Respect Trees, Keep Signs Off

In a few communities, ‘no parking’ signs and others have been screwed or bolted directly onto the trunks of trees. More commonly, citizens nail or staple ‘yard sale’ signs and other announcements directly on to the bark of trees. Arguably, if the nail or staple does not penetrate the tree’s bark, little harm is done. However, on thin-barked trees the hole created by the nail or staple kills cells in the inner bark, interrupts the flow of nutrients and provides an entry way for fungal spores that cause decay. While one or two such holes may do little harm, repeated use of the tree as a bulletin board or sign post is sure to shorten its life.

Trees deserve respect for their beauty and functionality. From the aesthetic standpoint, affixing signs on them is not unlike putting graffiti on a building. In addition, healthy trees provide enough environmental benefits and services without being asked to serve as sign posts. They also represent an investment worth protecting.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Dunn Foundation and Keep America Beautiful are two of the national organizations that focus on keeping both our natural and built environments clean and beautiful. For contact information about these organizations and for other information about signs in our communities, please visit arborday.org/bulletins.

How to Prevent Tree/Sign Conflicts

Signs are the lifeblood of most businesses. But so is a friendly, inviting shopping environment. Trees can provide a softened touch to an otherwise harsh downtown area and reduce even the most imposing buildings to human scale, and they can do it without interfering with signs.

The saying goes that some people shop to live, and others live to shop. That may be so, but one thing that is certain is that few of us enjoy the trudge between stores. In recent years, smart shopping mall designers have taken note of this fact and have gone to great lengths to provide interesting, appealing indoor decor to enhance the between-shop experience.

Outside the mall in the sprawling parking lots and in the central business area of towns, trees can be an important way to provide an interesting, attractive business environment. They do this by giving the area a unified appearance even if stores vary widely in architectural design, they also “soften” hard building materials, sidewalks and harsh streets, and add color, character and seasonal variety. Of course, they also provide their cool, welcome shade in summer.

How ironic, then, that some merchants oppose tree planting or ask that trees be removed. The reason is usually signs. Signs are a merchant’s link to customers and they must be seen to do their job. If a tree blocks the view, the conclusion by many business owners is that the tree must go.

Fortunately, there are proven ways to prevent the conflict between visible signs and the benefits of trees. Through improved signage, proper planting and planned tree care, an improved business environment can be created and both the businesses and the community will benefit from the presence of trees.