



Learning Landscapes

Guidelines for a Successful School Tree Planting Project

Selecting good quality tree species and planting them in appropriate locations, with the permission of the school district, are all key factors to a successful tree planting project. When determining the best places to plant trees, keep these three things in mind:

- 1. Wide open, grassy areas are ideal!** Look for areas where adding trees will screen the school grounds from noise and pollution, shade paved areas and buildings, and improve the aesthetic value of the property.

- a. Remember to consider the current use.**

Is it an existing or planned athletic field for sports such as soccer, football, or baseball? If so, trees should be planted no closer than 20ft to 25ft to any part of the playing field perimeter. The canopy should be no closer than 10ft to the field when fully grown for football and soccer and no closer than 25ft for baseball.

- b. Buildings and structures.**

Trees should not be planted where they will allow people or animals to climb them and access the roof or other parts of a building or structure. Plan to leave at least a 15ft buffer from the edge of the expected mature canopy to a building. Trees should be planted no closer than 20ft to play structures.

- c. Neighboring properties.**

Trees should be planted at least 20ft from any surrounding property lines.

- d. Utilities, both up and down.**

Trees planted under and adjacent to power lines should only be small-form, utility friendly trees. For buried utilities such as water, gas, and power, digging may not be permissible.

- 2. Talk to maintenance staff about proposed locations.**

- a. Leave room for maintenance equipment.**

In grassy areas, trees should be planted at least 20ft apart to allow good access for mowers between the trees, and should not make areas inaccessible to mowers or other equipment. Trees should not be planted on steep slopes that will be an obstacle to mowers. Slopes that are not mowed may be permissible for tree planting.

- b. Consider what kind of ongoing tree care maintenance will be necessary.**

Native trees and fruit trees are a popular choice, but are not always well-suited for the urban conditions found at many school yards. For safety and maintenance purposes, school districts will often require that trees be relatively free of fruit, cones, seeds, and thorns, as well as being drought resistant once the initial two-year



watering establishment phase has ended. Please see our table of [Preferred Tree Species](#) at the end of the Learning Landscapes [School Tree Planting Application](#) for an idea of the types of trees that are commonly accepted by school districts.

3. Get approval from the school district.

By following the guidelines above, you will be on the right track towards planning a successful school tree planting project.

- a. **It is best to contact your school district early.** Before you get too far along in the planning process, find out if it is likely that your project will get the green light.
- b. **There may be factors that you are unaware of.** School districts may have information that prevents them from allowing tree planting at this time. Don't be discouraged! There may be other suitable locations in your community for another tree planting project.
- c. **Take a look at past projects!** Urban Forestry's [Tree Maps for Learning Landscapes](#) is an excellent resource for seeing what has worked in the past.



A kindergarten class plants trees at Woodlawn Elementary School.