Scenic Watch

Special Edition - Our Urban Trees

Editor’s Note

Scenic Florida regularly hears from our members, elected officials, partner organizations and citizens about the urgent need to preserve and protect Florida’s priceless urban tree canopy.

Here’s a small sample of the renewed worldwide attention to this issue as we approach Arbor Day including the new trend toward "Afforestation" and efforts in Florida.

We hope you enjoy this special edition of Scenic Watch.

Swift Results For Urban Tree Canopies

"Restoring Nature Through the Miyawaki Method of Afforestation Environment"

Photo: The man-made forest at Tokyo Electric Power Company's Higashi-Ōgishima Thermal Power Station in Kawasaki, Kanagawa Prefecture. Starting in the 1980s, saplings were planted at the site, first just one plant per square meter, as shown at left. Later plantings increased this to three. More than 10 years later, the trees, which have yet to reach full height, have formed a dense forest. (Courtesy of Miyawaki Akira)

"The Miyawaki method is an innovative approach to planting forests garnering global attention as a quick way to 'greenify' cities. Its imitation of natural processes to create diverse woodland ecosystems makes it possible to reestablish native stands in a span of just a few decades. A student of plant ecologist Miyawaki Akira, the developer of the technique, explains the approach and talks about the importance of fostering urban forests.

Forests play a huge role in sequestering carbon dioxide, making them essential to offsetting emissions as the world races to achieve carbon neutrality. Japan has seen its forested land increase, the result of once closely managed areas like satoyama and secondary forests in rural farming communities being left to grow wild as populations in the countryside shrink. Green spaces in cities, on the other hand, continue to dwindle as urban areas swell. Below, I look at the benefits of urban forests, and describe how cities can regrow stands of native trees using the Miyawaki method. A Data-Driven Approach to Urban Forests

The Miyawaki method of afforestation is the invention of renowned plant ecologist Miyawaki Akira. Professor emeritus at Yokohama National University and former

president of the International Association of Ecology, Miyawaki remained a staunch advocate of restoring indigenous forests to urban areas until his death in July 2021 at the age of 93...

Miyawaki first utilized his method to plant a forest at the Nippon Steel Corporation's plant in Ōita Prefecture in 1972. This approach would later blossom into the creation of what he from the beginning called furusato no mori, 'hometown forests,' at locations other than factories throughout Japan. Following this inaugural project, he published an influential work in 1974 outlining his approach that focused on restoring native forests at Japanese educational institutions. Then in 1976, he put these ideas to work establishing another forest, this one on the campus of Yokohama National University in Kanagawa Prefecture.

Photo: (1) The site for the Miyawaki forest at Yokohama National University was a 2–3 meter embankment covered in invasive species of grass. (2) Topsoil was added and varieties of shii (Japanese chinquapin), tabu (Japanese bay tree), and kashi (Japanese oak) were planted. (3) Three years after planting, the trees had grown to 3 meters. (4) A decade after planting, the trees had reached 10 meters in height. (Courtesy of Miyawaki Akira) (1) The site for the Miyawaki forest at Yokohama National University was a 2–3 meter embankment covered in invasive species of grass. (2) Topsoil was added and varieties of shii (Japanese chinquapin), tabu (Japanese bay tree), and kashi (Japanese oak) were planted. (3) Three years after planting, the trees had grown to 3 meters. (4) A decade after planting, the trees had reached 10 meters in height. (Courtesy of Miyawaki Akira)

Since its inception, Miyawaki's technique has drawn the attention of experts in Japan and from overseas who have studied the method and reported their findings in books, journals, and other publications, creating a significant body of literature. These include a recently released report by the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies Japanese Center for International Studies in Ecology, where Miyawaki served for many years as director.

A half century on, Miyawaki's method has been used to restore forests around the globe. To date, some 900 projects in Japan have utilized the technique, including those to reestablish protective coastal forests devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake's tsunami in 2011, as well as more than 300 afforestation efforts in such far-flung places as Southeast Asia, the Amazon, Chile, and China. A Quick Path to Restoring Native Forests

The Miyawaki method is pioneering in its reliance on a large number of native species and the close proximity in which vegetation is planted. It mimics the natural distribution of plant varieties in native forests, enabling the biotopes to grow and mature more quickly than with traditional afforestation methods. The following are some of the defining characteristics of the technique.

