

Plant Health Care (PHC)

Plant Health Care is an emerging landscape management tool that uses a pro-active and holistic approach to managing tree and shrub health. The goal is to obtain and maintain a healthy growing environment. The results are healthier plants and better aesthetics. Techniques have been developed to help change the 'crisis management' approach to landscape management.

Plant Health Care takes the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) pest and disease management to a new level by paying special attention to the growing environment. Site management begins with a thorough site assessment by Tree Case Management, both above and below ground. An entire site inventory can be taken locating the trees and shrubs on your property. Their current health status will be described and environmental conditions are noted. Key trees and shrubs are identified, sources of stress are identified and changes, if required, are recommended then an annual treatment plan is put into place to ensure your trees and plants receive the best care available.

Tree Case Management (TCM) uses the same principles of human health management in Plant Health Care, such as:

- Preventive care for stress management.
 - Frequent monitoring.
 - Early detection of problems.
 - Informed decision making.
 - Integrated treatments to provide long-term, stable solutions.
 - And contact and communication with client.
 - Timely visits and record keeping enable a Plant Health Care Program to offer many advantages such as:
 - Pest problems may be recognized and treated early on before they advance and adversely affect tree health.
 - Disease problems can be diagnosed and in many cases, treated before causing irreversible damage.
 - Safety issues can be recognized possibly preventing future injury.
 - Growing environmental issues can be recognized and changes can be implemented to either reverse decline, or to maintain good tree health and vigor.
- Simple but effective examples of Plant Health Care are:
- Mulching bare soil beneath tree canopies.
 - Not allowing mulch to contact tree or shrub trunks.
 - Mitigating soil compaction.
 - Correcting high soil levels.
 - Correct irrigation cycles.
 - Correct water placement.
 - Matching water needs of trees to adjacent plants
 - Establishing and maintaining nutrient and soil microbiology components.

Proper plant selection, site placement, and plant cultural compatibility issues should all be taken into account during the initial phase of landscape improvements. Where conflicts exist, the PHC professional must consider making changes.

It may be necessary to remove or change the location of certain plants in order to match cultural requirements or to prevent problems such as root interference with landscape hardscape elements. A common mistake is to plant a tree with shallow aggressive roots near hardscape features such as sidewalks, driveways or other pathways. For several years everything appears fine. Then as this tree matures, roots begin to upheave the hardscape features nearby. Not only does this look unsightly, but also liability may become an issue. Be careful which trees you choose, as certain species are notorious for causing root damage.

Another example: When plants with high water requirements are located near plants adapted to a Mediterranean climate, cultural conflicts occur which may lead to decline caused by conditions that lead to pest or disease establishment. Naturally occurring pathogenic fungal organisms in the soil may be triggered by over-watering during summer months. Knowledge of the cultural conditions and the growing environment is key to long-term preservation of specimen trees in the integrated landscape.

TCM Plant Health Care Management Program

Site Analysis

1 – Environmental analysis of the site :

- Soil pH.
- Plant available soluble fertility components.
- Soil microbiology status.
- Soil drainage.
- Soil compaction.
- Define site micro-climates.
- Determine exposure.

2 – Defining the physical characteristics of the site:

- Site plan with property boundaries, structures, other characteristics plotted.
- Location of utility cables and pipes.
- Definition of view corridors.

3 – Plant inventory :

1. Inventory major trees and shrubs.
2. Assessment of the relationship of tree and shrub locations.
3. Detailed description of health conditions.
4. Detailed description of physical conditions.
5. Urgent treatment recommendations.
6. Treatment and care strategies.
7. Treatment timing schedules.

The Solution: Plant Health Care

To better address situations where trees and shrubs are potentially in decline, Tree Case Management creates Plant Health Care (PHC) programs. The objective of PHC is to maintain or improve the landscape's appearance, vitality, and — in the case of trees — safety, using the most cost-effective and environmentally sensitive practices and treatments available. Plant Health Care involves routine monitoring, preventive treatment, and a strong working relationship between the arborist and the property owner.

Why Plant Health Care, Not Tree Health Care?

While trees are dominant ornamental features in your home landscape, they share this area with turf grasses, shrubs, and other plants. All these plants are bedded in a common resource: the soil. The roots of trees, shrubs, turf grass, and bedding plants intermingle and compete for water and nutrients. The roots of a single mature tree may extend well into your lawn or flowerbeds. Every treatment applied to the lawn (fertilizer and herbicide, for example) can impact the appearance and vitality of a tree. Conversely, treatments applied to a tree, such as pruning and fertilizing, can influence the appearance and vitality of the underlying turf grass. The care of each plant in a landscape can affect the health of every plant in that landscape.

Why Contact Tree Case Management for Plant Health Care?

Tree Case Management (TCM) has the experience and training to detect many potential tree and shrub problems before they become life threatening or hazardous. TCM can also make tree and shrub recommendations, such as species selection and placement, to prevent problems from occurring in the first place. In addition, TCM can consult with other landscape and lawn care services you may use to ensure that the treatments are coordinated and will not be harmful to your trees and shrubs.

Remember, the potential size and longevity of trees and shrubs warrants special attention in your landscape. Bedding plants can be replaced in a few short weeks and a lawn in a single growing season, but it can take a lifetime or more to replace a mature tree.

What Does a Tree and Shrub PHC Program Cover?

Every client has different landscape objectives, so there is no standard PHC program. However, PHC programs do have several common features. First, PHC involves monitoring tree and shrub health. This step allows problems to be detected and managed before they become serious. The monitoring may be as simple as annual visits to check on a few special trees in your landscape, or it may involve more frequent quarterly or monthly inspections of all your trees and shrubs. The monitoring frequency and complexity of your PHC program depend on the size and diversity of your landscape, as well as your particular landscape goals.

Second, if a problem or potential problem is detected during a monitoring visit, your arborist will work with you to develop a solution. This could be as simple as reducing lawn irrigation frequency so soil conditions aren't too moist for tree roots. Other solutions include more detailed suggestions, such as pruning, fertilizers, or spot applications of pesticides.

Tree Case Management will provide you with information about your trees and shrubs that will let you make appropriate management decisions for your budget and goals. Can you tolerate a disease or pest that only affects a plant cosmetically? Would replacing a shrub with a more disease-resistant cultivar be preferable to treatment? Plant Health Care is a program tailored to the needs of the client and his or her trees and shrubs.

What Will a PHC Program Cost?

Because each program is individually designed to fit the needs of a particular landscape, no standard price can be given without a site visit and assessment. You may have an interest in developing a plan for a few key trees in your landscape, or you may wish to have the entire landscape placed on a program. PHC programs can also be structured in different ways. For example, some sites we charge a fee for monitoring and bill each treatment separately. Other sites we have an annual fee that covers all monitoring visits for the season as well as many potential treatments. These more comprehensive programs provide peace of mind in knowing that treatments for most potential problems are already covered by the program without additional charges. Individualized programs and flexibility are at the heart of PHC. You will find that Tree Case Management can design a Plant Health Care program that fits your goals and budget.