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BY RICHARD ELLIS
PHOTOS BY RICHARD ELLIS AND CLINTON UYTENBOGAARDT

PC's Tree Doctor:

A BATTLE BETWEEN NATURE AND AESTHETICS WITH CLINTON UYTENBOGAARDT, CERTIFIED ARBORIST AT ESCHENFELDER LANDSCAPING

The life of a Park City tree can be nasty, brutish, and short, as a young evergreen in Pinebrook demonstrates. His needles, sadly, have turned orange in mid-March. Clinton Uytenbogaardt, a certified arborist with Eschenfelder Landscaping, prods the bark with a pocketknife before giving a diagnosis.

"The bark is separating from the vascular tissue, which indicates that the vascular tissue collapsed at one point," Clinton says. "He's begun sapping, which means he's trying to seal it off. He's a replacement."

The fate of this evergreen is the story of many trees planted in Park City. He is the right tree in the wrong place, with too much southwest exposure. As sunlight warmed the little evergreen, he thought it was spring, so he pumped water up to new growth. He misjudged. That water froze and expanded, destroying his vascular system.

In a way, he died of mountain town aesthetics. Just because a tree is native or rated to survive here, that doesn't it mean it will thrive where we want it to.

That's where a certified arborist comes in.











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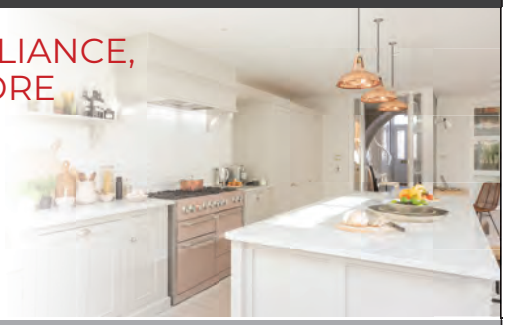
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Essentially a "tree doctor," according to Clinton, certified arborists undergo three years of hands-on training followed by a certification test that covers tree biology, maintenance, and care. Clinton, born and raised in South Africa, has been working with trees in Utah for over 20 years.

Park City trees awakening in spring of 2025 are in for a rough season. The inconsistent snow and multiple thaw-freeze cycles have created what Clinton calls "interesting conditions." Needles on natural and planted evergreens are turning yellow. Heat and sun trick them into pumping water and making food through photosynthesis. Although most won't freeze and die, the ground is frozen, so they can't replenish the water or nutrients. It's as if the trees started an ultramarathon on the wrong date and 20 miles in can't find the aid station.

Along Jeff's driveway, we find fir, spruce, and bristlecone pine. Some arborists use smell to tell trees apart, but Clinton prefers touch and visuals. "I don't have much of a sense of smell. Martial arts. Got punched in the nose one too many times," he says. On the side, Clinton owns Utah Valley Lotus Blossom Martial Arts, where he teaches Taekwondo and Haidong Gumdo, a form of Korean swordsmanship.

At Jeff's, a southwest-exposed maple—non-native to the Wasatch Back—is having a rough time. At least twice, it has pumped water too early. The engorged cells froze and "popped like balloons," says Clinton. "This is why I tell people not to plant maples."

After visiting Jeff's, we drive to Promontory, the opposite of Pinebrook in many respects. It's sunny and open, accommodating for sagebrush but not evergreens and aspens. They're planted here anyway and see frequent visits from elk and deer. In fall, young bucks rub the velvet off their antlers, leaving scars up and down the aspens. In spring, fauna clean off dirt and mud by rubbing on spruce trees.

Deterring wildlife is not easy. Some homeowners apply coyote urine around their trees to scare off fauna (yes, you can buy coyote urine online). It doesn't work in Clinton's experience, especially not with large animals. "If it's a big buck, he's not going to care."

"The thing to remember is we're in their territory, not the other way around," Clinton says. Wildlife, for better or worse, don't know or care which trees allegedly belong to us.

Clinton runs into the most problems with an unsuspecting animal: the porcupine. They feed on evergreen trees, which isn't ideal for the homeowners who paid good money to plant them. At a home in Promontory, they've chewed through bark on multiple evergreens to reach the tasty fibers inside. The evergreen meant to give privacy to the homeowner's bedroom has been gnawed badly. To prevent further damage, Eschenfelder has fenced the trees. The bent, mangled sections of fencing suggest that porcupines haven't given up yet.

"Mother Nature has no rules," Clinton says, reflecting on why some trees make it and others don't. But then he hesitates. "Well, she does have one: survival of the fittest."

