
ARBOR VITAE

NEWSLETTER OF TREES FOR CAPITOL HILL, INC. 2025 Issue



2024 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 Division (UFD) within the District's Department of Transportation (DDOT). 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 UFD 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 8 trees (5 street trees and 3 in private yards) on November 2024: A Shagbark Hickory (*Carya ovata*) on the 500 block of E Street SE (near the southeast corner of Marion Park), a Plum yew (*Cephalotaxus harringtonia Plania*) at 1354 North Carolina Avenue NE, a second Shagbark Hickory and two Snowbells (*Styrax japonicus*) at Eliot Hine Middle School, 1800 Constitution Avenue NE. We also planted in private yards: a Crape Myrtle (*Lagerstroemia Twilight*) at 501 Tennessee Avenue NE, a multi-trunk Serviceberry (*Amelanchier laevis, Autumn Brilliance*) at 1326 North Carolina Avenue NE, and a Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) at 623 C Street NE.

We are very grateful for the help of our volunteers on planting day - in particular, the fellas who wrestled the crape myrtle with a giant root ball up the steps and through a narrow gate to its new home. Honestly, it was "touch and go"; it took two guys pulling on the ball cart and three pushing from behind. But the results are worth it - the tree looks like it's been there for years and it really enhances that corner lot.

We also had help from the younger members of our community: At Eliot Hine MS, two students and their father prepared the holes at the school and gave us a big assist in settling in the two new trees. Brownie Troop 44123 at Brent Elementary sponsored the Shagbark Hickory on the edge of Marion Park. The girls and their families had the hole ready and waiting when we arrived. They carefully replaced the soil around the root ball, tucked in a few spring bulbs, and gave it a thorough watering. They've pledged to care for the tree and will water it this summer, as they did for a tree planted nearby in 2022. Engaging the next generation in this work is rewarding beyond just the additional labor they provide; it's essential for the long-term sustainability of our urban forest.

We're planning to be "back at it" on November 22, 2025, 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 UFD. We ask that tree-requesters prepare the hole, assist with the planting, and agree to water the tree for at least the first two summers. And check out our Friends & Family program (page 6), if you have room for a tree on your own property.



Brownie Troop 44123



Parker brothers at Eliot Hlne



Everyone loves the big red Merrifield Garden Center truck



Cheer, cheers, the gang's all here - at Eliot Hine MS - two of the students and their father joined the planting crew



That was one heckuva rootball!

Bonus Tree Plantings

Elizabeth Nelson, Vice-President/Treasurer, TFCH

TFCH members have been fostering saplings in their backyards, until they're sturdy enough to survive in public. Three newbies made their debuts in the last twelve months. In September 2024 a Catalpa and an Oak joined the landscaping on the 13th Street side of Maury ES (1200 Constitution Ave. NE). In June 2025, a slender Pecan (*Carya illinoensis*, var. *kanza*) joined the pecan plantation centered on the 1300 block of North Carolina Ave NE where, it is hoped, it will cross-pollinate a Pecan (*Carya illinoensis*, var. *pannee*) planted in 2022. We hope to plant its "twin" nearby, sometime this summer. Still striving for a bountiful nut harvest!



Oak from Christine Mullins's back yard



New juvenile pecan tree



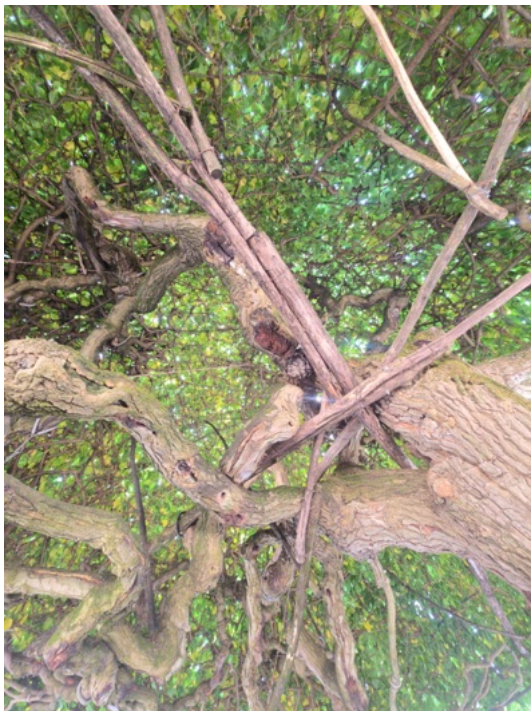
Catalpa in its new home, Maury ES

2025 Tree of the Year

Mulberry, White (*Morus alba*) and Red (*Morus rubra*)

