

Tree Planting Brings Community Together

Margaret Missiaen, Vice-President, TFCH

Trees for Capitol Hill completed another successful tree planting on November 23, 2013, adding 10 trees to the 1500 or so we have planted since 1992. Our success depends on volunteers who can solve the problems that inevitably arise. Jerry Sroufe arrived to help dig the hole on 6th Street, SE when another volunteer couldn't make it. Brandon Schmitt worked until after dark on Friday night to remove a huge root that remained after the tree stump was ground out. When the lift on the truck malfunctioned in the down position, Rich Cottrell coaxed it back into place. Nick Alberti stepped up to dig the holes on A Street, NE. We even had a volunteer from Germany, Bettina Kurtz!

The work went quickly with unusually mild temperatures for the Saturday before Thanksgiving. The cold front with falling temperatures and gusty winds did not arrive until after the last tree, a Sourwood (*Oxydendrum arboreum*), was planted on Emerald Street, NE next to Libo Liu's house. Again this year we selected a wide variety of trees from Merrifield Garden Center (MGC). Gone are the days of a designated species for each street. Diverse plantings reduce the chance that a disease will decimate all the trees in a few years, such as is happening on East Capitol and other streets planted with American elms. Zelkova (*Zelkova serrata*), an Asian species in the elm family, has been a reliable street tree. We planted 2 at the edge of the triangle park between North Carolina and Constitution Avenue at 15th Street, NE to replace a pair that were plowed down in a car accident. Black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*) is a new species that is proving its value as street tree. A new cultivar with spectacular red fall color was sponsored by Bob Dalton in the park near his home at 18th Street and Potomac Avenue, (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*) and a 'Purple Robe' Black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) were planted on A Street near 13th Street, NE. That black locust is a real winner; it bloomed like crazy this spring in a most delicious and unusual shade of purple.

Not only did we have perfect weather for humans to do their digging and planting, we had perfect weather for the trees to settle in, cool and drizzly for the first week they were in the ground. If we could just get a few of those gray days in July and August, we'd have it made.

Beth Purcell and Elizabeth Nelson made the shopping pilgrimage to MGC last August, much earlier in the season than usual. Rich Cottrell, who served as our "personal shopper" until his retirement, joined them to help make their selections. After all these years, they've had plenty of practice, but Rich still catches a lot they miss, the crooked trunk and the dreaded double-



No lift, no problem - for Senor Limpio



ID check on Independence Avenue



Zelkova on Constitution Avenue

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leader. In a nostalgic moment, Elizabeth stumbled across a Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*), the first she'd even seen in the District. Quite common where she grew up in the Poconos, they were used to make root beer. As a child, she loved them for their fuzzy, mitten-shaped leaves and glorious fall color. On impulse, she snagged it for a parklet on the 1500 block of North Carolina where first-time volunteer Kristin Palumbo and her husband are tending to it.

But the work isn't done until the trees are able to survive without supplemental water. We can all pitch in on this effort. Keep an eye out for thirsty greenery on your own block and follow the directions on page 3.

The planting team would like to thank Rich Cottrell for schlepping all the way into the District from his home base in the outer 'burbs. We'd have been up the creek for sure, if he hadn't cowed the truck into submission. And Tony Topez, aka "Senor Limpio" for driving the MGC delivery truck. With the lift broken, he wrangled those trees to the ground the old fashioned way—brute force.

Without you, we could not do our work. If you are interested in sponsoring a tree for public space (parks, public schools and tree boxes), please contact Margaret Missiaen at margaretmisiaen@gmail.com.



Bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, waiting for the truck



Baby Sassafras on 1500 block of North Carolina Avenue



Last stop on Emerald Street

Please Water Trees

Beth Purcell, President

We are fortunate to have received so many new street trees this year, both through our own efforts and those of the UFA. A good tip for spotting the “newbies” is to look for stakes with wires attached to them, between the sidewalk and the curb; they should be sporting a green “tree-gator” tree-watering bag.

- These trees will need supplemental water for at least their first two-three summers if they are to survive.
- The District government plans to water twice a month. Even if they follow this schedule, it may not be enough water so we all need to help. We estimate that it costs less than \$10 to water a tree for an entire summer

A quick blast from a hose encourages poor root development. It's much better to let the water trickle for 20 to 30 minutes—or better still, use a watering bag or basin. A garden hose connected to a nearby water source makes this job easy and it provides a useful way to measure the amount of water you are delivering.

- Fill the green tree-gator bag once a week.
- The hole for the hose is a slit under the paper tag at the top of the bag. See how-to water video on www.caseytrees.org
- The water will gradually drip out over 24-48 hours.

