

## EDITORIAL

# Tackling climate change one tree at a time

At least 60 per cent of the carbon stored in Toronto's urban forest is stored by trees on residential lands.

By **Star Editorial Board**

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The meticulously pruned vanilla strawberry hydrangea tree is a pretty sight on a summer's day.

But it's not really a tree, is it? Even if a growth spurt takes it to two metres, the ornamental is a lousy stand-in for a towering maple, or an oak, or those extraordinary tulip trees.

And yet, we see household lawns bare of trees altogether; others that feature a single, and seemingly artful, hydrangea with its pretty panicles.

Clearly not all landowners adhere to the We're-All-In-This-Together mantra. By which we mean working together to densify the city's tree canopy to the benefit, not just of the city, but the planet.

A point to bear in mind: roughly 55 per cent of the city's 11 million-plus trees grow on private property. And this: The greatest amount of permeable potential planting area is on single family residential lands. The city's [tree canopy study](#), revised in October, 2021, pointed to approximately 5,200 hectares of residential lands lying in wait for, say, a white oak.

It's no surprise that available planting space on nonresidential lands -- that is, public lands -- is ever shrinking. Think condos. Think concrete. We say a little prayer for the honeysuckles lining streetcar routes hoping they will survive another winter of extreme salt and a long-term future of extreme climate shifts.

What is surprising is that 57 of the city's 140 neighbourhoods have seen a decrease in canopy coverage, particularly in neighbourhoods in the north and west of the city.

Trees are climate workhorses, this we know. But we may not know that at least 60 per cent of the carbon stored in Toronto's urban forest is stored by trees on residential lands.

The city's focus on growing and maintaining the urban forest has resulted in incremental improvements: the canopy cover was recorded at 28.4 per cent in 2018, up from 26.6 per cent in the year 2000. But -- there's always a but -- that 2018 number is actually a slight decrease from 2014. And getting to 40 per cent is where we want to be.

We are not doing a good enough job.

Federal initiatives include Canada's own commitment, announced in 2019, to plant two billion trees across the span of a decade. It was this that drew primatologist Jane Goodall to Sudbury last month, joining Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in planting the



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Bottom line: there's a nature-based opportunity for dealing with climate change.

The city appears to be doing its bit. But as the canopy report notes, "the extent to which the city can influence maintenance and replacement of trees on private property is limited. At the same time, residential areas present some of the greatest areas of opportunity to maintaining and expanding the city's tree canopy."

Seizing that opportunity couldn't be easier. From requesting a city tree to be planted on a property's roadway allowance, to tapping the nonprofit organization LEAF to explore backyard options for a modest fee.

Soon enough, the days will cool to autumn, perfect for planting. Sept. 21 is National Tree Day. How many of us are aware that there's a National Tree Day? We can, collectively, make change. We can, collectively, grow Toronto.

**Read more about: [United Nations, Climate Change](#)**

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