

TREES, VIEWS & PRIVACY

An Arborist's Guide to Replanting in the Fire Zone

By Richard Trout



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CHAPTER ONE: WHY READ THIS BOOK?	5
An Arborist's Perspective	
Privacy and Views — the Main Focus	
Compromise and Dignity	
Asking the Right Questions	
What Makes the Fire Zone Unique?	
Platitudes Aren't Enough	
Ten Basic Rules of Thumb When Choosing and Siting Trees	
CHAPTER TWO: SHORT- AND LONG-TERM CONCERNS.....	9
Short-Term Needs	
Long-Term Needs	
The Desire For Immediate Gratification	
Some Do's and Don't's	
CHAPTER THREE: SOLAR ACCESS	11
Solar Access Changes During the Year	
Light and Tree-Maintenance Considerations	
CHAPTER FOUR: VIEWS AND PRIVACY.....	13
A Room With a View	
Understanding the Nature of Views	
Tree Choice, Siting and Maintenance Considerations	
Some Examples of How to Site Trees and Shrubs	
Use a Sheet of Clear Plastic as a Perspective Device	
Maintaining Trees at a Given Height	
CHAPTER FIVE: VIEWS AND PRIVACY IN LOW-SLOPE AREAS.....	21
Retaining Views in Areas With Low Slope	
Maintaining Privacy in Areas With Low Slope	
CHAPTER SIX: PRIVACY AND SCREENING SOLUTIONS	23
Types of Screening	
Examples of Effective Screening	
Other Considerations	

CHAPTER SEVEN: CHOOSING A TREE26
 Identify Your Needs and Wants
 Prioritize and Narrow Your Choices
 Look and Learn
 Get an Arborist’s Advice
 Deciduous or Evergreen
 Qualities to Look for in New Trees
 Ten Trees That Deserve to be Planted More Often in the Fire Zone
 Ten Trees to Avoid in the Fire Zone

CHAPTER EIGHT: GOOD AND BAD PRUNING STRATEGIES33
 Topping
 Crown Reduction
 Windows
 Thinning
 Pollarding
 Developing Multiple Leaders on a Tree

CHAPTER NINE: LONG-TERM MAINTENANCE36
 How to Give Your Garden the Look of Maturity
 Drought-Tolerant Landscaping
 Fire-Resistant Landscaping
 What to do with Existing Trees

CHAPTER TEN: SPECIAL DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS.....40
 Vacant Lots and New Neighbors
 Sideyards
 Accommodating Design Changes
 Totally Uncooperative Neighbors

APPENDIX A: VIEW ORDINANCES43
APPENDIX B: A CHECKLIST OF FACTORS TO CONSIDER.....46
APPENDIX C: FURTHER READING.....48

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FIGURE 1

**HOW A HOMEOWNER'S CONCERNS AFFECT
TREE HEIGHT AND VEGETATION DENSITY**

IF YOUR CONCERN IS HAVING:	YOUR TREES' HEIGHT WILL TEND TO BE:	AND YOUR VEGETATION DENSITY WILL TEND TO BE:
PRIVACY	HIGH	HIGH
VIEW	LOW	DOES NOT APPLY
FIRE SAFETY	LOW	LOW
SOLAR ACCESS	LOW	DOES NOT APPLY
SKYLINE VALUE *	HIGH	DOES NOT APPLY

* Skyline Value refers to what you see when you look uphill or to the side of the view. It often involves seeing trees in silhouette.



WHY READ THIS BOOK

An Arborist's Perspective

I am an arborist, which means that I spend my life working with trees. Working full time with trees not only gives one a certain amount of expertise in the subject, it also provides a unique perspective on landscaping and neighborhoods.

About a third of my work involves pruning or removing trees because of view or sunlight considerations. I have looked out of countless windows in the Berkeley and Oakland hills and have seen what short-sighted and ill-considered decisions can do to a landscape and to neighborly feelings.

In the course of writing this book, I looked at many garden design and tree publications. This book differs in its approach in several key ways:

- ☞ I treat trees as being as important as the hardscape (the constructed part of the landscape). Many books about design tell you to design the hardscape first, then plug the trees into the appropriate spots. I feel that the act of choosing and siting appropriate trees goes hand in hand with designing the rest of the landscape. Trees are not an afterthought.
- ☞ Most books about garden design mention views only in passing, if at all. From long experience, I have learned that views are a critical issue when choosing, siting, and maintaining trees.
- ☞ I emphasize the long-term maintenance considerations of trees, especially pruning. Many books and articles consider maintenance to be merely a budgetary item, like getting one's drapes cleaned. I try to make clear that a tree's maintenance affects the structure, enjoyment and value of a garden, and also affects one's neighbors.
- ☞ I give a lot of attention to neighbors. A garden cannot be designed in a vacuum, especially when plants play such a critical role with regard to views, privacy and light. I show how issues affecting neighbors are predictable, and put them in a framework the average homeowner can understand.

- ∞ How you see a tree, a garden, or a view, depends on where you are looking at it from. I explain how this affects the choice of a tree and its location.
- ∞ I believe that conflicts regarding trees are inevitable, especially in the fire zone. Most books about garden design do not mention conflict at all. Those that do tend to regard it as a problem of personality, and not of design.

Rebuilding in the fire zone is a daunting process. There are so many issues to deal with that it is easy to become overwhelmed. This book was written to make one part of your life just a little bit simpler. The graphics, lists, and text can help you avoid common mistakes regarding tree choices and maintenance and aid you in making good long-term decisions. In short, this book can help you rebuild a livable community with your neighbors.

You do not have to know anything about trees to find this information helpful. However, you should be willing and able to prioritize your needs, to think carefully about what kind of house and garden (and neighborhood) you want, and to acknowledge that your neighbors may have valid concerns, even if different from your own.

The pictures and graphics are purposely simplified. Obviously, your situation will be more complicated than those shown in the pictures. *Read the captions and explanatory text carefully.* They clarify the issues and help you understand just how complex any problem actually is.

Privacy and Views — the Main Focus

The primary focus of this book is on choosing and siting trees so that you get as much privacy and retain as much view as possible. There is also advice about coordinating with your neighbors to achieve these goals, along with a section on what to do if your neighbors are *not* willing to cooperate. Landscaping for drought tolerance and fire-resistance are also covered, as are long-term maintenance considerations.

You may have noticed that there has been no mention, so far, of aesthetics or garden theory. This is deliberate. I find that people are most concerned with function — whether or not a garden fulfills their needs with regard to view, privacy, and useable space. Once these considerations have been met, a beautiful garden can be designed that also meets those further aesthetic requirements.

This approach is neither good nor bad, but practical. One can take a very plain, utilitarian garden and beautify it without much trouble. However, if you begin with a beautiful but impractical garden and are obliged to mutilate it in order to satisfy some functional concern (a common example is topping a tree in order to retain a view), you can *never* regain the same level of beauty.

Compromise and Dignity

Although I try to avoid making value judgments in this book, there are two general principles that run through these pages. The first is *compromise*. The only way in which you can rebuild a real neighborhood is by understanding your neighbor's concerns and being willing to try to accommodate them.

The second principle is *dignity*. You should choose and site trees with regard to the optimum health and appearance of the tree. Trees should not have to be bullied into submission or mutilated in order to serve a homeowner's or neighbor's interests.

Asking the Right Questions

Many of you will get professional advice regarding landscaping. This book will help you ask the right questions of your architect, landscape architect, garden designer, or arborist. You may find it worthwhile (though time-consuming) to hire the services of several people — a landscape architect for hardscape, an arborist for trees, and a gardener for plant selection. I am not making this suggestion because I want you to spend a lot of money — I truly think this is the most economical way to get the best and most satisfying results in the long run.

What Makes the Fire Zone Unique?

First, let's consider what it would be like if you were building a house on a vacant lot in a well-settled residential area. You and your architect would have a context to work in.

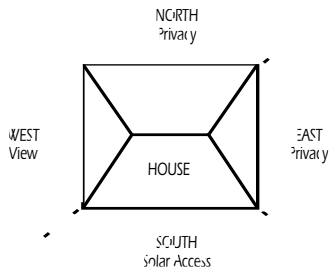
You could look at the surrounding houses and imagine how your house would fit into an existing neighborhood. You could imagine looking out a window and getting a good idea of what kind of view you'd see. You could look at your neighbors' gardens and plan yours to fit right in. If your neighbor has a hedge, you could figure that you don't need to plant another one next to it. You would know who your neighbors are, which ones are cooperative, who has a noisy dog, and who never cleans up their yard. After you built and moved in, you would be living in an established neighborhood with a normal amount of noise and activity.

Compare this with the situation you face in the fire zone. You are trying to build a house and garden practically in a vacuum. You don't have much of an idea of what your house or your neighbors' houses will look like. You don't trust the sketches and find it hard to imagine a house in three dimensions from blueprints. You hope that your architect has been cooperating with your neighbors' architects, so that you don't end up looking into each other's kitchens.

Your house will probably be larger, and so will those of your neighbors. You don't know what kind of view you will have, and you are becoming increasingly concerned about privacy and noise. Many of your old neighbors are not rebuilding, and you don't know the new lot owners. Many of the lots are vacant and will remain so for several years. Most of the trees you used to have in your neighborhood have burned down. You don't know what the new landscape will look like and have not heard any credible predictions. You've been told that it should comply with fire safety guidelines, but aren't sure what those standards are, or how they will be interpreted and applied. You know your landscaping should be drought resistant, but you still want at least some plants that need summer water. You know that your city has a view ordinance, but not how it will work in the rebuilt neighborhood.

FIGURE 2

A HOMEOWNER'S MOST IMPORTANT CONCERN DEPENDS ON WHICH DIRECTION HE OR SHE IS LOOKING



Platitudes Aren't Enough

I have seen a lot of articles about landscaping that say something like, “Be sensitive to your neighbor’s need for sunlight and view. Don’t plant trees that will become a problem.” Or, “Many trees can be judiciously pruned to allow a filtered view. Contact a certified arborist if you want to have this done properly.” If it were that easy, no one would have any problems.

The first thing to understand is that conflicts between homeowners are almost inevitable, and are not always the result of thoughtless neighbors.

Figures 1, 2 and 3 illustrate this point.

Figure 1, on page 4, shows how a homeowner’s specific concerns influence his or her choice of tree height and vegetation density. Note that privacy and skyline are the only two concerns that encourage the growing of tall trees. By tall, I don’t mean enormous, but trees that get above roofline. In contrast, a homeowner who places great emphasis on views, solar access, and fire safety will tend to choose smaller trees.

Every decision has its tradeoffs. One result of planting small trees to maintain views is that the views will be of many more buildings — and of fewer trees — than were formerly visible. This is neither bad nor good. However, residents do need to be aware of the large-scale consequences of favoring small trees over large ones.

Figure 2, on page 7, shows the concerns that tend to be most important to a homeowner based on the direction one is facing from the house. In the hills of Oakland and Berkeley, the view tends to be to the west. Solar access is most important to the south, especially during the winter low-sun months. Privacy is most valued to the east and north, since without it one would be looking at neighbors. Fire resistance and drought resistance, while very important to a homeowner, tend not to be the main concerns when a given direction is considered.

Figure 3, on page 11, gives a picture of what happens when you put several properties together. Note that every property line has a potential tree-height conflict between views and privacy, or between solar access and privacy. This generalized diagram illustrates the situation in many cases.

Ten Basic Rules of Thumb When Choosing and Siting Trees

It is easy to get lost in details and forget the larger picture. I’ve tried to put that larger perspective into a series of small maxims. Here are some simple rules to consider before you begin choosing trees:

1. Plan and plant for the long term.
2. Use short-term solutions for short-term problems.
3. Cooperate with your neighbors and try to understand their interests.
4. Don’t choose your trees until your house and other nearby houses under construction have been built.
5. Plan to maintain your trees within a height *range*, not at a set height.
6. Get good advice that is specific to your needs and site. Don’t just decide you like Japanese maples and plant them because of that feeling.
7. Before choosing a tree, be sure to look at mature specimens, not just at nursery stock. Look at both well-maintained trees and trees that have been poorly maintained or are otherwise causing problems.
8. Never plant a tree on a property line.
9. Don’t try to make a tree do too many things.
10. The larger the mature size of a tree, the more drought-resistant it should be.