1. Selecting Native Species

Core to the technique is the process of selecting native species that are best suited to the local ecosystem. In most cases, cities hoping to establish urban forests have to look elsewhere to identify plant species native to the area, including by surveying large old-growth trees in areas like the sacred forests (chinju no mori) of Shintō shrines. Another resource is overgrown satoyama and secondary forests in rural areas, which are seeing a return of broad-leaf evergreen varieties like native oak and chinquapin. However, differences in conditions like climate, terrain, and soil at survey areas and planting sites must be carefully considered when choosing tree varieties, and a diverse range of indigenous plant species—as many as 40—occupying different forest layers is required.

2. Collecting Seeds

Another important aspect of the Miyawaki method is its focus on keeping things local. Rather than ordering saplings from far off nurseries, native plants should be grown from seeds collected from adult specimens nearby the site. Old-growth trees of species like bay, chinquapin, and oak are abundant in rural areas and are excellent sources of seeds. Teaming up with local nurseries is another good option. However, there must be strict guidelines to prevent the accidental introduction of closely related species at a site in order to ensure the genetic integrity of a forest.

3. Hand-Grown Plants

Once seeds are collected, they are placed in trays to germinate. The sprouts are then transferred to plastic planting pots and are cared for until they have reached a size that they can be transplanted. When planting a Miyawaki forest, selecting saplings with robust root balls is crucial, as these have a better chance of surviving and quickly growing into adult trees...

4. Boosting Environmental Awareness

Planting takes place on reprepared embankments that have been fortified with materials that enrich and protect the soil and help with water retention. The planting area is divided into one-square-meter plots, on which three or more different species of plants, typically three-year-old saplings standing around 50 centimeters tall, are planted. The planting process is straightforward, consists mainly of digging holes with hand-held planting trowels and placing the sapling inside, and can easily be coordinated as a group activity. Large projects can be conducted as part of local efforts to raise environmental awareness, with planting volunteers being recruited from surrounding communities. At one such 'planting festival' to restore coastal woods destroyed by the tsunami in Iwanuma, Miyagi Prefecture, 10,000 volunteers came together and planted 100,000 saplings in a single day on a sprawling 50-by-100-meter site.

Planting events help raise community awareness of environmental issues and are especially suited to children, helping spur interest in similar projects. They also provide opportunities for like-minded people to meet, and there are many instances of participants going on to form dedicated groups that actively take part in planting events...

5. Tending Young Forests

Once planted, the closely spaced saplings compete with their neighbors for available resources, spurring plants to grow quickly. A newly planted site needs to be tended for the first few years, including regular watering and the addition of a layer of rice straw mulch to control weeds. After three to five years, though, Miyawaki forests are self-sustaining once trees develop to a size blocking sunlight from reaching the ground, making further human intervention like weed prevention unnecessary.

Miyawaki forests grow rapidly, around a meter a year in height. In as little as a decade, an area with no vegetation can be transformed into a native forest with trees standing 10 meters tall. And in another decade, it will be fully developed, with indigenous vegetation occupying the different layers, including a canopy soaring 20 meters or more in the sky. The Gold Standard of Urban Forests

Urban concentration is responsible for dwindling wooded areas in major cities. This trend needs to be reversed, though, as such green spaces play a number of vital roles beyond just beautifying the urban environment. Trees shade roads and buildings, helping to fend off the heat-island effect. Stands of trees also protect against natural

calamities, an important characteristic in disaster-prone Japan. For instance, after major earthquakes, urban forest act as fire breaks, checking the spread of devastating conflagrations that follow powerful temblors, along with other disaster mitigation functions.

Cities wanting to 'greenify' can look to Tokyo's Meiji Shrine forest for inspiration. Established in 1920, the man-made forest has flourished over the last century without intervention by humans. Considered the gold standard of urban reforestation, experts have rigorously studied the workings of the biotope and its effect on the surrounding urban environment.

There is no need—nor is it be practical—for cities to create something as grand as the Meiji Shrine forest, though. Instead, municipal authorities should utilize the Miyawaki method to strategically plant many smaller stands. Undertakings of this kind would make cities healthier for residents and increase biodiversity while also bolstering disaster readiness, decreasing noise pollution, and mitigating climate change..."

