



Oak tree damage in the Hill Country from the February 2021 freeze. The owner said that he heard this popping sound outside; it was the oak trees snapping under the pressure of the accumulated ice. Photo. Bill Swantner

## ***The Freeze and Trees...Five Months Later*** **By Bill Swantner, Bexar County Master Gardener**

On a recent webinar, hosted by the Texas chapter of the International Arborist Society (ISA), a prominent local arborist was asked when one could finally determine the extent of tree damage caused by the 2021 February freeze. He replied:

*“I used to tell people to wait until July 4<sup>th</sup>, then I thought Labor Day, but now I’m thinking- 2022.”*

Arborists throughout Bexar/Central Texas also thought that by July 4<sup>th</sup> the extent of damage done to trees from the unprecedented freeze would be evident. But two things happened in July:

- 1) There was an abundance of rain, and
- 2) The temperatures were on the mild side.

The availability of rain and the mild temperatures could be hiding tree damage since the trees were not as stressed with the lack of water and higher temperatures that they would have endured in our typical July weather. At the time of this writing, the indications are that the second half of July will continue to be wet with mild temperatures. If these trends continue through Labor Day, the full extent of the damage to trees might not be visible until sometime in 2022.

Currently, arborists recommend we watch for the following:

- 1) Bark splitting on the trunks and roots of live oaks
- 2) Chlorosis (the yellowing of leaves) and other nutrient deficiencies that are caused by the abundance of rain.

There is also some significant damage amongst ash and Chinese tallow trees with some parts of the tree turning a powdery brown.

Some of the trees that are suffering may have been challenged before the freeze and the freeze simply amplified the issue (*damage to trees can take years to manifest itself: years of drought or floods, extreme cold or heat, the installation of a sprinkler system construction*).

What can be done? To fully determine the damage caused by the February freeze, it might take another year. In the meantime, if trunk or root splitting, yellowing leaves, a brown powder substance on the tree are observed, you should call a certified arborist.

Certified arborists have gone through basic training in “all things trees” and have passed a state exam. They have at least 3 years documented experience in arboriculture, and they are required to have a minimum number of hours of continuing education to maintain their certification. It’s cheaper to call an arborist ahead of time to try to avoid more serious problems.