The trees will need an absolute minimum of 10 gallons each week from spring bloom until winter freeze—but as much as 20-30 gallons may be needed in very hot, dry weather. Even if you think that Mother Nature has been providing enough rain, it doesn't pay to be over-confident. By the time a tree looks like it needs water (is shriveled or drops leaves), it has already been damaged. Don't wait. Be pro-active!

- If there has been less than 1.5 inches of rain in the last week, new trees need water.
- Check the “Watering Alerts” on www.caseytrees.org.
- Casey Trees offers a free rain gauge to people who take the “25 to stay alive” pledge to water new street trees.
- A note of caution: watering bags must be removed as soon as they are no longer needed. If left on over the winter, they prevent proper bark development and can cause permanent damage.

Watering basins are a good alternative but can be difficult to find. The advantages are that they are easier to fill with a bucket, where hoses won't reach and they aren't easily damaged by mowers. The disadvantage is that the holes may become clogged, preventing the water from draining into the ground. In very light rain, they can block water from reaching the tree.

Mulch is also important in keeping a tree hydrated. A 2-4 inch layer is sufficient but the mulch must be kept away from the trunk. Clean weeds and debris from the planting space. This helps in two ways. First, the tree will not have to compete with the weeds for precious water. Second, water bags are far less likely to be punctured by mowers if there is no vegetation to mow.

Trees for Capitol Hill has a few bags and basins that can be borrowed for the season. If you want one, contact Margaret Missiaen, margaretmissiaen@gmail.com. Service requests can be made on dc.gov or by calling 311.

The Urban Forestry Administration, within the District Department of Transportation can be reached at 202 673-6813 or <http://ddot.dc.gov/page/ddot-urban-forestry>.



Treegators are easiest to fill by hose



Jack Montgomery and Margaret Missiaen filling Treegator with bucket



No hose? Basins may be easier to fill

Preventing Mower Damage

Elizabeth Nelson

It's Biology 101; damage to the bark is harmful, if not fatal, to the tree. The tree's "circulatory system" is located in the cambium layer between the wood and the outer bark. But the contractors hired by the City to mow public greenspaces, especially pocket parks, don't seem to know this. All too often they run the blades of the mowers into the trunk of the tree a few inches above the ground. If the tree is lucky, it may be just a nick; all too often, a chunk of bark is torn off or the tree may be completely girdled. In most cases, the wound will not heal over. The tree may survive the initial attack but will not thrive as it would have with intact bark. Trees in areas that are maintained by residents are at less risk partly because their neighbors are looking out for them but also because lawn mowers designed for home use, have the blades recessed. But even these trees can be damaged through inattention.

Plastic trunk-protectors are very helpful and inexpensive, and they should be used whenever possible. But they are not fool-proof; they are easily shredded by high powered mowers. Keeping weeds and tall grass away from tree trunks reduces the temptation to mow too close. A wide circle of mulch discourages unwanted vegetation and preserves moisture. Best of all, it keeps those mowers away from the trees.

Recently, a team of TFCH volunteers made a bulk purchase of mulch from Frager's Hardware, who gave us a very generous discount. Of course, when they attempted to load a full pallet of mulch into the truck, it became apparent that the truck wasn't expecting to carry quite such a heavy load. It was riding low and the tires looked squished. The salesperson cautioned us not to go more the 5-10 miles an hour or we might pop the tires. Fortunately, it was only a few blocks to our first drop off point. So we inched along and breathed a sigh of relief as we lightened our load, distributing mulch to 45 trees deemed to be at high-risk, many of them in the triangle parks along North Carolina Avenue between 13th and 16th Streets, NE.



Plastic bark protector



Nick Alberti and Mark Grace create a mulch moat



Channeling Rain Water to New Street Trees

Margaret Missiaen, Vice-President, TFCH

Care instructions for newly planted trees begin with “Water weekly during the first two growing seasons.” TFCH volunteers have spent many hours watering trees, especially since watering bags and basins came on the market. However, there are street trees planted so far from any water source that isn’t practical to haul water. In these cases, the following procedure will help many of these to survive.

This process of soil aeration and weeding channels rain water to the tree roots and offsets the effects of heavy foot traffic:

The first step is to aerate the soil by using a 4-pronged spading fork to poke holes around the perimeter of the tree box.

[Photo 1] Working the fork back and forth enlarges the holes to capture storm water as it runs toward the gutter.

Pulling the weeds also aerates the soil and loosens the much that may have caked during the winter. [Photo 2] A weeder used carefully near the trunk will not disturb the roots.

