



Tony Glover
Regional Extension Agent
News Release

Slime Flux

Question: My oak tree is “weeping” awful smelling ooze down the trunk on one side. Insects and bees are constantly hovering around the ooze. What is it and will it harm my tree?

Answer: What you are describing is a fairly common occurrence on trees and it is called “wet wood” or, my favorite, “slime flux.” I am not sure who came up with a great name like “slime flux” but you have to admit it has a ring to it. It occurs in apple, birch, elm, hemlock, maple, mulberry, oak, poplar, willow and many other trees. Slime flux is very common in large, mature, landscape oaks, tulip poplar and elms.

Slime flux is a bacterial disease. The infected wood is frequently discolored or appears water soaked hence the name “wet wood.” Carbon dioxide gas is produced during fermentation by bacteria. The gas produces pressure in the wood. This pressure forces sap from the trunk through cracks in the trunk. This oozing of sap is termed fluxing. The flux is colorless to tan at first but darkens upon exposure to the air. As fluxing continues, large areas of the bark become soaked. Many different microorganisms grow in the flux producing a foul or alcoholic smell. As you mentioned, various types of insects are attracted to the slime flux. Did you notice if the bees and insects could fly in a straight line after feeding on the ooze?

Now I will address your original question about the health of your tree. If the fluxing continues for months on a branch rather than the main trunk, leaves on affected branches may be stunted and chlorotic. Grass may be killed where the flux runs down the trunk onto the grass. If as you described the ooze is from the main trunk the sap may continue to ooze for months, with no apparent damage to the tree. This slime flux may be triggered by heat, drought and other stress. Last years drought stress will likely cause a great increase in this problem this year and possibly next year.

There is no curative or preventive measures for slime flux except to maintain trees in a general good state of vigor and minimize wounds and injuries. In other words keep lawn mowers and weed eaters away from tree trunks. An insignificant nick in the trunk can lead to problems far down the road in terms of overall tree health. Treatment is not advised because more damage can be done to the tree in attempting to cure slime flux than the slime flux will do alone. It has been a common practice with slime flux to drill a hole in the trunk and insert a pipe, which does not cure the problem. Inserting a pipe only allows the sap to drip on the ground rather than run down the trunk. This practice is not recommended because it does not speed up the natural healing process. If there is loose or dead bark in the slime flux area, remove all of the loose bark and allow the area to dry. Do not apply a wound dressing.

The next time you are visiting with your neighbor across the backyard fence ask him if he has seen any slime flux lately. I am sure that will start an interesting conversation. For more information visit: <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/pp/notes/oldnotes/od8.html> or contact Tony Glover, Regional Extension Agent-Home Horticulture, Home Gardens and Home Pest Management at the St. Clair County Extension Office at (205) 338-9416 or email gloveta@auburn.edu.

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