-- Suzuki Shin'ichi, Nippon.com Environment

Read entire article

Manatee County Afforestation

"These volunteers are working to slow down climate change one tiny forest at a time"


Photo: Daylina Miller, Wusfnews.edu

"Volunteers at Heritage Harbour Park in Bradenton drill holes, haul mulch and nutrient-rich dirt, and plant trees and shrubs to create the area's first microforest.

Forests store more than a quarter of the earth's carbon dioxide. But trees don't grow fast enough to compete with the amount of fossil fuels released into the atmosphere. Lately, communities are learning that a small solution could make a big impact in fighting climate change.

It's early morning in Bradenton, where about 100 volunteers armed with shovels and pruning shears kneel in about half an acre of fresh soil for a community planting.

Manatee County master gardener Norma Kisida, crouches down and grabs a sapling.

'We're going to clip these roots so it will come out of the pot,' she says to a local school group. 'Oh yeah, we don't want big roots,' answers an enthusiastic young volunteer.

By the end of the day, these gardeners will have planted about 1,800 shrubs and trees to create a microforest, a tiny densely-planted wooded area, at Heritage Harbor, a planned community just east of I-75.

Charles Reith, with the nonprofit group Sarasota Urban Reforesters, says a coalition of

community groups, including Florida Veterans for Common Sense, Solutions to Avoid Red Tide, (START) and the Sarasota Bay Rotary Club, have established several microforests throughout the Gulf Coast region.

They hope that when these small but dense forests mature, they will make an impact in the fight against climate change.

The project was inspired by Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki, who pioneered the technique of planting species close together so they compete for sunlight.

“Because of the density, the canopy trees get these shade signals in early morning and late afternoon light that stimulate hormones to grow as fast as possible," Reith said.

That means a microforest will mature in just decades instead of up to a century.

Advocates for the Miyawaki method say the miniature forests grow 10 times faster and become 30 times denser and 100 times more biodiverse than those planted by conventional methods.

Reith, a self-described sustainability activist and former professor at Tulane University in New Orleans, says as a result, the trees planted in Bradenton will be able to absorb high levels of carbon much sooner than a traditional forest.

The team estimates that a microforest planted at the Celery Fields in Sarasota two years ago, will sequester approximately 600 tons of carbon in 30 years.

Gene Jones, the president of the nonprofit Florida Veterans for Common Sense, says another major benefit is that microforests intercept and filter rainwater and help reduce pollutants that flow into waterways.

'Runoff contributes a lot to the nutrient load in our bay, which exacerbates red tide,' he said.

These small forests are becoming increasingly popular, particularly in urban areas where space is tight, because they can fit pretty much anywhere. The one in Bradenton is the fifth of its kind in the Gulf Coast region.

Brad Oberle, a professor of biology and environmental studies at New College of Florida is helping organizers track the amount of carbon these microforests will eventually store.

Oberle helped create a food forest with New College students on just under an acre of the Sarasota campus in 2015.

“If we can understand how to make forests grow even better, we potentially have a

really powerful tool to combat climate change," he said.

The New College team measured their trees two years after the initial planting. Taking the soil and trees together, Oberle said the tiny food forest pulled 20,000 pounds of carbon dioxide out of the air. That's equal to the amount produced by two households in a year.

At double the size, and with larger trees, the microforest in Bradenton should sequester a lot more...

'These microforests create a zone certainly under them, but extending further out than one might expect, that cools the air down considerably, said Reith.

While the most obvious way trees cool the air is by shading, they also do it through transpiration, which happens when trees release water into the atmosphere from their leaves.

As the water turns from liquid into vapor, the surrounding air is cooled..."

-- Cathy Carter, Daylina Miller, Wusfnews.edu

Read entire article

Black History Month in Jacksonville Includes Planting Fruit Trees

"Volunteers plant fruit trees to aid area deemed food desert"

Photo: 200 fruit trees being planted at White Harvest Farms in Moncrief neighborhood, WJXT

"Volunteers are doing their part to ensure one part of Jacksonville has easy access to fresh food.

Fruit trees are being planted in that area [Moncrief] this weekend and Feb. 18.

Mikey Howell has been a farmer there for more than a year…

One part of the farm will be a citrus orchard. Volunteers spent the rainy and wet morning planting orange, lemon and grapefruit trees. Other food available includes apples, peaches, grapes, pears and blackberries.

There are also fall and spring crops, including collard greens, kale, herbs, broccoli, lettuces, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and squash.

