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Make Room for Trees

Whether in traditional suburban areas or redeveloped urban sites, sharing our environment with trees continues to be critically important. Even though the practical benefits of trees are becoming better known, competition for ever-scarcer space requires determination and techniques to include trees in the landscape.



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When a property owner sees the value of trees, or when ordinances require the inclusion of trees, a little imagination can make it possible to find ways to make room for them in just about any situation.

The social science literature is rife with interesting experiments about the influence of urban environments on human behavior. For example, when researchers intentionally littered a parking lot and then placed fliers on windshields, nearly half of the drivers tossed the fliers on the ground. When the scientists repeated the experiment by first sweeping the parking lot clean, only one in ten of the motorists threw down the fliers. In this experiment, condition of the environment made the difference. In urban forestry, other researchers have shown the importance of including trees in the environment. These studies have shown how trees help reduce crime, increase healthful exercise, improve mental states and make other positive behavioral contributions to society.

Professor Adam Alter, writing in the *New York Times*, noted that we humans are “more like chameleons who instinctively and unintentionally change how we behave based on our surroundings.” He added that “environmental cues can shape and reshape us as quickly as we walk from one part of the city to another.”

With all the evidence available today that trees play an essential role not only in modifying social behavior but also in providing environmental services ranging from cleaner air to reducing storm runoff, the question should not be whether we include trees in the landscape, but how to make room for them. In this issue we provide some of those ways and some examples of communities that are giving trees the priority they deserve.