CITY OF CORAL GABLES

--MEMORANDUM--

TO: **Mayor Lago, Vice Mayor Mena, Commissioners Fors and Menendez, City Manager and Assistant City Manager**

FROM: **Commissioner Anderson**

DATE: **July 10, 2021**

SUBJECT: **Staff Up-Date re Strangler Figs on Coral Way Specimen Oaks**

Agenda Item G-15 is for a staff up-date regarding the removal and eradication of Strangler Figs on the specimen Live Oaks on Coral Way. Photographs showing examples of Strangler Figs in Oaks on one block of Coral Way are attached along with an article describing how the Strangler Figs will damage and kill the Live Oak Trees.

ORAL WAY
1100

How Long Does It Take for a Strangler Fig to Kill a Tree?

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By Josie Myers

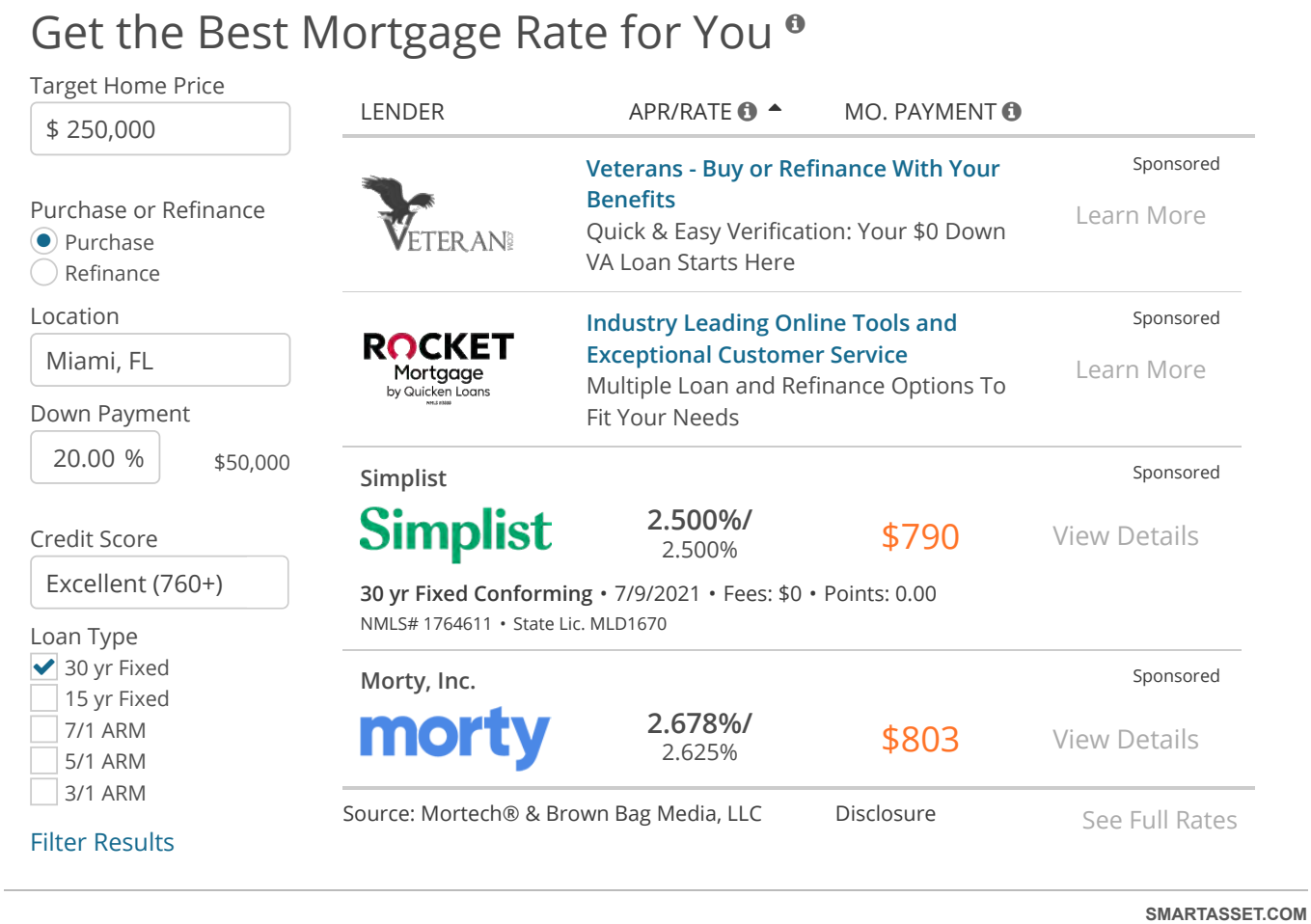
The strangler fig sentences its host tree to a nearly certain death. But that death is usually a long and excruciating process for the host. The strangler fig slowly curls its way around the host, and consumes all of the resources available. In time, the host will become a shadow of itself and eventually die.

Strangler Fig

More than 1,400 species are called "strangler figs" around the world. In the United States, the one most often called by this name is Ficus aurelia, or the golden fig. This perennial member of the Moraceae family, or mulberry family, grows extremely fast and aggressively, reaching 70 feet or taller with an even wider spread. The strangler fig produces small fruits that are soft and sweet. It can be found in U.S. Department of Agriculture plant hardiness zones 9 through 11.

