
ARBOR VITAE

NEWSLETTER OF TREES FOR CAPITOL HILL, INC. 2023 Issue



2022 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 or infestation appears, e.g., Dutch elm disease or emerald ash borer. 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 2022: on the 1300 block of North Carolina Avenue, NE, a Black gum (*Nyssa sylvaca*), a trident maple (*Acer guergeranium*) a Main Street maple (*Acer buergeranum*), and a Sweet Bay Magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*), at 1417 A Street NE a Chinese pistache (*Pistacius chinensis*) a Burr Oak (*Quercus atlantica*), opposite 501 E Street SE, and two Oklahoma Redbuds (*Cercis canadensis*) and a male ginko (*Ginko biloba*) at Maury Elementary School, 1250 Constitution Avenue NE. Plus a Blue Atlas cedar (*Cedrus atlantica*), a rebud (*Cercis canadensis*), and a Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*) on private property.

Brownie Troop 44123 at Brent Elementary sponsored the burr oak on the edge of Marion Park, not too far from the school. The girls and their families had a lovely, perfectly sized hole ready and waiting for us when they arrived. They carefully replaced the soil around the root ball, tucked in a few spring bulbs, and gave it a thorough watering. They all promised to love and protect the tree – and they have; as soon as hot dry weather set in the spring, they were back on watering duty. We are very grateful for their help and that of other volunteers on planting day.

We're planning to be "back at it" on November 18, 2023, 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 (page 7).



Brownie Troop 44123 at Brent ES

Tucking a few bulbs around the root ball (below)



Michael Fahey tags a blue atlas cypress at MGC (above)



Planting Friends & Family trees (left & above)



Always a thrill when the big red truck arrives!



The crew at Maury ES (left) and watering volunteer (right)



Updates

*Elizabeth Nelson, Vice-President/Treasurer,
TFCH*

Pecans

As reported in our 2021 issue, I am fixated on pecans. I want not only pecan *trees* – I also want pecan *nuts*. This is not so easily accomplished...

First, it's hard to find pecan trees available for purchase. The one pictured below was the largest we could find and the only one available at MGC when we did the "big shop" in 2020. Second, 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 much prefer a mate of a different variety. 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

We're tackling problem #1 by purchasing them as twigs and bringing them along in my backyard nursery; and addressing problem #2 by choosing different types. It'll be a few more years before the babies can join their brethren in public, but "fingers crossed" for future bounty.

Pecan sapling in triangle on 1300 block of A Street NE



Catalpa

Heavy snow in January 2022 brought down a zelkova on the 1300 block of North Carolina Ave NE, stripping most of the branches from the young catalpa in its path. The catalpa, planted by TFCH a few years back, looked like a "goner" but our friends at the UFA, knowing the effort we'd put into it, took pity on it and, instead of ripping it out and starting over (surely their first inclination), they just cleaned it up a bit and gave it a chance to recover. Look at it now! It's bigger than it was before the damage – thanks in large part to the residents of the nearby Audubon condo building, who have given it as much water as it could possibly desire.

Ginkgo

The sponsor of this poor beheaded tree witnessed a photographer lopping off the top to get a better shot at the mural (a riff on Hokusai's "The Great Wave"). You wouldn't think an art fancier with an appreciation for one of the most iconic images of the natural world would do such a thing but – yup, they did. Shame on them! We were advised by the UFA that it will likely form a new leader, and it seems that it has, so we're hoping for the best.

Catalpa in front of the Audubon



Decapitated ginkgo at 14th Place & North Carolina Avenue NE



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.

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.

Urban Forestry in the District

Mark Grace, Secretary, TFCH

The District of Columbia has, under its Department of Transportation (DDOT), an Urban Forestry Division (UFD). Trees for Capitol Hill (www.treesforcapitolhill.org) works with the Ward 6 Arborists, Steve Mckindley-Ward and Alex Grieve, receiving advice on tree selection, site planting, permits and maintenance, and on-going care. Trees for Capitol Hill helps promote the UFD mission of greater public understanding and connection to the urban tree canopy. The UFD has created an interactive portal that helps residents understand the urban forest that surrounds us. Scroll through it to explore information describing the history, value, and management of the urban forest in Washington, DC. On the site you will be able to:

Apply for a tree permit - Knowing when, where, and how to get the right permit for tree work can be a complicated process. Fortunately, Urban Forestry has the information you need at (ddot-urban-forestry-dcgis.hub.arcgis.com/pages/permitting). If you suspect Special and/or Heritage Trees (44" and 100" diameter, respectively) are being removed illegally, call their office at: 202-673-6813

Request a Street Tree Service or Planting - Call 311 or go to 311.dc.gov online to request street tree services, including reporting emergencies, pruning, removals, and planting.

Arbor Vitae asked Steve Mckindley-Ward two questions about the UFD:

1. *Are there any exciting projects or goals that DDOT urban forestry has that residents can look forward to?*

One growing in importance in the last five years is our urban wood re-use program. A lot is taking place on public schoolyards---and there's a waiting list for various wood products.

2. *What are three simple ways or habits that DC residents can adopt to help protect, restore, and grow the urban tree canopy?*

Always #1 is watering first-year street trees through their first long, hot DC summer. The first year is critical. #2.) Learning and spreading-the-word about the DC Municipal Regulations "Beautification of Tree Spaces"*** helps tamp down a lot of inappropriate and "tree-hurtful" practices by uninformed residents. Report violations to 3-1-1. #3.) Call 3-1-1 if you have a tree concern of any kind and to get a direct response from the arborist, use the DC311 app!

