

Rising from the Ashes

A Green Solution for Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan

By Brian Colter

I enjoyed reading a recent "From the Field" article titled "A Green Solution in Blue Hill." I wanted to share our experience in utilizing urban "waste wood" in Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan

Grosse Pointe Park is losing hundreds of trees a year due to the emerald ash borer epidemic. Since 2002, nearly all of our 1200 ash trees have been killed by this Asian invader. Eventually too, however, for every ash removed another tree will be planted. We are replacing the ash with a diversity of desirable yet under-used species. Grosse Pointe Park's urban forest will be better than ever as it will be diversified to protect against future epidemics. In the mean time, what do we do with all the wood generated from removals?

It's a common misconception that infested ash wood is useless and needs to be



destroyed. On the contrary, the wood is still viable. The insect kills the tree by disrupting the exchange of water and nutrients from the roots with the sugars (food) produced in the crown. This activity takes place in the thin cambium which is immediately beneath the bark, an area which is removed during the milling process. The rest of the wood is insect free and unscathed. According to the Michigan

Department of Agriculture, kiln drying and chipping are accepted ways to destroy the emerald ash borer larvae.



The idea of utilizing infested wood from our community had its roots when emerald ash borer was first diagnosed in Grosse Pointe Park in August 2002. Our tree contractor built a kiln and started to dry and store the many logs we were accumulating.

Logs are cut into lumber and used for practical purposes such as wood benches (below left), picnic tables (left), flooring (above right) for our new warming hut by our ice rink, a huge mantle (below) over the fireplace in the same building and for an educational timeline, which is on display at City Hall. Woodchips were also recycled and utilized to resurrect a dilapidated fitness trail at one of our parks. Bags of finely chipped wood are given out to residents during our spring and fall flower exchanges. Woodchips are always available to residents free of charge for use as mulch. Some wood is split and the firewood burned by campers at our annual overnights at our park. Lumber from ash and American elm is being used to make a bocce ball field.



My favorite use of our dead trees though, is that the stakes used on the new trees are milled from ash trees removed from our community. This "giving back" kind of nurturing reminds me of the "mother tree" concept where a mature tree which has fallen to the forest floor, decayed, supports dozens of saplings growing from its nutrient rich decaying trunk.



The author with a newly planted tree held by stakes from recycled ash.

Rather than fill up our landfills with infested ash, it's far more prudent to find productive applications for the wood. In 2006, Grosse Pointe Park received the prestigious "Michigan Award" from Keep Michigan Beautiful, Inc. for recycling infested wood.

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