



NEWSLETTER

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR
OKLAHOMA COMMUNITY FORESTRY COUNCIL

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Growing Professionals: Becoming a Lifelong Learner

By: Shain Armstrong

Tree care is both an ancient practice and a continually developing profession. The principles we use today are built on generations of observation, research, and experience. Even so, our understanding continues to evolve, which means our learning must evolve with it.

No credential, degree, workshop, or textbook represents the finish line. Each gives us another framework for looking at our work and improving our judgment. Sometimes the most valuable thing we gain from learning is exposure to a variable we did not previously know existed, and with it, a new direction for growth.

I see this in my own work every year. As my knowledge has grown, so has the range of factors I consider when evaluating a tree or site. I recognize more possibilities, ask better questions, and have more resources to draw from when providing guidance. Those additions make us more capable and allow us to bring greater value to the people and communities we serve.

Trees are complex, long-lived biological systems, and the concerns we encounter frequently require diligent root cause analysis (pun intended). Yet professionals are still expected to assess conditions, communicate clearly, and recommend a path forward, often without unlimited time, budget, or diagnostic tools.

Lifelong learning takes many forms. It can mean participating in a workshop, exploring a new area of the industry, making professional connections, learning from peers, pursuing a new skill, or becoming more engaged with the work around us.



It may even give us the confidence and capability to step into a new role, expand the services we provide, or explore an entirely new area of the profession. Growth begins with curiosity and continues through a willingness to seek new experiences, perspectives, and opportunities to improve.

Learning requires curiosity, but it also requires professional courage, the willingness to recognize there is more to learn and then do something about it.

We will never know everything, and that is part of what makes this profession interesting. The goal is not to become infallible. The goal is to keep learning, growing, and becoming better prepared for the next tree, the next question, and the next challenge.

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Tree Spotlight:

Baldcypress, Taxodium distichum

By: Joe Howell

Baldcypress (*Taxodium distichum*) is an excellent Oklahoma landscape tree when its mature size and site needs are respected. Native to southeastern Oklahoma in McCurtain county and usually found in low swampy condition, baldcypress is also adapted to dryer upland sites in other areas across the state.

This deciduous conifer provides soft green summer foliage, attractive coppery-russet fall color, and a distinctive pyramidal silhouette. It tolerates full sun, periodic flooding, and once established, short dry spells, making it useful beside ponds, in rain gardens, and as a large lawn, street, or specimen tree. It has proven to be a very good street tree in numerous plantings both in Oklahoma City and in Tulsa.

Baldcypress can ultimately reach about 70 feet tall and 30 feet wide, so it is unsuitable beneath utility lines or in small yards. Seasonal cleanup of leaves and twigs is usually minimal. In wet or compacted ground it may produce “knees,” woody root projections that can complicate mowing. Standard baldcypress can also develop yellowing foliage in highly alkaline soils, a common concern in parts of Oklahoma.

Cultivar choice can address these issues. Shawnee Brave (‘Mickelson’) has a strong central leader and a dense, narrow pyramidal form, typically 50–75 feet tall but only 15–20 feet wide. It is a particularly good option where a tall tree is desired but horizontal space is limited. This tree has a particularly uniform growth habit.

Frio River is a seed-grown ecotype from the Texas Hill Country rather than a true cloned cultivar. It retains the typical baldcypress form, but is notable for strong adaptation to alkaline soils, reported to perform well around pH 8 or higher. For Oklahoma landscapes with calcareous soil, it can be the more reliable choice. This tree is commercially available from Sunshine Nursery in Clinton.

Overall, baldcypress is a durable, handsome tree for spacious Oklahoma sites as well as streetscapes, especially when the cultivar is matched to soil and available space.



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It Starts with the Soil

By: Caitlin Gipson

A sometimes under-utilized tool that we in the tree industry have available to us is soil sampling and testing. If you notice a tree is struggling; exhibiting chlorosis, poor growth, dieback, it could be beneficial to test the soil for pH and nutrient issues. Said tests can inform tree care professionals and allow us to make better plant health care decisions.

