The Eucalyptus Tree

and Newport Terrace

by John Sisker

Since moving into Newport Terrace a few months ago, I have heard all kinds of stories about the eucalyptus trees, especially those in the Meadow. There seems to be a love/hate type of relationship in reference to these trees, some feeling they are a hazard and messy, while others look at them as one of nature's own. Yet, in reality, I suppose that perspective is founded more on whether your house just happens to sit under a eucalyptus tree of not.

In addition, many eucalyptus trees are being removed from the Meadow; some people understanding why this decision was necessary from our Board of Directors, where some feel other methods are available to save all the trees, and/or quite possibly, our Board is being given misleading advise in reference to why these trees are dying, just so private companies can profit in their removal.

Personally, I felt a little more background information was necessary as to the why's and wherefores, so quite possibly we will all have a better understanding of what not only has to be done, but why. Likewise, it were left up to me, I would be doing everything I possibly could to save every eucalyputus tree within all of Newport Terrace, but after this research, I'm not sure that is a practical solution.

The native home of the eucalyptus tree is Australia. Yet, the eucalyptus is regarded generally as a "dirty tree" because if its litter is left untouched it can pile up to several feet on a grove's floor. This litter consists of falling bark, leaves, branches, and seed pods. They all contain oil which increases the litter's flammability. The oil also slows the decomposition process so the litter remains nearly whole and a fire hazard longer.

A few messy types of eucalyptus need to have their debris cleaned every year or two, but scores of other kinds are as orderly and as safe as any other broad-leafed evergreen.

Eucalyptus trees grown in California had no natural enemy as is found in Australia. This was because the genus was transplanted by seed and not by seedling. Seedlings carry parasites while the seeds do not.

In 1984, the introduction of a natural enemy occurred. Phoracanta semipunctata, or longhorned beetle, either came from Chile buried in a eucalyptus pallet, or was transported to the Lake Forest lumberyard in timbers from Australia. Regardless of how or where the beetle was introduced, the first infestation was discovered near El Toro, California in October 1984 much to the consternation of eucalyptus growers and lovers of the tree.

Upon discovery, a representative of the California Department of Forestry sadly announced, "The insect is loose and it's just a matter of time before it infests every eucalyptus stand we have in California."

The longhorned beetle is one inch in length and is black in color with a small yellow around its body. It is a strong flier covering several miles in one flight. It lays its eggs deep into the eucalyptus bark. When it bores into the inner bark, it cuts off the supply of nutrients the tree needs and thereby killing it.

Pesticides don't kill it because its eggs are laid under layers of bark. To protect surrounding trees the infested ones have to be removed.

It was noticed that well-watered trees weren't attack by the beetle. The bark became a sponge of water which drowned the larvae. California scientists looked to Australia for answers to the beetle problem. In Australia the beetle's natural enemy is the Syngaster lepidue wasp which locates the boring beetle by sound and stings it.

However, our problem is compounded. Introducing wasps into a dense residential area is certainly not a viable solution, and remember, our Meadow sits over a land-fill in which Methane medications methods has to be constantly addressed. The biggest of which is, not overwatering the trees and other vegetation, something that has to be constantly monitored and adhered to. Therefore, the only viable solution is the removal the dead and/or dying trees, those infected with the beetles, before they spread to the otherwise healthy eucalyptus trees.

- Sources…
    - Robert L. Santos, California State University, Stanislaus, Librarian/Archivist
    - H.H. Biswell, Professor of Forestry and Conservation at the University of California, Berkeley
    - Kevin Starr, USC historian and current California State Librarian
    - Sierra Club, Nature Conservancy, National Audubon Society, and the California Native Plant Society
    - Authors: Abbott Kinney, Ellwood Cooper, Alfred McClatchie, Norman Ingham, George Lull, C.H. Sellers, and Woodbridge Metcalf

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