



Tree City USA®

Take Pride in a Greener Community

You have seen the signs along the road and perhaps a Tree City USA flag flying at city hall in other communities. Towns and cities that have received their Tree City USA recognition take pride in this distinction. And the people who live there enjoy the valuable benefits of having a greener, healthier community.

Tree City USA is a national recognition program that began in 1976 and is sponsored by the Arbor Day Foundation in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and National Association of State Foresters. By meeting four fundamental standards, an incorporated municipality of any size can qualify.

Applying for the Tree City USA award is easy and the recognition is outstanding. There are now thousands of communities that proudly receive roadside signs, fly the flag of Tree City USA and – knowing the value of participation – renew their application every year.

Whether you are a business leader, a community official, or simply a citizen with an interest in trees, you are invited to visit arborday.org/TreeCityUSA for more information and to apply for recognition on behalf of your community.

“Tree City USA is a great way to get the community involved in green space. A community that feels involved will take better care of their environment.”

— Alison Litchy, Fort Smith, AR

Why Your City Should be a Tree City USA Community

“With emphasis today on the environment, residents need to know the importance of trees and the importance of the care of those trees.”

— Bernard Whiteley, Velda Village Hills, MO

WHY YOUR CITY SHOULD BE A TREE CITY USA COMMUNITY

The Tree City USA program provides direction, assistance, and national recognition to your community. It's the framework for a healthy, sustainable urban forestry program in your town. By becoming a Tree City USA your community is ensuring that its trees will benefit your community in many ways:

Reduce costs for energy, stormwater management, and erosion control. Trees yield three to five times their cost in overall benefits to the city.

Cut energy consumption by up to 25 percent. Studies indicate that as few as three additional trees planted around each building in the United States could save \$2 billion annually in energy costs.

Boost property values across your community. Properly placed trees can increase property values from 7 – 20 percent. Buildings in wooded areas rent more quickly and tenants stay longer.

Build stronger ties to your neighborhood and community. Trees and green spaces directly correlate to greater connections to neighbors.

Honor your community and demonstrate your commitment to a healthier environment through Arbor Day celebrations and Tree City USA recognition.

Use the framework for action provided by the four core standards as a way to begin caring for city trees. Some communities regularly enhance urban forest management through improved ordinances, innovative programs, and increased emphasis on planting and care.

Educate people living in your city about the value of trees and the importance of sustainable tree management. Annual participation as a Tree City USA community provides this opportunity and makes it easier to engage individuals and organizations through the city. Tree City USA status can also create a strong working relationship with your state forestry agency and other groups.

Increase community pride. Participation in the Tree

City USA program helps residents feel good about the place they live and work. Annual recognition shows visitors and prospective residents that trees, conservation, and the environment are important to your community.

Gain publicity with recognition materials. Tree boards, parks departments, public works officials, and volunteers are recognized for the valuable work they provide to the community. Many communities share their Tree City USA recognition across city departments and with elected officials, students, and business leaders.



Why Community Trees are Important

Trees along our streets and in parks have been treasured since the earliest days of settlement. Unmatched beauty, and cooling shade are still important, but there is more.

ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

A modest investment in community trees has a big pay-back. Studies show that for every dollar invested, there is often a four or five dollar annual return in environmental services, not to mention that green infrastructure is the only part of a city's infrastructure that actually appreciates in value over time.

- Trees clean the air, absorbing pollutants that trigger asthma attacks and other health problems.
- Trees absorb carbon dioxide and provide life-giving oxygen.
- Shade from trees cools the urban landscape.
- Water vapor given off through transpiration adds to the cooling influence of trees.
- Stormwater runoff can be reduced by tree canopies by as much as 65 percent, reducing flooding and the need for expensive facilities.



TREE CITY USA®

The Four Standards

These are the simple but important requirements for becoming eligible to be named a Tree City USA.

1. A tree board or department
2. A tree care ordinance
3. A community forestry program with an annual budget of at least \$2 per capita
4. An Arbor Day proclamation and observance

FINANCIAL BENEFITS

Much depends on the nature of the neighborhood, but real estate professionals report that houses with adjoining healthy trees and pleasant landscaping can contribute as much as 20 percent to the property value.

- In some cases, a single tree has raised the value by 9 percent compared to similar houses without such tree.
- Scientists with the U.S. Forest Service report that a tree planted today on the west side of a house can reduce energy bills by 3 percent in only five years and by 12 percent annually in 15 years.

PUBLIC HEALTH BENEFITS

Research has consistently shown the positive impact trees have on people, including worker satisfaction, students' ability to concentrate, faster healing time for hospital patients, and lower blood pressure among senior citizens. Their presence has even been found to reduce crime by providing inviting places that promote positive social interaction.

In summary, the growing volume of research says that trees:

- facilitate mental restoration.
- reduce depression, anger, anxiety, mental fatigue, and stress.
- focus attention and improve concentration.
- encourage healthful, outdoor activity for the young and old.