Nearly 600 residents shopped at either the White Harvest Farm's market or Clara White Mission's farmer's market in 2022…

It was Katie Sims' first time volunteering. Now, she wants this to become a weekly routine.

'These trees are going to be here for hundreds of years,' Sims said. 'Families are going to be able to nourish their bodies. This is the beginning. This is the beginning of change for this community. People should not have to travel far to get good food…'

The city of Jacksonville completed a food desert study in 2019 that revealed 38% of

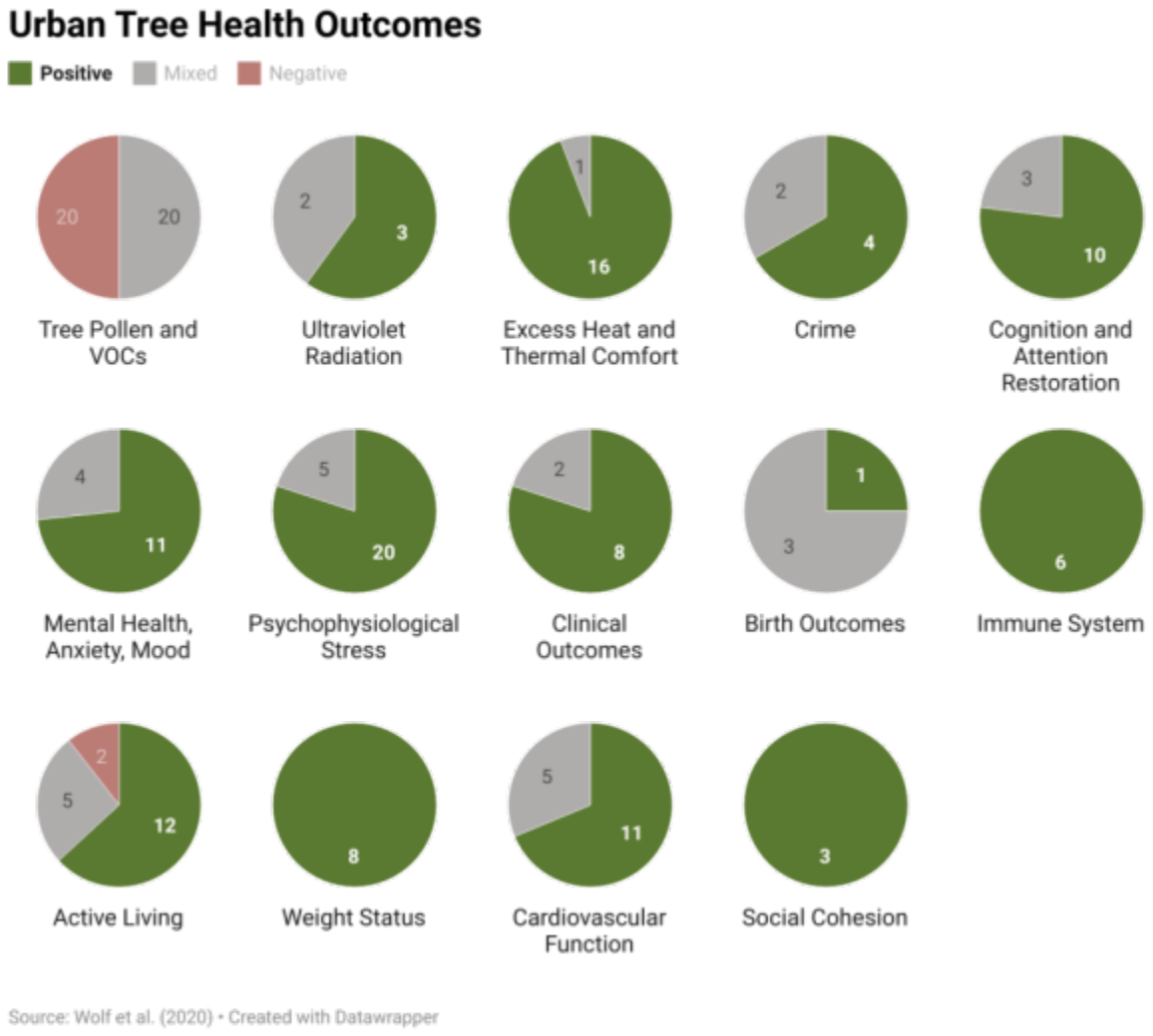
Northwest Jacksonville census tracts were considered food deserts. That is compared to 23% for the entire city..."

