



# Introduction and Precepts

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## Introduction

This is a different kind of tree book. It is a manual for those who want to go deeper. To quote Dr. Seuss in *The Lorax*, "I speak for the trees, for the trees have no tongues." First, to understand woody plants so that you can work with them, and do them the least harm, you need to know the tree or shrub itself. The more you know about how the tree's body works and what its many parts do, the more connected you will be and your decisions will do it the least harm.

A powerful concept I live with every day is the idea of the whole tree, the balanced tree, much more than the sum of its parts. The leaves, twigs, branches, trunks and roots are the first major parts we get to know. But they are not just parts, they are living tissue performing the different tasks necessary for life. A healthy tree is a balance of these five major parts, and to damage one is to damage all.

My journey with trees has been uncommon so I want to share it. Starting my career as a professional arborist in the mid 80's, I have spent my whole working life preserving and empowering trees, literally giving them energy. The most experienced arborist with the world's best pruning saw still wounds trees with every cut, except, of course, deadwood. So let's be careful and cost the tree the least energy with our work.

Having healthy trees is primarily a frame of mind. Of course, what you do or not do to your trees is important, but having a tree-healthy mindset allows you to make the right choices and decisions. The most important thing is to visually inspect your trees often; they are enjoyable to look at, aren't they? By constantly watching your trees and getting to know them on an intimate level, you will not miss a problem that needs addressing.

Trees are not static—they are alive, dynamic, and so is the world around them. Everything is continually changing, tree growth, insect movements, disease invasion. By regularly inspecting your trees you will catch the signs of drought, the first signs of an insect attack or the presence of disease.

You need to SEE, not just look. Don't skip over the tree; move your eye slowly up and down, back and forth. Once you get used to doing this and get to know your tree on a deeper level you will not miss any abnormalities. This is a visual game I play with nearly every tree I look at; where is something odd, different, perhaps dangerous, can you find one?

The best piece of advice I can give you is to learn what is normal and healthy, observe the tree regularly, noting any detail that is irregular. Once noticed, it can then be addressed. Maybe the tree just needs more water, perhaps a treatment to deal with an aggressive insect, or pruning to remove the first signs of disease.

This is exactly what I mean by bringing love to the tree, taking the time to pay attention. No one else can do this as well as you can—you live there. Paying people to care for your trees can be ineffective; most will not take the time required, do not have the eye or are too rushed to do it well. Commercial businesses want to keep selling you product, fertilizers and insecticides that you don't often need and that are not good for the world. You don't need these treatments, because through observation and proper watering practices you can keep your trees healthy. When the natural healthy state of the tree is a pattern in your thinking, any abnormality will jump out at you when you do your regular inspection.

This book is not a photo study of all the types of trees and shrubs that grow around us. It is not a disease and insect handbook, although diseases and insects play a part in it. It is not pruning instructions for hundreds of kinds of trees and shrubs; indeed, once woody plants are understood, the types of pruning needed are few, especially when teaching natural target pruning, pruning that does the least harm. I intend it to be a book of inspiration, filled with information that will easily open your wonder to the glory that is the tree.



## Some Precepts

Begin with a healthy appropriate tree for the space in your garden. Plant it correctly. Learn what the root crown is. Leave it to establish its root system for 2-3 years. Prune carefully to establish a strong permanent framework for the tree to age into. Keep it well watered. Know your soil. Never remove a large branch unnecessarily. When non-life-threatening insects come for lunch, allow it, don't spray. Know that a strong tree can endure this easily.

What does all this accomplish? Healthy, happy trees and people with a connection to their trees. We also get a healthier world, by increasing the number of healthy trees and significantly lowering our chemical footprint.

This is a holistic approach that focuses on keeping trees strong and healthy, increasing their natural capability to fight insects and other problems. Spend more on water, get a strong tree, then spend less on arborists.

All of us have a greater and deeper connection to trees than we may be casually aware of. Remember when you came home and the new neighbors had removed that beautiful tree of theirs you had been admiring for years? Do you remember how you felt? It's easy to make the transfer to losing your own tree.

It is no stretch to say that trees make a home. We see new houses; years later, protected with trees and shrubs, they become homes. Years pass, generations pass, our trees are constant and mark the greater passages of the times of our lives.

One of the purposes of this book is to make it clear to you that a hands-off commercial approach to trees is not in their or your best interest. Know your tree and its requirements, know your property and soil and their limits, and then work within these limits; water, prune as needed and watch your trees flourish.

There is a powerful natural joy in a healthy happy tree that is infectious, and I hope you get the bug. Much about how to understand and accomplish this is contained in the first two chapters of this book, with detailed sections on the tree's yearly journey, bud scars, soils, hardiness zones, watering, planting, fertilizer, pruning theory, shrub pruning, and tree repair.

This is an extract from my life's work. All of this comes from decades of reading and hands-on tree work as an arborist. It is a joy to finally share it. Do something today to deepen your connection with trees. It's good for the whole planet.