Fundamental Components of Tree City USA

The benefits enjoyed by communities that receive Tree City USA recognition usually include a more organized and effective approach to the care of their trees. In fact, that is exactly what the four standards are intended to encourage – a systematic, continuous tree care program.

STANDARD 1: A TREE BOARD OR DEPARTMENT

Larger cities usually have a department or other government official that is responsible for tree care. These communities meet Standard 1. The benefit of Tree City USA recognition will enhance recognition of the department's efforts and perhaps even help at budget time.

The formation of a tree board often stems from a group of citizens. In some cases a mayor or city officials have started the process. Either way, the benefits are immense. Involving residents and business owners creates wide awareness of what trees do for the community and provides broad support for better tree care.

STANDARD 2: A TREE CARE ORDINANCE

City ordinances reflect the values of a community. That is, they speak about what its residents believe are worth protecting to create or maintain their quality of life and an en-

vironment that is both safe and pleasant. Trees are certainly worthy of this formal attention for the common good.

A public tree care ordinance encourages beautification, air cooling and purification, noise abatement, property value enhancement, and all the other attributes of trees in cities of all sizes. It also enables city government to prevent and control destructive insects and diseases, avoid unnecessary costs and liability from hazardous trees and tree-related accidents, and protect residents from unscrupulous or careless operators.

Length of the ordinance does not matter. It should be kept simple, clear, and tailored to the needs of your community. A tree ordinance is an important tool for proper tree care — delegating authority to a board or department and establishing protection and regulation for public trees. There are plenty of models and help available to create a tree ordinance. For more information, see Tree City USA Bulletin No. 9 or visit arborday.org/bulletins and navigate to the resources for Bulletin No. 9. But above all, remember that the ordinance is modified to serve in your situation.

STANDARD 3: A COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROGRAM WITH AN ANNUAL BUDGET OF AT LEAST \$2 PER CAPITA

As pointed out earlier, most communities probably already spend at least \$2 per capita. Also, community trees — when cared for — can actually save money. A managed program can ensure benefits that surely outweigh costs. It does require dollars to plant and keep trees in healthy condition, but this should not be a barrier to becoming a Tree City USA. Even the smallest communities have found ways to raise needed funds:

- City budget (always a high priority).
- Local donations, often through adopt-a-tree or memorial tree programs.
- Including trees as part of public works or downtown revitalization projects that receive state or federal money.
- Assistance from the utility company.
- A donor-established trust with principal used for trees.
- Federal grants, often passed through to communities from the state forester's office.
- State funds from special license plates or tax return checkoffs.
- Tree donations from local nurseries or retail outlets, especially in late autumn.

Tree City USA Bulletin 34 and its supplemental resource library at arborday.org/bulletins provide additional ideas.

The importance of this tree-planting holiday provides an excellent opportunity to educate about trees and tree care.

STANDARD 4: AN ARBOR DAY PROCLAMATION AND OBSERVANCE

Arbor Day began in 1872 as the idea of founder J. Sterling Morton, a Nebraska farmer and newspaper editor. Since then it has spread to every state in the nation and many countries overseas. Most importantly, it has been the initial inspiration for generations of children who grew into adults who love trees and care about the environment.

The importance of this tree-planting holiday provides an excellent opportunity to educate about trees and tree care. It also creates pride within the community and can help garner public support for the city's entire urban forestry program.

Part of the fun of Arbor Day is creating something that will be enjoyed by the whole community. Here are some of the ways Tree City USA communities are making the celebration memorable. More help is available at arborday.org/celebrate.

- Involving school children, Scouts, church groups.
- Combining with an art and craft festival.
- Sponsoring contests for young people and adults (art, crafts, essays, best landscaping, etc.).
- A "Tree of the Year" contest.
- Presentations by celebrities.
- Honoring individuals who have made important contributions.
- Theatrical or musical performances.
- Food from nature-cooking demonstrations.
- And, of course – planting trees!



Myths and Truths about Tree City USA

Many communities fail to take advantage of Tree City USA recognition because of misconceptions about the program. Here are the perceived obstacles and the facts.

MYTH: We don't know much about trees ...

TRUTH: If this is true, it is a very good reason to pursue Tree City USA status! There is plenty of assistance available and a network of people who are passionate about the role trees play in every community. Help will be provided in forming a tree board if that's what you need. Materials are available to help you plan an Arbor Day celebration. Even a suggested proclamation for the mayor to read will be sent. You can be sure that you will learn and grow, and your entire community will benefit from it.

MYTH: We can't afford it ...

TRUTH: We think you can. First of all, there are no application or membership fees. Even the award materials are complimentary. Other services are part of what your state forestry department contributes. As for the \$2 per capita required, you are probably already spending this much on tree care. For example, in even the smallest of cities, if an employee removes a tree that fell during a storm or that appears dangerous, labor and equipment costs count. And if volunteers help plant trees, their time and expenses can count, too. Of course, the goal of this standard is to have community tree care be part of the local budget, but even without that, most communities already meet this standard.

