



TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE

Tree Health Issues:

*Ball Moss (*Tillandsia recurvata*)*

Ball moss is a flowering plant in the scientific genus of *Tillandsia* that is commonly found in the upper crown of the tree, especially in shade and relative higher humidity. Ball moss and its cousin Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*) are two native Texan members of Bromeliaceae, also known as the pineapple family. These plants are classified as epiphytes because of the benign nature of their interaction on their host. Ball moss photosynthesizes its own food and does not deprive its host of a significant amount of additional water. The prevalence of ball moss tends to increase in geographical areas with higher moisture and humidity such as lakes, rivers, and the sea. The seeds are easily disseminated by the wind and are born on conspicuous blue-violet spring time flowers. In fact, these flowers are evidence that ball moss is not a true moss and is instead classified as a flowering plant.

Tree species that have rough textured bark, such as live oak and cedar elm, are more prone to ball moss while species that shed bark, like pecan, or smooth barked trees, like crape myrtle, are less prone. You might also notice it growing on non-living hosts like power lines and fence posts. Ball moss will take about 3 years to mature and flower and will bloom for the about the next 7 years.

Ecologically, ball moss is important habitat for insects and small animals and act like a mini buffet for feeding birds and other animals!



Total elimination of ball moss on a site can be difficult as the seeds are easily spread by wind; a neighboring property several hundred yards away could be a seed source. Usually ball moss does not need to be controlled due to the benign interaction it has on the host tree and because of its ecological importance. In extreme cases where control is needed, you can hand pick each cluster of ball moss, prune away the dead branches that ball moss typically grows on, or use the following labelled materials: TC Tribasic Copper Sulphate, Blue Shield, Basic Copper 53, Micro Flo Basic Copper 53, Micro Flo Copper 3 FL. It should be noted that there is evidence that a copper based herbicide and fungicide has been shown to cause damage to tender growth on oak trees. Follow all instructions on the labelling on these products.