HOME AND GARDEN COLUMN

TREE BENEFITS

Trees are important, valuable and a necessity to the human existence. Without trees we would have a lot of difficulty surviving on this planet. Trees provide us with a wide range of economical, social, and environmental benefits.

During the hurricanes of 2004, thousands of trees in residential areas were lost, severely diminishing the urban forest in Osceola County. In addition to the acts of Mother Nature, forests are also being lost to urban sprawl. University of Florida economist, John Reynolds, estimates that from 2004 to 2020, approximately 174,105 acres per year, or 477 acres per day, will be converted from rural to urban uses in Florida. This validates the importance of creating a sustaining an urban forest in our community.

Why are trees in the urban environment so important? Here are just a few examples:

- Trees shade and cool their surroundings. Buildings surrounded by trees use up to 40% less cooling energy than those without trees.
- Trees produce oxygen, use carbon dioxide, and filter the air.
- Trees clean the soil by absorbing chemicals and pollutants.
- Trees control noise pollution by acting as muffler.
- Trees reduce storm water runoff, allowing underground aquifers to be recharged and reducing flash flooding.
- Trees control soil erosion with their root systems.
- Trees add aesthetic value to a neighborhood, along with screening and privacy.
- Trees in a well-landscaped yard can increase property value by 15% or more.
- Trees provide us with health benefits - mental comfort and physical contentment.
- Trees are important to recreational activities - hiking, biking, camping, and photography.
- Trees are habitats for many animals that depend of them for survival.
- Trees provide food for humans and wildlife.

You can help to replenish the urban forest of Osceola County and achieve all the benefits from trees as mentioned above. Osceola County, in coordination with the University of Florida IFAS Extension and funding by the U.S. Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Grant, is participating in a countywide grant program entitled, ReLeaf Osceola.

Due to the recent lost of many trees in Osceola County during the 2004 hurricane season, the ReLeaf Osceola program was developed. This program has been designed to reestablish the tree canopy, which was destroyed in the county, through an educational and tree giveaway program.

Program participants will attend a tree educational seminar consisting of information on recommended trees for central Florida, tips on selecting a good quality tree, how to properly plant the tree in the landscape, and proper tree maintenance procedures, including pruning. At the conclusion of the seminar, vouchers for a free 3-15 gallon tree will be distributed. The vouchers can be redeemed at one of the participating nurseries.

Although anyone can attend the educational seminars, only Osceola County residents may receive the voucher for a free tree (identification required). There is a limit of one (1) tree per person and two (2) trees per household. Exceptions may be made for common land in homeowner associations and for larger commercial private property. Nearly 4,000 trees will be distributed to residents through the ReLeaf Osceola program.

Classes are scheduled to be held during the next 10 months. The first one will be held on Saturday, October 28th at 10am in the Osceola Heritage Park complex. Classes will also be held for other organizations. If you know of an organization or homeowners association that may like to schedule a class (minimum of 10 people per class), please contact us. Registration is required for all classes. Call the Osceola County Extension office at (321) 697-3015 to register or for more information.
The Osceola County Master Gardeners will be holding their annual fall plant sale on Saturday, October 28th and Sunday, October 29th from 10am to 5pm at the Extension Services building in the Osceola Heritage Park complex. Old garden roses, herbs, shrubs, trees, and other quality and unusual plants will be for sale. Call (321) 697-3000 for more information.

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