



A community tree planting is fun for all ages and provides an opportunity to educate about the benefits of urban trees.
PHOTO COURTESY OF ALLIANCE FOR COMMUNITY TREES

Bringing branchy back

**Growers, retailers
and public agencies
make the case for
urban forests**

By Elizabeth Petersen

For the past two decades, J. Frank Schmidt & Son, a wholesale tree grower in Boring, Oregon, has championed this simple saying: "Trees are the answer." More than just a bumper sticker slogan, this message is loaded with sales potential.

Sure, trees are the basis of landscape designs and provide immeasurable beauty. But they do much more than just that. Recent research

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affirms that trees also account for quantifiable, verifiable monetary value by mitigating environmental, economic, health and societal problems, especially in the urban environment.

The diverse benefits of urban forestry are increasingly being accepted and put into use. Consequently, local, regional and national efforts are encouraging people to plant more trees — and helping them do it, too.

Growers and garden centers are slowly joining the movement by showcasing trees as viable — and vitally important — options for property owners of all persuasions.

Paul Ries, urban forestry director for the Oregon Department of Forestry, said that environmental awareness continues to grow, but “we still take trees pretty much for granted in our cities. Planting a tree is still too much of an afterthought for people.”

The nursery industry can help by promoting the benefits of tree planting, Ries said. “It is a worthy activity for nurseries to engage in,” he said. “In fact, if the nursery industry is healthy, that means people are planting trees, and that makes our communities more healthy.”

Benefits of urban forestry

“Researchers continue to discover new benefits of trees in the urban environment, and these ideas are starting to bump up against other fields, like human health care,” Ries explained.

As an example, Ries cited a 12-city study by Dr. Vivek Shandas of Portland State University, which examined the benefits of urban trees to reducing asthma rates.

And that’s just the start. Nancy Buley, communications director at J. Frank Schmidt & Son, has gathered an array of resources and links to empirical evidence about the benefits of trees and compiled them on a website — www.TreesAreTheAnswer.info, a treasure trove of information that tree proponents can use to convince people of the value of planting more trees.



The City of Portland’s incentive-based Treebate program, advertised here at Portland Nursery, has added more than 37,000 trees since 2008. Homeowners receive a rebate, deductible off their utility bill, for up to half the cost of a tree. PHOTO COURTESY OF CITY OF PORTLAND’S BUREAU OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES



The city of West Linn, Oregon, was named a “Tree City USA” by the Arbor Day Foundation in honor of its commitment to effective urban forest management. Cleaner air, improved storm water management, energy savings, and increased property values and commercial activity are among the benefits enjoyed by Tree City USA communities. PHOTO COURTESY OF PAUL RIES



Friends of Trees provides property owners with step-by-step instructions, from tree selection to permitting, utility location, tree delivery, hole digging, proper planting techniques and follow-up advice.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FRIENDS OF TREES

Buley was honored in 2014 by the Arbor Day Foundation for her lifelong commitment and outstanding contributions to tree planting, conservation and stewardship at the state level. She works closely with research scientists, horticultural experts, urban foresters, landscape architects, Friends of Trees and other organizations that promote the importance of trees.

“The tree market is very good right now and on the upswing,” said Buley, noting that sales have come back strong after being hit hard by the recession. “Efforts to emphasize the importance and economic value of trees have made a big difference.”

Buley pointed to research by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), which over the past 20 years has measured and evaluated the specific benefits that trees bring to the urban environment. ▶

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“Three well-placed trees can cut air-conditioning costs by 10 to 15 percent,” states the USFS website (www.fs.fed.us). “For every ton of new wood that grows, about 1.8 tons of carbon dioxide is removed from the air and 1.3 tons of oxygen is produced.”

Estimates of the potential savings from planting trees in available spaces around American homes and businesses come in at over \$4 billion each year.

Share the knowledge

“We as growers should be educating city and other government agencies about the value of trees as infrastructure,” Buley said.