*** a synopsis of the regulations appears on the following page (8)

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.

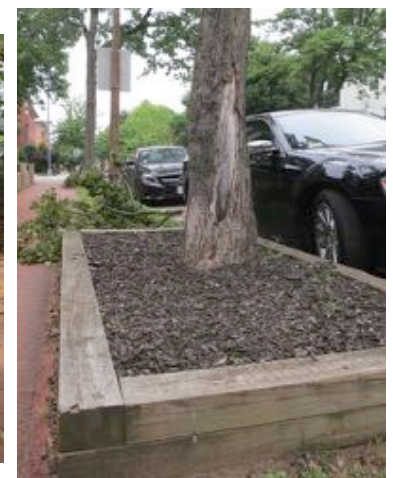
DO	DON'T
If adding soil amendments or replacing some soil in a tree space, work must be done prior to tree planting. After planting, only periodic light cultivation is advised.	Never try to replace soil around a tree after it has been planted. Trying to replace soil around a tree usually results in a 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



Photo 1: Poke holes with spading fork



Photo 2: Remove weeds



Photo 3: Extensive Bermuda grass root system

Channeling Rain Water to New Street Trees

Margaret Missiaen

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 4: Apply fresh mulch

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.

2023 Tree of the Year

American Smoketree (*Continus Obovatus*)

Mark Grace, Secretary, TFCH

The American smoketree is the Arbor Vitae tree of the year! Closely related to the Sumac, it has dark green deciduous leaves and sprouts extremely fluffy, cloud like (hence 'smoke'), reddish gray-bluff flowers. It is a gauzy, misty morning looking beauty!

The American smoketree is non-invasive in the northern hemisphere and a healthy specimen has a life span of up to 60 years. With growth of 1 to 2 feet per year one can expect a typical mature height of 22 feet. It can easily become a stunning focal point for small lots or used as a unique camouflaging or border plant. Ideal planting time is in the early Spring, the very best location is a spot that gets full sun. It is not dirt fussy and can do well in rocky or imperfect soil but do avoid soil that is heavily clay.

The smoketree can be planted as a bush and maintained as such by seasonal pruning, but it can also be easily pruned to be a tree. If you want a tree shaped plant prune it down to one center stem and continue cutting away branches as they appear. Note though! Pruning should not be done for the first two years of growth.

Imagine this beauty in your yard!



HISTORIC CONGRESSIONAL CEMETERY – Volunteer Gardening Opportunities

Mark Grace, Secretary, TFCH

Feel the need to get socially involved with the world again? Or perhaps with the underworld? Need to regenerate your soul with some dirt? Consider volunteer gardening at Congressional Cemetery! congressionalcemetery.org/

You likely know already of this historic, nationally significant, 35-acre site because of events such as the “Dead Man’s Run” (an annual mini-marathon), the occasional movie night out among the headstones, or are a K-9 dog Corps member, but did you know there is an opportunity to be a volunteer gardener?

Volunteers early on recognized the need to get involved to save the beauty of the cemetery. There are opportunities to garden, plant, and beautify the grounds by adopting and attending to a neglected family plot, a sitting area, or a pathway. Plots and areas vary in size so don’t be intimidated!

For example, volunteers have taken on the grand resting place of Mary Ann Hall, a 19th century proprietress of a successful Capitol Hill brothel, the fronts of a row of majestic mausoleums (neglected over the years as families and fortunes died out) and that grace a hillside, or small, sylvan areas by a pathway. There are plenty of spots that need attention.

Things to consider if you commit to volunteering; walk the grounds to understand what the best available location might be, consider the amount of sun or shade; understand that no food plants can be planted, i.e., tomatoes, pumpkins, vegetables; and don’t get ahead of yourself, test what works for you and the spot! Finally, know where the nearest water source is. There are spigots throughout the cemetery, and there are other volunteers you can confab with.

If you are interested, visit: congressionalcemetery.org/volunteers/

And remember that Congressional Cemetery is an active cemetery. There will be times when it is closed to accommodate burials.

The Congressional Cemetery gravestone of Herbert M.

Franklin (1933-2021) is worthy of note to all tree lovers who would be “diligent husbandmen.” It reads:

“He plants trees for the benefit of another century, for what purpose, if the next century were not something to him?”

The diligent husbandman, then shall plant trees upon which his own eyes shall never see a berry. And shall not a great man plant laws, institutions, a commonwealth?” --Caecilius Statius, as quoted by Cicero

Herb, as he was known, was an executive director for the Architect of the Capitol from 1989 until 2002 where he served as the project director for the design and construction of the Thurgood Marshall Federal Judiciary Building, the renovation of the U.S. Botanic Garden, and the creation of the National Garden.



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



Fall colors in Congressional Cemetery

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

Officers:

President:	Beth Purcell (202.544.0178)
Vice President/Treasurer:	Elizabeth Nelson (202.329.7864) (elizabeth_knits@yahoo.com)
Secretary:	Mark Grace
Newsletter:	Elizabeth Nelson
Web address:	Treesforcapitolhill.com