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# ARBOR VITAE

NEWSLETTER OF TREES FOR CAPITOL HILL, INC. 2021 Issue

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## 2020 Fall Tree Planting

*Beth Purcell, President, TFCH*

Trees for Capitol Hill 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. You can learn more about the UFA at [ddot.dc.gov/page/ddot-urban-forestry](https://ddot.dc.gov/page/ddot-urban-forestry).

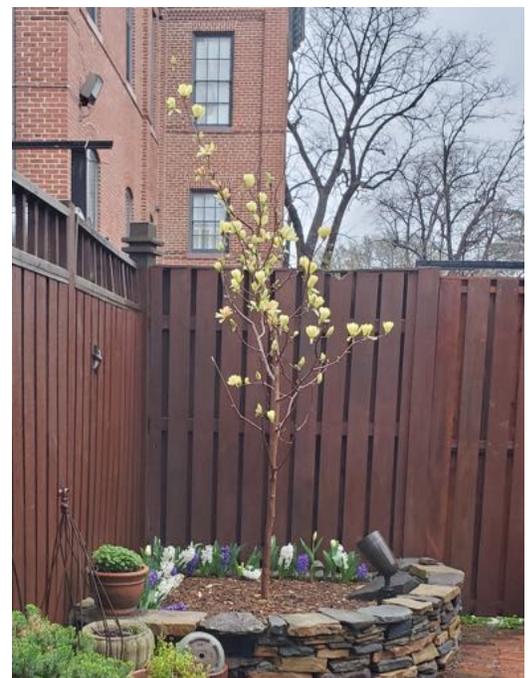
We planted these street trees in November 2020: on the 1300 block of A Street, NE, a Water Hickory (*Carya aquatica*) and a Hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*); on the 1300 block of North Carolina Avenue, NE, an American Hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*), and on the 200 block of 14th Place, NE, a male Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*). In private yards we planted a Butterflies Magnolia (*Magnoliaceae*), a Maple (*Acer*) and a Natchez crape myrtle (*Lagerstroemia*). All the new trees are in good hands, with committed “sponsors” ready to water them when the inevitable late-summer drought arrives.

We are very grateful for the help of volunteers on planting day; we couldn’t have managed without them. As you can see from the photos, everyone wore masks; we did our best to maintain “social distance;” and we kept the planting list short. We’re hoping to be “back to normal” this year on November 20, 2021, 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. This is our 30th birthday year, having been incorporated in 1991 – let’s make it extra special.

If you’d like to suggest a planting location on public property, let us know. Or check out our Friends & Family program on page 9.



Peter Herrick & Aiden Herron deliver a “Butterflies” Magnolia (left), seen blooming this spring (below)





1300 block of A St. NE scored a hackberry and a hickory



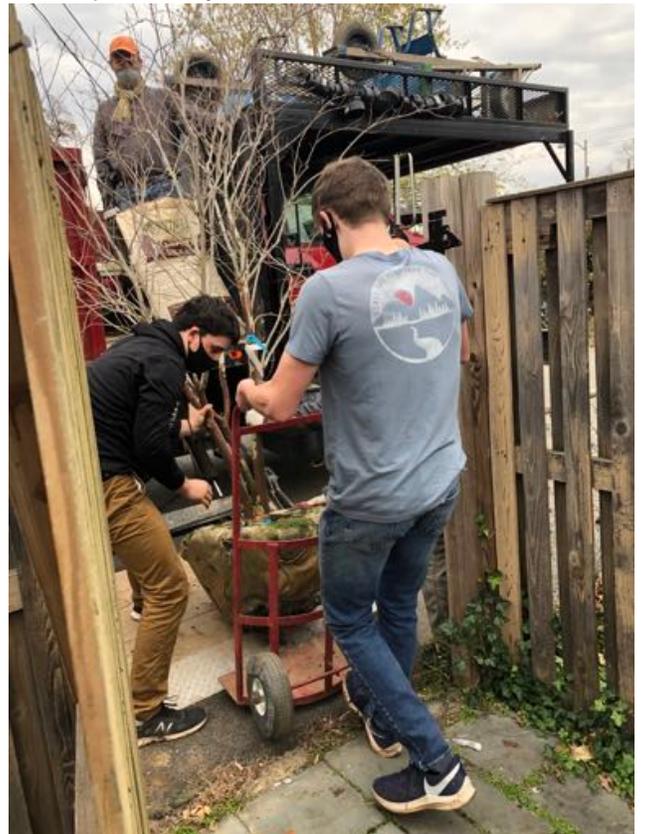
Hornbeam on North Carolina Ave NE



Ginkgo on 14th Place NE



Last stop of the day, whew!



