
ARBOR VITAE

NEWSLETTER OF TREES FOR CAPITOL HILL, INC. 2022 Issue



2021 Fall Tree Planting

Beth Purcell, President, TFCH

Trees for Capitol Hill (TFCH) continues to augment Capitol Hill's tree canopy in cooperation with the Urban Forestry Administration (UFA). Our volunteers are working toward the shared goal of adding diversity to our urban forest. Planting a wide range of tree species along our streets ensures that some trees will survive if a species-specific disease appears, e.g., Dutch elm disease and elm yellows. This diversity also serves an educational purpose -- the UFA is helping educate residents by leaving the ID tags on recently planted trees. Photos and detailed descriptions are available online: ddot.dc.gov/page/ddot-urban-forestry.

We planted these street trees in November 2021: a Shumard oak (*Quercus shumardii*) at 217 5th Street, NE, a Yellowwood (*Cladrastis kentukea*) at 23 4th Street, NE, a Serviceberry (*Amelanchier canadensis*) at 1345 A St. NE, and in triangle parks, a generously proportioned Golden Larch (*Laryx decidua*) in the triangle at 13th Street and Tennessee and Constitution Avenues, NE, an Oklahoma Redbud (*Cercis canadensis, var. texensis*) in the park at 15th Street and North Carolina and Constitution Avenues, NE, and a Pecan (*Carya illinoensis, var. pawnee*) between the 1300 blocks of North Carolina Avenue and A Street NE. We are very grateful for the help of volunteers on planting day.

We're planning to be "back at it" on November 19, 2022, our traditional Saturday-before-Thanksgiving planting date. Mark it on your calendar; we'll send a recruitment email when it gets closer to the time.

If you'd like to suggest a planting location on public property, let us know soon, so we can get approval from our friends at the Urban Forestry Administration (UFA). Or check out our Friends & Family program on page 9.



The Merrifield Garden Center truck, driven by Tony Lopez, arrives at the first stop (left) An impromptu stump removal (below)





The yellowwood with planting crew (left) and its sponsor (above)



Gorgeous fall color on the hefty Sumard oak (left) and Terry Turner's photo of the planting party with the Golden Larch (right)

Newsletter Editor Needed

Elizabeth Nelson, Vice-President/Treasurer, TFCH

TFCH is in dire need of a newsletter designer. We are limping along (or you would not be receiving this publication) but we're eager to find a more permanent solution. If you have publishing skills and can help with this annual effort, please let us know. Contact elizabeth_knits@yahoo.com.

Pecans: The “Facts of Life”

Elizabeth Nelson, Vice-President/Treasurer, TFCH

I have a penchant for pecans. They are one of my very favorite trees. What’s not to love? They’re large and sturdy. They generate plenty of shade, and they provide food for wildlife and people – at least in theory.

There have been pecan trees near my home, a bit northeast of Lincoln Park, for many years but, sadly, they have not borne nuts. Although pecan trees are monoecious, meaning they produce both catkins (male flowers with pollen) and nutlets (female flowers) on the same plant, they don’t self-pollinate and they are fussy about “choosing a mate”. Some trees mature the male flowers first followed by the female flowers - Type I or protandrous flowering. Other trees mature the female flower first - Type II or protogynous flowering. The pollen has to reach the nutlet during its period of receptivity so not every tree can pollinate every other. To complicate matters, pollination is most successful if the trees are within 150 feet of each other. Serious pecan growers use detailed charts and planting plans to ensure a good harvest.

We don’t know the classification of the older trees (although an expert may be able to tell from looking at the catkins*) and they are probably too far apart, anyway. Two winters ago, the Urban Forestry Administration (UFA) did a planting in between, on the 1300 block of North Carolina Ave NE. However, their contractor doesn’t share information on variety – leaving us guessing about the newbies. We can’t predict whether our Pawnee (Type 1 pecan) will be a match for any of the existing trees, but we’ll plant a Type II in the next year or two. And, at some point, the pecans should start raining down.

A reasonably easy-to-read pollination chart can be found at pecans.uga.edu/content/dam/caes-subsite/pecans/docs/pollination-chart.pdf

* *Catkins of Type I pecan varieties typically have short, thick catkins while Type II pecan varieties have long, thin catkins.*



Pecan sapling in triangle on 1300 block of A Street NE (above) Nut cluster (below)



Updates at Eastern HS

Elizabeth Nelson, Vice-President/Treasurer, TFCH

UFA Tree Planting

As reported in our 2020 issue, our colleagues at DDOT's Urban Forestry Administration (UFA) completed a massive tree planting effort at Eastern Senior High School (1800 East Capitol St. NE) in the winter of 2019-2020. With a project of this size, some fatalities are to be expected but, fortunately, nearly all survived. Two years later, they have enough growth on them to make a visual impact. The school looks so much more inviting, like a fancy New England prep-school, surrounded by a green urban forest. Give the trees another two years, and it will be difficult to imagine the formerly bleak scene. Many thanks to our friends at UFA!



