



Urban Wood: A Wonderful Resource

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It is the mission of the Arbor Day Foundation to inspire people to plant, nurture, and celebrate trees. But when trees in our cities die or must be taken down, it is time to promote use of the wood rather than letting it rot or add to the municipal waste stream. Imagination is the only limitation about how “waste” wood can be turned into practical or aesthetic products that extend the benefits of urban trees.

The need to find good uses of trees removed from our streets, parks, and yards has become urgent. Hurricane Katrina destroyed 320 million trees. Invading insects, such as emerald ash borers and Asian long-horned beetles, have taken tens of millions of ashes, oaks, maples, and others. New diseases, such as thousand cankers disease and sudden oak death, are contributing to the loss of some of our most beautiful urban trees. In 20 cities studied by the U.S. Forest Service, it was found that loss and removal due to all sources is at least 4 million trees per year.

John Haling of John's Urban Timber in Whitmore Lake, Michigan, stands next to bookmatched slabs he cut from a weeping willow.

While great emphasis must be placed on the need to replant trees — and with appropriate species — it behooves tree boards and other organizations to find and promote the use of wood from removed trees. Not only will this reduce pressure on landfills, it recognizes the beauty and benefits of wood that can continue beyond the life of living trees.

In this bulletin, a few of both the traditional and innovative uses of wood are illustrated. These ideas have great potential for wider application, and we hope readers will take up the challenge to promote this important type of recycling in communities nationwide.