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Laura Phillips  
District Extension Agent, Horticulture

### **Recent Decline of Hackberry Trees**

Over the last three weeks I have received numerous calls about hackberry trees, mainly from Nemaha County. Landowners are reporting their hackberry trees have yellowing leaves, holes and tears on the leaves, and leaves are dropping off the tree. Many owners have multiple hackberry trees with these issues, but their other trees are unaffected.

Our K-State Plant Pathology lab reports that this is most likely not caused by disease, but environmental stress. The holes in the leaves brought into our extension office look consistent with frost damage, and the discoloration looks to be a stress response from the tree. Normally when we see holes in leaves, we think of insect damage, and when we think of frost damage we think of entire leaves dying. However, frost can cause small holes in leaves. If a light frost hits as the leaves are still developing, it can kill portions of the new leaf tissue. As the leaf continues to develop, portions of the tissue that did not die continue to grow, leaving holes around where some tissue died.

Hackberry trees are particularly sensitive to late spring frost damage compared to other trees. In mid-April and in early May we had a few days with overnight temperatures in the lower 30's. While you can usually see initial damage from frost within a day, it can sometimes take a few weeks for the full extent of the damage to appear. This can make it seem like your tree is declining in health due to a disease, but really the damage from the frost is just slowly becoming more visible to us.

The good news is that hackberry trees are pretty hardy and should recover from the damage on their own. You might be tempted to prune out areas with heavy defoliation, but it's best to wait and see what those branches do. The tree might just send out new leaves. If you suspect a branch is dead, you can lightly scratch the bark with your nail or a knife. If you see green under the bark, the branch is still alive.

If you are concerned about your hackberry tree, or any other tree, start by taking pictures of your tree each week. Get a photo of the tree overall and some close up photos of the leaves. This helps me better understand the timeline of your tree's decline and determine the reason for your tree's issues.