The UFA planting in progress at Eastern High School



The same view, today

BayScapes Garden

In 2021, as part of the Anacostia Watershed Society's (AWS) Watershed Steward Academy program, Kristina Vidal installed a 'BayScapes' garden on the northwest corner of 19th and East Capitol Street NE. This sloping site on the Eastern HS campus is now home to a variety of native plants, including winterberries and little bluestem grasses, selected for hardiness and seasonal interest.

Funding was provided by AWS, with an "assist" from TFCH. The garden has improved on-site absorption of rainwater, and provided food for pollinators and other local wildlife, while reducing the amount of lawn that needs to be maintained.



BayScapes Garden three weeks after planting in 2021



Early summer 2022

Please Water Trees

Beth Purcell, President, TFCH

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

- These trees will need supplemental water for at least their first three summers if they are to survive.
- The District government plans to water their plantings twice a month. Even if they follow this schedule, there 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. Instead, 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 water will gradually drip out over 24-48 hours. 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.
- 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. If not properly drained, they can also become a mosquito breeding ground.
- 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.

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 proactive!

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. Cleaning weeds and debris from the planting space 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.

TFCH has a few bags and basins that can be borrowed for the season. If you want one, contact Elizabeth Nelson, Elizabeth_knits@yahoo.com.

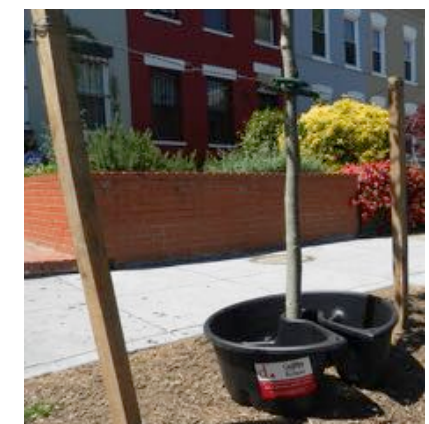
Service requests for tree inspection/removal/replanting can be made at 311.dc.gov or by calling 311. Making the request on-line is preferable because it creates a record of your request. You can create an account or login as a guest. This is a direct link to the “All Service Types” menu, which includes several tree related options: 311.dc.gov/citizen/servicetypes/all.



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 to Tree Bark

Elizabeth Nelson, Vice-President/Treasurer, TFCH

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 District government 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. However, 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 too are easily shredded by high powered mowers. Keeping weeds and tall grass away from tree trunks reduces the temptation to mow too close. It is recommended that a wide circle of mulch be used, as it discourages unwanted vegetation and preserves moisture. Best of all, it keeps those mowers away from the trees. But be sure to arrange it in a "donut" shape to keep it way from the trunk where it may create habitat for damaging insects. To request a bark protector from TFCH, email Elizabeth_knits@yahoo.com with 'bark protector' in the subject line.



Plastic bark protector



Nick Alberti and Mark Grace arrange the mulch away from the tree trunk



Donations Appreciated!

The generosity of our neighbors allows us to continue the work of keeping our neighborhood green and the streets tree-lined. Donations are fully tax-deductible. To make a contribution, send a check made out to "Trees for Capitol Hill" to 1330 North Carolina Ave., NE, Washington, DC 20002

Tree Space Beautification Best Practices

Steve Keboe, reprinted courtesy of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society (CHRS)

Residents are encouraged to adhere to these best practices, which will contribute to the robust growth and general health of Capitol Hill's public space trees.

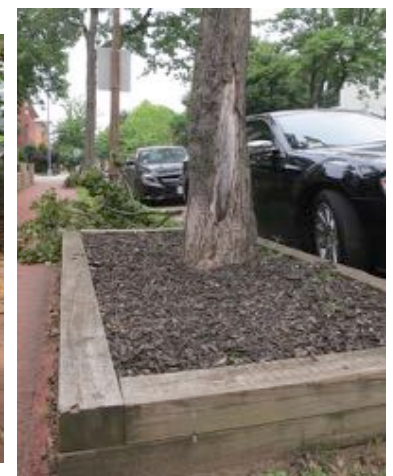
DO	DON'T
If adding soil amendments or replacing some soil in a tree space, work must be done prior to tree planting. After planting, only periodic light cultivation is advised.	Never try to replace soil around a tree after it has been planted. Trying to replace soil around a tree usually results in a dead tree within 1 or 2 years—particularly for trees that are just becoming established.
Mulching around a tree is encouraged, as is watering new trees when rainfall is less than 1 inch per week. New trees need 10 - 20 gallons of water once a week from spring bloom until winter freeze. Second- and third-year trees need 20 - 40 gallons per week.	Don't use gravel as a groundcover or deposit soil to increase the grade of a tree space. Both are prohibited (24 DCMR 109.10). Piling on additional soil exposes the tree bark to soil borne diseases and robs the roots of oxygen.
Any temporary barrier or fencing must allow the free flow of rainwater from the sidewalk into the tree space. This applies to permanent tree fences too. DC Dept. of Transportation (DDOT) requires a \$50 permit for a permanent tree fence (24 DCMR 225.1(h)).	Don't install any solid border or edging around a tree space. This practice prevents or impedes the flow of rainwater from the sidewalk into the tree space. DDOT has been enlarging tree spaces in an effort to increase the amount of rainwater runoff available to trees.
Limit plantings to annual or perennial plants having a shallow root system and a mature height of no more than 18 inches tall.	Don't use plants that grow via a deep root system, spread by underground shoots or runners, that climb or intertwine, or that are invasive.
Acceptable plants include perennials such as <u>variegated</u> Liriope, Ferns, Hostas, Dusty Miller, Yarrow, Sedums, Black-Eyed Susan, and flowering annuals that grow no more than 18 inches tall. Plants should be at least 2 feet from the tree trunk.	Don't plant bamboo and <u>dark green</u> Liriope, which spread by underground shoots to form an impenetrable root layer, or English Ivy, which climbs. Vegetable plants are not flowers and are prohibited (24 DCMR 109.11).