SHORT- AND LONG-TERM CONCERNS

Short-term needs can be at odds with long-term needs. The trick is to accommodate the former while planning for the latter.

Short-Term Needs

These are of greatest concern for the first year or two after moving back in to your home.

- ∞ Privacy and screening from neighbors
- ∞ Greenery
- ∞ Protection from deer

Long-Term Needs

These are the possible concerns of a homeowner over the next five to thirty years. Note that short-term needs are also long-term needs.

- ∞ Privacy
- ∞ Greenery
- ∞ Protection from deer
- ∞ View protection (Either your own trees or those of your neighbor's could block your view.)
- ∞ Sunlight
- ∞ Maintenance costs (You should have an idea of how long a tree will live, how much it will cost to keep it in good condition, whether it is likely to need spraying, and the cost of pruning to keep it to any given size.)
- ∞ Drought resistance
- ∞ Utility (Is the tree for play, shade, fruit, etc.?)
- ∞ Aesthetics
- ∞ Fire resistance
- ∞ Minimization of tree hazards

The Desire for Immediate Gratification

It is human nature to be most concerned with immediate problems. In the fire zone, this will lead to short-term decisions that cause unexpected problems in the long run.

As people move back into their homes, they will be appalled at the amount of noise, dust and lack of visual screening. Considering the rate of construction and number of still-vacant lots, it is certain that a high level of activity will continue for years. As a result, many people will look for a short-term solution and plant the fastest growing trees they can find (other than Monterey pines) to achieve immediate screening and privacy.

A good example of such short-term thinking is the homeowner mentioned in a newspaper article who has planted numerous new trees on his property. Later, as the trees grow, it is likely that neighbors will want to cut off the tops to maintain views and solar access. In addition, the fire department will be on the homeowner's case as these trees grow ever more thickly, causing dieback of lower branches — a real fire hazard.

Since many of the trees will be topped at roughly roof level, clogged gutters will become an increasing problem as the trees grow more thickly at that height and spread horizontally in response to topping.

Some Do's and Don't's

How can you avoid such mistakes and still get some immediate privacy? There are several things to keep in mind:

- ☞ Don't try to make trees do everything. A tree may not be the best solution to a given landscaping problem.
- ☞ *Plan and plant your trees for the long term.* I can't stress this enough. Short-term problems are best treated with short-term solutions.
- ☞ Compromise. Learn to prioritize. You may not be able to screen your neighbor's shiny new solar collector for many years. Concentrate on what you can do to improve your garden, and just have patience.
- ☞ Anticipate future problems. These include trees that may get taller than you want, or wider, or that may be too close to a sewer line, or may get shaded out by a neighbor's larger tree, or may cast denser shade than you want.
- ☞ Understand your neighbors' interests.



SOLAR ACCESS

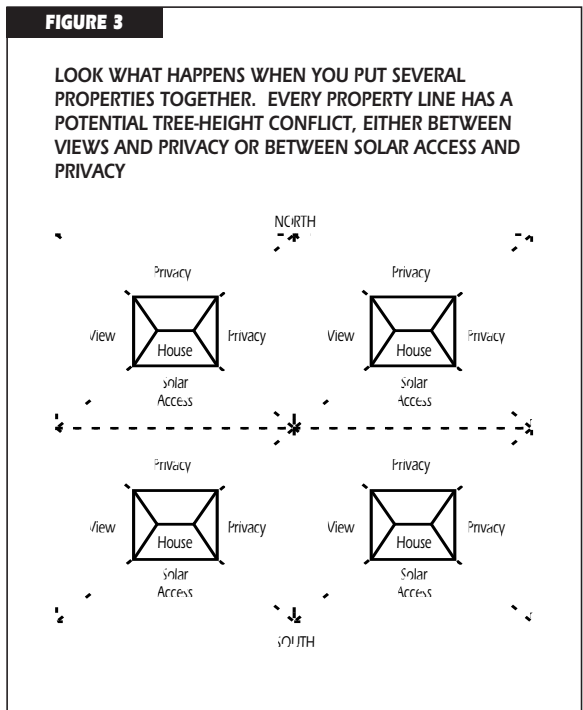
For the short term, the fire zone will have lots and lots of solar access. This being so, it will probably be low on most people’s list of concerns until the landscape matures and trees start to block light to houses and gardens. It is worth thinking about the subject now in order to avoid problems later.

Solar Access Changes During the Year

Figure 4, on page 14, shows the effect of the seasons on solar access. The sun is so low during the winter months that to get solar access at noon one would just about have to cut everything south of the house. A more reasonable aim is to have *enough* light, but not necessarily direct sun, during the winter.

Most gardens can get by with minimal sun during the winter months. (The glaring exception is lawns, which tend to get rust if they do not have the chance to dry out.) Light starts to become important for most plants in late winter or early spring, by which time the sun is markedly higher in the sky.

The intensity, duration, and time of sunlight all affect garden design. For exam-



ple, a place that gets full sun in the afternoon is much hotter than one that gets full morning sun. Many plants like filtered light, but not direct light. The permutations are endless and best explored with your landscape architect or garden designer.

Light and Tree-Maintenance Considerations

- ∞ Plant under your trees with future pruning in mind. For example, a tree that gets pruned in winter would be a poor candidate under which to grow winter-flowering plants, as the flowers would get damaged. A fragile groundcover, like baby's tears, should not be planted if you are going to have to step on it in order to prune above it.
- ∞ Thinning a tree can greatly improve the amount of light that the garden gets. However, thinning usually does not increase the amount of direct sunlight by an appreciable amount.
- ∞ Remember that privacy needs often conflict with sunlight needs. You need to decide which you value more, and plan accordingly. In summer, with plenty of light all around, you may want more privacy in your yard. When winter seems dank and dismal, you may find yourself willing to give up some privacy in order to get just a little more light. Take into consideration how you'll feel about your yard during each season, and come to some compromise.



VIEWS AND PRIVACY

If there is a hot-button issue in the hills, it is view protection. Some people want to read and understand as much as they can about this complex issue. Others just want to know how they can either cut their neighbors' trees or keep each neighbor from planting one in the first place.

As a result of the fire, many people in the hills who did not have a view previously will have one now. Many people who had an extensive view will lose some to new construction by their neighbors. New owners will want to retain all of the view they had when they bought the lot. One thing is certain — *everybody wants as much view as possible*. Since residents also want as much privacy as possible, the stage is set for a rancorous brouhaha.

I'll start by discussing general view issues. Then I'm going to describe both some workable solutions and some situations that are nearly impossible to resolve. The complicated and wacky world of view ordinances and how they will affect the fire zone are discussed in Appendix A.

In the discussion that follows, I use the term "privacy" to mean the result you achieve when you have effective screening. Screening is something you do; privacy is what you get.

A Room With a View

People tend to talk about "the view" in the abstract, when each house really has many views, and degrees of views. You can have a view from one window or many windows, a "three-bridge view" or a view of the south tower of the Golden Gate Bridge, a view while standing but not sitting, a view of the bay plus the bridge, or of the bridge only, etc. All of this sounds labored and academic until you get into a dispute with a neighbor. Then, each window, each little noodleswidth of view, can become a battleground.

Views are worth a lot of money. A three-bridge view can add up to \$100,000 to

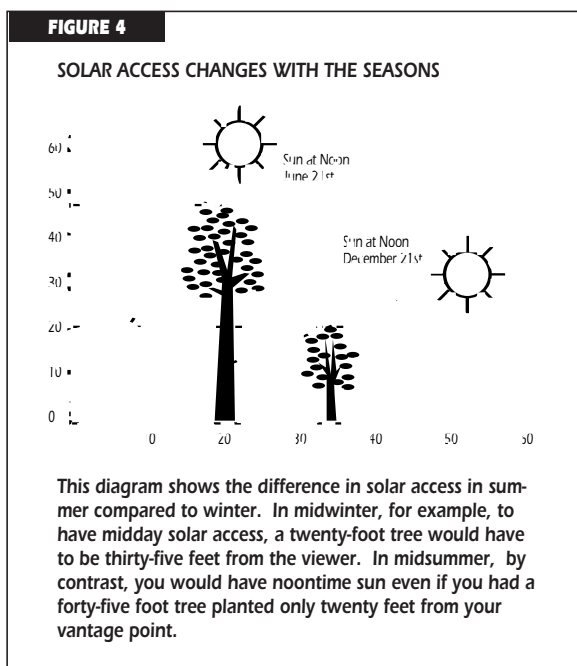
the value of a property in the Oakland hills. From a strictly economic perspective, wrecking a tree to gain a view is almost always worthwhile. That is, more value will be added to a house by gaining a view than will be lost due to the destruction or mutilation of a tree.

Note, however, that the person gaining value from a view is often not the tree owner, whose own property often *loses* value when his or her tree is mutilated or removed (see Figure 5, on page 15).

Understanding the Nature of Views

There are three basic themes to consider in order to understand views:

- ∞ Views are not just a two party-issue.
- ∞ Views and privacy are inseparably related.
- ∞ Slope has a tremendous effect on views.



Theme #1: Views are not just a two-party issue.

View disputes tend to become personalized very quickly. “Your tree is blocking my view,” or “My \$#@#* neighbor wants to butcher my tree,” are not uncommon sentiments. These feelings, however understandable, are counterproductive.

Sometimes only the tree owner and one other party are affected by a tree. Sometimes many neighbors have an interest. Figure 6, on page 16, illustrates the range of concerns neighbors can have in just one tree (for example, shade, litter, fire, allergic reaction, view, screening, and wildlife). In view ordinance language, these concerns are called “benefits and burdens.” It is important to keep in mind that *all* of these interests are legitimate, even if they are not equally important. Neighbors will get nowhere if each dismisses the others’ concerns as trivial or irrelevant.

Take, for example, the classic view from the Oakland/Berkeley hills: San Francisco, the Golden Gate Bridge, and Mt. Tamalpais, with trees artfully framing the scene. I have lost track of the number of times I have had to point out to clients that those “framing” trees are undoubtedly blocking *somebody else’s* view.

Theme #2: Views and privacy are inseparably related.

The crux of the view/privacy dilemma is that people often depend on the same tree to solve contradictory problems. An uphill homeowner’s view may be maintained at the expense of a downhill owner’s privacy, or vice versa. Just as important, the uphill owner often depends on the same tree to both provide privacy *and* allow views.

Unfortunately, there is no single tree height that will solve everyone's problems. From any particular vantage point, there is an ideal height of vegetation which provides maximum privacy while still allowing for a view (see Figure 7, on page 17). From one window, the ideal height of a tree may be 26 feet, and from another it may be 21 feet. From one neighbor's window it may be 16, and from another neighbor's it may be 30.

Theme #3: Slope has a tremendous effect on views.

Life is not fair. People living in low-slope areas will have a much harder time retaining their views than people living on steeper locations (see Figure 9, on page 19). These same "low-slopers" will also find it much harder to get and maintain adequate and aesthetically pleasing privacy.

Tree Choice, Siting, and Maintenance Considerations

Many people are going to want to grow good-sized trees. A neighborhood with a lot of medium and large trees is, after all, more attractive than one with only small and low trees. However, with the current social climate and legal situation in the fire zone, I would not advise anyone to grow tall trees unless they are certain that the trees, when mature, will not be blocking somebody's view.

Your neighbors are probably determined to retain as much of their view as possible. If you try to buck the trend, you will be considered a "bad citizen" in the eyes of the neighborhood. Before you plant a tree that will get large, ask yourself if you are willing to assume and maintain that role. You should also find out what your neighbors do for a living. If you live between a lawyer and his view, for example, that may well affect your decisions regarding tree size and placement.

In addition to those considerations, the status of the view ordinances of both Oakland and Berkeley is uncertain. The ordinances may be interpreted and enforced in such a way that it is almost impossible for a tree owner to grow a tall tree (this topic is covered in greater length in Appendix A). For these reasons, I am assuming that most homeowners will choose not to plant new trees that will grow higher than roofline.

Since the pressure to keep trees low will be too great for all but the most irascible and well-heeled druid to resist, one may as well plan accordingly.

FIGURE 5

THE PARTY WHO GAINS A VIEW IS OFTEN NOT THE PARTY WHO LOSES VALUE

Here is an example of the relationship between the value of views and the value of trees.

BEFORE: Al's view is blocked by Bill's tree. Al's property is worth \$400,000 without a view. Bill's property is also worth \$400,000.

