

The Oval – Fun Facts & History

When were the original Oval trees planted?

- The center double row of trees (the tree allee) were originally planted in 1881 as part of a larger tree planting effort on campus. This was almost 30 years before the Oval as we know it today was proposed as part of the 1910 Master Plan by W.W. Parce, a landscape architect with an office in Boulder. Most of these 1881 trees survive today, but many have been replanted over the last 137 years, and are now of equal size with the originals.
- The Elm trees ringing the exterior of the Oval were planted between 1922 and 1927 in successive annual plantings. Many of these trees are now larger than the original 1881 planting.

What kinds of trees are in the Oval?

- Almost all of the trees are American Elm - *Ulmus americana*

What differences are there between the original trees and the trees planted today?

- It is apparent that the plantings of 1881 and of the 1920s were seedling American Elm, and unlike the clonal varieties of American Elm sold in the nursery trade today, each is genetically unique. As a result, some of the trees have unique characteristics, and some tree lovers would say personalities.

What impacts have there been to the health of the Oval trees over the years?

- The Oval trees have survived many fall and winter ice and snow storms largely intact, but there were two periods of extreme crisis, which could have resulted in the loss of the Oval elms that exist today.
- Dutch Elm Disease (DED) was an extreme risk to the Oval starting in the 1970s when the disease arrived in Colorado. Without active intervention, including a sanitation protocol, Dutch Elm Disease is fatal, and by one account of the estimated 77 million elms in north America in 1930, 75 percent were lost by 1989. Most of the Oval trees have survived Dutch Elm Disease, but there have been losses over the years, even in the last 15 years. The Elms are monitored for signs on the disease, and if the disease is confirmed the tree is immediately removed and isolated from adjacent trees by trenching around the infected trees. The trees are of such size, that their roots are intertwined and likely grafted together in places allowing the disease to be spread from tree to tree.
- In the 1990s a study identified the Oval Trees as being in decline. A lack of funding for ongoing maintenance and the use of the Oval grounds for multiple events during the school year and summer had placed the trees in vulnerable state. The trees were suffering from equal parts neglect and the overuse of the turf which contributes to soil compaction which is directly related to tree health. A steering committee was brought together to recommend a new plan for the Oval, public meetings were held, and emotions ran high as two competing visions emerged. One vision called for the removal of all Oval Trees and a replanting of 98 elms in their

original positions to maintain the original Oval pattern. A second vision called for the addition of multiple species of trees in an irregular pattern to be planted over time to give the Oval both species and age diversity, while maintaining existing elms, but replanting them in the original pattern. In the end neither vision was implemented, and 20 years later the Oval trees are arguably in a more sustainable state that they were 20 years ago, and the Oval remains the most iconic space on campus.

What recent efforts have contributed to the success of the Oval?

- Holding events regularly on the Oval had accelerated compaction of the soil; therefore, the elimination of non-CSU events (such as Taste of Fort Collins and an annual Dog show among others) from the Oval grounds and limiting other events has helped to manage and mitigate compaction.
- No structures are allowed to be built on the Oval, including benches, and nothing can be hung from the branches of the Oval trees.
- The Oval is free of lighting and electrical receptacles, and although it is sometimes suggested that holiday lights be hung from these trees, the extensive trenching needed to bring power to each tree would likely kill or significantly shorten the lives of these trees.
- Trees are annually treated to control a scale insect that saps the strength of the trees.
- Trees are continually monitored for Dutch Elm Disease during the growing season.
- Dutch Elm resistant, and scale resistant elms have been planted when older elms are lost, maintaining the historic Oval tree pattern.
- All of the Oval elms are pruned on a three-year interval for tree health, and safety of the campus community.

How much does it cost to sustain the Oval trees?

- On an annual basis it costs more than \$50,000 to sustain the Oval trees. Annual treatments for insect (scale) control is \$30,000, and the last three-year cycle of pruning cost \$130,000. The Oval Preservation Fund proceeds go directly towards these costs, but cover only approximately 10% of costs on an annual basis.

What is the Oval Preservation Fund?

- Primarily it is a vehicle to preserve the existing Oval Elm trees in a safe and healthy condition for future generations. As these historic trees are lost through extreme age, disease, or storm damage, the Oval Preservation Fund helps to plant new Elm trees in their places to insure the Oval composition endures into the future.