

The Reactor

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Those 'Weedy' Trees

I love trees as much as the next guy, but the smartest thing I ever did was to get rid of the Monterey pines I planted in my front yard about 25 naive years ago. It took them about 15 years to get almost to the stage where they qualified as heritage trees. My wife knew the wife of a tree trimmer. Her husband came over one weekend, strapped on his belt and his spikes and went up those trees at flank speed.

His arm held the chain saw straight out, as he notched and whacked pieces of each tree. As each chunk of pine dug into the earth I thought to myself "Boy, what a bargain!"

This happened during the drought of the late '70s, when some of the tree roots had started to snake above ground, searching for water. I didn't want a tree to fall on my house. That's why I made the decision to get rid of the trees. I didn't know about the heritage tree ordinance then. I'm sure I would have been even more adamant about removing them if I had known I would have to go through a bureaucratic hoo-ha just for allowing them to grow a little more. I am sure that the goal of the ordinance is something quite different, but the practical result of such an ordinance should be to alert every home owner to check the circumference of his trees. If they are approaching the critical 50 inches in circumference 24 inches above the base, he should seriously consider cutting them down NOW!

The alternative is to give the city, and interfering neighbors, the option to delay or prevent him from removing his own property from his own property. I don't think anyone should be forced to go through a lot of hassle before he is allowed to get rid of weedy trees like Monterey pine and Monterey cypress.

These are short-lived, very fast growing trees. Planted too close to a home they are dangerous. No one needs a tree falling on his roof. In a small yard, it takes no more than ten years for a Monterey pine to go from pleasant landscape to shedding, sidewalk-breaking monster.

I have two well-behaved trees in my backyard I thought of as heritage trees the day I planted them. One is a ginkgo. It would be at home with your favorite dinosaur. It is a living fossil. While not rare in the United States, it does have a special story, and a heritage.

The other tree in my backyard is a dawn redwood. This deciduous redwood was discovered living in the interior of China three years after it first became known as a 70-million-year-old fossil. The romantic story of its discovery and the San Francisco Chronicle writer who helped save the species has been told by Willy Ley, in his famous book, *Dragons In Amber*.

These are my kinds of heritage trees. They are worth saving. If you have a potential nuisance of a tree get rid of it, before you need your neighbor's permission, or that of the Parks, Beach and Recreation Commission.

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