AFTER: Al paid the \$1200 cost of topping Bill's tree, so that he could get a view. Bill's tree will never look any good, no matter what care is taken with it in the future. In addition, it is more prone to decay and will become more of a hazard as decay spreads. Al's property with the view is now worth \$440,000. Bill's property with the mutilated tree is now worth \$395,000.

Some Examples of How to Site Trees and Shrubs

You and your neighbor can benefit from careful siting. Below are three very common situations where people need to figure out where to site trees or shrubs. In these examples, I am only dealing with two homeowners for the sake of simplicity. Keep in mind that trees may have an impact on several homeowners.

Situation 1: Uphill neighbor wants view/downhill neighbor wants privacy.

This scenario is the most common situation where a dispute develops between view and privacy. Both homeowners want privacy from each other. The uphill neighbor also wants to maintain a view.

Solution:

If the houses are on a steep slope, the tree should *usually* be planted closer to the uphill house. This will:

- ∞ allow the roof of the downhill house to be screened earlier, as new growth close to the viewer screens proportionately more than the same amount of growth far away (see Figure 14 on page 27);
- ∞ mean lower maintenance costs, since it is generally cheaper to keep a small tree pruned than a large one;
- ∞ allow for more effective pruning for view, as *the closer a tree is to a viewing point, the easier and more effective it is to prune for view by “windowing” or thinning, or crown reduction.*

The drawback to this approach is that trees on the downhill side of a house are a fire hazard. When sorting out this problem, you need to balance the relative fire danger. For example, is a small tree fifteen feet from your house more or less hazardous than a larger tree thirty feet from your house?

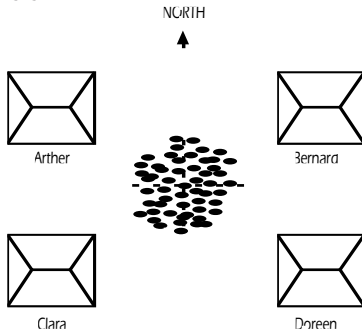
What does the downhill neighbor get from siting the tree close to the uphill neighbor?

- ∞ more morning light — because he or she doesn't have to have a large tree on the east side of the property;
- ∞ more flexibility — the ability to plan that part of the garden for other long-term considerations, instead of having to plan everything around privacy;

- ∞ spaciousness — the yard may appear larger, as there can be more open space;
- ∞ lower maintenance costs — there is less of a problem with leaves in the gutter.

FIGURE 6

SEVERAL NEIGHBORS CAN HAVE DIFFERENT INTERESTS IN A TREE



What you think about a tree depends on your point of view. In this example, a forty-foot tree is growing right where the property lines of Arthur, Bernard, Carla and Doreen meet.

Arthur would like the tree to be lower in order to get more morning sun. However, he does not want the tree removed, as he would then see Doreen's house.

Bernard wants the tree removed to gain maximum view. Other plants provide screening from Clara, and if the tree is only lowered, his plants will still have to compete for sun and space.

Carla likes the tree just the way it is. It provides a sense of seclusion, and is the only tree in her garden.

Doreen likes the tree at its current height, but would like to remove the branches that grow into her yard, so that she can have more sunny garden space. The others are concerned that this may unbalance the tree and increase the likelihood of its falling over in a storm.

If the houses are on a moderate or low slope, the neighbors will generally have more choices regarding tree placement. Other factors, such as the amount of morning or afternoon light available to a room or patch of garden, can be taken into greater consideration.

Situation 2: Southern neighbor wants privacy/northern neighbor wants maximum solar access. Both agree to plant a hedge.

Solution:

Hedges are usually best placed on the northern edge of the southern property, instead of on the south side of the neighbor's yard or on a property line. This way, each party's prime interest is favored. The northern property has more solar access because the hedge is farther from the garden. The southern house is able to control privacy and gets it more quickly because the hedge is closer to the house and garden. This general principle applies to trees as well, though with trees it is harder to make long-term decisions that will please everybody.

Situation 3: Front yards.

Front yards pose a unique set of circumstances because they raise issues that deal more with public space than with particular neighbors. Whereas backyards tend to be designed around family activities and privacy, front gardens are used more as a stage-set for the architecture of the house.

Solution:

When choosing and siting trees in front yards, keep these concerns in mind:

- ☞ Driveways and messy trees do not coexist well. If you have a fondness for a tree that drops fruit or one that raises concrete, site it away from the driveway.
- ☞ Front yards are much more likely than backyards to have underground lines.

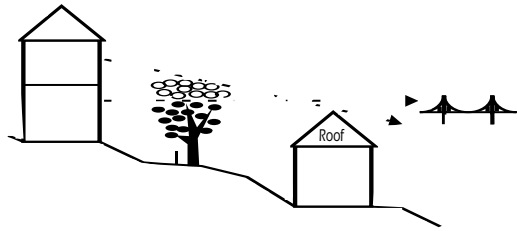
These include water, sewer, gas, electricity, phone and cable. It is a good idea to mark the location of these lines in some permanent and inconspicuous way. Some trees love sewers, but no sewer loves trees.

- ☞ Using the same tree, or complex of trees, and other plants throughout a neighborhood is one of the easiest ways to provide a sense of continuity and community in an area. If, for example, an entire neighborhood decides it wants coast live oaks and buckeyes, that neighborhood will look and feel much more cohesive in the years ahead than one that has no trees in common. Such "theme" trees fulfill their role more effectively when planted in the front than in the back yards.

FIGURE 7

THE LINE OF MAXIMUM VIEW AND PRIVACY

This is a term for the optimum level of vegetation that allows maximum privacy as well as view from any given point of view. This line varies from house to house and from room to room, and even changes depending upon whether one is sitting or standing.



Note that the uphill property owner cannot get both screening and view from both vantage points. If the homeowner chooses to have a view from the lower floor, he will see the roof from the upper floor. If he wants to screen the neighbor's roof as he looks out from the upper floor, the view is obscured from lower down.

Use a Sheet of Clear Plastic as a Perspective Device

A square of clear plastic with a simple tree outline drawn on it can be a useful tool in determining where to site trees, how many to plant, and of what shape. It is a good way to see, in practice, the points about screening and perspective that are illustrated in Figures 7, 10, 14 and 16. Using this device can be a little tricky. You have to either look through it with both eyes or use the eye that doesn't make the image jump to one side.

Draw a simple outline of a tree (rounded, pyramidal, flat-topped, columnar — your choice) with marking pen on a piece of clear plastic about sixteen inches square (the size is not critical). Pre-cut acrylic plastic, which can be purchased at an art framing store, will do nicely. You will also need a pole about six or eight feet high.

Hold the cutout at arms length and look through it at what you want to screen. With someone holding the pole where you are thinking of placing a tree, you can

get an idea of how tall the tree needs to be to meet your screening requirements (see Figure 8 on this page). It is also helpful to look through the cutout at the pole from several different vantage points to see what effect a tree in that location would have on your garden.

Besides screening effect, you will want to imagine the effect of other factors, such as amount of shade, the appearance of the tree with leaves, branches, and flowers, both at a distance and close up, and how easy or difficult it will be to work under and around a tree in that part of your garden. When you get tired of doing this with one tree shape, erase it and draw another.

This device can also help you decide if you need more than one tree. If you must screen a wide area, you are usually better

off choosing several trees than planting one that will be very wide. Maintenance on very wide trees is usually more time-consuming and costly. In addition, wide-spreading lateral branches are more prone to breaking in storms than relatively short branches.

Maintaining Trees at a Given Height

The first thing to realize is that you don't maintain trees at, say, 26 feet. You maintain them within a height *range* (see Figure 10, on page 20). The closer to a fixed height you want a tree to stay, the more often the tree needs to be pruned. Pruning affects the health, structure and appearance of the tree, and also affects its amenability to future pruning.

Have you ever looked inside a hedge and noticed a line at a lower height that seems full of twigs and dead leaves? That is an old maintenance line, where the hedge was pruned at the same height over and over, giving a progressively thicker top. The same thing can happen with trees, but on a grander and more expensive scale.

FIGURE 8

USING A SHEET OF CLEAR PLASTIC AS A PERSPECTIVE DEVICE



Building
To Be
Screened



Joe has drawn a simple outline of a round tree on the clear plastic. He holds it at a comfortable distance to see through. Bobby moves the pole to different parts of the yard where Joe is thinking of planting a tree. Joe looks through the plastic and gets an idea of how large a tree would have to be to satisfy his screening needs.

Let me give you an example of poor height management. I had as clients a couple with a tulip tree (*Liriodendron*) in their backyard, which had been brutally topped a year before they moved in, and which had then put out a mass of watersprouts (suckers that originate above ground level). Since their uphill neighbor had had a view, she was entitled by local view ordinance to try to regain it.

The upshot of the dispute was that both owners hired lawyers, who then cobbled together an agreement which provided that the tree be “pruned” at least once a year to a height of not greater than fourteen feet, nine inches, as measured from the base of the patio adjacent to the trunk of the aforementioned tree. I couldn’t prune higher than agreed upon or the uphill neighbor would be upset, and I couldn’t prune lower or the tree owners would be upset. The result was a tree that just got uglier and uglier and more subject to decay, as time went on.

Choose a tree that can be kept within the height range you want without damaging the health or appearance of the tree. This is one of the most important lessons to learn from this book.

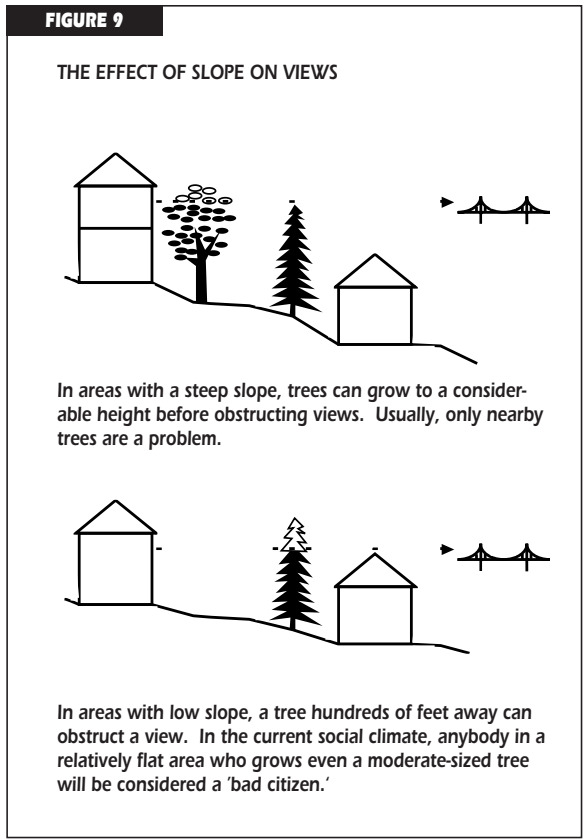
Here are some guidelines to keep in mind as you choose, buy and maintain your trees:

- Start pruning your tree *before* it gets to your desired height. Many people grow a tree until they realize it is much taller than they want it to be, then top it. This is usually a disaster for the tree’s health and appearance. Early training is critical.

- A tree with a single leader (the tallest, most vigorous upright stem) will grow taller than a tree of the same type that has multiple leaders. Choose trees that can be pruned to develop multiple leaders. Most hardwoods and some conifers fit into this category. However, some trees are not at all amenable to this kind of pruning. Among conifers, fir trees are notable for retaining a single leader, while many pines can successfully be pruned to develop multiple leaders. Palms are an extreme example of a tree that can’t be pruned to control height. If you cut the top of a palm, you kill it.

- The more you try to limit a tree’s growth, the more problems you will have. If you take a tree that, left to itself, will grow to thirty feet and you keep it at twenty five, you will probably not have many problems. If you take a tree that wants to be eighty feet and try to keep it to twenty five, you will probably have a lot of problems.

