



TREES AND VIEWS

Any discussion about trees and other vegetation with respect to the preservation of views from private property must begin with a realization that both views and vegetation have considerable value and can co-exist. While experts tell us that a scenic view adds value to our home, they also tell us that trees and landscaping can account for between five and ten percent of our property's worth. Santa Barbara residents enjoy their private views of the ocean, mountains, and the city but also realize that attractive landscapes, including skyline trees, are an essential part of a valued — and valuable — public or private view.

This brief brochure has been compiled to suggest creative ways to reap the benefits of both trees and views.



In January 2002, a View Ordinance (Municipal Code Section 22.76) was adopted by City Council to establish a private process for neighbors to resolve disputes regarding blockage of private views by trees or other vegetation. The ordinance established the right of property owners to a private view, but stipulates that a private view may not necessarily be restored to an unobstructed panorama. The process encourages neighbors to seek assistance from certified arborists, mediators and arbitrators to identify a solution satisfactory to both neighbors. A brochure on the view dispute resolution process is available from both the Community Development and Parks and Recreation departments.

When a View Claim Is Initiated, Consider Value:

Whether you are the tree owner or the complainant, consider the value of the disputed vegetation to you and to your neighbors. Large trees add value to the owner's property, to the neighborhood, and to the whole community. Trees replenish oxygen, improve air quality, and provide wildlife habitat. Your tree may afford privacy to both you and your neighbor while mitigating an otherwise unrelieved public view of hillside homes. You may benefit from the shading and cooling effects of the disputed tree and from the way it buffers wind and anchors the soil, preventing erosion. The borrowed views of neighbors' trees can enhance the aesthetic qualities of your own landscape. On the other hand, poorly-maintained trees and other vegetation can be fire hazards. Consider how the co-existence of vegetation and view may benefit everyone involved.



Assess the tree's physical condition:

Is it healthy? Is it old or hazardous? Does it require too much maintenance or water? Does its location in the landscape serve your lifestyle? A different tree, or perhaps even the same kind of tree in a different location, may provide better value for you while answering your neighbor's objections. A landscape professional, certified arborist, or nursery person may be able to help you address these issues. You may also decide to have your tree appraised by a qualified tree appraiser. Photos taken of the tree and view before and after view restoration may prove useful.

If an agreement is not reached: If you and your neighbor cannot reach agreement on the view restoration, find a mediator or arbitrator to help achieve the best possible result. Having followed the steps suggested here, you will be well prepared for negotiation if your initial discussions with your neighbor do not achieve a balanced resolution.

Additional City Tree Ordinances

Santa Barbara has two ordinances which regulate the planting, pruning, and removal of City trees and residential front yard setback trees (Municipal Code Sections 15.20 and 15.24). One of the purposes of these ordinances is to serve the public welfare by protecting trees from destructive pruning and unwarranted removal. The ordinances also define how a City tree or a privately-owned tree can be given special protection by the designation "Historic" or "Specimen" tree.

These tree preservation ordinances may limit view restoration options. A City permit allowing tree pruning or removal may be required. Contact the office of the City Arborist at 564-5433 to find out about special tree designations and permits.

All ordinances can be found in the Municipal Code available on the City's web site at www.ci.santa-barbara.ca.us.

Proper Pruning Restores Views Without Damaging Trees



Each view restoration situation is unique. In order to reasonably restore a view without unnecessarily damaging or sacrificing trees, it is important to appreciate the desires of each party while understanding and preserving the form and growth habit of the disputed tree or trees.

The guiding principle of tree pruning for view enhancement is to work with the natural branching habit of the tree. Avoid stubbing cuts (**topping**) and excessive thinning; either of these practices results in over-pruning. Trees may die from over-pruning or respond with rampant growth of weakly attached branches which quickly obscure the view again.

Several techniques, used alone or in combination, comprise excellent view restoration strategies. **Crown thinning** and creating “**windows**” are the two pruning techniques which provide the benefits of both views and vegetation. Selective removal of branches by these techniques provides, in the first case, a filtered view, and, in the second, a view as seen through a window in the tree canopy. These two pruning techniques, if properly done, restore views with the least amount of injury to the tree itself and to the role it plays in the landscape.

Other modes of view restoration are **crown reduction pruning** or even **tree removal**. Crown reduction can reduce the overall height of the tree with appropriate thinning cuts. Crown reduction is not the same as topping.

Do not top trees!

The growth that may follow develops into weakly attached limbs. These limbs have a strong tendency to break from the tree. Topping stresses the entire tree, leaving it susceptible to disease, insect infestation and death.