On Feb. 18, there will be more tree planting at White Harvest Farms as well as the Black History Month Food Festival with the Clara White Mission."

-- Aaron Farrar, News4Jax

Read entire article

Yale Data
"The little-known physical and mental health benefits of urban trees"



Data Chart: Created by Dana Nuccitelli using Datawrapper and data from Wolf et al. (2020), International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health.

"Trees slow climate change — and they help people live happier, healthier, and longer lives...

But you may not know that urban forests also benefit people's health.

A recent study of a 30-year tree-planting effort in Portland, Oregon, found that one premature death was avoided for every 100 trees planted. And researchers have identified a plethora of physical and mental health benefits that come along with planting more trees in urban areas.

For example, the cooling provided by urban forests can increase resilience to worsening heat waves. Access to trees can also help reduce individuals' stress, improve mental health, strengthen immune systems, reduce crime, and improve student academic performance, among other benefits.

The climate is changing, and our journalists are here to help you make sense of it. Sign up for our weekly email newsletter and never miss a story.

But as with many social issues, access to urban trees is highly inequitable in the United States, with wealthier and whiter communities enjoying substantially more tree canopy cover than poorer neighborhoods and Black and Brown communities.

What research shows about the benefits of urban forests

A 2020 paper published in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health reviewed 201 studies on the various physical and mental health impacts of urban trees. These included a variety of scientific approaches, including different types of experimental, observational, and modeling studies.

The research also considered a wide variety of different health effects that the 2020 study authors grouped into three categories — reducing harm (such as by curbing air pollution, heat exposure, or crime), restoring peoples' capacities (such as by reducing stress, restoring mental cognition and attention, or improving mental health), and building peoples' capacities (such as by strengthening immune systems or motivating active living). For most of the potential benefits evaluated in these 201 papers, the majority of studies identified positive effects from an increase in urban trees...

Six studies have investigated the impact of urban forests on crime. For example, a 2017 paper found that the presence of tree cover was associated with reduced gun assaults in Philadelphia, and trees located on public property were found to have a 40% greater crime reduction impact compared to trees on private property in a 2012 study of Baltimore.

Research has also found that urban forests reduce air pollution, although generally by less than 1%. Leaf surfaces can intercept some dangerous tiny particles from the air, and leaf pores absorb some gaseous pollutants. Despite their relatively small effects on air pollution, one study estimated that in 2010, the health benefits of urban forests in the U.S. were worth nearly $7 billion, preventing 850 premature deaths and 670,000 incidents of acute respiratory symptoms that year.

Urban trees do have one significant adverse health effect: Their pollen releases can trigger allergic reactions. A 2018 study noted that 30—40% of the world's population is affected by some form of allergy, but tree allergies can be reduced by planting species that produce less pollen or preferentially selecting female plants of species that produce more pollen, like pine and oak.

Trees help people feel better

Research has linked exposure to trees to both physical and mental restoration. For example, a number of studies have found that exposure to urban forests generally reduces mental and physical stress, anxiety, and depression, and that they improve moods.

Studies of clinical populations with diagnosed mental health conditions also found mainly positive results from exposure to forests. For example, a 2015 study in London found that in boroughs with higher urban tree density, individuals diagnosed with depression required lower antidepressant prescription rates. And an influential 1984 study of postoperative patients in a Pennsylvania hospital found that those with views of a tree through their window had significantly shorter recovery times following gallbladder surgery.

Urban forests promote active lifestyles

Studies have also identified several positive effects from exposure to urban trees on individuals' physical and mental health capacities. Nearly every study on the subject found that people live more active lifestyles when living in proximity to urban forests.

Six papers found that exposure to forests tends to result in healthier human immune systems, for example through boosted immune cell numbers and activity, though the underlying pathways are not completely understood. Numerous papers, for example, a 2015 study in Toronto, found lower incidences of cardiovascular disease in neighborhoods with higher tree density. Three papers also found that residents in communities with more trees feel a greater sense of connectedness, belonging, and trust.

A 2010 study in Michigan, a 2014 study in Massachusetts, and a 2018 study in Toronto all found that students in school campuses with greater tree cover perform better academically. The 2010 paper found that to be especially true when trees were visible through classroom and cafeteria windows.