- Avoid trees that have a tendency to produce vigorous watersprouts after prun-



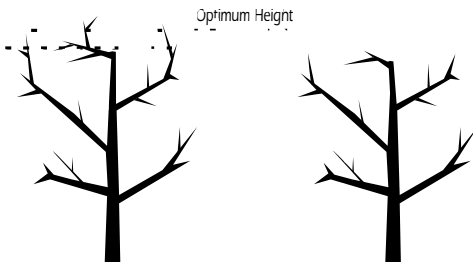
- ing. It is difficult and expensive to maintain such trees in an attractive manner over a long period. Plums are particularly bad in this respect, as are most hawthornes.
- ☞ Avoid trees with weak branch structure, such as mulberry. Pruning to control size often encourages excessive growth of laterals, and poorly made trees are more prone to branch breakage in such situations.
 - ☞ Naturally spreading, flat-topped trees can work very well to provide screening to a particular height, and to preserve the view. However, these trees can be almost impossible to prune to look through. An extreme example is Italian stone pine, which forms a beautiful flat-topped umbrella. However, if someone needed to see *through* the umbrella, it would be very difficult and expensive to prune.
 - ☞ Avoid “fastigate” trees, such as Lombardy poplar and Italian cypress. This refers to a growth habit in which the branches grow nearly vertical leading to a tall, narrow tree. It is very difficult to encourage lateral growth on such trees, and these slender trees can be difficult to safely climb and prune. Round-headed or flat-topped trees are much more appropriate.

FIGURE 10

MAINTAINING TREES WITHIN A HEIGHT RANGE



You should start pruning a tree before it gets to the height you want. Homeowners often do not want to do this because it means they have to wait longer to get privacy.



Eventually, a well-shaped tree will grow to its planned height, and even surpass it. Then you cut to a height lower than you want while still maintaining the form of the tree. Keeping the tree within a height range allows you to have a shapely tree that doesn't look like a huge hedge



VIEWS AND PRIVACY IN LOW-SLOPE AREAS

Retaining Views in Areas With Low Slope

Retaining a view in low-slope areas is *extremely* difficult. If you are determined to maintain as much of your view as possible, you will need to plan your own tree(s) carefully, and also coordinate with your neighbors. There are several unpleasant rules to keep in mind:

- ☞ As discussed in the previous chapter, it is virtually impossible to keep a tree at a fixed height without seriously damaging the tree and your wallet.
- ☞ In the fire's aftermath, in a rebuilt environment, trees will be called upon to hide unsightly structures. If your neighbor to the west had a wood-shake roof before the fire, you probably didn't mind looking at his roof and could concentrate on keeping your own trees low enough to maintain your view. If your neighbor rebuilds with composition shingle, for aesthetic reasons you will be much more likely to want to maintain your view *and* screen out your neighbor's roof. This is very tricky, and at the risk of sounding repetitive, the lower your slope, the more complicated and difficult it is to resolve. You need to decide, for example, whether you want to prune a tree lower than your neighbor's roofline and have to look at that roof part of the time while retaining your view, or prune at the roofline and maintain screening while losing some view part of the year.
- ☞ You will also need to keep an eye on your neighbors' tree choices and maintenance. For example, your neighbor may choose an appropriate tree, but not prune it until it is already blocking your view. By this time, it may be impossible to prune the tree so that it looks good and also allows you a view. You may want to contact your neighbor about pruning *before* the tree gets to the point that it obstructs your view. What's wrong with that? Nothing, except that your neighbor very likely wants the tree to get to a certain height as quickly as possible in order to screen out your house!
- ☞ A neighbor hundreds of feet away may block your view with his or her tree. If

- you live on a low slope and you want to maintain your view, you will need to be concerned about many more neighbors than someone on a steeper slope, who only has to worry about immediate neighbors. I have had homeowners point out trees as much as a quarter mile away that they wished to top or remove.
- ☞ Sometimes it is impossible to have a situation that is satisfactory to both sides. These are generally cases where the downhill neighbor cannot get enough privacy without blocking the uphill neighbor's view. If you are in such a situation, you can give up, wage an ongoing battle, or attempt a compromise where both parties feel they have gotten the worst of it.

Maintaining Privacy in Areas With Low Slope

In many ways, this is just the mirror image of the view issue; however, there are some differences. If your uphill neighbor is determined to maintain a view, privacy is up to you. You cannot count on your neighbor to be as concerned about your privacy as that person is about his or her view.

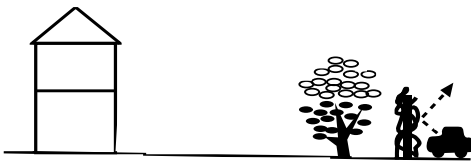
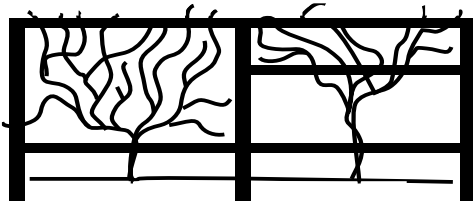
On the other hand, in a low-slope situation, if you try to gain your own privacy by growing a tree higher than your roof, it is likely that at least one of your uphill neighbors will try to force you to cut it back. The trick is to provide as much privacy *on your own side of the property line* as possible, and to gain privacy without growing trees higher than the roofline. This generally involves using different plants for general screening and for line-of-sight privacy.

In contrast to the situation with views, privacy tends to be a problem *only* with the near neighbors. They are the ones who are close enough to make you feel as though your privacy is being impinged upon. Keep in mind that while there are ordinances to protect views, there are no matching laws to protect privacy.

FIGURE 11

A SIMPLE WIRE FENCE WITH A VINE

A simple wire fence can be permanent or temporary — you can even put an addition on top of a permanent wooden fence. Whatever variation you choose, fast-growing vines can provide some quick screening while you wait for other, permanent plantings to grow to their desired size.





PRIVACY AND SCREENING SOLUTIONS

This chapter will discuss ways to achieve screening right away, without compromising long-term interests. But first, here are some broad distinctions among types of screening.

Types of Screening

Line-of-sight screening

You don't want your neighbor or a passerby to watch you eating breakfast or to be able to see your hot tub. Line-of-sight screening provides visual privacy to a particular window or viewpoint. This is most important in cases where you don't want to have to keep a window shuttered or curtained. A kitchen is a good example. Bathrooms, on the other hand, seldom need visual privacy, because people tend to have frosted windows or keep the curtains shut.

Visual screening

This is a more general concept. It involves having enough screening, be it by fence, vine, shrubs or trees, that one gets a sense of at least some seclusion. Since line of sight is not so directly involved, visual screens are often best placed on the outside edge of one's property in order to get maximum usable garden space.

Noise and dust screening

These are closely related to visual screens. The only difference is that one needs much thicker foliage to screen out noise with any degree of effectiveness than is needed for solely visual screening. Except for getting done with surrounding construction, the main solution for dust is more plants.

Wind screening

This type of screening is directional. The most common strong winds come

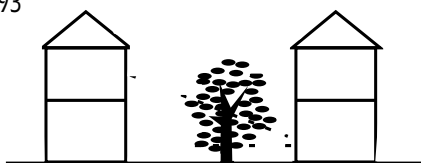
from the southeast, south, and southwest. However, the most damaging winds, which trees and shrubs are not prepared to resist, are the occasional very strong winds from the north and northeast. Being in a neighborhood with tall trees tends to moderate the wind at ground level (which is good), but increases the likelihood of a large tree falling on to your house (which is bad).

The bottom line about screening is this — the fire zone is going to be windier, dustier, hotter, noisier and more exposed than before. These conditions will continue for quite a few years, until a replacement landscape matures and moderates the local microclimates. You can do *a lot* to improve your own situation, but you should not expect overnight miracles. Choose your plants accordingly, or be prepared to be disappointed.

FIGURE 12

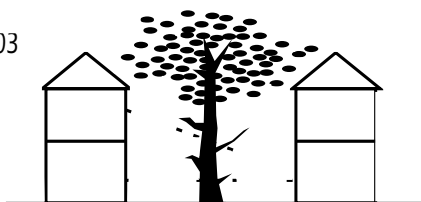
AN EXAMPLE OF POOR SCREENING

1993



A fast-growing tree is chosen to provide rapid screening. But as the tree grows...

2003



Ten years later...The lower branches are dead or dying due to shade. These dead branches pose an increased fire hazard. The tree now provides very little screening. The gutters are getting clogged with leaves. There is increased maintenance expense due to the size of the tree and neighbors' demands to keep it low for view. The windows receive less light due to the dense shade cast by the tree.

Examples of Effective Screening

Screening for the short-term — a simple and economical method

Figure 11, on page 22, shows a simple wire fence, which can be permanent or temporary. This one has a red passion-flower vine growing on it. One passion-flower vine, planted from a one-gallon container, can cover a ten-foot by ten-foot area in one, long spring and summer. I recommend building such a fence around as much of your property as possible before moving in, if it is possible to do so without unduly hindering the construction process. This helps solve many problems at once. It provides privacy, greenery, and at least some protection from deer (by limiting access to your garden). Perhaps most important of all, it also buys you time. With greenery and privacy in place, you can choose the most appropriate shrubs and trees (including hedge plants to eventually replace the fence, if desired) and let them grow without having to worry about whether they are growing slowly or fast.

Line-of-sight screening

Figures 12 and 13 show two attempts to solve the same privacy problem through line-of-sight screening. One

doesn't work — the other does. Figure 12, on this page, shows what can happen when people think only of their short-term needs. In Figure 13, on page 25, the placement of the temporary screen close to the window successfully allows room for the tree to grow unhindered to its planned size.

Other Considerations

The relationship between distance, screening and size

A small tree close to a viewpoint has the same screening ability as a large tree farther away (see Figure 14, on page 27). This is true in regard to both height and width. However, small screens tend to work only in a small area, or for a limited point of view.

Using the most appropriate screen for the purpose

Figure 15, on page 29, shows a mature garden in a small backyard with two different types of screens. The hedge provides a general sense of seclusion to the yard, and the tree provides line-of-sight screening between the two houses. The lower branches of the tree have been pruned, and the canopy is kept thinned, which also allows enough light to the hedge to allow it to thrive and be effective as a screen.

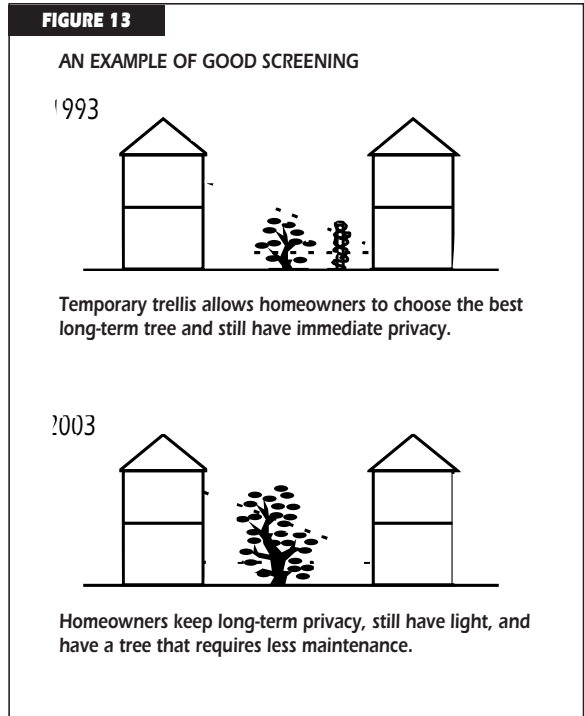
Screening tall objects or distant objects, such as telephone poles

The most common offensive tall objects are telephone poles. While the fire zone itself is going to have its utilities underground, there are a number of “edge” properties that will be close to phone poles. How best to screen a phone pole or other tall slender object depends on how many points of view you can see it from (see Figure 16, on page 31). If you just see it from one spot, the most effective screen is close to that viewing point.

If you see the pole from many locations, a tall narrow tree or other screen close to the pole is a better solution. Bear in mind, however, that the most effective solution for one problem may cause other problems for your garden or perhaps for your neighbors.

Screening adjacent obstructions of varying heights

Sometimes you will need to screen a tall building and a shorter adjacent building (for example a house and garage). Choosing two different trees with different mature heights is usually the best solution. Often a homeowner will try to finesse this situation by encouraging one part of a single tree to become extra wide, while removing other parts to “match the roofline.” This strategy does not work well in most cases, leading to an unbalanced tree that is difficult to maintain.





CHOOSING A TREE

It seems to me that many people spend more time choosing a pair of socks than selecting a tree. The trouble with this is that your socks will wear out before your shoes, but your tree may outlive your grandchildren.