Bermuda grass has invaded many tree boxes with its extensive root system. [Photo 3]

A thin layer of mulch, kept away from the trunk, will help retain soil moisture. These steps may need to be repeated during the growing season. [Photo 4]



Photo 1: Poke holes with spading fork



Photo 2: Remove weeds



Photo 3: Extensive Bermuda grass root system



Photo 4: Apply fresh mulch

Restoring the District's Tree Canopy

Margaret Missiaen, Vice-President, TFCH

The District's Urban Forestry Administration (UFA) along with Casey Trees and various neighborhood groups, such as Trees for Capitol Hill are working to increase the city's tree cover. Tree cover is a measure of the area of a tree crown or canopy viewed from above. These crowns create most of a tree's benefits: providing shade, reducing energy consumption and noise, removing particulates and slowing storm water runoff.

Since 1950, D.C.'s tree canopy has fallen more than 2 percent every decade to its current level of 36 percent. At the same time, impervious surfaces have increased to 41 percent, meaning D.C. is now covered by more concrete and asphalt than trees. (For more information, see Casey Trees, Tree report Card 2013.) To reach the goal of 40 percent tree cover, the UFA has expanded its street-tree planting program adding 7,000 trees during the winter of 2013/14. Many of these trees have been planted in tree boxes and planting strips between sidewalks and curbs. As these sites are filled, attention is turning to large public spaces, like schoolyards, playgrounds and recreation center fields, and also to potential opportunities on private property.

Homeowners can also help expand the tree canopy by planting trees on their own land. When trees are planted on private lots, the trees benefit because private lots offer more of what trees need most and often don't get next to the street: soil. Greater soil volumes lead to larger, healthier and longer-lived trees. Casey Trees sponsors a tree rebate program for planting certain species. (Details on their website Caseytrees.org).

Trees for Capitol Hill is now prepared to offer assistance to neighbors wanting trees for their own yards. Our "friends and family" can purchase a tree through us for planting in November 2014. The owners will be required to prepare a hole on their property and pay the cost of the tree (at our discounted price) and a pro-rated share of the shipping costs. TFCH will select and purchase the tree, arrange delivery and assist in planting. Trees will be selected by the TFCH shopping team (from a list of species preferred by the sponsor) during their annual visit to Merrifield Garden Center (MGC). These trees are quite large, typically 1-2" caliper, and not inexpensive. But you will have a more mature tree than what you could bring home and plant by yourself; the discount makes them much more affordable; and you will pay much less in shipping and installation costs than if you purchased those services from MGC. If you are interested in participating in this program, contact Elizabeth Nelson, elizabeth_knits@yahoo.com or 202.543.3512.

Check Our Website—and Volunteer!

Elizabeth Nelson

Thanks to generous funding from the National Capital Bank, and the efforts of Mark Grace, you can follow us online at <http://treesforcapitolhill.org>. Newsletter articles, photos and other information are posted there.

Volunteers are needed, wanted and appreciated. We are always looking for tree-huggers to assist with the fall plantings. If you know of anyone who would enjoy that activity, please lasso them! **We are also in dire need of a newsletter designer.** We have temporary assistance (or you would not be receiving this publication) but we would welcome a more permanent solution. If you have publishing skills and can help with this annual effort, please let us know.



Tree of the Year, Copper Beech

Elizabeth Nelson

Our tree of the year is the mighty Copper beech (*Fagus sylvatica*). A sentimental favorite of our Secretary, Mark Grace, they are slow growing but robust street trees with wide canopies and sturdy trunks. At twenty years, they can reach 46 feet high and will often top out at 82 feet at maturity. They may live 100-200 years or more. Though their foliage is deep purple during spring, it changes to a showy copper hue in autumn. They are useful as well as beautiful, providing dense, cooling shade and an abundance of food for wildlife. The beechnuts begin to drop after the first frost opens the nuts. The nuts are tasty but slightly toxic to humans if eaten in large quantities. Copper beeches will grow in Zones 4 through 7 on the USDA hardiness zone map. The District is in Zone 7, at least for now.

TFCH planted a row of them on the 1300 block of North Carolina Avenue in 2012. They are still small but are already adding a new shade of green to the streetscape.



Stately Copper beech in Folger Park, 2nd and D streets, SE

Trees For Capitol Hill, Inc.
647 South Carolina Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20003

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED



Trees For Capitol Hill

Who we are:

Trees for Capitol, Inc., a DC non-profit corporation founded in 1991, is dedicated to enhancing our neighborhood by planting and caring for trees in public spaces. Our funding comes from generous grants from the Capitol Hill Community Foundation, the National Capital Bank and individual donors. We are a 501(c)(3) corporation.

To make a contribution, send a check made out to:

Trees for Capitol Hill, Inc.
647 South Carolina Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20003



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