



Saying Goodbye to Trees **Dianne Westlake**

We have recently said goodbye to some friends in our garden.

Last week we had a number of our trees taken down. If you have to do this, be sure to have professionals do the work. Like an enormous puzzle, dismantling a mature tree is a complicated task. It is like watching performance art, fifty feet in the air. There is too much at stake in terms of personal injury and property damage to try it yourself.

We are using much of the wood for heating and had the smaller pieces chipped to use as mulch.

While this is sad, it is also an opportunity to change a shade garden into a new sunny garden. There will no longer be a great deal of competition for moisture and nutrients. A new bed can be designed, the shade loving plants moved and new ornamental trees, shrubs, ornamental grasses and perennials added.

Eight years ago when we bought our house and one-acre lot, we inherited a number of mature trees, many of which we believe were planted about forty-five years ago when the house was built. Individual Austrian and white pines, a plantation planting of approximately seventy-five other pines as well as roughly twenty-five Norway maples grew on the lot. Add many black locusts and you have lots of trees to care for. Most of these trees are at least forty to fifty feet in height although there are some that have grown from the seeds of the original trees.

In a plantation planting, the trees grow close together in rows, a particularly stressful situation in the recent years of drought. Over the past few years, some of these pines have died. We did not notice until all of a sudden the tree fell over followed by others. The base would rot and a wind would topple it. If we were lucky we noticed the tree leaning before it fell but some were just found lying on the ground. This is a potential hazard because the gardens in this area require maintenance and we have grandchildren who enjoy the outdoors.

We tend to think of trees as being permanent but trees have a life span as well. They do not last forever although some live longer than others do. Most of the varieties of trees on our property are not particularly long-lived and urban conditions have changed since they were planted.

Pollution is taking its toll. If we have difficulty breathing on days when there is a smog advisory, the trees are having trouble too and some varieties are more susceptible to poor air quality than others.

The effect of the drought conditions of the previous few years is also evident. Many trees are shutting down some of the parts to keep the core part of the tree alive resulting in dead branches. And then there is the potential threat from imported pests like emerald ash bore or Asian long horn beetle.

As we developed the gardens, we incorporated the trees into the design or made use of the conditions under them. We have large areas of shade, mostly dry shade.

Keeping some of the trees had become a safety issue. A few years ago a split appeared up one side of the trunk of the largest norway maple. Each year the split has widened and sap has poured in the spring. The split this year the gap began to travel up the main branches. This tree leaned over the carport and in each windstorm there has been the threat of damage but our major concern has been the concern for our family's safety. A swing has hung in the tree for many years and has been used by our grandchildren and great-grandchild. This tree has also been one of the supports for our hammock.

One pine was planted within a foot of the driveway and from time to time the snowplough has taken chunks out of the side. Another so close to a maple that it had living branches on only one side.

One disadvantage of a monoculture is the spread of disease or the infestation of a specific pest. Trees of the same variety, planted at the same time will probably reach the end of their life span at the same time. We believe we will probably see the majority of our pines die within a few years.

We started planning for this inevitable situation a few years ago when we planted some new trees. We are choosing a variety of trees. This is the opportunity to try interesting native trees, many of which we have purchased at the Ecology Park on Ashburnham Street. We keep our eyes open for different varieties that will tolerate drought, pollution and are disease and pest resistant. Trees are planted as a legacy for future generations so we needed to choose carefully.

Be careful when choosing the location for your new tree. Think about the ultimate size and shape of the tree. Do not plant a tree that will ultimately be fifty feet tall under, or near hydro lines. The tree will be pruned to ensure that the lines are not damaged and the ultimate result is a misshapen tree. Think about potential dangers to the trees, like a snowplough.

Be sure that the growing conditions are suitable. A tree that requires moist conditions should not be planted in a dry area and vice versa. No amount of aftercare will change poor siting or conditions.

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