Grand Challenge: Community Vitality
Title: Protecting Shade Trees

Why is this issue important?
With so many rainy days this spring, leaf diseases were rampant in Shawnee County. Sycamore Anthracnose, was especially prevalent. This disease can cause many shade trees, but especially sycamores, to completely defoliate in just a matter of days. The good news is that the tree will recover, and when warmer days arrive, the trees will put out new leaves. The bad news is that in the few weeks when the tree doesn’t have leaves it looks dead and is at risk for removal. Many homeowners received offers to have their trees cut down. Losing an established tree has a significant impact on homeowners and community members both emotionally and economically.

How did Extension address this issue?
As calls came in for anthracnose we initially told homeowners that all they needed to do was wait for the weather to change. This approach changed when we received a call from a homeowner who had a flyer placed in her door offering to cut down her seemingly dead sycamore tree. The Master Gardener Response Line team went through every anthracnose call again and made sure the homeowners realized that the disease could completely defoliate their trees, but that it would still recover. Because sycamore trees are so prevalent, we asked them to spread the word to neighbors. In May and June we answered more than a dozen calls on anthracnose.

What was the impact?
Losing a tree has economic ramifications. The initial cost is the price of removing the tree. Tree removal cost is based on location and tree size, so a tree with a height of 75ft, typical for a sycamore, would cost at least $1,500. Homeowners and local governments continue to pay after the tree is gone. Shade trees around your house reduce energy costs (up to 30%) for homeowners. In addition, a study by the National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture found that having trees along roadsides can save up to 60% of repaving costs. Trees also have emotional value to homeowners, providing privacy and creating feelings of relaxation and security.

One homeowner shared, “My sycamore is healthier and fuller than ever. I was expecting it to be very sparse, but it just came right back. I think you all did wonderful and it really eased by mind to know I didn’t have to cut down my tree and that everything would be alright.”

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