The Oakland-Berkeley hills are blessed with an embarrassment of riches when it comes to trees. Hundreds of species, probably thousands, can grow here. Before selecting a tree, I suggest that you ask yourself the following questions:

- ∞ How long am I going to live here?
- ∞ Do I want a deciduous tree or an evergreen one? (See page 28.)
- ∞ What do I want the tree to do?
- ∞ How much am I willing to spend on the tree, both initially and to maintain it?
Do I want to pay an arborist to prune it every year? Do I want to go to the trouble of learning how to do simple pruning myself?

After reading this chapter you may want to read Appendix B, A Checklist of Factors to Consider When Choosing and Siting a Tree.

Identify Your Needs and Wants

A typical homeowner may come up with a summary like this: “I want a fast-growing evergreen tree with pleasing form, attractive flowers, and strong branch structure, one that isn’t messy, doesn’t need summer watering, that will get to twenty feet in four years and then stop, a tree that is pest and disease free, that won’t lift the concrete, and that I can prune myself without wrecking its form.” I am sorry to say that such a tree does not exist.

Prioritize and Narrow Your Choices

The next step is to decide where you are going to compromise. Maybe you had your heart set on yellow leaves in the fall, but the best all-around candidate does not have fall color. Or you may need to choose a slower-growing tree, or spray it for

pests, or rake the leaves more than you wish.

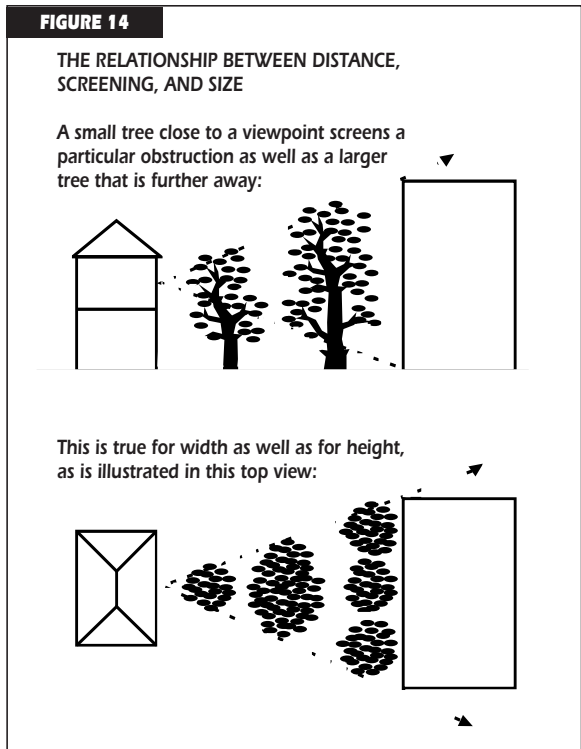
Start to go through lists. The best known are the lists in Sunset's *Western Garden Book*. Mark the trees you know that sound good, and also the ones you don't know but which sound appealing. More lists can be found in various other garden books. Don't take any of these recommendations at face value — you need to do more specific research. I have included a couple of lists of my own in this book, and the same cautions apply.

Look and Learn

Once you've made a list of trees, get a copy of *Trees of the Berkeley Campus*, available for \$2.50 (a bargain) at the ASUC Bookstore in the basement of the student union. Many changes have occurred on campus since this book was written in 1976, but it is still useful. First, the book tells you where any given tree can be found. Second, it lists the trees around each campus building, so that if you find a tree you like but don't know what it is, you can identify it by back-checking through the list to the tree descriptions in the book's front. *This is an invaluable publication, and the best way I know of seeing mature trees of many different kinds with little trouble.* The U.C. Botanic Garden, Tilden Botanic Garden, Strybing Arboretum in Golden Gate Park, and the Blake Estate in Kensington are also good sources of identified, mature trees.

Get an Arborist's Advice

At some point in the process you should get professional advice. By this I mean consulting *at the site* with an *arborist*. Unlike nursery workers, gardeners, and landscape architects, arborists are the only professionals who work almost exclusively with trees in the landscape on a daily basis and are familiar with all phases of tree care. An arborist will be especially helpful in giving advice on what maintenance the tree will need, how amenable it is to pruning, long-term problems, and how much the tree will cost over a long period of time. A good arborist will also be able to give you several local addresses of your tree, so that you can see how it does under a variety of circumstances, what it looks like when poorly pruned, examples where it has caused problems, and the whole range of possibilities that a sapling represents. It is also well worth getting an arborist to select your tree from the nursery. An individual tree may be a poor candidate as a free-standing specimen, for example, but well-suited to form part of a tall screen.



Deciduous or Evergreen?

A deciduous tree is one that loses all of its leaves or needles for part of the year — a maple, for example, or a dawn redwood. An evergreen tree has leaves on it year round. Live oaks are evergreen, for example, as are pines.

Choosing whether you want a deciduous or evergreen tree is one of the most basic decisions you can make about your garden. Consider carefully, and don't let yourself be unduly swayed by only one factor, unless you know that it is far more important to you than any other.

Points in favor of deciduous trees

- ☞ They allow more winter sun. For this reason, deciduous trees are often planted to the south of a house.
- ☞ They are better for lawns (because the extra light in the winter makes the lawns less likely to stay wet and develop rust).
- ☞ They appear “friendlier.” This is a widely held perception, especially among people who grew up back East.
- ☞ They often have fall color and interesting branch patterns in winter. (On the other hand, a poorly pruned deciduous tree is likely to be more conspicuously ugly than a poorly pruned evergreen.)
- ☞ It is easier to clean up the leaves. An evergreen tree will tend to drop needles or leaves throughout the year, while a deciduous tree does it all in one season.

Points in favor of evergreen trees

- ☞ The fire zone has a general paucity of trees. Evergreen trees will help relieve the barren look more effectively than deciduous trees.
- ☞ They provide year-round visual and noise screening.
- ☞ Evergreens help cut the wind, particularly in winter when this screening is needed most.
- ☞ There are more drought-tolerant evergreen trees to choose from than drought-tolerant deciduous trees.
- ☞ Evergreens make a good backdrop for your garden.

Qualities to Look For in New Trees

The fire zone is going to be a harder place for most trees to live than before. Your choices should reflect this, at least in the first five or ten years after the fire.

- ☞ Wind-resistant trees will do much better. Unless you have created a very sheltered area, you should stay away from trees like threadleaf Japanese maple, which will get wind-burned easily. Trees that blow down easily should also be avoided, or kept thinned. Incense cedar, for example, is subject to being blown over in windstorms, and should not be planted in exposed areas unless you are willing to invest in regular pruning so that the wind can pass through it.
- ☞ Trees should be able to withstand poor drainage. Most areas will have more compacted soil than before the fire (due to construction and the effects of heavy machinery driving over the lot). This impedes drainage. Many contractors will just dump some topsoil on top of this compacted soil for you to plant your garden in.
- ☞ The fire zone will be hotter in the summer. When this will really affect plants is during the occasional heat wave, when the temperature gets into the high 90's for several days in a row. Less vegetation means less protection from the after-

noon sun, and less moisture in the air. Trees with tender leaves are much more liable to suffer than they were before the fire.

Ten Trees That Deserve to be Planted More Often

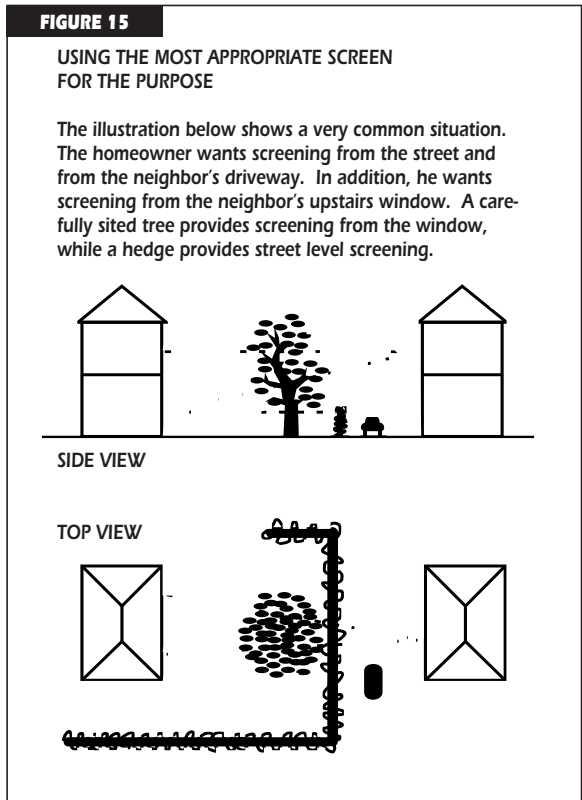
(This is a good place to practice using *Trees of the Berkeley Campus*. If there is a specimen of the tree on campus, I mention where you can find it at the end of the plant description.)

☞ *Acer buergeranum*, trident maple. It seems like everybody and his brother plants Japanese maples. If you want something a little different, try this. It is easier to prune than upright varieties of Japanese maple, and has good fall color. One is north of the culvert on Strawberry Creek just east of the west circle.

☞ *Aesculus californica*, California buckeye. This is one of our most beautiful indigenous trees, with great form, beautiful bark, spectacular flowers, and nice leaves. Its only drawback is a tendency to drop leaves early, in late summer, and that can be minimized with just a small amount of supplemental summer water. They can be difficult to keep below their natural height, so plant them in an area where they can be allowed to grow to full size. The branch collars (where the branch attaches to the trunk) are large and protuberant on buckeyes, so extra care must be taken not to prune branches too close to the trunk. These trees can develop wonderful knobbly trunks of great character with minimal effort. There is a nice tree at the southwest corner of Hearst and Euclid

☞ *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, dawn redwood. This tree is a good alternative to coast redwood in replacement plantings. It develops a beautiful fluted muscular-looking trunk. In addition, it does not get as tall as a redwood, and is deciduous. This allows for more winter light into your garden, and you get the added bonus of bright, new, apple-green needles in the spring. There is less of a tendency than with coast redwood to produce long branches that are subject to storm damage. Three are growing along the west side of the Earth Sciences Building.

☞ *Nyssa sylvatica*, tupelo. This is one tough tree. It can take poor drainage, poor soil, and can survive some drought. In addition, it is well-behaved, easy to prune to shape, and has gorgeous fall color. A small one is near the southwest corner of Warren Hall.

