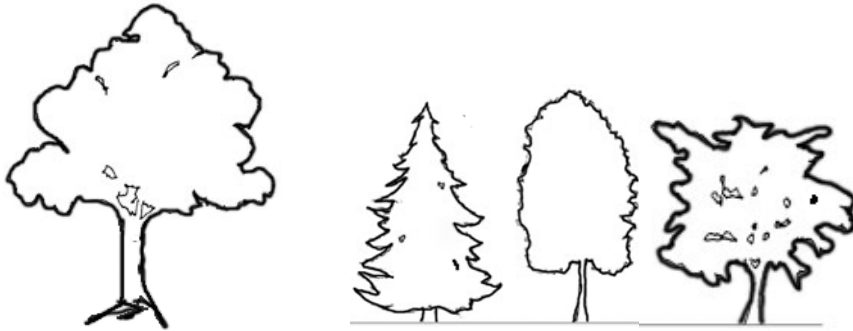


KEEP NEEDHAM GREEN - WITH TREES



In Needham buildable open space is rapidly disappearing. What can each of us do to keep our Town as green and livable as possible? We can plant street trees and take care of the trees already growing in our yards. Here are some of the benefits we derive from the trees growing around our homes.

1. Trees convert sunlight into chemical energy (for instance in wood, leaves, nuts, fruit). In doing so, trees remove carbon dioxide from the air (reducing a greenhouse gas that contributes to global warming) and release oxygen that we need to breathe.
2. Trees clean the air by collecting dust and soot on their leaves and bark. They are even pollution indicators, turning brown when the air is too noxious.
3. Trees are natural air conditioners, cooling the air as excess water vapor evaporates from their leaves (called transpiration) and shading us on hot, sunny days.
4. Trees are excellent sound absorbers, so street trees along our busy streets reduce the sound as well as the sight of traffic.
5. Evergreen trees planted on the northeast side of the house buffer cold winds in winter. Deciduous trees planted on the south and west sides of the house provide shade in summer. In this way trees save energy dollars otherwise used for heating and cooling.
6. The root systems of trees help prevent erosion in heavy rains, especially important where the ground slopes.
7. Trees can increase the value of a home as much as 20%, with an average increase of 10%.
8. Trees (both alive and dead) provide refuge and habitat for birds and other wildlife.
9. Trees are pleasant to look at and to be near. The sound of a breeze through their leaves is soothing to us.

If a street tree has recently died in front of your property or if there is sufficient space, you can ask the Town to plant a street tree. Some suitable kinds of shade trees that may be available are native red maple and sugar maple as well as London plane tree, thornless honeylocust, and Japanese zelkova. Smaller flowering trees may also be available such as crabapple, tree lilac, and Kousa dogwood. To request a street tree, call the Public Works Department, Parks and Forestry Division at 781-455-7534.

You can request that the tree be planted in your front yard rather than in the berm adjacent to the street. Experience has shown that many trees do not thrive where root space and water is restricted by paving, where frequent pruning may be necessary to prevent interference with

overhead wires, or where trees will be exposed to fumes, the salting of roads in winter, and collisions with cars and snowplows. The Town will help site the tree in the most advantageous location. To request a street tree, call the Public Works Department, Parks and Forestry Division at 781-455-7534 and ask for Lance Remsen.

The tree will be planted by Town employees, who will mix compost from the Recycling and Transfer Station (the RTS or the “dump”) with the existing soil and carefully plant the tree at the same level at which it was growing in the Town nursery. Once properly planted, the tree becomes the homeowner's responsibility. The homeowner should "adopt" the young tree and give it good care, especially for the first two years. Good care includes :

1. Watering the tree slowly so that water penetrates about 6 –12 inches deep every few days, depending on the weather, for the first two to three weeks. Then water deeply during dry periods (less than one inch of rainfall during a week) for the first 1-3 years.
2. Planting groundcover plants and/or mulching around the tree. Mulches add nutrients to the soil, prevent weed growth, and help keep the soil cool and moist. Use no more than 2 to 3 inches of mulch that doesn't actually touch the trunk; too much mulch, such as the too often seen “mulch volcano,” can reduce air and water to the roots and even kill the tree. One of the best mulches is a layer of partially decomposed compost, either homemade or obtained from the RTS for a small fee (presently \$2.00/large trash barrel). Other possible mulches are pine needles and ground up bark.
3. Protecting the young bark from damage, especially from “lawnmower disease,” by putting mulch or groundcover around the trunk (see #2 above) so that lawn mowers or weed trimmers will not bang into the trunk. Bark contains the living layers of cells that carry sugars made by photosynthesis in the leaves to the roots and other parts of the tree.

