

Trees and Sewer Lines

Defective Sewer Lines

Most sewer/root conflicts are symptomatic of a defective sewer pipe, not a tree problem. Tree roots are opportunistic and grow where conditions are suitable. Leaking joints and cracks in old terra cotta sewer laterals servicing many older homes create an inviting environment for root growth. While root pressure may dislocate an otherwise secure terra cotta pipe joint, most root/sewer conflicts simply reveal the degradation of joint compounds brought about by pipe age, not tree roots.

Best Solution – Repair Lines

The most effective solution to the problem of roots in sewers is the replacement or repair of the damaged pipe. Unfortunately, open excavation can lead to extensive root disturbance and nearby tree loss. New methods of minimal site disturbance for pipe replacement are the burst pipe method, relining the pipe, the injection of polyurethane grouting, and slip lining. As work is performed on the pipes, quality, watertight construction is of premier importance. In certain areas, wrapping pipelines in a barrier fabric may be the best solution.



Other Solutions

Replacing sewer lines can be an expensive proposition for many. To reduce the amount of root intrusion into sanitary sewer lines, collection operators may recommend trees that are “sewer-safe.” The general recommendation is to choose small, slow-growing species, varieties or cultivars with less aggressive root systems and to replace them before they get too large for their planting area. There are no “sewer-safe” trees, but by using small, slower-growing trees, sewer lines should be safer from the intrusion of tree roots. Defective lines will still need to be treated to prevent future incursions.

Sources:

<https://www.mortonarb.org/trees-plants/tree-and-plant-advice/horticulture-care/tree-root-problems>

<https://sma.memberclicks.net/assets/documents/roundtables/roundtable%20sewer%20lines%20and%20trees.pdf>

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/SP628.pdf>