

# TREE NEWS

SEPT. 2023

YOU CAN USE

## CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

### LEAVES DROP... IT'S WHAT TREES DO!

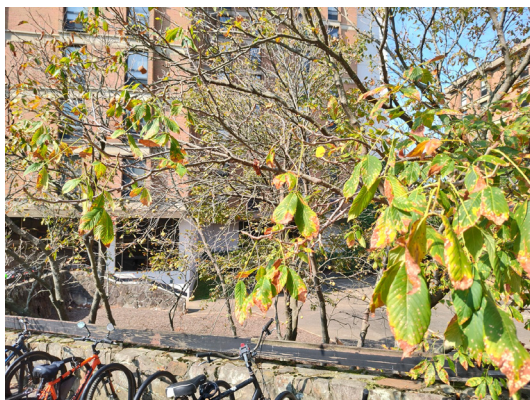
By September in East Tennessee, we're all eagerly awaiting the cooler temperatures and brilliant colors that fall brings. Unfortunately, even though it's still a few months away, you may notice some trees in your landscape dropping leaves in a slow trickle. While it might be concerning, trees are living organisms constantly responding to their environment. Your trees might be sending you a message, or simply showing off one of the clever ways they've adapted to outlast the long hot summers.



#### Heat/Drought Stress

Several native trees seem to start dropping leaves beginning in August. Tulip poplar (*L. tulipifera*) and river birch (*B. nigra*) are prime examples in the urban landscape. They will regularly shed leaves from their inner canopy giving them a thin appearance. While providing supplemental water during the late summer can lessen

early leaf drop, the loss of this interior foliage is not a sign of tree decline. Interior leaves are typically those that emerged at the beginning of the growing season and have been around long enough to store up sugars and develop the buds that will start the next growing season. Losing older leaves is a good way for many trees to limit the need for water and preserve the less developed second flush of foliage out at the branch tips.



#### Pest/Disease Pressure

Leaf blights can also cause early leaf drop. Bacterial leaf scorch (red oaks and sycamore) and Guignardia leaf blight (buckeye) are commonly showing their worst symptoms during this time of year and resulting in partial or complete defoliation before the end of summer. Currently there aren't effective treatments for these tree diseases, but

supplemental watering and good cultural practices may help slow a tree's decline. Additionally, pest pressure causes an early fall color change or partial defoliation. These kinds of issues can occur in patches throughout the tree instead of a gradual transition of the entire canopy.



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#### When you should be concerned:

- Leaf loss from the outer branch tips could result in branch dieback and could be a sign of tree decline.
- Asymmetrical leaf drop could be a sign of pest or disease pressure.
- Leaves wilting and remaining attached.



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