

## **Trees, Plants & the Environment ...**

### **Cities Become Community Forests**

As our cities grow larger and faster than ever before, trees and plants are vitally important if our urban communities are to survive for generations.

Right now, we're behind. In fact, the 126-year-old non-profit group American Forests says our cities have cut down so many more trees than we have planted, the nation now has a "tree deficit" of 634-million trees. To compile the figure, the group studied several cities throughout the U.S. over a six-year period.

Because of the tree deficit, we have hotter, more polluted cities.

But the good news is, many cities are now doing something about it. They are serious about saving and planting trees.

Trees and plants cool and cleanse the air, increase property values, break harsh winter winds, and provide habitat for wildlife and recreation. Plants absorb and remove contaminants from soil and groundwater. EPA is even planting fast-growing trees and shrubs to help clean up pollution at some Superfund sites.



## **Urban Forestry**

Urban forestry is becoming a part of many cities' regular planning. Albuquerque, for example, has a staff urban forester responsible for plant selection, maintenance and pest control for city-owned parks and open areas. Austin's urban forester must approve removal of any tree on city property, and can recover replacement costs if public trees are damaged or removed.

Many cities like Fayetteville, Arkansas, require anyone seeking building, grading or parking lot permits to adhere to its Tree Preservation and Protection Plan. Other cities have amended their zoning codes to include landscaping requirements for commercial properties. Most cities try to accomplish two goals, as Tulsa put it, "to achieve a meaningful urban forest while permitting economically feasible urban development to occur."

## **Tree Cities and Planting Projects**

The National Arbor Day Foundation's Tree City USA program recognizes cities that have active tree programs. Current Tree Cities include ten cities in Arkansas, 20 in Louisiana, nine in New Mexico, 19 in Oklahoma, and 44 in Texas.

In many cities, private groups and companies are busy with urban forestry projects. For example:

- Texaco and hundreds of volunteers are determined to reforest Houston. Trees are potted and nurtured for a year at the Growing Out Center on Texaco land, and each April the National Tree Trust provides thousands of seedlings that Trees For Houston volunteers transplant into 5-gallon containers. Since 1995 over 68,000 trees have been distributed.
- In 11 weeks the Dallas Trees and Parks Foundation created its Tramell Crow Urban Tree Farm on two acres alongside a downtown freeway interchange by planting 947 five-gallon trees in ten-gallon containers. The Foundation's second thousand-tree site is already growing, and they are looking for more sites. Each year the ten-gallon trees are distributed to the public through Trees for Dallas, and another generation of five-gallon trees is planted.
- H.E.B.'s Brodie Lane supermarket in Austin is built on only nine acres of its 60-acre site. Surpassing local guidelines, the company left 85% of the property in its natural state. Some 2,670 live oak, cedar elm and hackberry trees are preserved.
- Church groups, business organizations, and social and fraternal clubs all join together the last weekend in April for what Euless, Texas, calls "the largest Arbor Day celebration in the universe." The 3-day festival between Fort Worth and Dallas annually draws 150,000 people and has given away over 125,000 trees and 75,000 North Central Texas Tree Guides.

### **Is Your Group Involved?**

Of course, EPA, the Forest Service and state agencies encourage urban forestry efforts as a means to cool cities and fight pollution. But local organizations, homeowners associations, school groups, local companies and news media make the projects work.

Many cities have a huge tree deficit to make up – but a lot of hard-working people are convinced they can do it.