Epiphyte

Strangler figs are epiphytes, a category of plant that can gain nutrients from the air and rain exclusively. An animal or bird drops the strangler fig seeds on leaves of another tree. The seeds germinate on the leaves or branches of the new host tree. The seedling will send one long root down to the ground to find soil, usually wrapping around the host's bark, while other aerial roots grow upwards. The roots thicken and grow nonstop, eventually enveloping the tree beneath. This creates the strangler fig's signature coiled and wrapped bark.



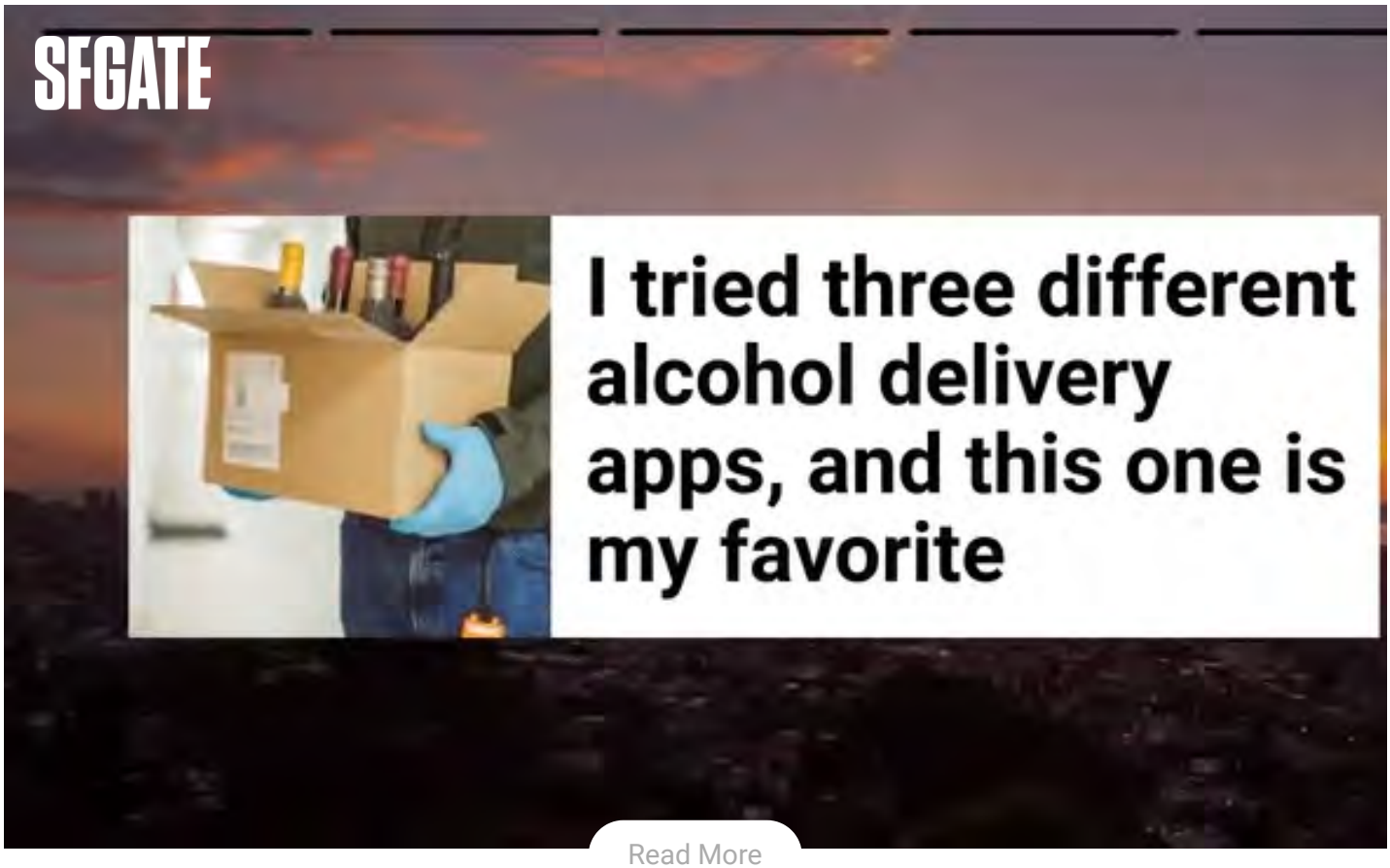
Host

The host is most commonly a palm or oak tree, but can be any available tree. The strangler fig's aerial roots contribute to an extremely wide spread, causing it to eventually block most of the light to the host. The roots

sent down into the soil get wide and thick, also multiplying in number. They soak up the nutrients and crowd out the root system of the host tree, strangling it not just from above but also from below.

Death of Host

It is nearly inevitable that the host tree will die given enough time, but how long that may be is completely arbitrary. Very old and large trees could take decades or longer to die, while small, weak or sick trees could die within a season. The variables in the question are so great that it is impossible to say with certainty how long the host will live. In general, a healthy large host will not live any longer than 200 years past the time of infestation. It is not uncommon to find centuries-old strangler figs with empty middles, as the host tree died and rotted away, leaving a little hollow room within the trunk system.



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