But access to trees is unequal

In short, access to urban forests provides a plethora of physical and mental health benefits, allowing people in communities with better tree cover to live longer, happier, healthier lives on average.

But an analysis by the organization American Forests found that majority Black and Brown neighborhoods have 33% less tree canopy on average than majority white communities, and neighborhoods with the highest poverty rates have 41% less tree coverage than the wealthiest communities. American Forests also created a tree equity score tool with data about the level of tree inequity in every community around the country.

These findings suggest that efforts to reduce tree inequities by planting more urban forests in disinvested communities could provide the dual benefits of improving physical and mental health among residents of those neighborhoods — while also helping to slow climate change."

-- Dana Nuccitelli, Yale - Climate Connections

Read entire article

"Is Tampa's tree canopy shrinking because of a change in state law?"


Photo: Times files

"Tampa's tree ordinance was preempted by a state law in 2019. The city's senior forester says an upcoming analysis of the city's canopy will likely show a reduction in coverage, in part because of the law.

Tree advocates and builders reached what was called a historic compromise on protecting the city's award-winning tree canopy in the spring of 2019. A week later, a new state law gutted much of Tampa's and other local governments' power to set rules about tree removals.

At the time, exasperated city officials and advocates raised concerns about the law's provisions allowing grand trees to be cut down as long as a certified arborist or landscape architect signed off, cutting city inspectors out of the process. Some large-scale removals that summer ratcheted up their fears...

Nearly three years later the city hopes to figure out if those fears were justified.

Brian Knox, the city's senior forester examiner, says an upcoming analysis of the city's canopy is planned for release in 2022. A similar analysis in 2016 found 32 percent of the city covered by tree canopy.

And while the data isn't in yet, Knox has a pretty good idea what it will say.

'I expect we will see a decline in the canopy,' Knox said.

It's not just the state law, he said. Tampa's hot development streak has also taken a toll as new houses or commercial developments often require the removal of mature

shade trees. Although they're often replaced with younger trees (developers can also pay into a city tree-planting fund as an alternative), it can often take at least a decade for the canopy to be replenished.

Still, the state's preemption of the city's tree code, in place since the early 1970s, has likely had an effect, Knox said. How much of one is hard to know since the law has no provision for a property owner to inform the city if trees are removed because they're deemed dangerous to persons or property.

'We really don't have a way to monitor the information. We can't really factor the trees that are removed in our decision making,' Knox said. 'That's the part that makes it difficult.'

Taking her dog on daily walks through Davis Islands about six years ago first made Lorraine Parrino aware of the disappearing canopy in her neighborhood as mid-century homes were being replaced with much larger ones. She's since become active in the Tampa Tree Advocacy Group or T-TAG.

Parrino says she has seen ample evidence of healthy trees being taken down. And she thinks not only the state law, but a city government that has streamlined permits and other development-related tasks are responsible.

'Between one thing and another we're losing a lot of trees,' she said. 'We're really flying blind...'

Parrino points to developers replacing oaks with palms, which don't provide much in the way of shade or pollution reduction...

What is certain to City Council member Guido Maniscalco is that trees are a passion point among many residents in Florida's third-largest city. Since being elected in 2015, Maniscalco has listened to hours of testimony and arguments from both sides. He still laments the state preemption of that 'historic' compromise, which allowed builders more flexibility to build in return for more commitments to replenish and maintain the canopy.

And, although it can't systematically track how many trees are being removed under the provisions of the state law, a recent reorganization of city departments makes employees better able to respond to resident reports of suspicious activity, allowing examiners to get to the scene more quickly, Knox said.

'The citizens are our eyes and ears. When they alert us to something, we respond,' he said.

If the tree cutters don't have the proper paperwork from an arborist or landscape architect, code enforcement will be alerted to pursue a violation, he said.

Parrino remains skeptical that's happening often enough. And she worries that the city's trees are falling victim to developers' desire for profits by building bigger homes right up to the property lines. Eventually, she said, one of Tampa's calling cards, its shady, tree-lined streets, will be gone. So will the city's ability to offset rising temperatures and soak up pollution.

'This affects everyone. It's not just a matter of aesthetics,' she said..."

