

## **Gregg County Office**

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### **NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:**

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### **Mistletoe**

Mistletoe is easily observed in trees in East Texas during the winter season causing concern for many homeowners. Unfortunately, there is not a good or easy control of this parasite.

Mistletoe is a dioecious evergreen plant, meaning the male and female flowers are on different plants and the plant remains green all year long. It is particularly conspicuous on hardwoods after leaf fall. The mistletoe derives water and mineral nutrients from the sap of its host plant. This pest affects many of our landscape trees in Texas with water oak, sugarberry and elm being the most commonly infected. Ash, beech, cherry, dogwood, sweet gum, hickory, maple, Osage-orange, persimmon, sassafras, walnut, sycamore, willow and other oaks also may be infected. Mistletoe has been reported on 110 different species of trees in the eastern United States.

Generally speaking, mistletoe is not considered to be a serious pest of trees, so don't kiss your tree good-bye if it is infected with mistletoe. When heavy infection occurs, the mistletoe becomes an additional stress factor to the tree and may contribute to poor tree health. It is unlikely that mistletoe kills trees directly, but tree branches may die as a result of mistletoe infection. Effective control of mistletoe is difficult to achieve.

New infections of mistletoe are caused by the dissemination of the seeds. The whitish, sticky berries of mistletoe are attractive to birds. The birds feed on these berries and then excrete the seeds which can form new mistletoe plants. Additionally berries may ripen and drop from the mistletoe onto lower branches and create new infestations. The spread of mistletoe is directly related to the proximity and severity of established infestation.

The most effective method of controlling mistletoe is by physical removal of infected branches, preferably as soon as the parasite appears and before it can produce seed. Cuts should be made at least one foot below the point of attachment in order to completely remove the root of the plant. Removing the mistletoe at its point of attachment will only provide temporary

relief as new growth will appear at that point. Presently no chemical control has proven satisfactory in controlling mistletoe.

Because of the close relationship between the mistletoe's root and the tree's vascular system, chemical control has not been effective. Herbicides such as glyphosate, 2,4-D, MSMA, and others evaluated in trials by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service have been ineffective or caused injury to the tree. Currently no herbicide is recommended for mistletoe control. Florel was approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for mistletoe control several years ago. The active ingredient is an ethylene compound. Ethylene is a natural occurring plant hormone that increases during fruit ripening. It is labeled for several uses in production agriculture and on ornamentals. Florel is applied during the winter months. When used in the field, Florel kills the top but by late summer new growth is observed breaking through the bark of the limb. Another concern with Florel is that some plants exposed to the drift may experience leaf shedding.

Please contact the Gregg County Extension Office to preregister for the course at 903/236-8429.

This program is for those producers who have never been certified or licensed as a private applicator.

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Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability, or national origin.