

Published April 20th, 2016

Digging Deep

By Cynthia Brian



The ivy growing up the cottonwood and the shaggy palms.

voluntarily seeded itself in my front yard. Over the winter, mistletoe dangled from the heights, ivy strangled the trunk, and giant ugly mushrooms sprouted along the base. While other trees on the property had leaves unfurling when the vernal equinox approached, my cottonwood remained haunted.

Over the years, Advance Tree Service had delivered free wood chips to my property as mulch for my garden. It was time to call the arborist cavalry there. Owner and President Darren Edwards confirmed that the tree was dead and needed prompt removal. He offered a reasonable bid and we set up a time for his crew to prune my palm fronds and cut down the dead cottonwood. I used the occasion to find out more about the company, proper tree care and how to spot trouble.

Growing up in Moraga, Edwards was nicknamed "Dedwards", AKA "Dead Wood" in junior high. The name would prove prophetic. In 1987 he began working for a tree care company and realized he loved everything about the work: being outdoors in nature, climbing trees, meeting people and taking care of the environment. By 1991 he had started his own business with a single pick-up truck and climbing gear. His entrepreneurial father, Lew, realized how much Edwards enjoyed what he was doing and partnered with him in 1994 to form the official Advance Tree Service, Inc. It became a family affair with his mom, Fay, and two sisters, Lorie and Lisa, also involved.

Both father and son went back to school to become certified arborists so that they would have the professional knowledge necessary to understand the internal biology, growth habits, pests, diseases, and best pruning and removal practices.

Edwards indicated that by the end of April deciduous trees have leafed out and should be

"Trees are poems the earth writes upon the sky" - Kahlil Gibran

It was a glorious sunny day, almost mocking the tragedy that was to come. As my grandfather mowed his lawn - something he'd done many times before - the limb of a diseased elm tree came crashing down on him. He was killed instantly.

I write this week's article as a cautionary tale. My grandfather knew the tree was diseased, but the city he lived in had not yet issued the permits needed to remove it. With this tragedy always in my heart, I am forever diligent in inspecting my trees.

Trees are the life source of our world, offering so much for so little. Trees clean our air, provide shade, offer oxygen, filter runoff drainage, and cool the air. Without trees, many species of birds, squirrels, bees, and other wildlife would not have habitat. Trees beautify a neighborhood, conserve energy in our homes, bear fruit and offer climbing structures for adventurous children. Trees are harvested to make furniture, paper products, and firewood. Sitting next to a tree recalibrates our bodily energy. Property values are higher in residential areas with mature trees. Trees are indeed poems written in the sky.

This past year moss began to form on the branches of the gigantic cottonwood tree that had

looking fresh and healthy. Because of our California drought, many trees have suffered injury. Many have died, are dying or are extremely stressed. It's time to take a walk around your property to inspect your trees and larger shrubs. Check for dead, dry, brittle branches and holes in the bark or trunk. If you have a suspicion that a tree may be impaired, it's critical to contact a certified arborist who will be able to identify hazards and offer advice. If your tree needs a treatment or removal, they will help identify your options.

What YOU can do to protect your trees:

1. Plant the correct tree in the correct area. Before planting a tree, learn more about its habits.

Considerations include:

- How tall and wide will the tree be at maturity?
- How much water does this specimen require?
- Is it disease prone?
- Will it survive in a drought?
- Does it bear fruit?
- Is it evergreen or deciduous?
- Will your tree block a neighbor's view?
- Is it appropriate for your landscape?
- How will it look in all four seasons?
- Keep rocks away from around the base. Rocks get hot and the heat is not good for the roots.

Use mulch instead.

- Trees are thirsty, especially redwoods. They need water all year long. Large trees need more hydration with a deep watering wand.
- Prune correctly. Improper pruning damages trees. Watch for crossovers.
- Remove suckers from the base of trees.
- Hire a certified arborist to inspect your trees. Ask questions and learn.

Signs of Trouble:

- Mushrooms growing at the base of the tree. These are poisonous, do not consider eating them.
- Mistletoe hanging from the branches. As much as we love mistletoe at Christmas, it is always a sign of concern when it invades a tree.
- Branches without leaves and no new growth evident.
- Ivy or other vines climbing the trunk. Remove quickly.

What to Look for in a Tree Specialist for Hire:

- Arborist certification
- Valid state contractor's license
- Certified Tree Care Safety Professional by the Tree Care Industry Association(TCIA)
- Insurance
- Workers' Compensation
- Experience over cost
- Ask for recommendations and do your research
- Get an evaluation and a written bid before proceeding

My cottonwood exhibited all of the warning signs. The branches were so brittle that a bucket truck was necessary to elevate a worker with a chainsaw to cut the branches. When a tree is healthy, it can be climbed for pruning, but if the tree is dead, it could be too dangerous to attempt to climb it. The crew placed plywood in a "V" position to catch the cut branches as they fell. They then cut the pieces into firewood. Another option is to chip all of the wood for mulch.

After the cottonwood was finished, the bucket was used to cut the dry branches from the Mexican palms. Advance cleaned up the area and left the mulch for me to use in my garden.

If you are considering planting trees this spring, consider this:

- Redwoods and pines need copious amounts of water. Don't plant them. Pines are also very flammable.
- Ornamental trees such as red buds, pistachio, and Japanese maple do well with little water.
- The most drought resistant species are the natives: oaks, buckeye, manzanita and madrone, as they need very little water and in fact, won't thrive with too much.

The danger of a falling tree is real. Most homeowners are not really aware of the signals that

trees exhibit when they are suffering. Don't wait too long to have your trees inspected. It's far better to be safe than sorry.

"The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now." - Chinese Proverb

Cynthia Brian's Mid-Month Reminders:

CELEBRATE Arbor Day on April 29. Plant a tree or offer gratitude for the trees you already have.

AERATE lawns to help with proper drainage and root growth.

PREVENT unwanted pests, including termites, ants, grubs, etc. with an organic spray. Cedar oil contained in Yard Guard is safe for pets and children.

PROTECT peony buds from freezing once they've sprouted by putting a sheet over them before frost is expected.

ALLOW the leaves from bulbs that have completed blooming to turn brown and crispy. Daffodils and narcissi require this procedure to refuel the bulb for next year's flowering.



Using a bucket to cut down the cottonwood tree. Photos Cynthia Brian



Free wood chips and firewood are offered to customers.





A view through the trees of the tree trimmer in the bucket.



The ugly tree mushroom growing at the base of the tree.



Equipment for tree cutting.



A stellar showing of short lived grape-like clusters of purple wisteria twine through an arbor.



Crew of Advance Tree Service with owner Darren "Deadwood" Edwards and Cynthia Brian.

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