

Dear Monarch,

Why do they plant those messy trees that drop leaves everywhere? I moved to Southern California for the tropical, evergreen landscape!

DECIDUOUS TREES

Dear Concerned Resident,

Deciduous trees are those that lose their leaves, typically once a year in the fall. These “messy” trees can be challenging to live with. Are the landscape designers just out to ruin your patio or are there other reasons for planting a tree that loses its leaves? Here are some thoughts to consider from a design perspective.

- **Fall color.** Spectacular, seasonal color changes add a dynamic element to the landscape. A good designer will consider how to convey a sense of time and seasonality throughout the year. Changing leaves, new spring buds, flowers and fruit are all indicators of a **natural life cycle**.
- California has many **native** deciduous plants (ex. California sycamore). Perfectly manicured, evergreen landscapes have been artificially created and planned for a certain experience, but they are not natural. The true “look” of California is more nuanced and should be considered in **contemporary design**, especially when plants are chosen for sustainability.
- Shedding leaves lets **more light** into the landscape. Deciduous trees naturally create leafy shade for the hot months (saving on your cooling bill), then drop this coverage for the cool season, brightening up parks and homes (saving on heating and light). Bare branches are also an advantage in adding textural, sculptural interest to the skyline.
- Crunching through fall leaves is an **autumnal treat** for the feet! While it may not be much fun to clean up, strolling through dry leaves is undeniably satisfying. They are also excellent as fall décor, teaching young ones about seasons and nature, and using as a natural mulch layer. Consider leaving a layer of leaf litter in place under trees and around shrubs this season to add organic matter back into the soil.

MONARCH TIP

Allowing a layer of **leaf litter** to accumulate under trees and shrubs acts as natural mulch. This will retain soil **moisture**, suppress **weeds**, and add **nutrients** as they break down.