



ASLA  
SAN DIEGO  
CHAPTER

# THE VALUE OF TREES

American Society of Landscape Architects - San Diego Chapter

Board Approved: July 28, 2009

## POSITION STATEMENT

The San Diego Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects emphatically supports the continued planting, nurturing and replacement of trees in San Diego's urban environment and specifically to:

- Promote the maintenance and health of existing trees.
- Plant appropriate trees for San Diego's climate, microclimates, environment, soils, slopes, and water availability.
- Promote replacement of declining or dead trees.
- Discourage invasive, non-native tree species that may invade or displace native tree habitats.
- Support tree survival even in drought emergencies, providing ample water to maintain tree health.
- Protect existing trees, and encourage San Diegans to nurture existing trees and to plant new trees.

San Diego ASLA also encourages local governments to adopt policies and to enforce the review and regulation of tree preservation, removal, and mitigation.

## BACKGROUND

Trees are the most important component of urban planting. Trees improve air quality, protect water quality, save energy, reduce global warming, add aesthetic value, improve economic sustainability, improve consumer perceptions and behaviors, increase real estate values, improve neighborhood identity and esteem, and have many positive sociological benefits. Therefore it is critical to support the continued planting and maintenance of these valuable societal assets. Trees represent a long-term investment and have greater value than other components of the landscape.

Trees have outstanding economic, cultural, aesthetic and environmental value as described below.

Economic benefits: Trees increase commercial and residential property values and the perception of value. First impressions of communities are based largely on trees. They enhance community economic stability by attracting businesses and tourists with a corresponding increase in property values. Trees contribute to the success of business districts, apartment complexes, residential properties and offices. Trees conserve energy, and reduce cooling and heating costs.

Air Quality Benefits: Trees and urban forests improve air quality by carbon sequestration (converting CO<sub>2</sub> to oxygen by removing carbon and storing it in woody tissues while releasing oxygen back into the atmosphere). Leaf surfaces trap and absorb gases and particulates to reduce pollutants, including, sulfur dioxide and other chemicals. Trees lower local air temperatures (reduce urban "heat island" effects) by transpiring water, shading surfaces and reducing cooling costs, energy use and the resulting pollution.





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**Water Quality Benefits:** Trees and urban forests improve water quality by intercepting rain in the leaf canopy, increasing water infiltration into soil, slowing surface run-off and reducing flooding and erosion. Trees help to remove particulate matter, nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, pollutants harmful to water quality, and help to protect wetland ecosystems from pollution. Trees help to protect ground water from pollution and increase ground water recharge.

**Reduction of the Greenhouse Effect and Global Warming:** Trees help prevent re-radiating solar energy, shade pavement, absorb carbon dioxide and transpire water and air, cooling the surrounding air thus reducing urban “heat island” effects. Healthy, actively growing trees are one of the most cost effective ways to draw excess CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere and reduce greenhouse effect by shading homes, roofs, streets and parking areas, reducing cooling needs and consumption of fossil fuels burned to produce electricity.

**Social Benefits:** Trees provide significant social benefits, including a sense of well-being and comfort. Trees reduce the perception of noise and provide visual and physical buffers between discordant neighbors and land uses. Trees provide an enhanced sense of community and connection to the environment.

**Urban Design Benefits:** Trees add beauty, grace, fragrance and shade to outdoor spaces. They can visually buffer buildings and relieve harsh visual conditions. Urban trees enhance traffic calming, and protect pedestrians from traffic by providing a physical separation from vehicles. Windbreaks improve comfort in outdoor spaces, and trees provide shading and evaporative cooling. Trees provide habitats for birds and other wildlife in urban areas. Shaded asphalt streets retain their stability and need resurfacing less frequently since the oils do not dry out as fast to release the aggregate.

## **Maintenance and Management**

Trees and the urban forest are part of the community infrastructure, requiring a long-term commitment to management, maintenance, protection, and replacement. Management should be based on the best research, scientific data, monitoring systems and long-term management practices for these critical natural resources. Practices should include planning for species diversity to minimize the effects of insects and disease on the overall urban forest. Aging trees should be replaced regularly based on health, condition and function. Utility repair and installation procedures should protect tree root zones from trenching, compaction by vehicles, and damage. Protection measures should be based on the tree species, the condition and sensitivity to root cutting of the individual tree. During droughts, water for tree survival can be supplied by bubblers, soaker hoses, or by manually filling watering basins. It is the responsibility of property owners, renters, business people and the general public to encourage, protect and honor trees.

Also see the following related position papers:

- Water Conservation
- Fire Safety and Landscaping
- Golf Course Water Conservation
- Gray Water and Rainwater Use for Irrigation
- Home Owner Association Water Conservation
- Reclaimed, Recycled and Re-Purified Water
- Regionally Appropriate Landscapes
- Revegetation/ Restoration
- The Value of Native Plants
- The Value of Parks
- Use of Turf Grass in the San Diego Region
- Vegetative Erosion Control
- Water Quality