-- Charlie Frago, Tampa Times

Read entire article

Beauty is for Everyone - 450 more trees for Miami's Million Tree Initiative

"Miami-Dade County partners with One Tree Planted to increase urban forestry in neighborhoods with low tree canopy"

"Miami-Dade County Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces Department is partnering with One Tree Planted, a reforestation nonprofit, to plant more than 450 trees at Amelia Earhart Park in 2023. The plantings, led by Neat Streets Miami-Dade's Million Trees initiative, will be achieved in three phases to increase tree canopy in some of Miami-Dade County's neighborhoods with the highest need.

'With the support of wonderful partners like One Tree Planted, Miami-Dade County is progressing to achieve its mission of a 30 percent minimum tree canopy countywide, prioritizing tree equity in our most vulnerable communities,' said County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava. 'Investing in our urban forest is a crucial component of our county's recently launched Extreme Heat Action Plan and overall resilience goals.'

'The 2020 Miami-Dade County Urban Tree Canopy Assessment shined a spotlight on our lowest tree canopy neighborhoods, allowing us to maximize our efforts by planting trees in areas with the greatest tree canopy disparities,' said Miami-Dade County Commissioner Eileen Higgins, Chair of Neat Streets Miami-Dade. 'This project is a perfect example of how we're utilizing the Assessment to enhance quality of life for

all residents by increasing environmental justice, improving air quality, reducing urban heat island effect, and mitigating flooding through tree plantings.'

Amelia Earhart Park is a 515-acre park which sits within the boundaries of multiple neighborhoods that contain some of Miami-Dade County's lowest existing urban tree canopy percentages, some as low as 7.4 percent. Trees planted as part of this project aim to increase the urban tree canopy of these areas, which can improve both environmental and human health benefits for residents..."

-- Newsrelease, Community Newspapers

Read entire article

Placemaking

"The big pink trumpet tree on Coffee Pot Bayou is in bloom. What's its story?"

Photo: Dirk Shadd, Tampa Bay Times

"The hot pink petals caught in the breeze over Coffee Pot Bayou, fluttering like snowflakes onto a lawn dotted with admirers. After all, it's a great place to snap a pretty picture.

Over the last week and a half, a steady stream of people have made the annual pilgrimage to the giant pink trumpet tree at the corner of Coffee Pot Boulevard NE and 23rd Ave. NE, cell phones and tripods in hand. Cyclists and dog walkers pulled off the winding path that runs along the water. Cars and joggers took turns pausing in the middle of the brick boulevard to gawk.

For some, a selfie from across the street was plenty — the long grey branches extend tall and wide, like the two-story palace perched behind the tree. Others got face-to-face with the trunk, stepping onto a lawn blanketed with flecks of flower heads. The bold ones flopped right onto the grass.

The pink trumpet tree, perhaps Historic Old Northeast's most famous plant, is in full bloom. Also known as the Tabebuia tree (pronounced ta-buh-BOO-ya, as in Tabebuia heterophylla), this plant has attracted its own fan club for decades.

But this year, neighbors have noticed more of a frenzy than ever. The theory is an increase in social media presence (hello, bloggers and influencers) has inspired a new generation of onlookers. Linda and Bob Dobbs moved into the century-old house behind the tree on the night of Valentine's Day 2003. Stepping outside the next morning for a cup of coffee, they encountered the rosy petals for the first time. Nature's housewarming present...

"It was a mystery," Linda Dobbs said. "We'd moved from New Jersey, where it was sleet and snow. We were thinking that was paradise just to come outside in February. But to see that, that was like, 'Oh my!'"

Based on old photos of the house and a chat with someone who grew up in the area, the couple estimate the tree's current age to be between 80 and 90 years. Over the 16 years they lived in the house, the bloom became the highlight of their year.

Linda Dobbs brought one to Sunken Gardens, where she has volunteered for years. The couple donated another to the city, asking it to be planted at Crescent Lake Park. Over the years, hurricanes knocked down both.

Dobbs, a retired journalist, said she wrote her Northeast Journal piece to make her case for more Tabebuias around town.

"I just thought, wouldn't it be wonderful if we had a whole line of them, and people could come from all over?" she said. "Forget the cherry blossom festival in D.C. You could come to Tabebuia festival in St. Petersburg in February! But they never took me up on it."

The Dobbses, now in their 70s, downsized to a one-story house in 2019. They christened their yard with a sapling from the Tabebuia. A young tree can take six to eight years to grow flowers. Last year, a few emerged.

They're still waiting for this year's bloom..."

