

STREET SMART™ TREES



Part 3

THE THIRD PART OF THIS SERIES SHOWS HOW TREES BENEFIT ALL LIVING THINGS IN THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT. WE ARE STARTING TO UNDERSTAND HOW INTERACTIONS WITH TREES CAN MODIFY HUMAN BEHAVIOR.

Plants, if properly placed and cared for can become 'living technology', part of the urban infrastructure, and bring back a balance between living things and manmade objects. Views of nature have positive mental and physical impacts on people even if they are not consciously aware of it. Active or passive participation in nature can further increase mental and physical benefits. For example, recent research conducted by Lynne Westphall (of the North Central Research Station for the US Department of Agriculture Forest Service), reveals that just having a "green" view helps people recover from surgery more quickly (The Social and Psychological Impacts of Trees, Lynne Westphall).

STRESS IN THE CITY

Doctors tell us all the time that Stress can kill. Most people in the world live in urban areas, where artificial objects outnumber anything natural. Plants in cities can soften the affect of being surrounded with hard edges and noises. Plants bring a humanizing element. By providing habitat, food, water, and cover for animals and birds trees bring more life to urban areas, and provide a more habitable environment for the city dwellers.

Urban residents have mental health needs that do not apply to people living in more pastoral settings. Urban dwellers have a need for biological stimulation to break the monotony of daily life, and a need for a real sense of community that does not come from having obligatory neighbors. The urban inhabitant also needs a sense of control over their environment to restore confidence that they are not just another speck of dust blowing down the street.

Fortunately, all of these needs can easily be met by green activities including gardening, landscaping and tree-planting projects. In all plant related projects in the city, when people are involved: from the ideas and planning stage, to the follow-up and maintenance stage, not only does tree survival increase, but human benefits increase, with an enhanced sense of community, a positive social identity, and increased ownership.

The influence of plants on human communities is a relatively new area of study. The role of plants in the development of the mind, emotions, interests, manners, and tastes is often overlooked. The issues of integration of plants in human culture and civilization, is of interest to environmental psychologists, landscape architects, social ecologists, anthropologists, sociologists, geographers, communications, foresters, and the rest of the green industry.





ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN COMMUNITY PLANTING PROJECTS STRENGTHENS TIES BETWEEN EVERYONE IN THE COMMUNITY.

The social benefits of urban trees come from not only having nearby green spaces, but active involvement in creating green space. The North Central Research Station for the USDA Forest Service is studying the 'Human Dimensions of the Urban Forest' for just these reasons. Eighty percent of Americans live in urban areas.

For example:

- *To an individual, nearby green spaces have health benefits, but if they participate in greening projects, there are additional personal benefits in having a sense of accomplishment and ownership.*
- *To civic organizations, nearby green spaces help boost local businesses, and active participation increases members, and support for local government.*
- *To communities, nearby green spaces help decrease crime, but active participation by the community in greening further provides great resources to help solve other problems.*



Promoting tree planting in communities includes finding what organizations already exist and tie their interests and missions to tree benefits. Active participation in community projects leads to empowerment. There may be a different greening project to suit every community group that result in overall community benefits.



It is also important to understand what motivates people to participate in greening projects. Volunteers are motivated by not only ties to nature or people, but by the chance to make a difference with results that they can see. Decision makers are motivated by ways in which a community may increase its desirability as a place to live through greening and improved residential and business added value.