtained from your Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (PA DCNR) district forest office.

- **Landscaping materials:** Dead landscape trees can still



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bring beauty and structure to your yard. You can have them milled to become landscape timbers or chip them to less than one inch in two dimensions to create mulch or compost for gardening and home landscaping.

- **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. Woodturners, chainsaw carvers or woodworkers can be good resources for finding a suitable craftsman.
- **Firewood:** Wood from trees killed by the EAB 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 Penn State Cooperative Extension county office or the PDA regional office near you.

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 EAB:

- 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 PDA quarantine regulations.
- Dispose of your tree at one of the current sites with an EAB compliance agreement. Either you or your tree service company may dispose of ash wood at one of the state's sites with a current compliance agreement. A list of current locations can be found at www.paemeraldashborer.psu.edu.
- 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 EAB quarantine regulations.
- Donate the wood. Your wood could make a difference in



your own community. 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 EAB management 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.

Limitations imposed in the federal and state EAB quarantines restrict or prohibit movement of the following:

- EAB in any living stage of development;
- Ash trees of any size;
- Ash limbs, branches, stumps, and roots;
- Any cut, non-coniferous (hardwood) firewood;
- Non-coniferous (hardwood) bark and non-coniferous (hardwood) wood chips larger than one inch in two dimensions;
- Ash logs and lumber with either the bark or the outer one

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

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. (<http://www.treesearch.fs.fed.us/pubs/11059>)

Cesa, Edward T.; Lempicki, Edward A.; and Knotts, Howard. 2003. *Recycling Municipal Trees: A Guide for Marketing Sawlogs from Street Tree Removals in Municipalities*. NA-TP-02-94. Morgantown, W. Va.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry. (http://www.fs.fed.us/na/morgantown/frm/cesa/rmt/rmt_index.html)

Sherrill, Sam. 2003. *Harvesting Urban Timber: A Complete Guide*. Fresno, Calif.: Linden Publishing. (<http://www.harvestingurbantimber.com/>)

inch of sapwood, or both, attached;

- Any item made from or containing the wood of the ash tree that is capable of spreading the EAB; and
- Any other article, product or means of conveyance determined by the PDA to present a risk of spreading the EAB infestation.

More information about current quarantined areas and regulations can be found at the PDA web site (www.agriculture.state.pa.us/emeraldashborer) or obtained by calling your Penn State Cooperative Extension county office.

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