# New BayScapes Garden at Eastern High School

*Kristina Vidal*

Like many who used the pandemic to take advantage of new opportunities, I opted into the Anacostia Watershed Society's (AWS) virtual training for its Spring cohort of the Watershed Steward Academy program. Along with learning about a number of issues affecting watershed quality, would-be stewards are asked to complete a capstone project, and I chose to install a new 'BayScapes' garden at Eastern HS, 1800 East Capitol St. NE, to help improve our local watershed. After consultation with the program advisers, TFCH and the Eastern HS community, I finalized my plan for this environmentally-sound, native plant-based garden near the intersection of East Capitol and 19th Streets NE. As there were already a number of recently planted trees near my site, my focus was on smaller plants, and TFCH donated six of those – three winterberries and three little bluestem grasses.

The bulk of the funding for my capstone was provided by AWS, and I spent the early part of 2021 finalizing the plant list, the planting plan and logistics. Planting took place over two days in early spring – one day to plant the winterberries, and a community volunteer event to get the rest of the plants in the ground. The new garden put 70 new natives plants on a sloping site, and the plants were selected with an eye toward hardiness and ability to provide seasonal interest. While the bluebells have passed their prime, several other plants should be growing/blooming over the summer months, with the winterberries, partridgeberries and grasses waiting in the wings to take the spotlight when the weather turns cold. The new BayScapes garden should increase the amount of on-site absorption of rainwater, provide food for pollinators and other local wildlife while reducing the amount of lawn that needs to be mowed on a challenging slope.



Planting day volunteers



BayScapes Garden three weeks after planting



... and two months later

# Trees for Bees

*Toni Burnham - president and founder of the DC Beekeepers Alliance. This is her 17th summer keeping bees in DC.*

In the MidAtlantic region, native tree species are critically important for pollinators, as forage and home sites, whether the bees in question are native or managed honey bee colonies. More than 400 species of bees are native to our region and most have co-evolved with indigenous plant and tree species.

Most people do not think of trees as blooming plants, though they represent by far the largest source of nectar and pollen for honey bees in Washington, DC. Three species in particular, the Black Locust (*Robinia pseudo-acacia*), the Tulip Poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), and the American Basswood (*Tilia americana*), are the main sources of nectar collected for honey in our region. During the bloom period of these three species (typically early April through mid-June), a single mature specimen can produce the equivalent of 2 acres of blooming forage for honey bees. Interestingly, Basswood (*Tilia americana*) is far more prevalent in downtown Washington than in the suburbs, and makes DC honey distinctive and wonderfully delicious!

Both native and managed bees energetically pollinate native species such as Persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*), Paw Paw (*Asimina triloba*), Holly (*Ilex spp.*) and Hawthorn (*Crataegus*) species. In early spring, my bees deeply appreciate my front yard Eastern Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*).

Honey bees are cavity nesters, and feral colonies preferentially select voids at 20 feet up or higher in hardwood trees as nesting sites. Other species such as Bald Faced Hornets build paper-like nests in tree branches at similar altitude.

While hornets are less popular than honey bees and native bee species, traditional farm wisdom says “the farmer who kills a hornet’s nests sacrifices a harvest” due to their voracious predation of garden pests. Hornets in their preferred tree locations are unlikely to sting beyond a ten-foot radius of their nest (if not stimulated to do so by human interactions), and provide all-natural, beneficial pest control without chemical damage to our green spaces, streams, and families.

Native bees nest in a wide variety of locations, and differ from honey bees in that they are generally active only while the native plant species with which they co-evolved is in bloom. Many tunnel nesting species (Osmia, for example) will seek out woodpecker and other holes in trunks and branches for producing young that will remain

dormant most of the year—these are the same bees for which nesting block “bee hotels” are designed.

One less-comfortable secret about trees and honey bees, however, is that they seek out and benefit from many invasive tree species, as well. The Golden Rain Tree (*Koelreuteria paniculata*) is one example of an attractive tree which has become a problem. Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) is another pollen and nectar source from a “junk” tree, but not one we are likely to place intentionally. One non-native, non-invasive tree which beekeepers are happy to see in the downtown landscape is the Japanese Pagoda Tree (*Sophora japonica*), because its late-summer bloom provides a rare source of abundant, healthy forage at an otherwise difficult time for bees.