“Educate, educate, educate. Show customers how to plant trees strategically, like using a shade tree to cool the house in summer but allow solar gain during winter. Or plant trees for wind breaks.”

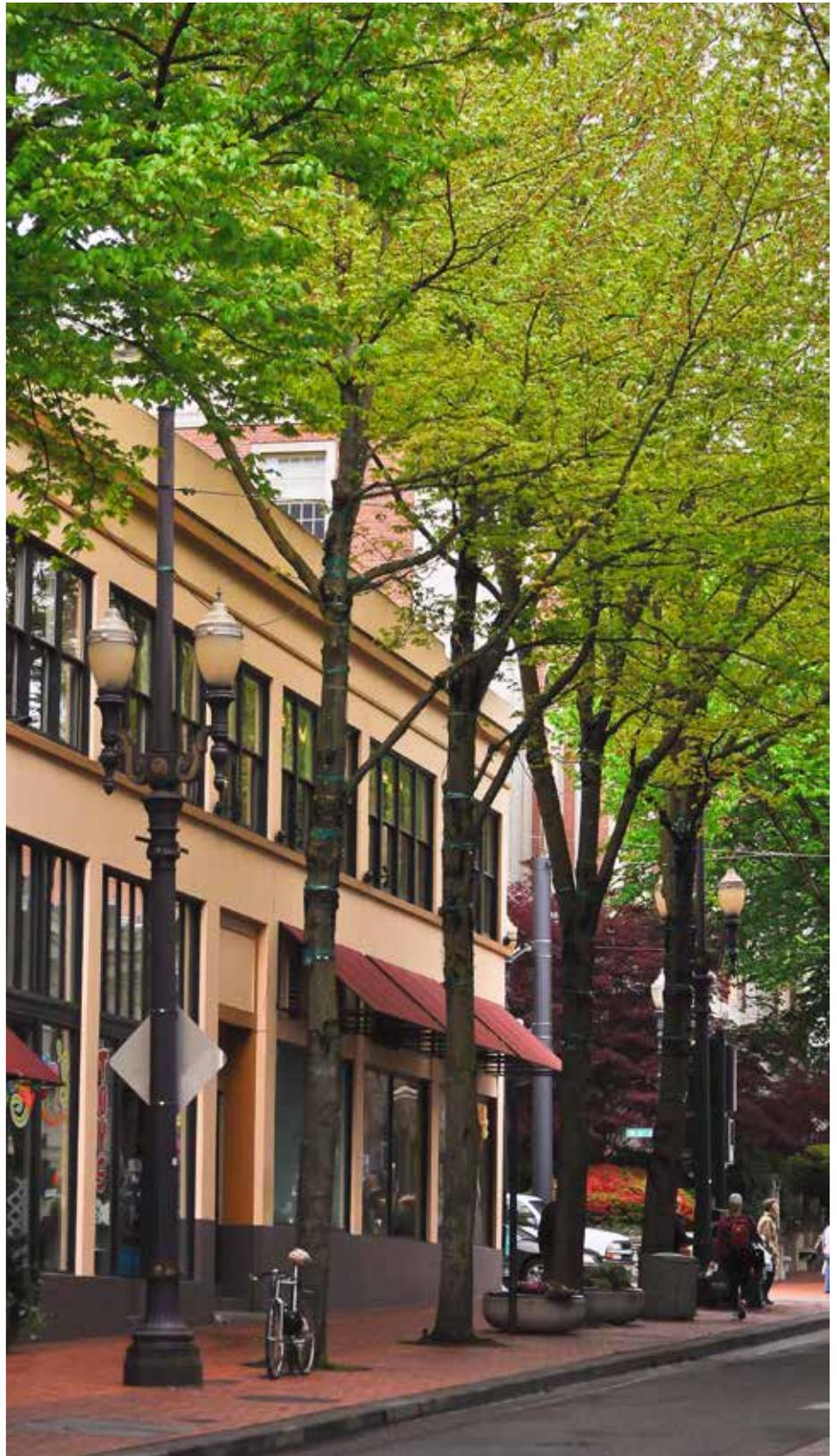
Ries would also like to see nurseries play a greater role in promoting Arbor Day. “For a nursery to ignore Arbor Day would be like a florist ignoring Valentine’s Day,” he said. “Arbor Day should be a built-in PR event for nurseries.”

