



HABITAT ACQUISITION TRUST

# URBAN FOREST

protection

& stewardship

Leaves of the Vine Maple (*Acer Circinatum*) Photo by Todd Carnahan

## Stewardship Series

Issue 3: Fall 2015

### HAT & the future of our Urban Forest

Our region is changing rapidly as result of urban development, land use changes, climate changes, and natural forest aging processes. **Trees play an important role in our communities.** They reduce flooding, absorb air pollutants and carbon, increase property values, provide habitat for wildlife, and contribute to our physical health and sense of well-being. In contrast, communities that lose tree cover can expect to pay more for the services trees provide for free, such as stormwater management and pollution control.

To plan for the future, we need to understand what we have today and how our region has changed in the past. With your support, HAT initiated the ongoing Urban Forest and Land Cover Mapping Project as a quantitative way to do just that. From this study, we learned that over the past decade tree cover has been rapidly replaced by impervious surfaces like roads or new homes.

We also learned that many residents want to protect important trees on their property, but needed better information and in-person guidance. In response, we launched the **2015 Urban Forest Good Neighbours Project**. Through this project, HAT staff can provide information about stewarding the trees on your land. With your continued support, we aim to protect our Urban Forest for our climate and for generations to come.

## What is an Urban Forest?

*"...an interconnected network of green space that conserves natural ecosystem values and functions and provides associated benefits to human populations."*

- Benedict and McMahon, 2002.

**1. Urban forests are treed landscapes found within a community.** They include old growth remnants, backyard fruit trees, trees in urban parks and trail systems, Garry Oak meadows, and treed boulevards. A large proportion of the tree cover of Greater Victoria is made up by trees on private, residential land. Urban forest cover has been significantly declining due to extensive tree removal for construction, and for human convenience and preference. You may not consider the single tree in your back yard to be part of an 'Urban Forest', but it plays a crucial role in connecting larger green spaces in an increasingly urbanized landscape.



Urban trees are homes for city-dwelling hummingbirds.

**2. Whether it is a playful monkey-puzzle or a majestic Garry Oak, all trees need care.** Trees in our urban environment become stressed due to roads or paths over their roots, ever-increasing vehicle traffic pollution, and just plain removal. "Most urban trees do not have the opportunity to live out their natural lives. They become diseased and die, or land use changes and trees suffer the worse for it. If a homeowner decides a tree has become too large or too

messy, it is likely to be cut down instead of sustainably managed." Val Shaefer, author of *A Guide to Victoria's Urban Forest*. Caring for our trees means regular maintenance by a trained individual, and choosing the right tree for the right spot.

**3. Urban Forest tree cover benefits us as much as wildlife, creating habitat in an otherwise uninhabitable concrete jungle.** The urban canopy carries immense value to homeowners including protection from wind, noise and light pollution from busy urban streets. Their shade reduces our utility bills in the summer, increases property values and provides us with much needed oxygen!

They also absorb water, reducing flow into septic or sewer. They create key habitat and migratory paths for wildlife species, not to mention areas for wildlife watching. We can effectively manage our urban forests for both wildlife and human use with careful planning and consideration for both our basic needs: food, water, shelter, and space. **With your support, HAT's Wildlife Stewardship Program can work with the Urban Forest Project to enhance habitat for city-dwelling wildlife at risk, like bats and owls who need suitable shelter in our increasingly urbanized landscape.**

# Leave the leaves...

Leaf litter is an extremely valuable resource; it enhances the soil, suppresses weeds, provides habitat for many organisms, and ensures healthy plants. Compost or shred your leaf litter instead of raking it to the curb. Leave for winter, spread it on garden beds and under trees the following year. It is a free, clean and green fertiliser – the benefits to your local flora and fauna far outweigh any need for neatness!



*Curbside leaves are perfect mulch to transform your backyard.*

# Common Tree Problems and simple solutions

For some property owners trees are considered problematic, easier to cut down rather than sustainably manage. The loss of even one tree may have detrimental effects on the surrounding habitat. Here are the 5 most common tree problems we encounter, with simple solutions.

*Note: There are legal restrictions on tree removal and we always recommend consulting your local Tree Bylaw before acting.*

## ***My tree is messy with sap/leaves/bird droppings***

Nature can appear untidy, but it is natural, and manageable. Many issues are only seasonal and the long term ecosystem benefits often outweigh the short term inconveniences.

