

“1987 — The Frenzy of Mechanical Tree Moving”

by M. Beebe, Certified Arborist

Although my main source of income for the past 15 years, I am beginning to wonder if Mr. Vermeer and Mr. Big John were correct in their estimation that one can transplant ten to twelve inch diameter and bigger trees mechanically, with any degree of success.

After relocating trees from the Gulf of Mexico, Florida, Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, to the Great Lakes Region, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin, it seems to me after careful examination of my transplanting records, and personally inspecting the aforementioned trees over the years, that the larger ones, i.e., eight, nine, ten, and eleven inch diameter trees, deciduous and conifers, all eventually succumbed to one form of transplanting stress or other related problems over a five year time span.

On the other hand, the smaller diameter trees, i.e., 4, 5, and 6 inch diameter, whether it be Crape Myrtle, Live Oak, or Red Oak, all did well if properly transplanted at the right time of the year, and were properly taken care of for the following two years. Even with excellent care for two years following, the big trees all died.

With all the emphasis on large trees in this rapid building and moving time we are in, and people wanting a forest now, and not wanting to wait for their trees to grow, it is of my opinion that they would be far better off to plant six inch caliper material or less than the extremely large material that they are buying and having installed. This large material, whether it be Oaks, Maples, or Conifers, does not do well in the third, fourth, and fifth year, and in most cases have died by the fourth year due to stress induced by transplant shock.


If a homeowner, municipality, golf course, or park district is willing to spend huge sums of money on large trees, it behooves us to inform our customers on the facts of these Magnificent Tree Moving Machines, and be more realistic and knowledgeable in our endeavors as purveyors of this plant material that will shade, beautify, and add value to their property. It also behooves these same people, to research the company they are doing business with to ascertain if in fact they are (Killing Trees For Dollars) or they know trees, and have the ability to follow up on care for these newly planted trees. Are they a member of the I.A.A., do they have a certified Arborist on Staff? Big Trees for big dollars usually ends up dead trees, and the homeowner will have to replace his Big Trees with smaller ones, this situation then becomes a lose, lose proposition. He loses his Big Trees, his financial investment, his family loses the shade and beauty, and they and their neighbors all lose respect and esteem for the Green Industry as a whole, not to mention what a volume of dead Big Trees can do for the aesthetic quality of an area.

It is of my opinion that we have a law passed, or some prerequisite established, that anyone involved in moving trees or all Tree Moving Companies, must have a Certified Arborist on Staff, and the abilities and knowledge, positive proof thereof, on the after care of these trees.

The Frenzy is on, and trees of all dimensions and sizes are being mechanically moved, irrespective of the American Nurseryman Association's standards of ten inches of dirt for each caliper inch of trunk. I haven't seen any one hundred and

POA ANNUA FREE BENT GRASS SOD


Grown In Fumigated Soil
Free from Foreign Strains of Grass and Weeds



- PENNCROSS BENT SOD
- PINNEAGIE BENT SOD
- XL-100 BLEND SOD
- A FULL LINE OF LANDSCAPE SUPPLIES
- DECORATIVE STONE
- LANDSCAPE TIMBERS

Illinois' largest sod grower

HEIOD

nursery, inc. 

3900 West 167th Street,
Markham, IL 60426
312-596-7200

thirty inch diameter tree spades on the road.

It may hit some of us in the pocketbook if we stop to take a look at the trees we are KILLING FOR DOLLARS, but I feel it will do our industry and our urban areas, and our neighbors a better turn, if we are honest in our tree moving endeavors. And, to be honest is to learn about those trees we are moving, attend all the seminars and classes we possibly can. Like Dr. Alex Shigo says, “HUG A TREE TODAY”, and I say “They may be gone tomorrow” if we don't educate ourselves to the task at hand.

Anybody can learn to operate a tree spade, it is not difficult, and any eighth grade graduate can do it, as has been proven over the years. But, to educate yourself about those trees, to do the very best you can for your customer and yourself, and your environment, one needs to focus his attention on education in the Arboricultural and Horticultural aspects of the business as well.

Before municipalities, golf courses, homeowners, park districts, and anybody else hires a tree moving company, I feel they should protect not only their tree dollars, but also their trees, by finding out just how much the company they are doing business with knows about trees, or are they just another “KILLING TREES FOR DOLLARS” tree moving company.

During this period of frenzied tree moving, I only can think of what the future results will be, and if we don't slow down and seriously contemplate what we are doing, all the efforts of the designers of these machines, and their wonderful ability to relocate trees and provide the beautiful benefits to our urban tree canopy, will have been in vain, and we will have created an insect haven of the highest order.