# Saturday Tree Skills Training - The Treeist

## SOUTHEASTERN ELMS

**SLIPPERY ELM (Ulmus rubra)**

☐ Leaf: rough/sandpapery above; base asymmetrical; double-serrate.
☐ Buds: rusty-hairy.
☐ Bark: dark, furrowed; inner bark mucilaginous (“slippery”).
Notes: Often on moist, rich sites.

**WINGED ELM (Ulmus alata)**

☐ Twigs: corky “wings” on young twigs (variable but diagnostic when present).
☐ Leaf: smaller, firm, finely double-serrate.
Notes: Common small/medium elm in the Southeast.

**AMERICAN ELM (Ulmus americana)**

☐ Form: classic vase-shaped crown with arching limbs.
☐ Bark: ashy gray, diamond-fissured; cross-section shows buff/reddish bands.
☐ Leaf: larger, base asymmetrical; generally less rough than slippery elm.

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## COMMON IMPACTS IN THE SOUTHEAST

Larger elm leaf beetle (Monocesta coryli, native): summer skeletonizing; looks rough but usually cosmetic on established trees—monitor; treat only after repeated heavy defoliations.

Elm anthracnose (Apiognomonia/Gnomonia): cool, wet spring leaf blight & minor twig dieback—usually minor; improve airflow, rake litter, monitor.

Local note: Dutch elm disease exists but is less frequently encountered in many SE neighborhoods compared to northern cities—stay alert for wilting/flagging on American elm.

## HOMEOWNER CONSIDERATIONS

Elms are strongly **phototropic**—they lean and reach toward available light—so near homes they quickly push long, uneven shoots over roofs and facades, which means frequent clearance pruning. Because that becomes a long-term maintenance burden, we encourage removing young/self-seeded elms close to structures and replanting a better-sited species.

We routinely reassure clients in summer that the tattered look on their elms is usually from larger elm leaf beetles and anthracnose—both common, often cosmetic problems rather than tree death

## TREE WORKER CONSIDERATIONS

Live elms are generally pleasant to work: the interlocked, long-fibered wood makes **strong hinge wood and dependable rigging points**, though cuts can be stringy—use step/relief cuts to control tear-out.

Here in Chapel Hill, **dead elms deteriorate fast** (brittle tops, hidden stem/union decay, sloughing bark), so spurs lose purchase and anchors can't be trusted.

Treat dead elms as **high-risk removals**—prefer bucket/crane, keep pieces small, and if a climb is unavoidable, use redundant tie-ins, very light rigging, and a widened exclusion zone.