MYTH: People in our community view trees as a frill or nice to have, but that's about all ...

TRUTH: This is probably because they don't understand that trees not only lend beauty to our communities, they provide benefits such as cleaner air and water, lower energy costs, stormwater retention, and a host of others. There are also numerous proven public health and economic benefits. Living in a Tree City USA community usually instills a sense of pride among the residents and opens opportunities for education about the benefits of a healthy tree canopy. With a little understanding, trees become viewed not as a frill but as a necessary and profitable part of the city infrastructure.

MYTH: Another ordinance just means more restrictions and more bureaucracy ...

TRUTH: A tree ordinance is needed for systematic and continuous care of your community's public trees – and public safety. However, there is no single ordinance that fits every community. Some might be lengthy and detailed, but others are very short. The ordinance should fit the needs of the community.



MYTH: Our community is too small ...

TRUTH: If there was genius in the founding of the Tree City USA program, it was in the requirement that qualifying expenditures are on a per capita basis. This provides a level playing field for communities ranging from New York City with its population of more than 8 million people to Sibley, North Dakota, and its 28 residents.

“The real advantage to the designation is it speaks to the rest of the world about who you are as a community and what you value in your world.”

— Steve Ayers, Camp Verde, AZ

MYTH: We lack leadership ...

TRUTH: This thought may be the number one obstacle to achieving Tree City USA recognition. On the other hand, it takes only one motivated individual to get the ball rolling. Maybe that person is you. Whoever starts the Tree City USA process usually finds that there actually is support from others. It may be the mayor, a council member, a park staffer, or someone else affiliated with the city. Or, it may be another resident or two who share the desire to move forward. In searching for supportive individuals, you might start with other organizations such as a Garden Club, civic group, business associations, or just a group of friends. Kindred spirits are out there.

MYTH: No one here wants the responsibility of taking care of trees ...

TRUTH: Ouch! This attitude can hurt in more ways than one. Not only can citizens be injured, it is also a plaintiff lawyer's dream. Cities have the responsibility for public safety. Tree City USA standards help communities be more aware not only of the duty of care owed to citizens and visitors, but how to make conditions safer down the road.

MYTH: There is no Arbor Day celebration (or proclamation) in our community ...

TRUTH: Arbor Day is one of the nation's oldest celebrations. The first one was in 1872 and the idea spread quickly to all states in the nation. If your community doesn't have an Arbor Day celebration of some kind, it's time to start. Countless numbers of adults can trace their earliest memories of stewardship to an Arbor Day celebration at school. Ways to celebrate can be as simple as a brief ceremony and planting a new tree near city hall, the library, a home for the elderly, or some other public or private building. For ideas and a copy of a proclamation that can be read at the ceremony, see the Celebrate Arbor Day section online at arborday.org/celebrate.

HOW TO EARN TREE CITY USA RECOGNITION

1. Get Your Community Interested — Find Allies and Partners
2. Contact Your State Urban and Community Forestry Coordinator
3. Work Together to Fulfill the Four Tree City USA Standards
4. Celebrate Arbor Day!
5. Submit your Application

Communities that receive Tree City USA recognition receive support that helps make the celebration easy to plan and conduct. Here is some of what you will receive in your first year:

- Two road signs.
- A 4' x 6' Tree City USA flag.
- Beautiful wall plaque.



With a bit of organizing, virtually any community — large or small — can qualify for Tree City USA recognition. The end result will be safer community trees, better informed citizens, and a higher quality of life for residents and businesses.

It's Time to Get Recognized

“Becoming a Tree City USA is a way to make your community stand out. It shows you're dedicated to the management of your urban forest and strive to provide a beautiful landscape to the residents you serve.”

— Mike Fraider, Alsip, IL



TREE CITY USA®: *Your Community Is Ready*

As the first step in helping your town or city become a Tree City USA community, an important person for you to contact is the urban and community forestry coordinator in your state forester's office.

Visit arborday.org/coordinators for your contact's information and a directory list of all states.

Your state coordinator is the resource for beginning your Tree City USA application. He or she will have answers to your questions and will be more than happy to help your community become a Tree City USA.

How to Apply

Simplicity is one of the principles of the Tree City USA application and annual recertification process. Experience has shown that getting started as a Tree City USA often results from a single individual or a small group taking the lead. Here is all you have to do:

A Talk with the person in your community currently responsible for trees (city forester, park superintendent, public works director, etc.). Also discuss with your mayor, city manager, city clerk, a key council person, or whomever else in your city government should be informed and whose support you will need.

B Go to portal.arborday.org. The Tree City USA application can easily be completed online.

C The application is normally completed by the city forester or other person responsible for trees, or the tree board chair. Once your application is submitted, it's reviewed at a state level and then it will be reviewed by the Arbor Day Foundation at a national level. To learn more about applying and your state's deadlines visit arborday.org/treecityusa.

