

Let's Diversify Community Forests



from the **TREE CITY USA®**
BULLETIN

With news of invasive insects and diseases that are destroying community trees throughout the country, it is easy to view the situation as hopeless. However, one of the most powerful means of combating the havoc caused by these invasions is relatively simple and inexpensive — diversifying the kinds of trees we plant and manage.

A greater focus on diversification of a community's trees should be a goal of every tree board and urban forestry department.

When reflecting on his state's historic loss of elm trees, Dr. John Ball of South Dakota State University told *The Forestry Source*, a publication of the Society of American Foresters, "I realized we learned the wrong lesson. The lesson we learned was not to plant elms. What we should have learned was to diversify."

That important lesson means not simply switching to another species that is immune to a current plague, but rather to truly diversify the trees being planted. To ensure maximum effectiveness and maximum protection of the benefits

provided by the urban forest, the diversification needs to be carefully planned.

Urban forest diversity has been defined by Professor Emeritus Joe McBride of the University of California–Berkeley as "the complexity of tree species composition, the size distribution of trees, and the patterns of distribution within an urban forest." With the continuing spread of urbanization and in the face of climate change, the concept — and practice — of tree diversification is more important than ever.



LACK OF DIVERSITY ADDS TO COSTS

In a report to the city of Lincoln, Nebraska, Professor Eric North of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln pointed out, "There are direct costs (maintenance, removals, and replacements) associated with poor diversity." He went on to illustrate that only three genera (maple, oak, and ash) currently make up 43 percent of the city's public trees, 16 percent being maples of various species and cultivars. If a serious pest that affects maples were to arrive, the cost of removal and replanting would be approximately \$15.8 million. If the percentage of maples were only 10 percent, the cost would be \$9.7 million, a savings of some \$6 million.

IN THIS ISSUE, READ ABOUT:

- ✓ Diversity in nature and the urban forest
- ✓ Why tree diversity is important
- ✓ Theory to Action to help diversify the trees in any community



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