Taking a soil sample is easy. With a probe or similar tool as pictured below, collect several soil samples randomly from under the drip line. Preferably, collect samples to at least a depth of 6 inches, but up to 18 inches is acceptable. Don't collect too close to the trunk. You want to get a representation of the soil where the fibrous/uptake roots are located. Grass, mulch, or other surface level debris do not need to be included in the sample. Mix the soil cores together in a clean bucket or Ziplock bag. Do not collect rocks or submit a saturated sample.

Take your soil sample to your county extension office, or directly to the OSU Soil, Water & Forage Analytical Laboratory (SWFAL) located at 045 Agricultural Hall, Stillwater OK 74078. For trees, a routine analysis is typically recommended. This test determines pH, lime, and Nitrogen(N), Phosphorous(P), and Potassium(K) levels. Many soil-caused tree issues can be alleviated by correcting pH or NPK issues. However, you may choose to run additional tests like Secondary Nutrients (Mg, Ca (M3), and SO₄-S (0.008M Calcium Phosphate)) and/or micronutrients (Fe, Zn, B and Cu (DTPA - Sorbitol)).

The listed soil tests typically cost between \$5-\$15. Soil sample results are delivered to the client on-line via a client portal associated with the SWFAL website. While soil testing can take time, effort, and require fees, it gives tree-care professionals accurate insight as to what is happening under our feet and how to best help our trees.

See the SWFAL website for more information: <https://extension.okstate.edu/programs/soil-testing>



Unlocking Oklahoma's Hidden Treasure: Why Your Community Needs Pawpaws

By: Riley Coy

If you've ever stumbled across a pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*) in an Oklahoma bottomland, you know the feeling. It's like finding native tropical fruit right in our backyard. Sometimes called the "Okie banana", (okay, that's not true, but it SHOULD be), the pawpaw produces a sweet, custard-like fruit tasting of banana, mango, and vanilla.

Indigenous communities and early settlers relied heavily on the pawpaw as a vital seasonal food source and traded seeds like currency. Yet over the past century, wild pawpaw patches have steadily declined across our region. Land development, forest clearing, and livestock grazing have fragmented the shaded, moist understory habitats where these trees naturally thrive.

Bringing pawpaws back into our community forests is one of the best moves an urban forestry team or homeowner can make.

Here's why they fit perfectly into municipal landscapes:

-Utility Friendly: Reaching a modest height of just 15 to 25 feet, pawpaws are ideal understory trees. Their small stature makes them remarkably safe to plant near overhead utility lines without risk of high-voltage interference.

-Tough & Proven: Don't let their tropical look fool you. Pawpaws are surprisingly hardy, thriving down to USDA Zone 5 once established in rich, well-draining soil with light shade or filtered sunlight.

-Ecological MVPs: Pawpaws serve as the exclusive host plant for the stunning Zebra Swallowtail butterfly (*Protographium marcellus*). Without pawpaws for caterpillars to feed on, these distinctive black-and-white butterflies simply can't reproduce.

-By planting pawpaws in community parks, public orchards, and neighborhood yards, we aren't just adding unique fall color and delicious fruit, we're restoring a piece of Oklahoma's natural heritage and building biodiversity from the ground up.

Want to add pawpaws to your town's planting list this fall? Reach out to your local nursery, join a local pawpaw enthusiast group on social media that may trade and sell seedlings, and harvest from native patches to grow from your own seed.

P.S. Please harvest responsibly, leave fruit for wildlife and others to enjoy, do not harvest before they're ripe, and utilize the seed to repopulate this rare treasure. Happy foraging!

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**OKLAHOMA COMMUNITY
FORESTRY COUNCIL**

Upcoming Event:

Annual Forestry
Conference
October 27, 2026
Edmond, OK

For registration
information, visit
www.OKCFC.org

Prescription Pruning
Qualification Course
April 13-15, 2027
more details coming soon