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Curb Your Planting Habits or Risk Waste from Removal

By David Goldstein, VCPWA, IWMD

Although adding trees and other vegetation to your landscape can be a great move to enhance your personal environment while helping the planet, several risks should be considered when deciding which plants to add and where to place them.

Trees, bamboo, or large bushes can grow into the eaves of your home, roots can disrupt your plumbing or crack your pavement, and fallen leaves from a deciduous tree can become a burden. Even the shade of a tree, so valuable for reducing cooling bills in the summer, can become a problem if it prevents your vegetable garden or your solar panels from receiving sunlight. In some cases, vegetation can become a fire hazard, and in other cases, invasive, exotic species can spread, wiping out native vegetation.

Add to this list of cautions additional ones related to vegetation near curbs. Most cities restrict how close plants can be to a curb as well as the minimum allowable heights for branches overhanging sidewalks or streets beyond the curb. People who live on corners are usually also required to keep vegetation low enough so drivers can see approaching traffic as they near an intersection.

Homeowners are generally responsible for trees in the city-owned landscape strip between their home and the street. However, planting, pruning, or removing trees from these strips usually requires a permit from the city.

Some cities also have ordinances making homeowners liable for obstructing the views of other homes. For example, in 2014, the city of Ventura passed an ordinance setting up a dispute resolution process for views blocked by trees. Each unresolved dispute can potentially end in a court case where the loser must pay the winner's legal costs. The key element for consideration is whether the quality of the view has changed since the move-in date of the homeowner whose view is being blocked.

New trees and other vegetation can hold carbon, produce oxygen, filter particulate pollution, create shade, and prevent erosion while beautifying a neighborhood. However, careful consideration is needed. The wrong planting in the wrong place can become an expensive item to remove and discard.