

Neighborhoods stepping up to save their ash trees, preserving their shade, green beauty

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CLEVELAND, Ohio - The emerald ash borer, a metallic green beetle from Asia, has devastated Ohio's native ash trees over the past decade, killing millions of them in the state.

But some neighborhood groups in Northeast Ohio aren't surrendering without a fight. Other cities are beginning to calculate the value of their ash trees, and the economic benefits of saving them with insecticide treatments, versus chopping them down.

Scientific studies have shown that healthy landscape trees typically increase property values; provide shade and reduce air-conditioning bills; and contribute to the quality of life in a neighborhood. The larger the trees, the greater the economic benefits

Neighborhoods across Ohio are facing this dilemma: Should they spend the money to save their ash trees, or spend the money to cut them down?

The emerald ash borer has no natural predators, and ash species in North America have no defense against it. If left alone, there is nothing to prevent the beetles from burrowing into every ash tree in North America, causing certain death in three to five years.

But there are insecticides that, if injected into a tree every two or three years, have proven effective at warding off the beetles and keeping the stately arbors healthy. The cost: about \$100 per treatment, per tree.

That's a price worth paying, say residents of West 50th St. in Cleveland's Ohio City neighborhood and on Helena Drive in Tallmadge.

"We had some people who would have chained themselves to the trees if the city had carried through with its plan to cut them all down [to thwart the spread of the invasive beetle]," said Roger Scheve, a leader of the 45-52 Block Club in Ohio City.

"It was a total local rescue effort, and an amazing success story," said Scheve.