



## Relationship #9



Mistletoe is a plant that grows on trees, particularly hardwood trees like oak and apple. As mistletoe grows on a tree, it sends out its roots right into the tree's bark and takes nutrients from the tree. Sometimes, mistletoe can harm a tree and cause deformities in a tree's branches, but usually it doesn't kill its host. If the host dies, the mistletoe dies.

Broadleaf mistletoe absorbs both water and mineral nutrients from its host trees. Healthy trees can tolerate a few mistletoe branch infections, but individual branches may be weakened or sometimes killed. Heavily infested trees may be reduced in vigor, stunted, or even killed, especially if they are stressed by other problems such as drought or disease.

Mistletoe plants are either female (produce berries) or male (produce only pollen). The berries of the female plant are small, sticky, and whitish; they are very attractive to birds such as cedar waxwings, robins, and others. The birds feed on and digest the pulp of the berries, excreting the living seeds that stick tightly to any branch on which they land. In most cases, the initial infestation occurs on larger or older trees because birds prefer to perch in the tops of taller trees. A heavy buildup of mistletoe often occurs within an infested tree because birds are attracted to the berries, and may spend a good deal of time feeding on them. In addition, seeds may fall from mistletoe plants in the upper part of the tree, creating new infestations on the lower branches. The rapidity with which mistletoe spreads is directly related to the proximity and severity of established infestations, and newly planted trees can be quickly infested if they are growing near old, heavily infested trees.