

Conservation Committee - Tip of the Month

Two things about Oak Trees

1. Now is the BEST time to have your oak trees pruned. They are dormant and bird nesting doesn't begin for several months.

Best practices for pruning trees, from the International Society of Arboriculturists (ISA):

- **Follow good sanitation practices:** Tools and water are primary vectors for pests and pathogens including sudden oak death
- **Amount to prune:** Never remove more than 25% of a tree's living branches and foliage
- **Cut location:** Make cuts just outside the branch collar, which is the swell at the base of the branch where it meets the trunk. Cutting the branch collar can damage the tree.
- **Cut type:** Make small cuts to minimize exposed wood and ensure they don't retain water
- **Branch removal:** Prune back to a lateral branch or parent branch that's at least one-third the diameter of the branch being pruned.
- **Branch selection:** Remove broken, dead, dying, or damaged branches. Establish a dominant leader, lowest permanent branch, scaffold branches, and subordinate temporary branches.
- Please chip and leave remains on site – removal risks spread of disease and letting them decay on site supports health soil.

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2. Have you wondered why there are so many acorns lying around?

This is a “mast” year for our Coast Live oaks. Masting is a phenomenon that has been well-known for centuries and describes the observations of variable but synchronous production of acorns and other tree seeds across large geographic areas and is quite common in Northern hardwood forests. [Put more colloquially: some years are great, all the trees of this species in the area are producing exceptional quantities of fruit, other years are terrible, with very low fruit production and no pattern or way to know when these bumper crops will occur.]



Origin of the term mast comes from farmers who used acorns and other tree seeds to fatten swine and observed vast year-to-year variability in production.

Men knocking down acorns to feed swine. From the Queen Mary Psalter, made in England between 1310 and 1320. Image in the public domain courtesy of the British Library