Tree Talk

By Judson R Scott, Vine & Branch Inc, Arboricultural and Horticultural Consulting

In the November issue Ellen Treelover persuaded us to build a house on her wooded lot. The next few quarterly columns will examine how to plan for success. Throughout the process remember Ellen's admonition to "Preserve the trees at all costs!" Now what do we do?

Last column we discussed the importance of including a consulting arborist in the design/building team. How do we find this arborist? Begin by searching the directory on the American Society of Consulting Arborists (ASCA) website, www.asca-consultants.org. Locate a consulting arborist in your area and schedule an interview to inquire about his or her credentials. Find an arborist who:

1. Is a Registered Consulting Arborist (RCA) with ASCA or at the very least a Certified Arborist with the International Society of Arboriculture?
2. Exhibits an understanding of tree biology, tree hazard recognition, construction procedures and expenses.
3. Has received national awards or other such recognition for their company's tree preservation efforts.
4. Possesses people skills that your contractors will enjoy working with.

After choosing a consulting arborist, schedule a meeting on site with the homeowner, architect, construction manager, landscape architect and the consulting arborist. The purpose of this meeting is for everyone to walk the lot together and become familiar with the property. A rough footprint of the house can be staked out and discussion will naturally follow; "How will the proposed house impact the trees. How can we lessen that impact?"

The consulting arborist will nest want to inventory the trees on the site. This should be a tagged inventory, using blue or white ribbon to mark trees for preservation. Do not use red, orange or yellow ribbon because these colors signify "remove" to most tree clearing crews.

The inventory will amass data that helps the architect design a house to fit the lot. Each tree will be given a number and inventoried according to species, diameter at breast height (dbh), condition, location, and drip line measurements.

The inventory will also be used to place trees and their drip lines on the architectural drawings and to draft a *Tree Preservation Plan*. To understand the importance of this inventory let's look at the information that will be gathered.

Species determination is important because various species respond differently to construction. Species information will be used extensively in the tree preservation plan. Also, the species diversity of the site will help the landscape architect to plan trees for the landscape. For a large site a good diversity at least fifteen different species is recommended, while smaller lots should have seven to ten different species.

Diameter at Breast Height (dbh) is a nationally recognized measurement for native trees. It is a measurement taken at four and a half feet off the ground. Landscape or installed trees are measured by caliper inch, a recognized measurement taken at six inches from the ground for four inch or smaller trees and twelve inches for larger landscape trees.

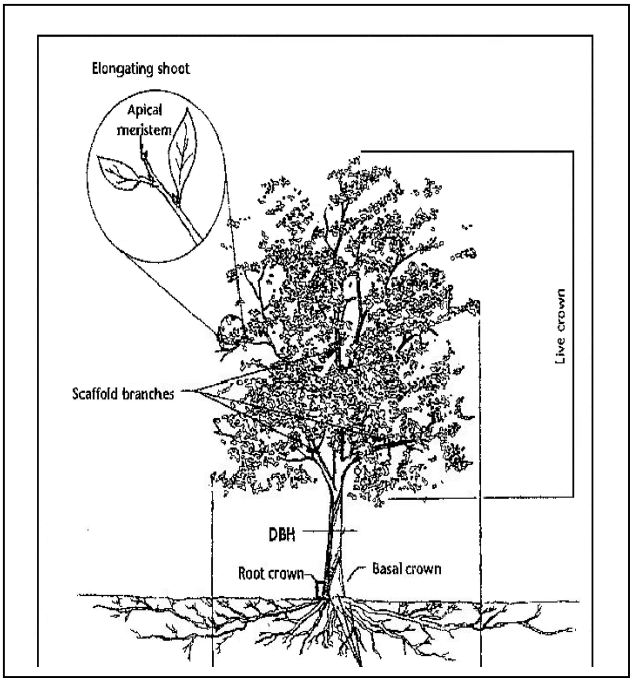
Condition is one of the most important bits of information gathered. Early recognition and removal of potentially hazardous trees prevents the builder from being exposed to negligence lawsuits, and saves the homeowner from expensive removal costs once the house has been built. Nobody wants to build around a tree that is hazardous, sick or in decline. Builder Association of Greater Indianapolis (BAGI) member John Lerchen of Lerchen Residential Builders illustrates this point:

> "We often use a Consulting Arborist to inventory the trees before building. Recently the Arborist found a tree that the homeowners had tagged as a signature tree, "the focal point for the home site", to have an extensive crack which if retained would have endangered the house. Sadly the tree had to be removed" (John Lerchen 2003).

Location will be determined with Global Positioning System (GPS) or by the survey crew when they do the topographical work-up of the property. This information is necessary to determine how close the new construction and other features will be to the trees.

Drip Line Measurements show the width and breadth of the drip line of the tree. The architect should plot at least the drip line on the architectural drawings, marking them as "tree preservation areas". The figure to the right is an illustration of the tree root system and the drip line for a tree.[i]

All of this information is gathered so that the house site can be properly planned. In the next column we will discuss the need for a *Tree Preservation Plan*, which includes tree-clearing specifications.



Drip line of a tree is at the outer edge of the limbs.

Note on the Author

Judson R Scott is a Registered Consulting Arborist (RCA) with the American Society of Consulting Arborists. As a RCA he advises Attorneys, Builders, Land Developers, Golf Course Superintendants, Architects, Engineers, Insurance Companies, as well as homeowners concerning their trees and landscapes. He can be reached at Vine & Branch INC. 317-846-1424 or by email at Treeconsultant@aol.com. Comments are welcomed!

[i] Illustration from, Matheny, Nelda, and James R. Clark. 1998 *Trees and Development: A Technical Guide to Preservation of Trees during Land Development*, International Society of Arboriculture, Champaign, IL.