-- Gabrielle Calise, Tampa Bay Times

Read entire article

Using Trees to Calm Traffic

Photo: From article on CaseyTrees.org

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, regional and national trends showed a sharp increase in vehicle-related fatalities – so much so that 2021 was the deadliest year on D.C. roads in over a decade. Since 2015, D.C. has participated in the U.S. Department of Transportation's Mayor's Challenge for Safer People and Safer Streets, resulting in Mayor Bowser's Vision Zero DC plan – which aims to reduce roadway injuries and achieve zero traffic deaths by next year (2024).

When used in concert with other solutions that reduce injuries and deaths on our roadways, trees can help make city streets safer – and D.C.'s Vision Zero a reality – through traffic calming.

Traffic calming is the use of mainly physical measures (speed bumps, horizontal shifts, roadway narrowing, etc.) that reduce the negative effects of motor vehicle use, alter driver behavior, and improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. And

among the methods to calm and control city traffic, the addition of trees to a city street has been proven to slow traffic, reduce accidents, and create safer streets for all – for those who walk, bike, drive, ride transit, exercise, play, dine, or any of the many other activities that take place on or near our streets.

Studies have shown that when a street is lined with trees, they act as a visual barrier between drivers and pedestrians. A study from 2019 found that a higher urban tree cover is associated with increased feelings of safety. The study states:'"High coverage and dispersion of trees are needed for increased perceived safety.'

The amazing thing is that areas with street trees not only feel safer, but they've been proven to be safer. Trees have been shown to calm traffic and reduce vehicle speeds by appearing to narrow the width of the roadway. Without trees, the open space gives drivers the illusion that they have more control to drive faster – when in reality, that's exactly how accidents occur. Reminder: If a street looks like a highway, people will treat it like a highway. In an area where streets were widened and trees were not present, accidents increased by almost 500% within an 8-year period.

Another unexpected benefit of using street trees for traffic calming is that drivers feel more relaxed in the presence of trees. This has shown to result in less road rage and accidents caused by frustration. Unlike other traffic calming devices, trees are multi-faceted – not only do they help make roads safer, but they also save energy, increase property value, reduce stormwater runoff, and generally make our lives more comfortable and beautiful!"

-- Christina Hester, Casey Trees

Read entire article

"University Of Florida Scientists Aim For More Tree Varieties To Ensure Urban Canopy Survives Pests, Diseases"

Andrew Koeser, UF/IFAS associate professor of environmental horticulture and a co-author of the study, conducts urban tree research. Photo: Deb Hilbert

"When cities are dominated by only a few species, new infestations of pests and diseases from overseas can just move through with dramatic results,' said Andrew Koeser, a UF/IFAS associate professor of environmental horticulture.

A diverse canopy is important everywhere, but particularly in Florida, where about 90% of the state's 21.7 million residents live in cities. Urban dwellers need trees for shade, oxygen, and more.

In addition to the benefits humans derive from trees, canopy diversity can make urban areas better habitats for wildlife like birds, pollinators or butterflies, said Koeser, co-author of a new study that examines factors that impede tree diversity.

Deborah Hilbert, a doctoral graduate of the UF/IFAS College of Agricultural and Life Sciences who studied under Koeser's supervision, led the study.

Researchers conducted focus groups with tree producers, landscape architects and municipal arborists around Florida.

Tree growers cited market demand, sales and other business-related production issues as impediments to offering a more diverse selection of trees. Landscape architects and city tree professionals mentioned ordinances and setback rules.

Many urban streets and residential areas are lined with a single type of tree – which can look beautiful, but the practice runs counter to ensuring a longer-living canopy.

'Some people love the look of uniform street plantings, and professionals design these to meet that need,' said Koeser, a faculty member at the UF/IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center in Hillsborough County. 'The problem is math.'

For example, if you have one or two tree species in your neighborhood, and a noxious pest comes in that that can kill that type of tree, it will likely kill 50% to 100% of those trees...

As potential solutions, several professionals from the focus groups suggested educating policymakers about tree species diversity, how it relates to climate change and the threat of devastating diseases and pests.

'Some types of trees will do better than others in harsher climates,' Hilbert said. 'We don't know yet which trees will thrive in the future, so planting a variety increases the chances that at least some of them will still be around in the next 30-plus years....'"

-- Brad Buck, The Free Press

Read entire article

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