We also should appreciate the grandeur of the mature yard trees that were planted and bequeathed to us by past homeowners. For instance, think of the great oak trees, beech trees, and old red and sugar maples still seen around Needham. Think twice before removing a mature tree, which is irreplaceable and may add thousands of dollars to the value of your property. Some actions we can take to protect our existing trees include:

1. Protect mature trees from damage due to “lawnmower disease,” when lawn mowers and weed trimmers injure the bark by striking it as they cut grass that is growing right up to the trunk . Planting groundcover and/or placing mulch such as compost around (but not touching) the trunk will help. But don't use too much mulch – see the suggestions in #2 and #3 above.
2. Prune properly. If you think your yard is too shady, cutting off the lower limbs of a tree is often all that is needed to add more light. Clean cuts that are made beyond what is called the branch collar, a bulge at the base of a branch, will allow the tree to heal properly. To read about pruning online, go to www.umassgreeninfo.org and within the Plant Culture and Maintenance fact sheet open “Pruning Shade Trees.”
3. Avoid certain herbicides like 2,4-D that are commonly applied to lawns to kill broad-leaved weeds such as dandelions and plantain without killing grasses (including crabgrass). Most trees, as well as many other plants, are broad-leaved plants that can be weakened by these herbicides, and the absorbing roots of trees spread beyond the rain

drip line of the outermost leaves. The EPA has found many herbicides to be toxic to people as well. For a healthier lawn that can outcompete the weeds try hand weeding, mowing high (about 3 inches), and leaving the clippings on the lawn.

4. Watch out for invasive plants such as barberry, Japanese knotweed, and burning bush that compete with trees and other desirable plants. You can find a list and photos of invasive plants in Massachusetts online at <http://efg.cs.umb.edu/invaders/MainHigh.php>. One real thug that can climb a tree and smother it is oriental bittersweet. You can cut the vines at ground level, but you'll need to keep cutting whenever you see them growing again unless you can pull out or dig up the roots.
5. Watch out for pests that may do serious harm to your trees. Go to www.umassgreeninfo.org and click on "landscape message" near the bottom of the page to read about current pest problems. Then click on "fact sheets" to find out more about any particular pest or problem of concern. If you decide that the problem is really serious, use the least toxic treatment available; you don't want to kill the beneficial insects along with the pest. Currently winter moth (remember those brownish grey moths you saw flying around your porch lights in November) whose caterpillars feed on many kinds of trees is an introduced pest from Europe that is moving south from Canada. The long-term solution is the introduction of specific insect predators that keep these problem insects under control in their native territory (that is how the gypsy moth has been controlled), but it will take awhile for these introduced beneficial insects to get established in sufficient numbers.
6. Ask for and hire a knowledgeable state certified arborist if your tree needs professional care for pruning or spraying. Be sure to ask for the least toxic spray, such as horticultural oil applied early in the growing season.
7. Protect existing trees from removal and/or damage during construction projects. Homeowners often do not realize that most tree roots grow in the top 12 inches of soil, and that those roots extend many feet beyond the tree's canopy. Root injury is the cause of decline and death of many trees. Common causes are root compaction from heavy construction equipment, root cutting during excavation, and drainage problems created by construction. Tree decline may not show up for several years after completion of a project. There are ways to protect your and your neighbors' trees during construction – and to remediate trees that are already damaged. Consult with a certified arborist BEFORE your project and discuss this issue with your contracting professional. If you have had recent construction, have an arborist review the health of your trees.

Make an investment in Needham's future both by caring for trees already growing in your yard and by having a tree planted in front of your home. The Town plants street trees, both shade trees and small flowering trees, and will plant a tree (or two) on your lawn or in the berm if there is space. To request a street tree, call the Public Works Department, Parks and Forestry Division at 781-455-7534.