“Retailers could improve tree sales by displaying them better,” Buley added. “When trees are all clumped together in the back forty and you can’t see their form, it can be daunting to try to pick out a tree.”

Stephanie Mack, tree and shrub buyer at Portland Nursery, concurred. At Portland Nursery’s two retail locations, blooming trees and other plants are moved into seasonal displays where customers can see them as they enter the grounds.

“If people see trees in bloom around town, they will see them when they get to the nursery too,” Mack said.

Another way Portland Nursery educates the public is on its informative website (portlandnursery.com). Web pages on plants and monthly gardening tips provide information on an ever-growing assortment of tree genera. Customers can also access a tree selection guide, a photo guide of featured



Initiated in 1988, the Southwest Montgomery Green Street project in downtown Portland demonstrated how in even the most urban conditions, streets can be retrofitted not only to fully manage stormwater runoff but to create and integrate vibrant pedestrian spaces. PHOTO COURTESY OF PAUL RIES

trees, and numerous links to other resources, such as the list of street trees accepted in Portland.

Homeowners who are considering the value of adding a tree might also try the free suite of i-Tree tools developed by the U.S. Forest Service. The website — www.itreetools.org — lets people look up their property online, pick out an appropriate tree, “plant” it virtually, and calculate the savings the tree will generate over time.

Volunteers from the nursery industry are a great way to support organizations that educate about the value of trees and promote community tree planting. Friends of Trees (www.friendsoftrees.org) and Alliance for Community Trees (actrees.org) provide property owners with step-by-step instructions, from picking appropriate street trees to permitting, utility location, tree delivery, hole digging, proper planting techniques and follow-up advice.

The goal of Friends of Trees is to make tree planting as easy as 1-2-3. They offer a service where a representative will inspect and permit a property. All the homeowner has to do is pick a tree — they will even come out to help plant it on the neighborhood’s planting day. And this year, as part of its 25th anniversary, Friends of Trees is offering street trees for just \$25.

Trees are urban problem solvers

Since 1991, Portland’s Bureau of

Environmental Services has worked on multiple fronts to improve wastewater management, since the existing system was ineffective and costly.

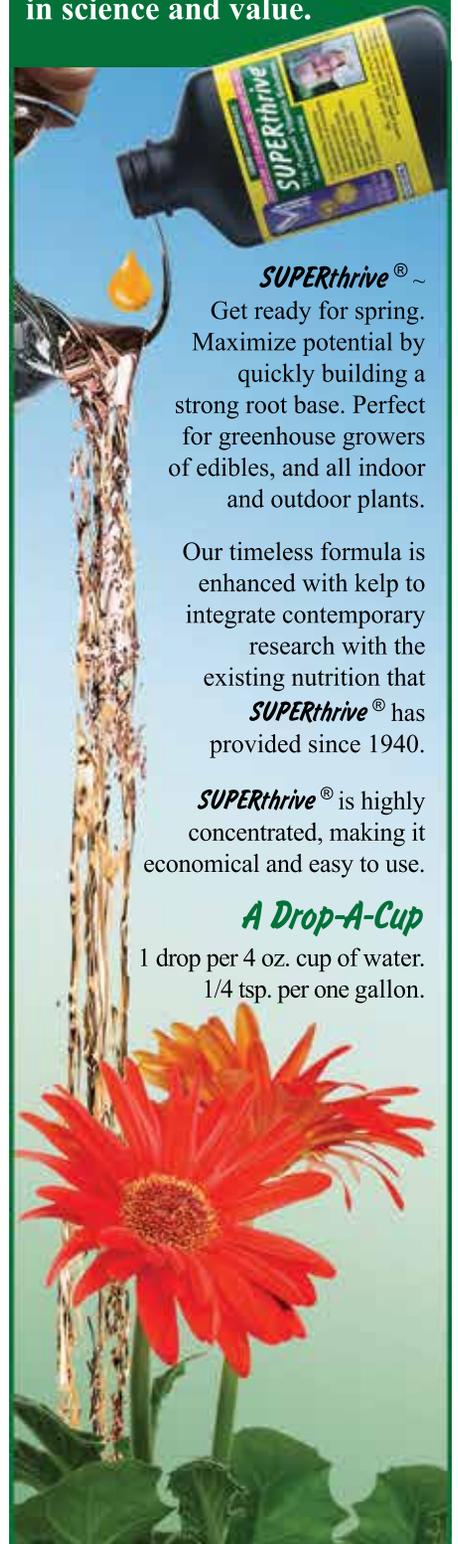
One solution adopted by the city was to take the pressure off rivers by reducing the amount of stormwater entering the system. How? By adding green infrastructure, including trees.

