

ASK CYNTHIA: Reader Requests

Dear Cynthia:

Your column gives me great ideas and new ways to think about gardening. Thanks! I have a problem and hope you will shed some light. I read the story on the front page of the April 25th Lamorinda Weekly edition about "Moraga's Johnny Redwood Seed" with trepidation. When we moved to our Orinda house we had beautiful sunset views until a neighbor below us planted redwoods. Our view is now gone, we have little sunshine, and our landscaping has died in the shade. We are very unhappy but they refuse to cut them down. What can we do? AJ

Hello Orinda AJ:

While I admire Kevin Bernie's love of trees in the April 25th article, I don't blame you for being discouraged. I agree with you that those trees must be topped or removed. Most CC & R's, design review boards, and city ordinances provide provisions for maintaining views. Check with your city offices about the local tree regulations. If they can't help you, unfortunately, you'll probably need a lawyer and not a gardening guide.

With that said, here's a tree lesson for locals.

At the time Moraga was known as Rancho Laguna de Los Palos Colorados (Ranch of the Lake of Redwoods), Lamorinda was not a developed area. As ancient and majestic as redwoods are, and despite the fact that they are sold in most garden centers, they are not viable choices to plant in neighborhoods, unless one doesn't care about being neighborly.

Redwoods are rapid growers, adding five to seven feet per year until they eventually reach a height of 300-375 feet with a girth of twenty to thirty feet. They will outlive us, our children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and beyond.

Redwoods block vistas and sunshine. As evergreens, they provide year round shade, limiting what will grow underneath. About a third of their limbs drop yearly and the foliage will block drains and clog drain-pipes. With shallow roots, they tend to suck nutrients out of the soil and if too near homes can destroy foundations, pathways, patios, and drive-ways. Being expensive to move, remove, or prune, redwoods were not intended for suburban yards.

Unless you live at the top of the hill with no one around and you plan on being in that location forever, think thrice before planting a redwood. In advance of digging that hole for that precious small tree that will quickly sprout to its reputation of being the tallest tree on earth, get the permission of those who live in front, behind, and next to you. They may have purchased their home for the amount of sunshine or pictorial views and paid a hefty price for that bonus. Your beloved redwoods will surely destroy everything, including the friendship, within a few short years. Landscapers tend to plant in multiples of three to five meaning that your trees have the potential to create a thirty story hedge over 150 feet wide. That is one giant fence.

With the abundance of beautiful trees available, visit redwoods where they thrive... in a redwood grove. A drive through the beautiful, yet dark dense redwood forests of Canyon provides plenty of warning of what will transpire when we plant the tallest living specimen on this planet in our lots.

I wish you and your redwood neighbors peace and good fortune.

Cynthia Brian
The Goddess Gardener

Cynthia will answer one or two questions per issue as space allows. Email your comments or questions to Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com

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