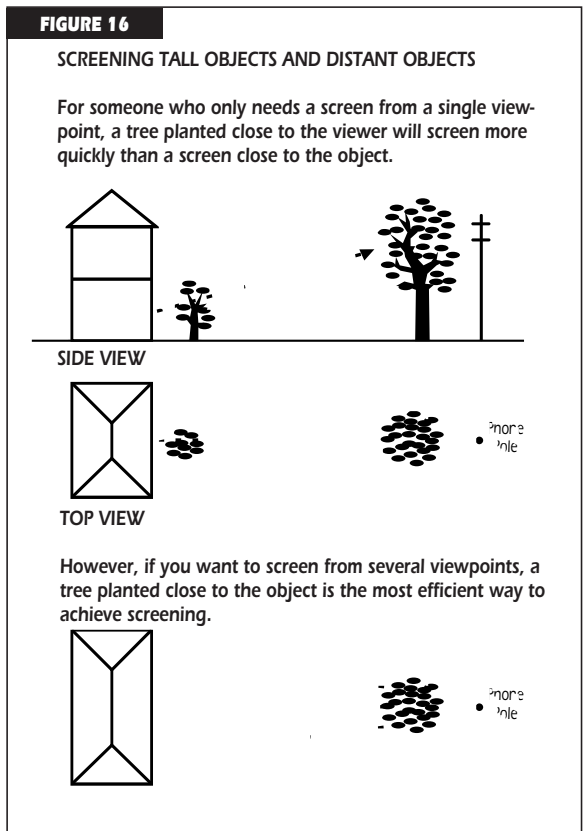


- ☞ *Olea europaea*, olive. The soft gray foliage and gnarled trunks blend well with a variety of garden styles. Olives are incredibly drought-resistant, long-lived and fairly pest and disease free. They can be pruned to a variety of forms, but beware of trying to keep them too low, as you may have a hard time keeping them shapely as well. Fruit drop can be a problem, but the tree can be sprayed to limit fruit production. Some people are allergic to olive pollen. Several trees are south of Wellman Hall
- ☞ *Pittosporum undulatum*, Victorian box. This tree is fast growing and nearly trouble-free. It is easy to prune and can be kept to size with little trouble. It is a good choice for a screening tree if you need to prune frequently to control height. Situate away from sidewalks and patios, as the sticky seed pods can be a problem. There are three trees between Cory Hall and Davis Hall.
- ☞ *Prunus lyonii*, Catalina cherry. This is another tough native, fast-growing once established. New leaves are a beautiful bright green. It is easy to prune and to maintain to height, and is drought-resistant. Several trees are south of Birge Hall.
- ☞ *Quercus agrifolia*, coast live oak. This tree needs no introduction. These are beautiful, long-lived, drought-resistant trees. People are often leery of planting them because they are perceived as being slow-growing, but they actually have a moderate growth rate. They are subject to oak root fungus (*Armillaria*), which is present in most of our soils. The most important thing to do for oaks is not to give them extra summer water. They also appreciate mulching. Oak moths can defoliate the trees occasionally, but seldom cause lasting damage. Coast live oaks are found throughout the campus. A particularly nice symmetrical specimen is south of Tolman Hall in a large raised bed.
- ☞ *Rhamnus alaternus*, Italian buckthorn. This is a great candidate for a fast-growing, nearly trouble-free, tall screen. A plant can get to fifteen feet from a five gallon can in three to four years with water and fertilizer, but they are also drought-resistant, wind-resistant, and can take a lot of heat, all qualities which will be useful in the fire zone. They don't have much form to speak of, but have the great advantage that an amateur can prune one without doing irreparable harm to the plant. A good alternative to the psyllid-ridden and frost-susceptible eugenia, or to English laurel.
- ☞ *Schinus molle*, California pepper. This tree gets mixed reviews, to put it mildly. Sunset's *Western Garden Book* says it's fire-resistant if reasonably well-watered. EBMUD puts it on its list of highly flammable plants. They are very tough, with beautiful gnarled trunks, and are quite easy to prune to keep to a given height. They are also messy, with a lot of leaf litter. Alternatively, one could say they are self-mulching. They have the reputation of having greedy roots that raise sidewalks, but I think people tend to overstate the case in this regard. These trees look attractive even when young, and only get more beautiful with age. There are quite a few between the east side of Barrows Hall and south of Morrison Hall.

Ten Trees to Avoid in the Fire Zone

This is not a list of "bad" trees. These trees are just usually inappropriate for use in the fire zone, for one reason or another. This list leans heavily towards trees that are susceptible to wind damage, as trees in the fire zone will be much more liable to limb breakage or blowdown than previously. Also, I am including some trees that are very high maintenance with regard to pruning or pests.

- ☞ *Arbor nongrata*, Prohibited Trees. The City of Oakland prohibits the planting in the fire zone of trees and shrubs marked with a capital P (for pyrophyte) in the EBMUD booklet, *Firescape*. This includes three species of eucalyptus including blue gum, all species of pine and juniper, coyote brush, greasewood, and red shanks. These extra flammable trees and shrubs are singled out in a larger list of “Highly Flammable Plants” on pp. 12 and 13 of *Firescape*.
- ☞ *Acacia spp.*, acacia. Various acacias range from a few feet high to over fifty. The consensus seems to be that they are all highly flammable. In addition, many people are allergic to the pollen they produce.
- ☞ *Calocedrus decurrens*, incense cedar. This tree doesn’t do well in windy situations. Often, the entire tree blows over — usually, a branch or a co-dominant stem breaks. If it is kept thinned, breakage is minimized. Most people don’t do this on a regular enough basis.
- ☞ *Eucalyptus sideroxylon*, red ironbark. This tree is just about the most poorly engineered of all the eucalypts. Where they have been planted in the past, you can see mature trees gradually shrink over a number of years as branches break or are removed for safety reasons. This tree is not listed as being highly flammable by EBMUD, and is not on Oakland’s prohibited list. For these reasons, some homeowners may want to plant it.
- ☞ *Fraxinus spp.*, ash. Ash trees have a tendency to produce branches that are weakly attached. These branches are liable to break in storms. Even when pruned carefully, they have less wind-resistance than most trees. Unfortunately, they also grow very quickly and are thus liable to be planted as a way to achieve quick screening.
- ☞ *Liriodendron tulipifera*, tulip tree (this tree should not be confused with *Magnolia soulangeana*, tulip magnolia). These are very large, fast-growing trees with greedy roots, subject to heavy infestations by aphids. Don’t plant them anywhere near a sidewalk, driveway, or patio, as the aphids which attack them produce an incredible amount of “honeydew.” They are also notorious for lifting concrete, as you can see by walking along University Avenue in Berkeley. Almost every tree has lifted the surrounding sidewalk. In addition, they don’t respond well to hard pruning, producing a lot of watersprouts and having rather poor protection against decay.
- ☞ *Morus spp.*, mulberry. Mulberry trees produce weakly attached branches that



break quite readily. In addition, they produce large roots near the surface that tend to lift any nearby concrete. They grow extremely fast, which when combined with their weak branch structure, means that they need extensive pruning every year.

- ☞ *Populus nigra 'Italica'*, Lombardy poplar. Have you noticed that this list is heavy on fast growing trees that break easily and are prone to decay? Here's another one, and it's a real doozy. These trees get tall, so there is often pressure to top them, which causes decay. Mature trees are often hollow at the base, which makes climbing them dangerous. In addition, the roots are greedy and love sewers. These trees are deservedly short-lived.
- ☞ *Schinus terebinthus*, Brazilian pepper. The branches look strong, but often break anyway. In addition it is subject to Verticillium wilt.
- ☞ *Sequoiadendron gigantea*, giant sequoia. These are really wonderful trees, but they are an inappropriate choice in a dense urban environment. Giant sequoias get huge very quickly. While it may take 1500 years to produce a tree with a trunk thirty feet in diameter, there are trees less than one hundred years old with trunks fourteen feet across at ground level. In addition, they spread quite a bit, blocking views, and can grow to over 250 feet. Planting a giant sequoia on a city lot is like buying a Great Dane puppy if you live in a studio apartment — you will surely regret it later.
- ☞ *Ulmus parvifolia*, Chinese elm. These trees have been widely planted because they are very attractive and fast growing. Unfortunately, they are also extremely high maintenance. The branches break with depressing regularity in storms. If they are pruned to lighten the branches or control the height, they produce an abundance of watersprouts that are weaker than the branches that were removed. If not pruned at least once a year, they cast very dense shade. Chinese elms produce a lot of leaf litter. They are subject to anthracnose disease, as well. If someone recommends this tree, think at least three times before you even consider it.
- ☞ *Umbellularia californica*, California bay laurel. These trees are often planted away from their rightful location, which is beside a stream or in a ravine. The leaves often turn blackish with sooty mold, a fungus that feeds on the honeydew excreted by insects that have been sucking on the leaves and stems. Also, bay trees are liable to crown rot caused by Ganoderma fungus. A perfectly healthy-looking tree can topple over, especially in late winter when the soil is saturated. Unless you can site this next to a stream, away from structures, I suggest you avoid it.



GOOD AND BAD PRUNING STRATEGIES

This is not intended as a primer on pruning or other maintenance skills. However, you can make better choices if you know something about various pruning strategies and how they might be used in different situations. I am going to try to avoid sounding overly technical without being inaccurate. Arborists may well feel that I have grossly over-simplified several complex topics, and for that I beg indulgence.

First, let me define “leader” and “lateral.” “Leader” means the main stem of a tree, which is also usually the fastest growing and tallest part of the tree. It is also used to mean the end of a branch, usually a fairly large one. “Lateral” means a side branch. It can connect to the trunk or to another branch.

Topping

The term “topping” reminds me of the late Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart’s definition of pornography — “I can’t define it, but I know it when I see it.” One definition of topping is cutting leaders and lateral branches to stubs of three inches in diameter or more. Another definition, though more technical, is that if you cut a leader above a well-placed lateral which is at least one-third the diameter of the leader, it is *not* topping.

A useful definition for lay people is this — if you think a tree has been topped, it probably has either been topped or had something else done to it equally bad for the tree.

Topping has several negative consequences. Cutting branches back to large stubs promotes the growth of watersprouts, which are weakly attached to the trunk and are thus liable to break off in storms. In addition, the large cuts produced by topping often decay, thereby reducing the safety of the tree and shortening its useful life. There is a consensus among arborists that removal is preferable to topping.

Alternatives to topping or removal include letting the tree grow until it is above

the critical part of the view, and then selectively cutting “windows,” and controlling the height of the tree through a pruning technique known as crown reduction.

Crown Reduction

Crown reduction is a technique to reduce the overall height and spread of a tree by selectively removing branches while still maintaining a natural-looking appearance and form and without adversely affecting the long-term health of the tree. With many trees this can be done with no damage to the tree’s health or appearance. However, severe crown reduction can stress the tree. Each tree needs to be evaluated individually in order to determine what level and kind of pruning it can safely sustain.

There is no hard and fast dividing line between crown reduction and topping. One person’s topping is another’s crown reduction. Whenever possible, choose, site and prune your trees so that the question of excessive pruning does not even arise.

Windows

To “window” a tree means to selectively remove part of a tree, usually horizontal branches, so that someone can see through it to a distant view. This can work, but only in special circumstances:

- ∞ The tree needs to be close to your vantage point. If a tree is far away, you need to remove a big chunk of the tree to provide a window.
- ∞ *Windows tend to provide a view from a single vantage point.* If you need to see through a tree in many places, you need to choose and train your tree very carefully, in order to avoid a very chopped-up look. If you need to torture your tree into compliance with your need for multiple views, perhaps a tree is not a good choice.
- ∞ Single-trunked trees with horizontal, spreading branches are most suitable for windowing. Deodar cedar, for example, can be pruned this way, as can horizontally-branching varieties of redwood. Trees whose branches sweep upward, or trees with weeping branches, are poor candidates for windowing.

Thinning

Thinning is related to crown reduction in that it involves pruning back to laterals and trying to maintain a natural appearance to the tree. The major difference is that in thinning, the goal is not a smaller tree, but a more open tree that allows more light to the garden and reveals an interesting branch structure. In practice, these goals are often combined with the size control of crown reduction.

Thinning is a very effective way of allowing more light into the garden under the tree — however, it is almost impossible to thin most trees enough to provide more direct sun.

Pollarding

Pollarding is a system of pruning that allows for a very dense tree in a small space. It involves cutting branches at the same spot every year, and allowing new watersprouts to grow up for a year before being removed. This leads to trees with big knobs on their ends.

Depending upon one’s point of view, pollarding is either a legitimate pruning technique that allows for beautiful formal patterns otherwise unattainable or a per-

version of horticulture leading to cancerous looking trees.

Regardless of what you think of this technique, it is likely to be used, or at least attempted, quite a bit in the fire zone as a view control measure. London plane trees are by far the most commonly pollarded trees. Other trees that can be pollarded with more or less success include hornbeam, fig, linden, and catalpa.

Developing Multiple Leaders on a Tree

A common mistake people make is to grow a tree to the desired height, and only then start to prune the tree to control it. This can lead to an unsightly, poorly shaped tree with very little screening ability, and a lot of new growth constantly poking into the view.

Start to shape your tree well before it gets to the height you want it to be. This means that you will have to wait longer to achieve screening, but the extra wait is worth it.

Training to develop multiple leaders involves selecting several branches spaced well apart from each other and attempting to get each of them to grow to roughly equal size, while discouraging any single branch from becoming dominant and growing much faster and taller than the others. I strongly encourage you to hire an arborist to train your trees. A small amount of money spent at this point to do the job right will help you avoid ending up with an unsatisfactory tree.



LONG-TERM MAINTENANCE

How to Give Your Garden the Look of Maturity

Have you ever looked at a full-grown garden, which includes good-size trees, and gotten the impression that it was really nothing but a bunch of overgrown shrubs? This is a result of how pruning and plant selection affect the perceived size of a landscape.

With such strong social pressures favoring the selection of small trees, it is going to be even harder to design a garden that looks like it has grown to its rightful size. I would like to focus on three main points that will help you maximize the appearance of smaller trees.

- ∞ Round-headed trees look mature, while pyramidal and other trees with central leaders tend to look young. This holds true for both broadleaved and coniferous plants.
- ∞ Trees with the trunk exposed and the crown raised tend to look taller and more massive than trees with no visible trunk or branch structure.
- ∞ If you keep the trunk of your trees visually clear, and plant the area close to the trunk with low groundcover, or leave it bare, the tree will look larger and taller than if you plant shrubs next to it and obscure the trunk.