Excessive shrubbery crowds the tree stealing nutrients and water



Raising the soil level will smother the roots and kill the tree



This planting box restricts free flow of rainwater, raises the soil level and creates a tripping hazard

2022 Tree of the Year

Fringe Tree

Mark Grace, Secretary, TFCH

This plant is classified as *Chionanthus virginicus* in the oleaceae (olive) family. Indigenous to the eastern U.S., it prospers from Canada to the Gulf Coast. Trees can be either male or female. Males sport larger, showier blooms, but females form attractive, blackish-blue fruits that are attractive to birds. Both sexes have bright yellow fall foliage.

In late spring, an abundance of feathery white flowers appears on the tree for a two-week blooming providing a showy display – and suggesting its nickname, old man’s beard. The flowers can perfume your garden with their sweet, lilac-like smell, particularly in the evening.

Fringe trees grow 12 to 20 feet tall and wide, with a rounded shape and are usually multi-trunked. They adapt to either full or partial sun, and prefer moist, fertile, well-drained soil. They’re a good choice for our neighborhood because they can tolerate urban air pollution and some drought.

Want to see one for yourself? This specimen on the southwest lawn at the U. S. Capitol Building is especially fragrant, positively intoxicating.



A particularly stunning example on the southwest lawn of the U.S. Capitol grounds

A Tree of One's Own - "Friends & Family" Program

Elizabeth Nelson, Vice-President/Treasurer, TFCH

In addition to planting in public space, TFCH assists neighbors wanting trees for their own yards. They are required to prepare a hole on their property and pay the cost of the tree (at our discounted price) plus a prorated share of the shipping costs. TFCH selects a specimen of the preferred species at the nursery, purchases the tree, arranges delivery and assists in planting. These trees are quite large, usually 1-2" caliper, and not inexpensive. Still, they are typically a more mature tree than what you could bring home and plant by yourself; the discount makes them more affordable; and your shipping and installation costs are lower than if purchased directly from a nursery. Memorial trees commemorating a loved one or a special occasion can be planted in public space or on private property. If interested, email elizabeth_knits@yahoo.com with 'Friends & Family Tree' in the subject line. There's no real deadline but most likely we'll do "the big shop" at Merrifield Garden Center in late August or early September.

Not quite sure what you want? Check out the "plant finder" at missouribotanicalgarden.org. The climate in Missouri is very similar to the Washington metro area and the advice offered by this website has proven quite reliable for plant choices on Capitol Hill.

Girdling Roots and the Storm of 2022

Elizabeth Nelson, Vice-President/Treasurer, TFCH

A heavy snowstorm on January 3 really did a number on trees all over the Hill. Saddest for me, personally, a zelkova planted by TFCH two decades ago toppled over and squashed a catalpa that was a sentimental favorite.

Margaret Missiaen, my predecessor as TFCH Treasurer, gave it to me as a seedling and I nurtured it in my back yard until it was large enough to make it on the street. So disappointing – it was just coming into its own.

Thankfully, the UFA salvaged it with a sensitive pruning, rather ripping it out, and it looks half-ways decent, though half as big as it used to be.

I did learn one interesting thing from the experience, though. Zelkova's are prone to "girdling roots" that can eventually strangle the tree. They're still great trees, well suited to an urban environment. But best to check for problematic roots and deal with it while they are still very young. This one looked completely healthy. But when it came down, the roots did not heave up; it just snapped off near the base, baring a pointy end that looked like it had been in a pencil sharpener. Something to be aware of when planting a Zelkova – or parking underneath one.



Note how the root is "cutting into" the trunk near the base, on the right hand side of photo

Trees For Capitol Hill, Inc.
1330 North Carolina Ave., NE
Washington, DC 20002



Third-place winner in CHRS photo contest – Margit Leiner-Henry

Trees For Capitol Hill



Who we are:

Trees for Capitol, Inc., a DC nonprofit 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” to 1330 North Carolina Ave., NE, Washington, DC 20002

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