



Recognized and Enduring Quality Since 1992

August 11, 2022

Mike Tull  
Riviera Gardens Condominiums. Palm Springs  
Landscape Committee Chairman

### Tree Evaluation Summary

Dear Mike,

On August 5, 2022, I met with John Benisch to walk the area at Riviera Gardens, Palm Springs. The purpose of the site visit was to evaluate the general condition of the trees. During the visit we discussed proper pruning standards, topping and crown reconstruction. We discussed the overall present condition of the trees. We looked at a number of specific trees for the need for possible removal. We discussed the need for developing a long-term tree management plan. We also looked at some concerns regarding the landscape in general.

The goals of proper pruning include, improving structure, removing excessive end weight, removal of any dead branches, and maintaining clearances or controlling size. Foliage should be maintained evenly throughout the canopy. Heights can be properly reduced, if necessary, by drop crotch pruning. Individual branches can be reduced, by making cuts at a lateral branch that is at least 1/3 the size of the main branch, leaving no stubs. Professional pruning standards recommend that not more than 30% of a tree's foliage be removed.

Topping is the common improper pruning practice of reducing a trees height, usually drastically, without consideration of a tree's structure or physiology. Large stubs are left, most of the foliage is removed, and the normal crown is left disfigured. This excessive foliage removal is very stressful to the tree and the unshaded branches often incur sunburn damage. The trees response to over pruning is to rapidly replace the foliage removed. Any regrowth is usually weakly attached and there is often significant decay associated with any cuts over 3 inches in diameter. Decay is a progressive process that gets worse over time. There is no cure. The speed at which decay increases, depends on the tree species genetic resistance and the health of the tree. Trees that have been topped and regrown, can look vigorous and healthy but be full of decay and structurally weak.



(Page 1)

The trees at Riviera Gardens have historically been topped repeatedly, at various heights. The result is trees with poor structure, weakly attached branches, and significant decay. Most of the trees have a high potential for branch failure. The Jacarandas and Silk Oaks, because of the amount of decay and their larger size, are of most concern. Many of the carobs and Brazilian peppers are in very poor shape but are less of a concern because of their smaller size. The eucalyptus have less overall decay, but because of their large size, structural defects, and close proximity to condo units, they should be evaluated for potential failures regularly.

The frequent branch breakage and dieback on some trees can all be attributed to the stress and decay caused by excessive pruning. I did not see any significant insect or disease infestation or activity.

Trees that have been severely topped can never be restored to their natural size or form. Any new growth will be weakly attached and have associated decay. Crown restoration of these trees requires restructuring the crown to smaller size and wider form. Replacement branches are selected and trained into this new form. Annual pruning controls the length and weight of these branches to reduce the potential of future failure. It usually takes 3 or more years to develop the new structure and stabilize rapid growth. The amount of foliage removed would depend upon the amount of regrowth. The amount of regrowth will vary depending upon species and the vigor of each tree. Pruning requirements will vary from tree to tree, from none to 30%.

The pine trees have not been topped. They would not tolerate that type of pruning. Pruning should be limited to removing dead material and limited thinning at branch ends if necessary. The pines may not require annual pruning.



The olive trees are recovering slowly from the last extreme pruning. In my opinion, they should not be pruned this year to allow them to recover.

The following specific trees were inspected during the site visit. These trees should be considered for removal for the reasons specified. 11 trees total.

1. Dead silk oak on Vista Chino parkway.
2. (Side of unit 411) Eucalyptus full of tumorous growth leaning significantly.
3. (East side of unit 312) Large Eucalyptus close to building with cavity and decay at base.
4. (West side of building 4 near Bob and Julie's unit) 1 Brazilian Pepper with extensive decay and 1 carob leaning toward patio with severe decay.
5. (Back of unit 315) Eucalyptus close to building with a lot of tumorous growth at base.
6. (West side of unit 312) California Pepper with extensive decay.
7. (Back of unit 112) Brazilian Pepper with extensive decay.
8. (East side of unit 212) Small carob is half dead with extensive decay.

(Page 2)

9. (South side of unit 511) Eucalyptus close to building with very poor branch structure. Very high possibility of branch failure.



10. (West side of building 14) Brazilian pepper with extensive decay.

The following areas were also specifically evaluated.

- A. 2 eucalyptus trees at gate 4. This is a very small planter for these trees. The lack of new vigorous growth is probably due to limited irrigation being applied to this area and the small planting area. The trees are otherwise healthy at this time but could decline in the future. There is damage to the curb and to the street under the parking structure, due to the roots from these trees. There is a high probability the damage will continue. The removal of these trees should be considered.
- B. There are a number of carob trees in the parkway on N. Via Miraleste. This area had turf that was removed and converted to desert landscape. Carobs in general do not respond well to these conversions. I would expect that they will decline over time. There are 2-3 of these trees that are in severe decline and should be considered for removal.

Trees in the Coachella Valley that have been repeatedly topped and experienced yearly excessive foliage removal usually begin to decline rapidly after 30 years. A mitigation program for the trees at Riviera Gardens would include crown restoration and annual pruning. A 15-year program for removal and replacement should be considered. A budget would be established, then each year all the trees would be evaluated and those trees that were considered most hazardous would be removed. The number of trees removed would depend on the budget established. The size of a tree, the potential for failure and the target that would be affected by failure are the factors that are



considered when determining the hazard, a tree represents. A separate budget would be established for tree replacements where necessary.

Following are a few general observations and considerations regarding the landscape.

- The overall condition of the turf was poor but that is normal for August in the desert where there is a lot of shade. Bermuda grass does not grow in shady areas. On this property there is an abundance of shade because of the trees and buildings. As the summer progresses the winter ryegrass dies off leaving nothing but dirt or weeds in many areas. After the fall overseeding the turf should look good until next summer. The ryegrass does fine in the shady areas during the winter. If there are brown spots in the winter, it is probably due to irrigation problems. Turf removal in some of the worst areas may be a viable option. There may be rebates available that would cover a significant amount of the cost.

(Page 3)

- Much of the plant material (hedges) around the buildings are declining due to old age. Desert conditions are harsh, and shrubs have a life expectancy. Some hedges are overgrown. The Carolina cherries have common disease that cannot be cured. A similar condition can be found on mature pyracantha. 30 years is old, under desert conditions, for most of the existing plant material.

Developing a multi-year plan that anticipates removal and replacement of plant material as it declines should be considered. A systematic plan will have financial



and aesthetic goals that will ensure consistency and prevent a hodgepodge of material being installed randomly.

- Because of the age of the property an irrigation audit should be considered. Upgrading the system could improve quality and save water. Increased efficiency and good water management could result in significant financial savings that could offset the cost of some of the improvement. There may also be substantial rebates for these irrigation upgrades.

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Alan Hollinger

Horticulturist, Arborist



(Page 4)