

[Print Article](#)

Print This Story

These trees create your own 'Urban Forest'

By STEVE JONES

Hernando Today columnist

What do you think of when you hear the phrase 'Urban Forest'? To me, it sounds a lot better than a concrete jungle, a phrase that conjures up visions of towering office and apartment buildings.

In recent years, the urban forest concept has developed largely to counter the concrete jungle, planting trees and shrubs in urban environments across America.

Urban forests mean different things to different people. To some it might mean setting aside areas strictly for native plants that probably grew there before the advent of the city. To others it might mean creating greenways with more exotic plants. For yet other urban forest enthusiasts, it could mean planting street trees throughout an inner city community.

Regardless of the specific type of planting, an urban forest can help remove pollutants, protect water quality and provide a wildlife habitat.

Dr. John E. Wear Jr., the founding director of the Catawba College Center for the Environment, located near Salisbury, North Carolina, said on a recent EarthSky broadcast on NPR that the greater the tree cover and the less the impervious surface in a community, the more ecosystem services are produced. These services are measured as storm water runoff reduction, increased air and water quality, carbon storage, and reduction of energy usage.

Air quality is a serious problem, particularly in urban areas. A tree canopy, notes Dr Wear, is a filtering system for our air. Urban forests remove significant amounts of ozone, nitrogen dioxide, smoke particles, and carbon from the atmosphere. And, he added, communities should consider the value of trees when planning for growth.

Los Angeles might be thought of as the poster child for concrete jungles. But the Million Tree Initiative plans to change that view with a goal of planting, yes, one million trees within the city, with the help of the Center for Urban Forestry Research and its director, Greg McPherson.

"Low-income areas tend to have higher incidents of asthma and respiratory disease," McPherson says. "Sometimes they're located adjacent to freeways, areas where there are high concentrations of pollutants. So, adding a layer of green in those areas will help filter out the small particulates and some of the ozone and gaseous pollutants."

You can read more about improving our environment by creating inner-city greenbelts by going to <http://www.earthsky.org> and searching for "urban forests".

If you live in a city or a densely populated suburban area you might want to see if there is a local organization whose goal is to create more green spaces. If there isn't one already, perhaps you can get together with some friends and start your own group.

But you don't need a group to make an impact on your own environment. Plant a single shade tree in your own yard can cut your air-conditioning costs by ten to fifteen percent, and reduce radiant heat loss from your home on cold winter nights.

Additionally, a number of studies have shown that real estate agents and home buyers assign between 10 and 23 percent of the value of a residence to the trees on the property.

Looking for some ideas for trees to create your own mini-urban forest? Look at these...

Princeton Elm

The classic shade tree, the Princeton American Elm grows a fast 3 to 6 feet per year, eventually reaching up to 100 feet in height. It's the only American elm with more than 75 years of scientific proven tolerance to Dutch elm disease. It is easily transplanted and easy to grow in good to poor soil conditions.

Bald Cypress

Bald Cypress trees display a rather attractive reddish brown fibrous bark. A stately tree that has moderate water requirements, and a moderate tolerance for salt and alkali soils.

Aristocrat Flowering Pear

Hardy to zone 4, The Aristocrat Flowering Pear reaches a mature height of 40 ft with a 30 ft spread, is pest resistant and tolerates drought, poor drainage and just about any soil. Aristocrat Flowering Pear can thrive despite the effects of moderate winds, smog, and extreme temperatures, making it a good "urban forest" choice.

There are many other trees that can bring shade, color and (literally) a breath of fresh air to your own landscape. Plant a tree, or two or three, and do your part to improve the environment!