Mark Grace, Secretary, TFCH

Morus alba, “white mulberry” is more commonly known as a mulberry or silkworm mulberry. It is a fast-growing, small-to-medium sized tree which can grow between 33 to 66 feet tall. The mulberry is native to China and India but has been cultivated and naturalized widely. Much of its global spread was due to travelers, explores, and merchants of earlier centuries eager to produce domestically the highly lucrative silk that is produced by silkworms, which are the larvae of the *Bombyx mori* moth (a type of caterpillar) and which exclusively feed on the leaves of mulberry trees. As they grow, the silkworms spin cocoons around themselves using a protein-rich substance secreted from their salivary glands. This cocoon is what is harvested and processed to produce silk. The colonial period of the United States had a short, fascinating boom and bust history with mulberry tree cultivation and silk production. To read more visit connecticuthistory.org/connecticuts-mulberry-craze/



Underside of 300 year-old tree in Karst, Slovenia

The white mulberry is also notable for the rapid release of its pollen, which is launched at greater than half the speed of sound. Unfortunately, it hybridizes readily with the locally native red mulberry (*Morus*

rubra). There is now serious concern for the long-term genetic viability of the red mulberry because of extensive hybridization in some areas.

The fruit of both trees is delicious though the flavor is different. The white is sweet but lacks character when compared with the more intense flavor of the red.

Both varieties can be found across Capitol Hill, though *Morus rubra* is more common. A great many of these trees extend along the bike path near Kingman Island. The kids in the Polite Piggy’s Hiking Club at Maury ES, look forward to their annual late-spring foraging trip.



Picking white mulberries on Kingman Island

A Tree of One's Own - Expanding “Friends & Family” Program

Elizabeth Nelson, Vice-President/Treasurer, TFCH

At the time TFCH was founded in 1991, the District's finances were in shambles and there was no budget for planting street trees. TFCH stepped into the void; many of the mature trees shading our streets were given their start by TFCH volunteers. Now that the Urban Forestry Division of DDoT is successfully fulfilling this need; nearly all the tree spaces in their purview have been planted. Our UFD arborists have pointed out that, to get the canopy coverage necessary to protect the environment, we need more trees on private property.

TFCH will continue to plant in public space, but we're expanding our program to assist neighbors wanting trees (or shrubs) for their own yards. Participants are required to prepare a hole on their property and pay the cost of the tree (at TFCH's 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 individuals could bring home and plant by themselves; the discount makes them more affordable; and shipping and installation costs are lower than if purchased directly from a nursery. 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.

UFD Arborists

Elizabeth Nelson, Vice-President/Treasurer, TFCH

Ward 6 lost both of its arborists: Eden Clymire-Stern, who joined the UFD just last year, left shortly after arriving, and Steve McKindley-Ward retired at the end of 2024. We wish them both well but their absence is keenly felt. Aleksi Aleksiev, the Ward 7 Arborist, is active on the east side of the Hill. And Jack Chapman, a former Ward 6 Arborist, now the Supervisory Forester, has stepped into the breach, taking time from his primary duties to support the Ward 6 canopy.

The District of Columbia has, under its Department of Transportation (DDOT), an Urban Forestry Division (UFD). TFCH works with the Ward 6 Arborists, receiving advice on tree selection, site planting, permits and maintenance, and on-going care. We help promote the UFD mission of greater public understanding and connection to the urban tree canopy. The UFD has created an interactive portal (trees.dc.gov) that helps residents understand the urban forest that surrounds us.

Ways you can help:

- If you suspect Special and/or Heritage Trees (44" and 100" circumference, respectively) are being removed illegally, call the UFD office at: 202-673-

6813 and ask for the “arborist on duty” because it is time-sensitive.

- Water young trees during their first three summers.
- Learn and spread the word about the DC Municipal Regulations “Beautification of Tree Spaces”** inappropriate and “tree-hurtful” practices by uninformed residents. Report violations to 3-1-1.



** a synopsis of the regulations appears on page 6

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 Division (UFD). 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 - but only for the first year. 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. Unfortunately, the contractors hired by the District government to mow public greenspaces, seem unaware. All too often they run the blades of the mowers into the trunk of the tree. If the tree is lucky, it may be just a nick; all too often, a chunk of bark is torn off or the tree is 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 because their neighbors are looking out for them and also because lawn mowers for home use have recessed blades. 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



Arranging mulch away from the trunk



Dead tree was girdled by a mower just above the root flare

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 Kehoe, 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.

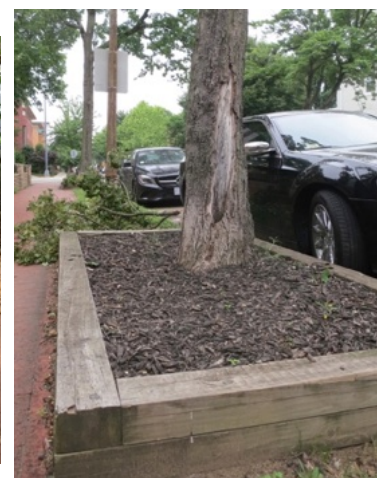
DO	DON'T
If adding soil amendments or replacing some soil in a tree space, work must be done prior to tree planting. After planting, only periodic light cultivation is advised.	Never try to replace soil around a tree after it has been planted. Trying to replace soil around a tree usually results in a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

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

Flower of the Tulip Poplar



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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