

{ The Big Dig }

a new yard from scratch

Calamity in the form of diseased soil was dealt with, resulting in a wonderful new tropical garden



STORY AND PHOTOS BY JOHN DERSOM

The yard was sick. A fifty-year-old Modesto ash that spread its canopy over the whole back yard was losing foliage. The owner called an arborist and the news wasn't good. "This tree will be dead within six months," he said.

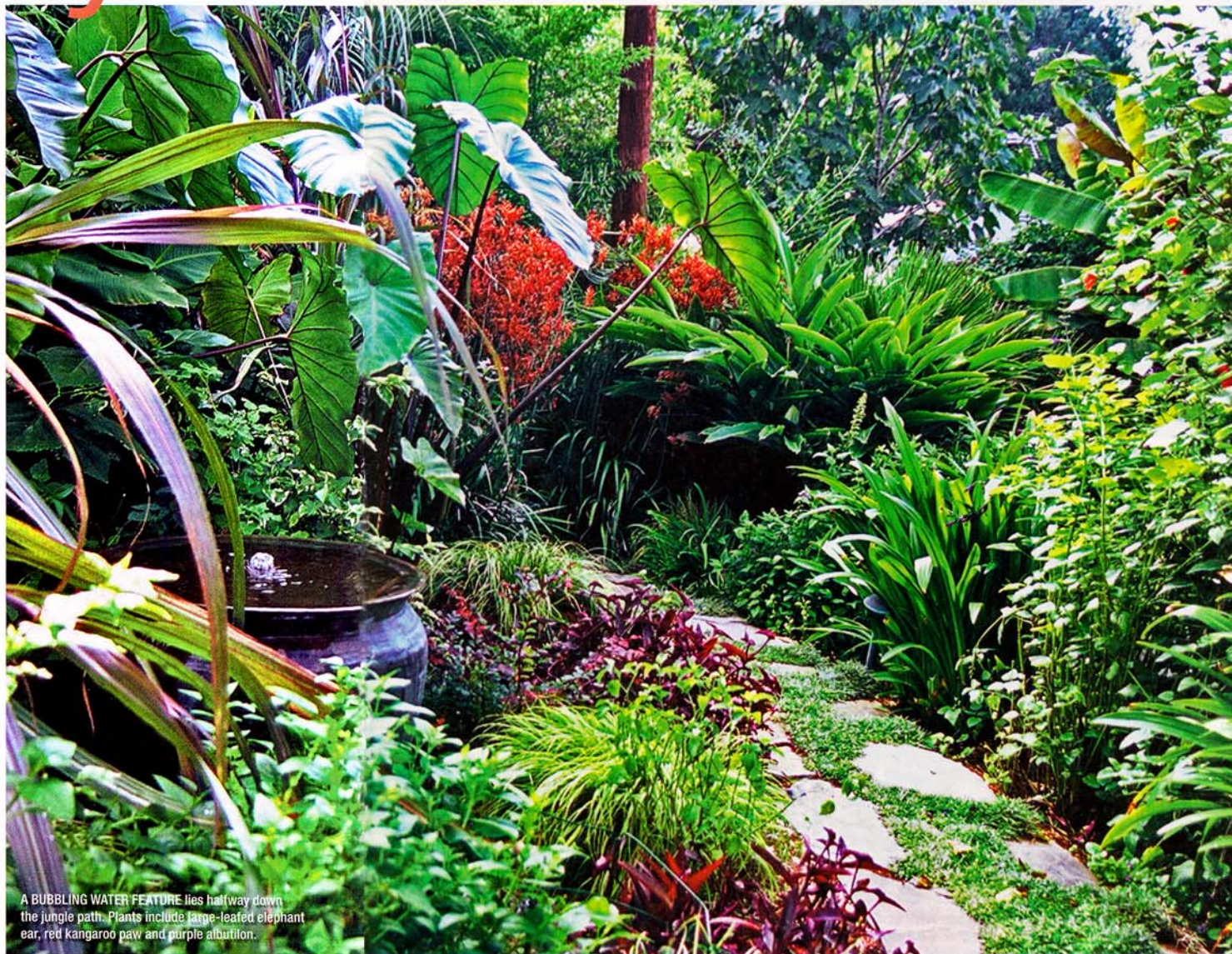
And sure enough, it was. Tests confirmed an infestation with Armillaria (oak root fungus), a deadly and persistent fungus that can infect a large variety of plants. Fumigation isn't always effective, and the fungus can return to infect new plantings. The owner's choices were few, the arborist said. She could plant everything in containers, choose so-called disease resistant plants (that sometimes aren't), or do something more drastic, such as removing every speck of soil and starting over. She decided to call in another expert.

John Tikotsky is a landscape architect who had dealt with diseased plants before. He did some research and came to the conclusion that there was only one real solution: The



ABOVE: The new jungle garden is visible from the pool area where a table and chairs offer a comfortable spot for viewing.

BELOW: The big dig! The yard has been excavated to a depth of four feet and new topsoil and gravel have been brought in.



A BUBBLING WATER FEATURE lies halfway down the jungle path. Plants include large-leaved elephant ear, red kangaroo paw and purple abutilon.