

# Forest Facts

## Tidy Gardens or Benign Neglect

With a title like that, you might be expecting a slanted article on perfection, but being the contrarian that I am, sometimes benign neglect can look very refreshing in a community driven by property values.

In fact, if you're a seasoned Carmel person, history paints a simpler picture of how individual gardens happened then. Those old gardens were often just the pine needles that dropped between the manzanitas, or a coffee can on the porch with a happy red geranium. It is now a romantic notion in our busy minds of how it used to be, but times change and sophistication slips in on us. Sophistication has several meanings, but one obscure definition is the absence of nature.

Several years ago, I was asked to design a garden in a spot that I remembered for its old tangled growth and mysteriousness that only time can bring to a garden, and yes, it was neglected. I tried to be gentle with this almost spiritual feeling of the landscape, but lost it in my effort to clean up before creating the new landscape. The completed garden took several months to develop, and when it was completed, it was new and fresh in a negative sort of way. The earlier essence was long gone and in its place was an adolescent waiting desperately for maturity.

I receive a number of landscape trade magazines and their pictures pridefully show just-finished, immature gardens with dots of color along the edge of a newly-sodded lawn with other just-planted shrubs in a gawky posture. All freshly mulched like the garden was just shipped from the County Fair. If a person could add *time* as a quality in designing a garden, it would surely be included.

So the title of this piece is really just a subjective judgement and another dance around the old idea of what is beautiful. But beautiful doesn't have to be a consensus of opinion anymore than it has to follow obvious standards that lead to thoughtless boredom. A well-designed garden that becomes old and shows some neglect can be considered natural in a refreshingly laid-back way. It might even be considered real.

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