



2006 Young Tree Care Survey Report

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Educating, Inspiring, and Engaging Palo Altans as Stewards of New and Existing Trees.

Background

Canopy is an independent nonprofit organization dedicated to educating, inspiring and engaging the community in the stewardship of new and existing trees. The Young Tree Care Program was originally created in to help address these goals. The Young Tree Care Survey is a component of this program, and seeks both to educate homeowners on the proper care of young trees and to notify the City of Palo Alto of any problems that need to be addressed with young street trees.

The Canopy Young Tree Care Survey began as a pilot project in the summer of 2001 and expanded into a citywide program in 2002. The Young Tree Care survey takes place in the summer months and surveys all street trees planted in Palo Alto by Canopy and the City in the past five planting seasons. At each address surveyed, information is left with homeowners on the proper care for young trees. Results from the survey are compiled and shared in a detailed report to the City's Public Works Department so they can take action on trees in need of help. Results of the survey will also be posted on Canopy's website, www.canopy.org.

Methodology

Canopy's Young Tree Care Survey is completed through volunteer labor. Canopy had 76 volunteers participate in this year's survey, an increase over past years. The total volunteer hours put into the effort was 345. Volunteers represented a broad sector of the community, from high school students to local community groups such as Kiwanis and Youth Community Services.

Survey routes for the volunteers were drawn up using mapping software, which allows us to pinpoint the location of all the young street trees in the city. Each survey group was given a list of addresses as well as a map of their area.

Approximately half of the trees were surveyed during two tree care survey events held on June 3rd and 6th. Volunteers were trained, divided into teams and assigned routes that could be completed within a 2-3 hour span. Volunteers completed the remainder of the routes not surveyed during these two events on their own time. All trees were surveyed between mid-June and early September.

In total, 1,192 trees were surveyed. Several of these were not on our original survey lists. This discrepancy exists for a number of reasons: homeowners often plant trees without notifying the City and errors exist in both the Canopy and the City databases. To record these "new" trees in Canopy's database so that they continue to be surveyed in future years the following approach was used:

- Trees were given a fictitious planting date, 12/25/04. This date was chosen since planting is unlikely on Christmas Day. This minimizes the chance of it being mistaken for the actual planting date. A planting date is necessary to make sure trees eventually drop off our survey lists.

- When volunteers were not able to identify the species of a “new” tree, it was recorded as “unknown.”

The survey form divides the possible problems a tree may have into responsibilities of the homeowner and responsibilities of the city. A copy of the form is included at the end of this report.

As in 2005, Canopy sent out watering reminders in early June. These postcards were sent to addresses with a young street tree and contained information on proper watering techniques.

Significant Results

The two most frequent problems that volunteers found with young street trees were that the tree needed water and that the stakes needed to be removed. Other common problems were the presence of a lawn or other competing plants such as ivy or suckers that needed to be pruned. Below is the breakdown on how many times a problem was reported (Note: Many trees exhibited more than one problem.)

Trees surveyed	1,192
Needs water	324
Stakes need to be removed	240
Lawn or other competing plants	177
Suckers need to be pruned	110
Needs weeding	107
Root flare no longer visible	95
Needs mulch	56
Needs basin re-building	56
Needs pruning	37
Needs to be re-staked	37
Tree is dead or dying	27
Mechanical damage or injury	19
Needs to be re-strapped	18

A list of trees and their corresponding problems has been provided to the Public Works Department so that the department may include the information in its records and attend to the trees most in need.

Below is a table comparing this year’s results to previous years. For each year, both the total number of trees and the percentage with each problem is shown.

	2004	%	2005	%	2006	%
Trees Surveyed	1,216		1,059		1,192	
Needs water	416	34	486	46	324	27
Stakes need to be removed	301	25	314	30	240	20
Lawn or other competing plants	183	15	218	21	177	15
Needs mulch	115	9	195	18	56	5
Root flare no longer visible	114	9	166	16	95	8
Needs basin re-building	107	9	148	14	56	5
Needs weeding	97	8	111	10	107	9
Suckers need to be pruned	90	7	132	12	110	9
Needs pruning	48	4	50	5	37	3
Needs to be re-staked	37	3	32	3	37	3
Tree is dead or dying	34	3	24	2	27	2
Needs to be re-strapped	28	2	43	4	18	2
Mechanical damage or injury	27	2	21	2	19	2

Evaluation

The largest difference between the results of this year's survey and last year's is the decrease in the percentage of trees that need water. One possible explanation for this is last winter's and spring's heavy rains; this water could have provided a deep enough watering to get the trees through the summer with little water. Other possible explanations are Canopy's watering postcards; the tree care brochure left on the homeowner's porch during the survey, and a general awareness about trees needs through Canopy's communication efforts. Lack of water has always been the biggest challenge facing young trees in the urban environment so it is encouraging that this year more trees were relieved of this stress. Canopy will continue to work to educate residents on this need to water their young trees.

There was another striking decrease in the number of trees that needed their stakes removed. Possibly the information that Canopy is providing to the city is facilitating stakes being removed on a timely basis to encourage a strong tree trunk. Again, the tree care brochure and general community awareness could be playing a part in encouraging residents to take a proactive approach to caring for their trees by removing the stakes themselves.

Canopy continues to look at ways to improve the tree care survey. Canopy hopes to do this through increasing volunteer participation and turning the survey into a community wide event. Work with the Tree Section of the Public Works Department will continue to make sure we are meeting their needs. In addition, Canopy is investigating ways to streamline the survey through a number of methods, including remote data entry technology.

Conclusion

Palo Alto's health and vitality depend on maintaining a healthy urban forest. Our forest canopy is one of the things that draw people to our community. Canopy's tree care survey seeks to make sure that young trees survive so that our urban forest is maintained. Understanding the biggest problems that we face with our city trees will help us to shape our programs in the future to better meet these needs.