Trees intercept rainwater before it washes over sidewalks and streets into storm drains and pipes. Trees help filter rainwater into the ground, and they release moisture back into the air by way of evaporation and transpiration.

“Trees are living green infrastructure that provides many benefits,” explained Jennifer Karpis, tree program coordinator for the City of Portland’s Bureau of Environmental Services. “Reducing stormwater runoff reduces wastewater treatment costs to save money for sewer ratepayers, and prevents basement backups and sewage releases. Trees also help keep pollution out of our rivers and streams, clean the air we breathe, provide shade and habitat, and help the city address climate change by storing carbon and cooling the air.”

Many parts of Portland are already lush with trees. According to the Urban Forest Canopy Report 2007, Portland’s urban forest included 236,000 street trees, 1.2 million park trees, and innumerable private property trees. In the years since that report was compiled, the bureau’s Tree Program has identified more than ▶

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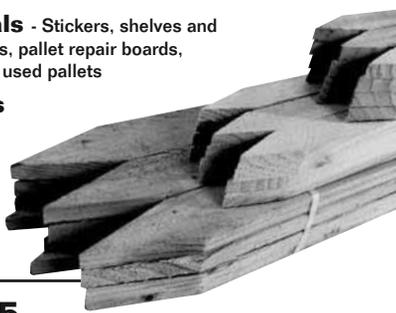
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130,000 empty locations in the city's right of way — the area between the sidewalk and curb on city streets — as places where shade and other benefits can be realized, Karps said.

Since bigger trees produce bigger environmental and economic benefits, planting trees of stature is particularly important. Big native trees, including Oregon white oak, Douglas fir, Western red cedar and Ponderosa pine are planted wherever possible. When the Tree Program identifies sites that could accommodate a large tree, property owners are sent a note saying, "Congratulations! You have room for a big tree, and we want to give you one."

In addition, the Tree Program seeks to spread trees equitably throughout the city, so areas with less tree canopy, especially in low-income neighborhoods, take priority. The Tree Program conducts outreach efforts, going door to door in targeted neighborhoods to encourage people to consider adding trees.

Portland's Treebate program has proven to be an effective way to convert hesitant homeowners into tree planters. The city has added more than 37,000 trees since 2008 by utilizing a long-term contract with Friends of Trees and on-call landscape contractors.

Treebate offers a monetary incentive to plant trees on residential properties in Portland. The program pays back homeowners who plant eligible trees on residential properties before April 30, 2015.

A Treebate for up to half the cost of a tree comes off the homeowner's utility bill (some restrictions and limitations apply). Qualifying trees have to be at least 1-inch caliper and 6 feet tall. The mature size of the tree and expected impact on stormwater runoff determines the amount of the rebate: the larger the tree, the larger the rebate. ©

Elizabeth Petersen writes for the garden industry and teaches SAT/ACT test prep at www.satpreppdx.com. She can be reached at gardenwrite@comcast.net or satpreppdx@comcast.net.