Although you may eventually want a tree with a clear trunk, it is a good idea to keep some lower branches on the tree for several years. This will help the tree develop a stronger trunk and minimize the need for staking.

Drought-Tolerant Landscaping

Drought tolerance is a matter of degree, as is drought itself. In the Bay Area, a drought-tolerant plant is generally considered to be a plant that can survive without summer water *if* we get normal winter rainfall. Plants from areas with Mediterranean climates (which, besides the countries of the Mediterranean basin, include large parts of California, Chile, South Africa, and Australia) tend to be able to

survive with little or no summer water. Plants that can survive extended periods of dry winters and dry summers are much harder to find.

Here is a useful rule of thumb — *The larger the tree, the more drought-tolerant it should be*. There are several reasons for this.

- ☞ It is entirely likely that at some point in the future there will be severe rationing of water for gardens.
- ☞ Large trees are the most important part of your garden and the part that you can least afford to lose.
- ☞ If a large tree dies due to lack of water, it is more expensive to remove than a small tree.

Monterey pines illustrate this principle perfectly. Though adapted to go without summer water under normal conditions, they become quite stressed during periods of extended drought. Right at the time when there is no water to spare, they need more. Stressed mature trees are very liable to attack by bark beetles. These beetles often kill the tree, which then has to be removed at great expense. They are not a good choice.

Coast live oaks, on the other hand, survive extended drought with minimal damage. A few get stressed and die, but most survive with no adverse effects. Live oak is a good choice to survive extended drought.

Fire-Resistant Landscaping

It is a virtual certainty that the rebuilt fire zone will be much more fire-resistant than it used to be. First, since wood-shake roofs are banned, the greatest single fire hazard is eliminated. Also, there will be much less fuel load, both because of vegetation management in wild areas and because there will be less total vegetation in residential areas. Just getting rid of all the burned Monterey pines and eucalyptus removes an incredible amount of fuel.

As you rebuild, I suggest that you think about acceptable risks. Almost nothing less than an asbestos bunker will protect you from a firestorm as happened in the first few hours in October 1991. However, the rebuilt landscape will be much more resistant to the spread of fire in less-than-catastrophic conditions.

One concept worth remembering is that of triage. In a large fire where firefighters have to choose which houses to try to save, they make quick, easy choices. “No trees in front, tile roof, savable house.” This is the kind of simplified decision that gets made out of necessity in emergencies. This is not to say, of course, that you should never plant trees in your front yard. It may be a good idea, however, to design your landscape not only to *be* fire-resistant, but to *appear* fire resistant to the casual observer.

What to Do With Existing Trees

Dead trees should be removed before construction starts. This is so self-evident that I hesitate to call it advice. However, throughout the fire zone are lots with standing dead trees and construction underway. It will cost more, and be more hazardous, to remove dead trees after a house is beside them.

Live Oaks

Many of the live oaks are coming back to a very limited extent, with new foliage that then becomes heavily mildewed. Trees with some live growth need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by an arborist. Make sure that the arborist explains the

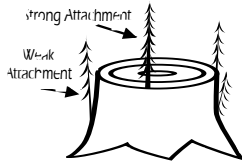
range of long-term prospects and maintenance options for the tree. As an example, an arborist may say that the tree in your back yard will “probably” survive but need restorative pruning. If it dies anyway, however, you would have been better off removing the tree before the start of construction, as the work would be easier and less expensive. I am not advocating one course or the other, only that you need to get good advice and make considered, informed decisions.

One thing worth remembering about live oaks is that they are categorically exempt from the provisions of the Oakland view ordinance, regardless of whether they are naturally occurring or are planted. This means that if you plant a live oak that eventually blocks your neighbor’s view, he cannot use the view ordinance to attempt to get you to prune your tree.

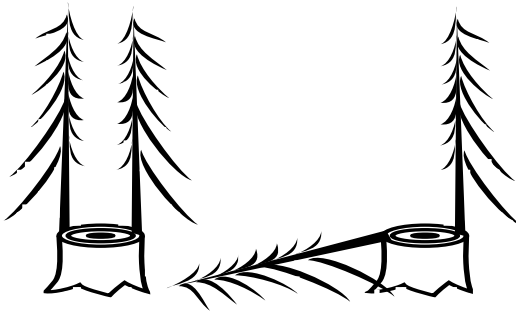
Redwoods

FIGURE 17

REDWOODS



The original branches grew from the center of the trunk. New suckers (called watersprouts if above ground level) are only attached to the outer edge of growing wood and break off easily. The suckers growing near the stump cut are more strongly attached than the ones growing lower down on the stump.



When two or more redwood trunks grow together (as in stump sprouts), they develop very uneven branch distribution, with lots of branches on the well-lit outside of the tree, but with fewer and smaller branches on the shady interior facing the other trunks. If one trunk is removed, the misshapen appearance of the remaining trunks becomes much more apparent. In addition, removing one trunk from a group, unless done early, renders the remaining unbalanced trunks more liable to being blown down in a high wind.

Redwoods pose special problems. Many of them were severely burned, but did not die. In some cases they are sprouting from the stump. If these sprouts are allowed to grow unhindered, the result will be a multi-trunked tree that is wider than the original, though not as tall (see Figure 17, on this page). In other cases, the top and side branches have died, but new sprouts are growing from the trunk.

Some homeowners have had their trees “topped” and “skinned” and are waiting for them to grow back to the original shape. These trees will likely require extensive restorative maintenance over the years to avoid a fuzzy-looking tree with multiple stems at the top. Even if maintained, the new branches, which are weakly attached to the tree, may be more liable to break off in storms. There are examples of redwoods that have recovered from severe fires and look like regular trees years later — however, the maintenance history of these trees is not known.

Another consideration is earthquakes. In the Santa Cruz mountains, there are areas where the tops of many trees snapped off in the Loma Prieta quake, and they all broke in the same direction, presumably in response to one extreme jolt that was just too much. When a large quake hits the Hayward Fault, it is very likely that these “reconstituted” redwoods will be much more liable to breakage than their undamaged brethren.

On the other hand — they may be funny-looking trees, but at least they're alive and providing some greenery in the landscape. Redwoods will probably become the dominant tree in the post-fire landscape, because it is not very likely that new trees will be allowed to grow as tall as the existing redwoods.

These redwoods, if allowed to live, are going to be subject to extreme pressures. While it is true that they are relatively narrow when compared to Monterey pine and blue gum, it is also true that almost every surviving redwood trunk is squarely in somebody's view. There will be great pressure to keep these trees very narrow in order to prevent lateral branches from encroaching on views.

Monterey pines

Most of the Monterey pines in the fire zone were killed. However, there are numerous trees around the margins of the fire zone that were merely damaged. Also, many trees that formerly were in the middle of groves are now exposed to the full force of the wind due to the death of their cohorts. These trees have not had to develop trunks sturdy enough to allow them to stand alone. They are very likely to have higher than normal rates of blowdown in storms. If you live within falling distance of Monterey pines, it is worth having their health and stability evaluated by an arborist, *even if they are not on your property.*

Acacias

Both blackwood acacia and Bailey's acacia were common throughout the fire zone. Both species are resprouting with a vengeance from cut stumps.

Acacias are beautiful trees — the question is whether they are appropriate in the fire zone. The problem is not so much the individual tree on a vacant lot, as much as their proclivity to spread through reseeding. On some hillsides they will become the dominant tree if nothing is done to control them.

Eucalyptus

There has been an endless amount written about whether or not eucalyptus, especially blue gum, contributed to the fire. Some experts feel they have been unfairly scapegoated, while others feel that eucalyptus forests and housing just cannot coexist. Still others try to strike a middle ground by claiming that it is possible to manage both eucalyptus and pine so that fire hazard is minimized.

I would like to put aside the question of determining fire hazard and consider what should be done with the thousands of eucalyptus stumps that are now resprouting vigorously. I have a piece of very simple advice — pull those suckers off! One-year-old suckers can easily be removed by hand. Older suckers will need to be cut. If you keep at it, you can starve the stump and it will eventually stop producing new suckers. If suckers are not controlled, many parts of the hills will soon have as thick a eucalyptus forest as before the fire.



SPECIAL DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Vacant Lots and New Neighbors

Many of you will be building houses adjacent to vacant lots. Some of these lots will not be built upon for several years. It is important to plan for the time when the lots will be filled. This includes construction, and living with new neighbors once they move in. Here are some things to keep in mind.

- ∞ Prune both sides of hedges. If you leave your neighbor's side of a hedge untrimmed, you may wake up one day to find it cut back so severely that it not only looks ugly, it is more subject to decay and provides less privacy than you need.
- ∞ Anticipate view needs and disputes.
- ∞ Have plans ready to increase privacy as needed.
- ∞ Document your view and the view from your neighbor's property at the time you buy, and at the time new construction starts.
- ∞ Decide ahead of time what your response will be when new neighbors come over and ask you to prune your tree. Your response should take the view ordinance into account, as well as general concepts of fairness. It is going to be tempting to exploit vacant lots to your east and north for privacy, and to load up on tall and thick trees on those sides. This is a recipe for conflict, as new neighbors will almost certainly feel shortchanged if your planting choices deprive them of views and sunlight.

Sideyards

One of the consequences of building houses with larger “footprints” is that there is going to be less space between houses than before. Narrower sideyards will allow less light between the buildings. Any shrubs or trees that are planted will need to be naturally thin or frequently pruned to allow light to the windows.

Since these windows are going to be closer than before, there is going to be

greater need for privacy. Unless one or both parties keep their windows curtained, some sort of screening will be needed.

Since many houses will be taller than before, there is going to be increased pressure by uphill homeowners to maintain the space between houses as a view corridor. Figure 18, on this page, demonstrates how this scenario results in a classic case of multiple demands on the same space by different parties who are competing for light, privacy and view. People may have to be satisfied with a situation in which nobody feels like a clear winner, but all three parties feel they have compromised their interests equally.

Accommodating Design Changes

Your garden will almost certainly need to be different than before the fire because your house and neighborhood will be different. Also, gardens are best designed within an existing context, such as an intact neighborhood. A garden that does not take into account your neighbors' plans or your own design changes may not work at all when actually installed.

Here, for example, are three common design changes that will affect your garden design, and the choice and siting of trees.

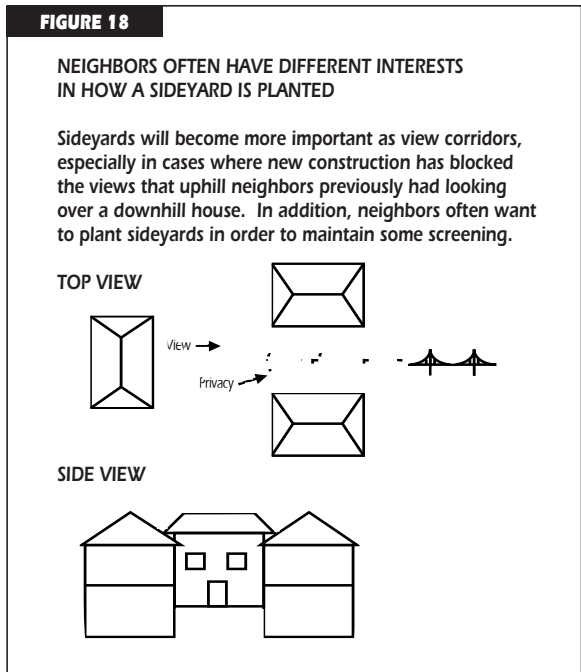
Design change 1: You rebuild with the original house plans.

This doesn't seem to be a change at all. However, your neighbors are rebuilding with different houses, the utilities are underground, some neighboring lots may remain vacant for years, and your neighbors will probably plant different trees than they had before. So, even though your house may be the same, the context in which you design your garden will be different.

I suggest you throw out your old landscaping plans and start from scratch. Use this book to help you figure out what you want your trees to do, not just now but ten or thirty years from now. Hardscape may change as well. The patio you used to have next to the neighbor's Monterey pine may now be looking directly up at three stories of stucco.

Design change 2: You rebuild with new house plans.