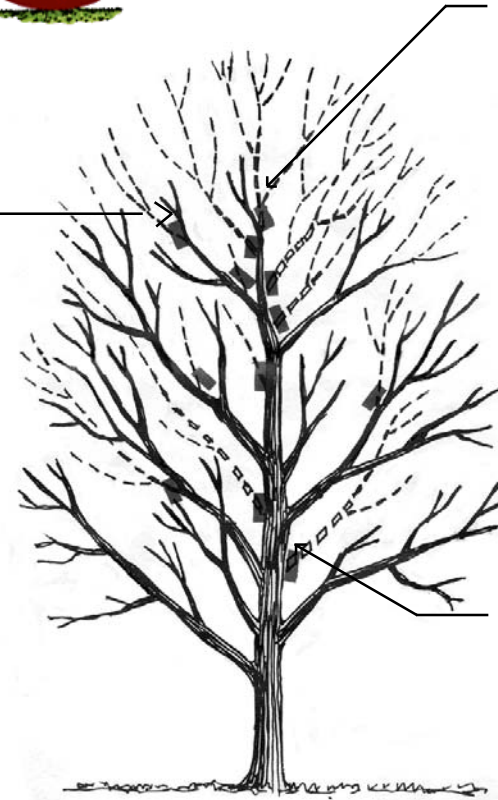


Topped California Pepper Tree



Do not top trees!

Perimeter limbs are pruned where they join large-diameter branches



The tallest branches are cut back to a large diameter secondary branch so that a leader remains.

To thin the tree, some branches are cut off back to the main trunk.

Crown reduction pruning

Tree removal followed by the planting of another tree in a different location on the property may be, in some cases, the only reasonable option. Alternatively, a more suitable tree may be planted at the site of the tree that was removed. Tree removal is listed in the *City View Dispute Resolution Process Ordinance* (MC 22.76) “hierarchy” of view restoration options as the last resort.



How to Find and Work with a Qualified Arborist

Making decisions about pruning which will enhance a view while preserving or even improving tree health is not always a simple matter. A trained expert may help you find the most comprehensive solution. The following guidelines may be used to find reputable professionals who will advise you and carry out your view restoration decisions conscientiously.

- Before hiring a tree worker, verify that he or she is currently a Certified Arborist with the International Society of Arboriculture. Contact the ISA at (530) 892-1118 or at www.isa-arbor.com.
- Phone the office of the Santa Barbara City Arborist at 805-564-5433 for a list of local Certified Arborists.
- Ask for local customer references from any arborist you may consider hiring. Contact those references and the Better Business Bureau.
- Obtain a written proposal for the scope of consulting services or the specific tree care services being offered and insist on having a written service contract. You may want to get several bids, but note that the lowest bid may not necessarily indicate the most qualified service.
- If actual tree removal or pruning services are being offered, insist that the company or individual demonstrate proof of a State contractor's license, a City business license, adequate property damage and liability insurance, and workers' compensation insurance policies.
- Be present if at all possible to observe tree work in progress in order to clarify your expectations and answer questions that may arise.

The Right Tree in the Right Place



Good planning can help you create a beautiful landscape with the fewest long-term problems. Here are some things to consider that will help you choose the right tree for the right place:

- Decide if you want a deciduous tree (one which loses its leaves in winter) or an evergreen (either a broadleaf evergreen or one with needles). Both evergreen and deciduous trees will provide summer shade; an evergreen will shade the site year round.
- Choose a tree whose ultimate size and shape fits your planting site. Some trees are upright, some conical or spreading. A spreading tree close to a property line may encroach on a neighbor's yard. An upright or conical tree may grow into overhead utility lines. Look for several mature examples for comparison and consider asking a qualified professional for advice.
- Consider the color, texture and shape of leaves as well as flowering and fruiting habits of your potential choices. All trees shed leaves, flowers, and fruit—some more than others.
- The majority of a tree's roots grow in the upper eighteen inches of soil. Surface roots can be a problem in your own or your neighbor's yard. Ask a qualified professional about the rooting habit of the trees you are considering. Root barriers installed during planting can often reduce problems.
- Are the water needs of your potential choices compatible with your existing landscape? Native oaks and some other species may be killed by year round irrigation. Rule out trees which are highly susceptible to annual leaf blight, defoliating pests or which commonly suffer from structural weaknesses that frequently result in branch splitting.

Remember, an optimal solution to a dispute will be one which you and your neighbor work out together. Explore solutions that will preserve the value of trees and views. Use this brochure as part of the strategy of good planning, good pruning, and good communication that will enhance and preserve the beauty of Santa Barbara.

Additional Resources:

Santa Barbara City Arborist
402 East Ortega Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
ph. 805 564-5433 www.sbparksandrecreation.com

International Society of Arboriculture
Post Office Box 3129
Champaign, IL 61826-3129
(217) 355-9411
FAX (217) 355-9516
(402) 474-5655
www.isa-arbor.com

The National Arbor Day Foundation
100 Arbor Ave.
Nebraska City, NE 68410
www.arborday.org

Sunset Western Garden Book



Selection of *Tree City USA Bulletins* by the National Arbor Day Foundation:

- #1 *Pruning Young Shade Trees*
- #4 *The Right Tree for the Right Place*
- #6 *How to Hire an Arborist*
- #8 *Don't Top Trees*
- #15 *Recognize and Prevent Hazard Trees*
- #28 *Placing a Value on a Tree*
- #30 *Ten Tree Myths to Think About*

Available at the Parks and Recreation Administrative Office,
620 Laguna Street, Santa Barbara 805-564-5433

Acknowledgements:

- Horticulture Consortium of Santa Barbara and contributions by local professional arborists and horticulturalists

CITY OF SANTA BARBARA
Parks & Recreation
Enriching People's Lives