Pollinator Partnership Ecoregional Planting Guides are free from [www.pollinator.org](http://www.pollinator.org), look for the Southeastern Mixed Forest Province Guide. There is also an app you can download to your phone! The free downloadable Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation Landscaping /Chesapeake Bay Watershed from the Fish and Wildlife service includes a section on trees with a chart that lays out planting advice and which wildlife species (including pollinators) benefit from each. [www.fws.gov/chesapeakebay/pdf/NativePlantsforWildlifeHabitatandConservationLandscaping.pdf](http://www.fws.gov/chesapeakebay/pdf/NativePlantsforWildlifeHabitatandConservationLandscaping.pdf)

*Common Native Trees of Virginia* is another free online publication with great guidance on pollinator friendly tree plantings. [dof.virginia.gov/infopubs/Native-Tree-ID-spreads\\_2016\\_pub.pdf](http://dof.virginia.gov/infopubs/Native-Tree-ID-spreads_2016_pub.pdf)

Learn more about the varied and beautiful native pollinator species who can benefit from your treescape by checking out the work of internationally renowned local bee researcher, Sam Droege of the USGS Native Bee Inventory and Monitoring Program, based at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center.

[flickr.com/people/usgsbiml/](http://flickr.com/people/usgsbiml/)



Stunning example of a wasp nest

# You Know, There's an App for That!

*Mark Grace, Secretary, TFCH*

“What’s that plant?” Do you find yourself often asking this question? Being able to readily recall the common name of a local flower, shrub, or tree seems to be a lost art. I have recollections from youth of being with older relatives who were able to identify the names and attributes (or dangers) of a wide variety of flowers, shrubs, and trees. They could distinguish weeds from herbs and good plants, vines, or mushrooms from some very, very bad ones. It was as if they had a first name relationship with the nature around them.

If you are just beginning to build your plant life nomenclature you’re fortunate, because the answers sit at your fingertips. As with so many other things now, these answers can be found on your mobile device. Similar to the apps that identify and inform you with the interesting facts, information, and background on star constellations, insects, architectural styles, etc., there are apps that let you quickly -- and with a high degree of accuracy -- help you identify plants.

And they are easy to use. These apps allow you to build a library and catalogue your favorite finds. It’s a great convenience to pull up a reference picture that includes a complete name and classification when you are at your preferred garden center. The app descriptions also include the planting zones and care instructions.

Both free and by subscription, here are some of the best plant identification app choices of the year from among those identified by [Hortibiz.com](http://Hortibiz.com) and [YouHadMeAtGardening.com](http://YouHadMeAtGardening.com):

**Pl@ntNet** is an application that allows you to identify plants by photographing them with your smartphone. It is also a citizen science project: all the plants you photograph are collected and analyzed by scientists around the world to better understand the evolution of plant biodiversity and preserve it. - Free (option to upgrade) - [identify.plantnet.org](http://identify.plantnet.org)

**iNaturalist** helps identify both plants and animals. A joint initiative by the California Academy of Sciences and the National Geographic Society, users’ observations are recorded and shared with scientists working to better understand and protect nature. - Free (option to upgrade) - [inaturalist.org](http://inaturalist.org)

**PlantSnap** lets you crop your photo and once saved, identify plants within a second or two. The app asks if its identification seems correct to you and, if so, you may save it to the database. If the plant is not already in the database or answers incorrectly, you can add it by saving it, thus increasing the plant identification app’s continued “learning.” In addition to the plant identification, the app gives you information about the plant, its genus, origin, size at maturity, flowers, and fruit. - Free (option to upgrade) - [plantsnap.com](http://plantsnap.com)

**PictureThis** is an on-line plant encyclopedia/identifier offering access to a growing database of plants with information including from watering frequency, pest and disease control, and fun facts. Take pictures of sick plants and get problem causes and treatment suggestions. It’s said to work well but users caution that it can be difficult to cancel the free trial. - 7-day free trial / subscription up to \$29.99 per year - [picturethisai.com](http://picturethisai.com)

**Flowerchecker** is a different type of plant identifier app. Rather than being computer-based, Flower Checker has a team of experts who receive a user’s photo, analyze it, and post an identification on the app. \$1.00 for each plant identification - [flowerchecker.com](http://flowerchecker.com)

**GardenCompass** also uses a team of experts to identify plants and/or plant diseases. Users can place their plant photos in a “digital care calendar” where the app will provide the user with advice and recommendations. - \$5.99 monthly membership - [smartplantapp.com](http://smartplantapp.com)

**Agrobase** is geared more for farmers and others who care for plants as a business. The app identifies a wide range of plants, weeds, plant diseases, and even pests. – Free – download from [play.google.com](http://play.google.com)

Being able to recognize by common name (or Latin classification if you really want to impress!) local flowers, trees, even fungi is a fun exercise for yourself or with your walking partners. And it is a particularly great ‘get outdoors and know the world’ learning adventure with little ones. Try one; it’s great fun!

