

How Not to Kill Your Trees

By Hugh Rice Kelly, Former Chairman
Southampton Tree Committee

- **Two principles to remember:**
 - Trees are easily killed by root cuts because their roots mostly live only in the top 12-18” of soil
 - Trees are easily killed as well because they get their air supply directly from the air that percolates into the soil. Covering soil with paving or a lot of dirt fill may strangle the tree
 - Any digging across the root zone to a mere one foot depth will cut most of the roots of your trees. Threats arise from electricians, plumbers, irrigators, contractors—anyone who has access to shovels or ditching machinery and a need to place anything below the existing surface level of your yard
- **Examples of potentially fatal home improvements:**
 - Trenching, commonly part of the work of
 - Sprinkler system installers
 - Plumbers
 - Electricians
 - Builders
 - Paving, such as
 - Circular driveways
 - Paving any part of the yard
 - Construction of new houses and home additions
 - Construction of retaining or larger walls
 - Gardening or lawn projects:
 - That strip the soil and rip up shallow roots
 - That bury the existing soil by grade raising
- **Trees along the street are highly vulnerable** because few roots are under the street
- **Don’t believe “Live Oak Decline”** and similar claims. Almost all tree losses in Southampton are from direct root damage
 - The only common exceptions are superannuated water oaks and some elms
 - No case of “oak wilt” has ever occurred in Southampton
- **“Sculpting” and Clearing Out “Suckers”** can weaken trees, especially old ones. “Poodle Cut” or “Lion Tail” pruning is unsound. Some thinning is okay, but follow professional arborist advice.
- **Get Professional Advice!** Your trees add tens of thousands of dollars in value to your property. Hundreds of dollars for professional consultation is cheap insurance. Davey Tree has professionals on staff, and Steven L. Anderson, an independent urban forester, are well qualified to advise you. There are doubtless other well qualified professionals, but itinerant tree “surgeons” rarely know more than how to prune.