In this case, a new landscape will be designed. Unless your plans take your neighbors' houses and landscaping into account, you will probably not be satisfied with the long-term results. *The best way to get a satisfactory landscape is to wait until your house and other nearby houses under construction have been built.* You don't want to design a garden that includes a forty foot tree only to find that



your neighbor will take you to court if it gets over twenty five feet. Conversely, you don't want to play it safe by planting very small trees only to find yourself looking at your neighbor's rooftop ham radio antenna. Try to find out what your neighbors are planning, with regards to both house and garden. If possible, cooperate. If you can't cooperate, you will still be able to design a more satisfactory landscape if you know your neighbor's intentions.

Design change 3: You rebuild and also anticipate future remodels.

Some people may build a house now with the expectation of adding another room or story later. These people are faced with an imaginative challenge of major dimensions. Not only are they trying to imagine what their house and garden will look like years from now, they also have to anticipate what their unplanted garden will look like from an unbuilt addition to their as-yet-unbuilt house.

This is not easy, but there are a couple of things you can do. If you are planning on adding an additional story later, get up on a tall stepladder during the construction process and take pictures from the planned location of your prospective addition. These can be used to evaluate view and privacy concerns. Look at your planned trees and consider their eventual height and spread. A tree expected to grow above a picture window in the original house may then obscure the view from the addition, for example.

If you are considering making any changes in the foundation, you need to consider the roots of the trees you plant now. You may need to change the location of a given tree, or start a regular regime of root pruning to minimize future problems.

Totally Uncooperative Neighbors

Most of this book is based on the premise that you and your neighbors will at least try to get along. What do you do if you hate each other and do not want to compromise? The following advice applies whether you want a view, privacy, or solar access, and it applies whether you are the jerk or your neighbor is the jerk!

- ☞ Document everything possible. Take pictures of your lot before you build, of the view from every window just after construction, of the obstruction caused by your neighbor's house, of the glare of the neighbor's flashing, whatever. Put the date, time, and location on your pictures, especially if you are documenting solar access (for example, a picture might be taken facing south on December 21, at noon, from the front steps, or on April 15 at 10 a.m., from the kitchen window).
- ☞ Control the plants in question as much as possible. If you are trying to maintain privacy between you and your neighbor, for example, make sure to prune the part of the tree that is on your side of the property line in a manner that will encourage thick foliage.
- ☞ Anticipate problems. Don't find yourself waking up to your neighbor cutting off everything that hangs over his side of the property line. Prune before that happens to maintain density and shape.
- ☞ *Never plant a tree on the property line*, or even close to it. This has been the cause of endless disputes over the years. Even if you get along swimmingly with your neighbor, he or she may move, and your new neighbor may have totally different interests. Even smaller items like hedges are best planted clearly to one side of the property line.
- ☞ *Try to keep your dispute civil and limited to the problem at hand.* If you have an argument over a tree, don't let it escalate into a running feud that affects every aspect of your life. Nobody wins in these cases.



APPENDIX A VIEW ORDINANCES

How They Work and Their Effect on the Fire Zone

Before I even start to get into view ordinance issues, you need to understand one thing — a city can have a simple view ordinance, or have a view ordinance that attempts to be fair, but *it is not possible to have an ordinance that is both simple and fair*. The issues involved in view and solar access ordinances are very complex. Don't worry if you don't understand them — I purposefully put this material in an appendix, so that you wouldn't be scared away from reading the rest of the book.

Many people think they have a right to their view. However, neither view nor solar access is a common-law right. Both, however, can be granted by statute. View “rights” are conditional easements that affect property rights of both the view-seeker and the tree owner. *People pay for a view, but they do not buy one*. Many people do not understand this, and thus find themselves in conflict with the neighbors and city government.

Oakland has a view ordinance on the books and is considering revising it in response to the unprecedented issues raised by the fire. Berkeley has a view and solar access ordinance which is roughly similar to that of Oakland; it too is under consideration for revision. Since the vast majority of houses burned were in Oakland, I am discussing that city's ordinance here.

I am only going to go into detail regarding Oakland's view ordinance that pertains to vegetative growth. The effect of construction on views is a separate issue.

How the Oakland Ordinance Works

A homeowner can make a claim against a neighbor based on the view that the homeowner had when he or she bought the property (however, all coast live oaks and California bay laurel are exempted, as are other indigenous trees where present due to natural regeneration). This claim, which includes documentation of the view at the time of purchase and the subsequent loss of that view, can be resolved by mutual agreement of the two parties or (if that fails) in binding arbitration, or (if arbitration is not chosen) by litigation.

In arbitration and litigation, the “benefits” provided by the tree are weighed

against the “burdens” it poses. An arbitrator or judge may decide on any level of action ranging from “no action” to removal of the tree. This is important to understand — *the view ordinance does not guarantee that you can retain all the view you had when you bought your house*. If the benefits posed by the tree outweigh its burdens, or if the amount of view lost is only a small fraction of a larger view, the view seeker may be able to get only part of the view back, or possibly none.

This is complicated enough, and yet it is a greatly simplified explanation of how the ordinance works in a typical neighborhood. The fire zone is infinitely more complex. Consider these problems:

- ☞ The houses, the trees, and the photographs that documented previous views have all burned. The net result is that documenting the previous view is impossible.
- ☞ Oakland’s ordinance in its current form provides that a homeowner may try to reclaim the view that existed at the time he or she bought the property. In practice, this creates two classes of homeowners:
 - (1) If you bought a lot from someone who decided not to rebuild, you had a virtually unobstructed view at the time you purchased the lot. As the ordinance now stands, you have the right to attempt to keep any trees from encroaching upon any part of your view;
 - (2) If you owned your house before the fire and are rebuilding, you are entitled to make claims based on the view at the time of purchase. So, if you bought your house in 1980, you can wait until your neighbors’ trees grow into your 1980 view and then make a claim to get the trees cut.

This has the odd result that typical neighborhood dynamics are reversed. In a more normal neighborhood, new owners try to fit into a neighborhood. In the fire zone, however, they have what amounts to a veto power over the landscape decisions of a long-term resident.

- ☞ Many houses will be rebuilt with entirely new plans. Is a homeowner entitled to make a view claim based on the view from the old house, or from the new house, which has windows in different locations and at different elevations?
- ☞ It is not clear if “view” is limited to one prime vantage point, or to any and all potential vantage points, or some combination. For example, if someone builds a two-story house with the living room on the ground floor and the master bedroom on the upper floor, is he entitled to try to maintain the view from the living room or only from the second story?
- ☞ In cases where a tree has suffered fire damage but still survives, and the top and/or some branches are removed for safety reasons and for the health of the tree, should the tree be allowed to regrow to its original size? If not, does this mean that it may be in a homeowner’s interest to keep his trees in a hazardous condition in order to retain his “tree space rights”?

These are not all of the questions that need to be answered, just the most important ones. In my opinion, the Oakland view ordinance is fatally flawed as a way to regulate tree growth in the fire area, and can’t be fixed. Personally, I think the best solution would be to declare the ordinance null and void in the fire zone. People



would then have to attempt to resolve their disputes solely by persuasion and negotiation. However, this outcome is extremely unlikely.

What I think most probable is that the city will do very little, because it can figure no way to “fix” the ordinance without making the situation even more complicated. The whole issue may get decided by the courts in a way that the average person can understand, but that doesn’t seem very likely either.

It is impossible to know at this time whether a homeowner can grow a tree that blocks another’s view without being in a dispute and possible lawsuit. Given that uncertainty, I advise homeowners to play it safe — either choose small trees or train larger trees so that, if necessary, they can be kept small without undue violence to the tree’s appearance and health.



APPENDIX B A CHECK LIST

Consider These Factors When Choosing and Siting a Tree

Don't be intimidated by the length of the list — most people will choose several characteristics that are of primary importance to them and concentrate on getting a tree that comes the closest to fulfilling those needs. Leaf shape may not be important to you at all, for example, while tolerance for poor drainage may be absolutely necessary.

Cultural Preferences

- ☞ sun
- ☞ part shade
- ☞ dense shade
- ☞ part shade
- ☞ dense shade
- ☞ good drainage
- ☞ no summer water
- ☞ occasional summer water
- ☞ regular summer water
- ☞ acid soil
- ☞ alkaline soil

Tolerances

(these are not necessarily conditions that the plant prefers, but common stresses that it would tolerate)

- ☞ normal summer drought
- ☞ extended drought
- ☞ summer irrigation
- ☞ wind
- ☞ heatwaves (the occasional periods of several days with the temperature above 90 F.)

- ☞ frost
- ☞ deer
- ☞ poor drainage
- ☞ heavy pruning

Physical Characteristics

- ☞ height at maturity (__ft. to __ft.)
- ☞ branch spread (__ft. to __ft.)
- ☞ natural shape
- ☞ deciduous or evergreen
- ☞ broadleaf or conifer
- ☞ interesting bark, leaf or branch patterns
- ☞ fall color
- ☞ messy fruit
- ☞ leaf drop
- ☞ flowers
- ☞ fragrant leaves
- ☞ produces root suckers
- ☞ allergenic pollen

Pests and Diseases

Diseases

- ∞ armillaria
- ∞ verticillium
- ∞ fireblight
- ∞ mildew
- ∞ anthracnose
- ∞ ganoderma
- ∞ other

Pests

- ∞ thrips
- ∞ aphids
- ∞ psyllids
- ∞ scale
- ∞ gophers
- ∞ whitefly
- ∞ borers
- ∞ oak moth
- ∞ squirrels
- ∞ other

Wildlife

Attracts

- ∞ birds
- ∞ bees
- ∞ butterflies
- ∞ squirrels
- ∞ raccoons

Nest sites

- ∞ birds
- ∞ rats

Siting Considerations

- ∞ effect on your views
- ∞ effect on neighbors' views
- ∞ effect on screening
- ∞ effect on shading your house and garden
- ∞ effect on neighbors' gardens
- ∞ effect on maintenance (for example: a tree at the bottom of a hill in the backyard will be more expen-

sive to prune than one close to the street, because it is more difficult to haul debris and to gain access in the first place)

- ∞ effect on pruning options (only trees close to a vantage point are well suited to prune windows, for example)

Potential Liabilities

- ∞ interferes with view
- ∞ interferes with solar access
- ∞ fire hazard
- ∞ physical hazard
- ∞ leaves in gutter
- ∞ "honeydew" exudate
- ∞ root problems (invasion of sewers, lifts concrete, shallow roots in lawns and gardens)

Pruning Considerations

- ∞ tolerates annual pruning
- ∞ can be pruned to develop multiple leaders (yes, no, with difficulty)
- ∞ tends to produce watersprouts
- ∞ protection against decay (good, average, poor)
- ∞ can be espaliered
- ∞ can be windowed
- ∞ can be kept to size
- ∞ subject to storm damage
- ∞ can be thinned

Costs

- ∞ tree and planting
- ∞ pruning
- ∞ hauling debris
- ∞ spraying
- ∞ fertilizing



APPENDIX C FURTHER READING

There is an unbelievable amount of written material available about trees and about gardening. I've narrowed down the list to those books and pamphlets I feel are most useful for the homeowner with minimal expertise.

Compatible Plants Under and Around Oaks, California Oak Foundation, Sacramento, CA; 1991.

This book brings together a lot of information in an easy-to-read format. The introduction discusses how to grow oaks.

Firescape — Landscaping to Reduce Fire Hazard, East Bay Municipal Utility District, Oakland, CA; 1992.

A very useful, well-organized, free booklet. Many lists and clear graphics.

Tree Pruning: A Worldwide Photo Guide, by Alex Shigo (4 Denbow Road, Durham New Hampshire 03824); 1989.

If you want to do any pruning on your own, this is the most informative book. Numerous photos show the effects of different pruning practices.

Trees of the Berkeley Campus, University of California, Berkeley, CA; 1976.

If you are interested in what your trees may look like when they mature, *get this book at the U.C. bookstore!* Each person reacts to trees differently, and photographs and descriptions are not the best way to make a decision. This book tells you exactly where to see full grown trees of many different species and varieties.

Water Conserving Plants and Landscapes for the Bay Area, East Bay Municipal Utility District, Oakland, CA; 1990.

A very well-organized book with a wealth of information and photographs of each plant discussed.

Western Garden Book. Sunset Books, Menlo Park, CA, 1988.

The standard gardening reference book for the West.



About the Author

Richard Trout, a certified arborist, has had a tree care business in the East Bay for the past fifteen years. Prior to that, he was a landscape gardener. He co-authored the Berkeley View and Solar Access Ordinance, has advised the Berkeley Street Tree Subcommittee, and is currently a member of the Berkeley Solar Access and View Committee.