

Signature Trees Speak for Themselves

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Erach Tarapore rakes his leaves on Michael Lane in Lafayette. He has taken care of his Modesto ash for more than 30 years.

“People think they’re evergreen, that they’re going to be low maintenance,” Olmstead says. “They’re like the ...” And he is obviously resisting using more Latin, so like the good people-person he is, he changes tack and goes back to English. “Redwoods are not low-maintenance,” he reports.

For one, redwoods shed their leaves, too. Sure, some people call them needles but they amount to the same thing. Trees have to be maintained. They can’t be planted somewhere under dubious soil circumstances and then fall down, say, and kill somebody. They can’t wiggle their roots into other people’s water pipes or sewage systems. People who plant trees have responsibilities, Olmstead says: They have to keep them healthy, clean up after them, and be responsible for them when they’re young, care for them as they mature. It begins to feel as if one is talking to a sex education counselor about responsible parenting.

So what do you plant if you want that magical effect?

“You start with how big,” he says, going back to the beginning, then he takes a big breath and his eyes almost start to well up. His passion for trees becomes obvious. “Deciduous trees are probably the best bet. You get everything with deciduous. Spectacular spring blossoms, bright green in the summer with shade, than fall color. You really can’t beat deciduous trees.”

Some people will plant collections, Olmstead explains. Like birches, in sets of three, “for faith, hope and charity.” And yes, he says, you have to rake the leaves. You have to watch out for the fruits that fall, which can be tedious to get rid of, especially when they’re knarly, like sycamores and others. Yes, you have to water it, preferably with a drip system that’s slow and deep off and on for a year or two – he will give you the amounts and times and everything else – and yes, they aren’t that pretty in the wintertime. But, he adds, “it’s winter.”

Still, the time comes to pay for the spectacular presentation of a nice tree. Erach



A beautiful oak on Burton Drive in Lafayette doesn't have to define a single house - it defines the whole neighborhood.

Photos Chris Lavin

Tapore of Michael Lane in Lafayette was found recently raking leaves quickly and dumping them into giant bags to get ready for an incoming storm. When asked why he bothered with a tree he had to care for, his face lit up: “This is a Modesto ash! They are beautiful trees, planted all along here,” he says, motioning up the lane. He has cared for his tree for more than 30 years, he says, and feels as if he has a relationship with it. He has it pruned every five to 10 years, and worries a bit about the mistletoe that’s taken hold high in its branches. He doesn’t mind doing the raking.

“I had to do it,” says Tarapore, holding his rake. “The tree will say, ‘I see you!’ And I know I have to do something. This is what I have to do today.”



Trees don't have to define the house. They also can provide swings with a needed branch.