

**Weird Looking Elms**  
**Rick Abrahamson**  
**For Week of June 7, 2010**

Lately many calls and emails have come in concerning trees that have not leafed out yet or are just not looking right. The first of these problems seems to be found on several cultivars of Green Ash. Most of the ashes out there are looking fine but a few seemed to have either given up the ghost over the winter or tried to leaf out only to suffer frost damage which stopped the expanding leaves. After looking at a few trees, I found that some of them may have been planted too deeply or may even have some graft incompatibility or other environmental reasons causing the buds to not open.

I was a little baffled after speaking to one homeowner about his tree. We discussed why it would appear to have been healthy last year only to “die” so suddenly so I have asked for some help from our forestry specialist Dr. John Ball. Dr. Ball is often in the Black Hills during the summer months and has been a great help when it comes to trees in the area.

The other problem referred to earlier has been noticed on Siberian elms. One emailed question indicated that many elms this year seem to be “brown”. Others have commented that they don’t have any leaves and are full of seeds. One caller told me that his elm has “never” had seeds on it before and this spring is just loaded with them. After looking at some elms I had to agree there were a lot of seeds in them. Recently, many of the elms have dropped the seed, which creates a whole different problem on the ground as they can be messy. The trees now appear to be devoid of leaves or at least very thin in the canopy.

Siberian elms, although a nice tree, have many problems associated with them. They tend to have weak crotches and become infected with canker diseases. They are a favorite of aphids which drip honeydew on our cars and patio furniture. If not protected Siberian elms will often suffer winter damage and drought has taken its toll on them over the past several years. When a tree is stressed, as these elms have been, it is not uncommon to see massive seed production in a single year. During these heavy seed years the tree puts most of its energy into flowering and seed production. Now that the seeds have fallen from these trees they will start making leaves again.

They should fill in some but they will most likely be sparse for the rest of this year. Next year they should be back to their normal selves barring any other stress factors. Decline in a tree is usually the result of many stresses and not often the result of one factor. Of course there are some very important exceptions to this rule, like Dutch elm disease. The good news for our Siberian elms is that they are relatively resistant to Dutch elm disease. My advice with these trees is to be patient and wait to see what happens the rest of this season. Be sure to give them at least an inch of water each week and fertilize them once or twice per year. Most often trees will steal sufficient amounts of fertilizer from your yard; if you fertilize your yard don’t worry about feeding your trees. Avoid running into them with the lawn mower and weed eater. Just enjoy them even if they don’t look normal this year.

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