

INSIDE AURORA: Ashes to Ashes?

By Scott Johnston

It's autumn in Aurora. At least, it is at our house.

Allow me to explain.

Over the past few years, the invasive Emerald Ash Borer has been chewing its way through southern Ontario's ash tree population, and has now staked a claim to Aurora.

Unfortunately, our native ash populations have little resistance to the pest, and these trees are likely to go the way of the elm which, except for a reduced number of specimens, was decimated by the invasive Dutch Elm Disease last century.

Last year, the Town treated 2,378 ash trees with the chemical TreeAzin in an effort to stop the ravages of this beetle.

There is some debate at Council about what to do next in this battle. Increase the number of treatments? Use other chemicals? Just replace the trees with another species? Some combination of these options?

I'm watching this debate with interest, as the boulevard tree at the front of our property is, you guessed it, an ash.

This isn't just any old ash, either. It's a survivor.

It's lopsided, and many of its branches grow downwards. Before a "limb-ectomy" by Town staff, the branches often scraped along the roof of our car with that wonderful fingernails on chalkboard sound, when our vehicle entered or exited the driveway, which not surprisingly, was fairly frequently.

Normally, people would pay big bucks at a nursery to buy a similar "weeping" variety of tree, but the Town gave us ours for free.

It's always the last tree on the street (yes, all ashes) to come out in leaf in the spring, and the first one to lose them in the fall.

It has defied gravity, wind, ice storms, drought, more pruning from the Town than any other tree on the street, and our annual expectations of its inevitable demise.

As I said, it's a survivor.

However, the end may be near. When the TreeAzin guys were here last year, one of them commenting unprompted on how unhealthy the tree was. Whether that was based on attack by the borers, or just a general observation, it was not a good sign.

Which brings us to my "autumn" comment.

About two weeks ago, our ash decided that it had had enough of being in leaf, and although it was only early June, and the weather had been pleasant and wet, it started shedding its foliage.

It was like fall, except without all the pretty yellows, reds and golds that one normally sees when raking the lawn.

This isn't the first time it's done this. Once, several years ago in mid-summer for no apparent reason ? it wasn't particularly hot or dry, no chemicals had been applied to the lawn ? it just dropped all of its leaves. Maybe they were too heavy, or it just felt like a change.

We're not really sure why. Neither were the local Town staff who came to look at it. In tree vernacular, they were stumped.

In any case, the ash pulled through that somehow, like it always does, and came back into leaf again the next year, fashionably late, of course.

This time, in its latest round of self-defoliation, it's lost about a third of its leaves, but has now taken a bit of a pause.

I'm not sure how many lives this tree has, but it's come back before, so maybe it will again, either on its own, or via a permanent intravenous supply of TreeAzin to keep it on life support.

Or perhaps it's just time to bow to the inevitable, say a final goodbye, and update the Town's ash tree tote board to 2,377.

Only time will tell.

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