



Mowers and Weed Whackers

Bob Eddleman

Mowers and string trimmers or weed whackers can and do cause serious damage to trees by destroying protective bark and the trees vascular system. There is a thin layer of living tissue just inside the bark that is made up of the xylem and phloem, which is the trees vascular system. This tissue is the vertical “pipes” that transports water and nutrients from the soil through the roots and up to the leaves and carries manufactured food from the leaves down to the roots. The leaves take carbon dioxide from the air and combine it with water creating carbohydrates which is the trees food. This important process releases oxygen back into the air for animals and humans to breathe.

The sharp edges of mower housing often completely tear away the bark and much of the critical vascular system. String trimmers tear away chunks of bark as well, especially on younger and thinner barked tree species. The result is often a dead tree or one that is so severely weakened at its base that it will grow slowly or even be toppled by a wind storm.

One of the best ways to prevent this damage is to keep grass and weeds from growing next to the tree by placing a 2 to 4 inch layer of mulch in a three to four foot circle around the base of the tree. An occasional spraying with a weed killer may be needed to control the toughest grasses and weeds. With no grass to worry about homeowners can keep mowers and weed whackers well away from the fragile bark and vascular system. Mulch piled deeper than the 2 to 4 inch maximum is a waste of money and an open invitation to rodents, insects, fungus and other diseases to attack the bark and vascular system of the tree.

Protecting the bark and vascular system of a tree is just like people protecting their skin, arteries and veins from damage. Additional information on basic tree care can be found at www.plantamillion.org. Plant a Million is a project of your local Soil and Water Conservation District, the Hoosier Heartland Resource Conservation and Development Council and nine other Soil and Water Conservation Districts in central Indiana. Plant a Million has two basic goals. The first goal is to help people in central Indiana plant a million or more mostly native trees over the next 6 to 10 years. The second is to provide information that will help our citizens take good care of the trees they plant or those that already exist in the ten county area.

#