### **Decomposed leaf litter makes fantastic mulch for garden beds!**

If your tree is producing more sap than usual, you may want to check for insect infestation. Aphid honeydew can often be mistaken for tree sap. Do not prune your tree during spring, when sap flow is greatest. Consider covering your vehicle, a simple washable cover is an environmentally conscious, affordable and low-maintenance solution.

### ***I do not like my neighbour's tree***

Your neighbour may be unaware of the tree's extent or your concerns. Discuss the issue with them to devise suitable tree management. Refer them to HAT for a habitat consultation.

## ***My tree is blocking my view/shading my property***

Let your view be framed by the trees, the shade keeps your home cool and fresh in the summer, lowering your electricity bills. Be sure to conduct proper management and pruning by consulting an ISA Certified Arborist to discuss your issues and get recommendations for management.

If interfering with powerlines, it is the responsibility of your utility provider to ensure that their supply lines are safe and maintained.

Contact your utility company directly.

## ***I'm worried my large tree will cause structural damage***

Concerns about house foundations are not typically founded on fact as tree roots require water and oxygen to survive and the conditions beneath a house do not provide the oxygen required.

A large tree standing alone near a house should be assessed if you are concerned. HAT recommends that you get you get a Tree Assessment by an ISA Certified Arborist.

## ***My tree seems diseased, hazardous, or unstable***

Often trees may look unhealthy, but are just growing in very little soil, or going through a natural cycle of dieback and regrowth. You should report the tree to your local municipality who will visit the site and make a decision if management or removal are most appropriate.

Look on the back page to identify signs of an unhealthy tree.

# Turn your turf into wildflowers!

Rather than maintaining a large swath of generic turf-style grass under your tree that requires frequent mowing, watering, and fertilizing, consider planting a native wildflower meadow. No watering or fertilizing!

**Composted oak leaves are the perfect growing medium for native wildflowers like native Camas lilies.**

HAT receives native seeds from local habitat stewards, gardeners, and nurseries to distribute to landowners who are transforming turf! If you have native, locally-sourced seeds you would like to give, or are interested in creating a meadow on your lawn, contact us 250-995-2428.



*Wildflower meadow under the canopy vs conventional turf*

**Removing a tree?** Leaving a portion of the tree trunk up to 10 ft for wildlife can have great benefits for cavity nesting birds like woodpeckers.



Photo: Students from Quadra Elementary proudly hold up trees and shrubs that were planted on their school grounds in native plant gardens as part of the HAT Green Spots Youth Outdoor Education Program

## 6 native trees for landscaping

These trees do not grow very tall, make great additions to many backyard gardens, and are native to our region.



**Cascara** (*Rhamnus purshiana*)

8-10m tall, dry to wet soil, grows well in shady sites. Red leaves in fall.



NWP

**Douglas Maple** (*Acer glabrum*)

1-10m tall, grows well drained moist sites. Beautiful colour in fall.



NWP

**Pacific Dogwood** (*Cornus nuttallii*)

15-20m tall, best planted in less than full sun. Red-osier dogwood also good.



WS

**Black Hawthorn** (*Crataegus douglasii*)

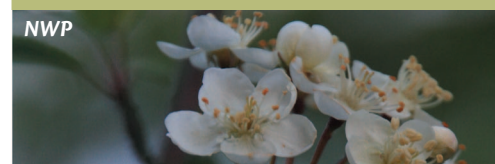
3-10m tall, blooms in May, white flower then small edible black berries.



JH

**Western Yew** (*Taxus brevifolia*)

5-15m tall, slow growing evergreen, small red cones look berry-like



NWP

**Pacific Crab apple** (*Malus fusca*)

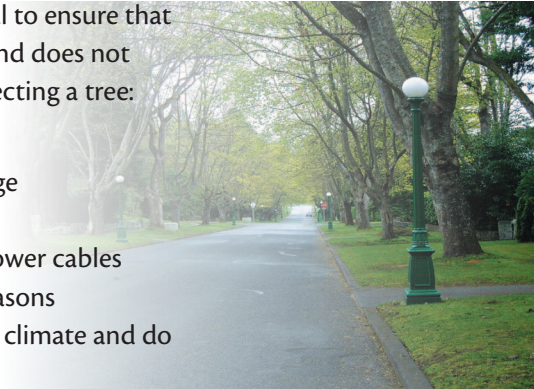
5-7m tall, fragrant white apple blossom like flowers bloom April, edible fruits.