# 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 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 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](http://www.caseytrees.org)
- The water will gradually drip out over 24-48 hours.
- 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](http://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!*

- 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. 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.

Trees for Capitol Hill has a few bags and basins that can be borrowed for the season. If you want one, contact Elizabeth Nelson, [Elizabeth\\_knits@yahoo.com](mailto:Elizabeth_knits@yahoo.com).

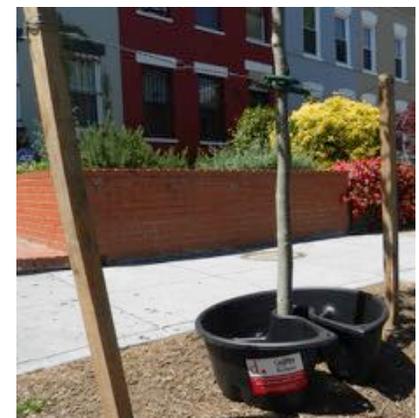
Service requests for tree inspection/removal/replanting can be made at [311.dc.gov](http://311.dc.gov) or by calling 311. Making the request on-line is preferable because it creates a record of your request. You can create an account or login as a guest. This is a direct link to the “All Service Types” menu, which includes several tree-related options: [311.dc.gov/citizen/servicetypes/all](http://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 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. 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. To request a bark protector from TFCH, email [Elizabeth\\_knits@yahoo.com](mailto:Elizabeth_knits@yahoo.com) with 'bark protector' in the subject line.



Plastic bark protector



Nick Alberti and Mark Grace create a mulch moat



## 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](mailto:elizabeth_knits@yahoo.com).

## Donations Welcome!

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*

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.

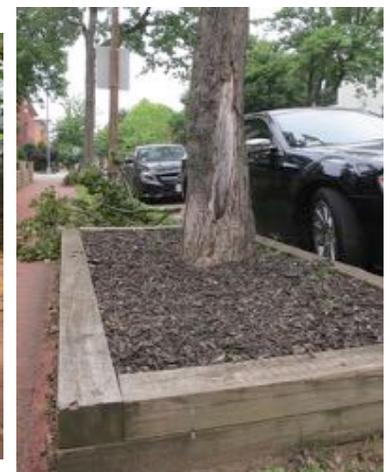
DO	DON'T
If adding soil amendments or replacing some soil in a tree space, work must be done prior to tree planting. After planting, only periodic light cultivation is advised.	Never try to replace soil around a tree after it has been planted. Trying to replace soil around a tree usually results in a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

# 2021 Tree of the Year

*Mark Grace, Secretary, TFCH*

I get it; our thoughts, actions, and conversations have been perversely defined by how awkward, sad, and unprecedented the last year and a half has been. But we have mustered through; it's what we had to do. So, let's now put our attention and sidewalk conversations to something fun and interesting. That's right. What tree has Arbor Vitae selected to be the 2021 Tree of the Year?

Well, the academy has voted and the winner is (dramatic pause) the Bald Cypress!

The Bald Cypress is a deciduous conifer in the Cupressaceae family, they are predominantly found in the southeastern region of the United States. The species is *Taxodium Distichum* which means it is monoecious, having male and female flowers on single plant. The tree has a thinnish, lacy needle that turns an attractive gold and copper-red in the autumn and drops in the fall. The Bald Cypress flowers in April and its seeds ripen in October, offering something of interest in every season.

If you are considering planting one, know that this tree is adaptable. This tree prefers full sunlight to partial shade, it can grow tall and wide at the base and can be as tall as 120 feet with a diameter up to 6 feet! While they really love wet, well-drained soil it can also tolerate dry soil.

The Bald Cypress can do well in acid, neutral, alkaline, and even saline soils! Other attributes are its provision of feed for wildlife from its cones and that it tolerates atmospheric

pollution.

And just where can you see an exceptional example of a Bald Cypress on Capitol Hill? On the south side lawn of the Library of Congress's Jefferson Building. If you've become accustomed to doing a pre-or-post dinner COVID open air stroll, find your way down East Capitol Street and check it out!



## 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](mailto:elizabeth_knits@yahoo.com) with 'Friends & Family Tree' in the subject line.

Not quite sure what you want? Check out the "plant finder" at [missouribotanicalgarden.org](http://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.

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



Sanctuary for mason and leaf cutter bees – important pollinators

## 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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