

## What Are Your Trees Worth?

Trees help beautify our surroundings, purify our air, act as sound barriers, manufacture precious oxygen, help us save energy through their cooling shade in summer and their wind reduction in winter. However, many people don't realize that plants have a dollar value, which can be measured by plant appraisers. If your trees or shrubs are damaged or destroyed, you may be able to recapture your loss through an insurance claim, or as a reduction from your federal income tax.

### Loss or Damage

A casualty loss is defined by the IRS as “. . . a loss resulting from an identifiable event of sudden, unexpected or unusual nature.” This can include vehicular accidents, storms, vandalism and even soil pollution. If you suffer damage to trees or landscaping from any type of casualty, consult your homeowner's insurance to determine the amount and kind of coverage that you have. You can request the insurance company to arrange for an appraisal by a competent tree and landscape professional who is experienced in plant appraisal. The appraiser will establish the amount of your loss in financial terms.

### Practical Advice

Plan, develop, install and care for your trees and plants so that each of them will be worth more to you. Here are four factors that effect a professional evaluation of trees and other plants that can be measured in dollars and cents.

- *Tree size.* Sometimes the size and age of a tree are such that it cannot be replaced. Trees that are too large to be replaced should be appraised for their value.
- *Tree type.* Choose tree types for their utility and adaptability. Tree values vary according to where they are located. Trees that are hardy, durable, highly adaptable and free from objectionable characteristics are worth the most.
- The *condition* of the tree, shrub or plant is important. A healthy, well-maintained plant will have a higher value.
- The *location* of the plant takes into consideration the functional as well as aesthetic values that it contributes to the property.

### Checklist

- 1 *Plan* your landscaping for both beauty and functional value.
- 2 *Protect and preserve* to maintain value.
- 3 *Take pictures* of your landscape.
- 4 *Check your insurance* for the amount of an allowable claim.
- 5 *Keep records* of your landscape appraisals and real estate appraisals.

This article is provided as part of a public educational campaign on trees in the City of Milpitas. Copyright International Society of Arboriculture. Used with permission.

**SIDEBAR** The City of Milpitas has currently planted over 200 new city street trees in the Manor and adjacent residential neighborhoods. For more information on city street trees, please contact Public Works at 408-586-2601