Many of our native shrubs are also excellent for landscaping provide shade, privacy, and habitat including: Evergreen Huckleberry, Oceanspray, Red-flowering Currant, and Indian Plum.

## Top Tips for Tree Care

Choosing the right tree for the right spot is crucial to ensure that your new tree is low maintenance, survives well and does not become a nuisance. Factors to consider when selecting a tree:

1. Tree size and shape (columnar vs broad)
2. Site suitability: light, soil nutrients, drainage
3. Growth rate & lifespan
4. Potential interference with buildings or power cables
5. Species lifecycle: fruiting and flowering seasons
6. Native trees: are best adapted to our local climate and do not disrupt the ecosystem



### pruning the pines

Effective pruning can be used to remove unhealthy parts of a tree or to provide aesthetic shaping by modifying the canopy. Techniques vary depending on the age, type and size of tree. Poor pruning can be detrimental and can lead to malformed, unattractive, and unstable trees. Many ISA Certified Arborists have free online guidelines for pruning and HAT strongly recommends that you seek professional advice.

Typically pruning should be conducted in fall and winter so as not to impact the tree during its growing season but it depends on the species. One should only remove a maximum of 25% of the tree canopy over one year. **Tree Topping** is a damaging method causing your tree to sprout, to be stunted and malformed and require more pruning in the future.

### remove and replace

While we encourage the retention of healthy trees, particularly those that are native and have significant ecological value, the removal of problem trees is sometimes necessary and a municipal permit is likely required. We recommend consulting with a ISA Certified Arborist to ensure safe and legal tree removal.

At HAT we strongly encourage the planting of suitable replacement trees in order to retain the vital services that urban trees provide and keep habitat connectivity for wildlife, including the Red-breasted Sapsucker(left) who will create little holes or sap wells in riparian species such as those in the willow and birch families. They also utilize other deciduous trees like orchard crops.



## Evidence of an unhappy tree

Trees have a natural cycle of mortality and regeneration, and it is important to recognize the difference between these natural events and when your tree is distressed. Taking photographs can be a useful way of tracking changes if you are concerned about its health. Trees are slow growing and it can take up to 24 months to truly assess the health status and hazard risk. Your safety should always be the priority so request a Tree Assessment by an ISA Certified Arborist. Visit [isa-arbor.com](http://isa-arbor.com) for a list of local arborists.

### Factors that indicate that your tree may be unhappy:

#### 1. Contorted growth & dieback

- Non-seasonal leaf colour change
- Change in form or growth
- Wilt & collapse (often caused by drought stress)
- New outgrowths from the stems/branches called epicormic growth

#### 2. Insect, fungus and pest damage

- Is there physical evidence of damage i.e. insects, holes from insects, resin blisters
- Are there parasitic plants on the tree?
- Are fungal spores present and do they appear to be causing damage to the tree?

#### 3. Galls, cankers and early leaf colour change

- Darkening around open wounds
- Blisters or growths, dead limbs

### common tree problems and diseases found in our region



1. *Arbutus* *Natrassia* infections, aka Arbutus canker: Spreads via spores and attacks injured tissue. Can kill the tree.
2. Maples create epicormic shoots grow when it is stressed or damaged.
3. Oaks jumping gall wasp infection.

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## Join the movement to protect our Urban Forests!

Habitat Acquisition Trust is Victoria's local land trust, helping our community understand and care for wildlife and their habitat. Become a Forest Friend - Your support will protect forest habitat for wildlife in Victoria.



Yes! I want to be a Friend of the Forest - to protect habitats including our urban forest. Here is my donation for HAT!

Please find enclosed my donation in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please direct my donation towards:

- Where Most Needed
- Urban Forests
- Youth Education
- Other:

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

#### PAY BY CREDIT CARD:

# \_\_\_\_\_

Exp Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ VISA MC AMEX  
(mm / yy)

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

- Yes! I would like to be added as a HAT member (free with donation of \$30 or more)
- Keep my donation anonymous

Charitable # 889626545RR0001. All donations over \$20 are tax-receiptable. Make cheques payable to Habitat Acquisition Trust or HAT.