

## A Tribute to Trees By Larry Figart, Urban Forester

January is the month to plant trees in Florida. While other states a little farther north are dealing with frozen soil, we are fortunate to have the perfect planting conditions. In fact Arbor Day in Florida is January 20th. Instead of my usual "Arbor Day" article this year, I thought I would write about why trees are important enough to get their own "day".

First the obvious. Trees provide us with thousands of products that we use every day. We all know about lumber and wood, but did you know that cellophane, and rayon were made from trees. Some other unusual things that have tree parts in them include football helmets, photographic film, shatterproof glass, and imitation bacon.

Trees help slow down runoff into the St. Johns river by acting as mini-reservoirs, controlling runoff at the source. Trees reduce runoff by; intercepting and holding rain on leaves, branches and bark; increasing infiltration and storage of rainwater through the tree's root system; and reducing soil erosion by slowing rainfall before it strikes the soil. In Jacksonville, it has been calculated our trees store 928 million cubic feet of water. The cost to engineer that much infrastructure equals \$1.86 billion.



Trees help us save energy by cooling our houses. A large shade tree cools an equivalent of 10 room sized air conditioners running 20 hours a day. By helping us save energy, trees also help us avoid subsequent pollutant emissions from power plants.

We all have been hearing a lot about climate change caused by the increase in Carbon Dioxide in the atmosphere. Well, trees can help by storing carbon. A typical 12 inch live oak stores 322 lbs of carbon. In Jacksonville, our trees store up 69,000 lbs of carbon per year.

Recent research by Dr. Kathleen Wolf of the US Forest Service has provided some interesting information on how trees influence is as consumers. Shoppers shop more often and longer in well-landscaped tree lined business districts, and are willing to pay more for parking, and up to 12% more for goods and

services. She also found that commercial office properties having quality landscapes rent for 7% higher rates.



One of the best benefits of trees for our sluggish real estate sector is that they add to property value. A yard with healthy trees growing on it has greater curb appeal. Also, a yard with a healthy landscape that includes trees can increase property value by 10-20 percent.

Well, you may say that all of this is well and good, but what about me? How does a tree benefit me? Trees provide the oxygen we breathe. One acre of trees produces enough oxygen for 18 people to breathe each day and eliminates as much carbon dioxide from the air as is produced from driving a car 26,000 miles. Also, tree-filled neighborhoods have lower levels of domestic violence, are safer and more sociable and reduce stress. In hospitals, trees decrease need for medication, and speed hospital recovery times.

Finally, trees create jobs. Landscape architecture is the fastest growing design profession. Employment is projected to grow by 16% over the next 10 years. In the tree care industry, there is a job opening for almost all trained workers. As green infrastructure alternatives are increasingly used to manage stormwater, improve air quality, and reduce the urban heat island effect, jobs in engineering, research, and modeling will be essential in the development, design and performance monitoring of green systems.

When you break it down and consider trees as part of the infrastructure of our community, and see the benefits they provide it is easy to see why they are so valuable to have. So, for this year's Arbor Day, lets take a moment to appreciate all the benefits that trees provide. For more information go to the Alliance for Community Trees at: <http://actrees.org>.

