

Occasional Soapbox

Dear Thelma

Tired of disrespect
and empty promises.

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'... A poem lovely as a tree'

A reader gets on his green soapbox to make a point about the need for nature in our concrete-filled lives.

By LOKE SIEW HING

IMAGINE a house compound with cold concrete walls and a porch floor all tiled up. It makes you feel hot, like a boring piece of arid land. However, hang a pot of ferns, scatter a few pots of colourful or green plants around the place and you will bring life to a once uninviting compound. An amazing transformation through mere plants and shrubs.

Years ago when a developer wanted to build two blocks of high-rise apartments in my housing estate, there was a storm of protests.

To the residents, the estate's small hill, with its greenery, was the green lung in their neighbourhood. In fact, the hill was a catchment area.

Eventually, though, progress took precedence over preservation, and more apartments came up. The price we have to pay is flooding in low-lying areas, higher temperatures, and more birds littering our walls and driveways with their droppings since they no longer have a natural habitat to live in. Trees not only cool our environment, they also absorb noise and dust (not to mention bird droppings).

Every morning, I am awakened by the chirping of birds, for which I am thankful. I also see squirrels in the trees. Trees provide good shelter for birds and small animals.

We work hard to maintain the tree outside our house. From January to March every year we have to sweep away the copious amount of leaves during the tree's shedding



'I think that I shall never see / A poem lovely as a tree.' Joyce Kilmer's *Trees*. — Filepic

season. We have to sweep three times a day because the leaves keep falling continuously.

But this is a small price to pay for this precious tree that provides much needed shade for our car whenever we park it outside.

Once, the workers of the town council trimmed too many branches from it. We planted a bird's nest fern to make up for the heavy loss of foliage. Now the tree looks very unique with a big fern stuck to it. More importantly it provides good shade. From an aesthetic point of view, it is a unique design.

and walking around the playground. Most mornings they come here to breathe in the fresh air. The cool air is also invigorating. Some come in the evening with their children.

Some of these playground trees, like the angšana, the pulai, the weeping willow and cabbage trees, have taken years to grow to their majestic heights. Some, with their vibrant colours like the flame of the forest, the yellow shower, the African tulip and the purple jacaranda beautify our environment.

The pink trumpet trees have even been likened to the cherry blossom trees of Japan. When they are full of pink and white blooms, they are a captivating sight to behold.

Each tree has its own form, beauty, and character. Similarly, every plant has its own unique design, shape, and beauty. All of them reflect the creativity of God. Think of the different types of begonias and marantha or prayer plants. The variety is just mind-boggling. Whenever I visit a nursery I am so smitten by all the beauty and diversity displayed by the trees, shrubs and plants.

Someone suggested planting a tree with your ashes when you leave this world. I think it is a very good suggestion. Even in death you can provide beauty, shade, and shelter. You will be a blessing to many around you after you are long gone.

Whether you love trees or not, I think we should appreciate their usefulness and importance. Then we will automatically want to preserve them as part of our natural heritage.

This time of year brings the small leaves and the dry flowers of the rain tree, which litter our roads and our compounds. The rain tree keeps us busy every day. The yellow flame tree sheds more flowers than leaves. The flowers get stuck to the road whenever it rains. Yet we have to preserve these trees for their aesthetic value and shade.

At the end of my road there is a small playground dotted with trees. It is a cool area where residents can enjoy exercising