



Why We Need Trees

John Thornburgh

As gas prices soar, foreign policy becomes more complicated, and politicians begin talking about energy policy, trees and the environment are beginning to make their way to the front pages of newspapers across the country. Much emphasis is being put on the benefits trees provide in helping us combat the release of Carbon Dioxide into the atmosphere. While this is certainly true, trees provide other important benefits that have been mostly overlooked thus far.

Many people have often by chance noticed the positive benefits trees bring to our lives. For example, consider the notion of planting trees around office buildings, or providing outdoor places for people to eat during their lunch breaks. Moreover, consider just the concept of a retreat, where companies and schools take individuals to the wilderness for a break. These examples alone provide proof that humans believe trees are important to our mental health and productivity. But recent studies can now back these premises up with scientific evidence.

For example, researchers at the University of Georgia report that patients in hospitals with views of trees outside their windows, or even with photos of trees near their beds, tended to recover faster and need less pain medication than those that didn't. Some people are suggesting that beyond the psychological benefits groups are studying, that the economic impact should be taken into account as well. Are trees a way of keeping the cost of health care down? Some would suggest yes.

In another recent study done at the University of Illinois, it was found that women who lived in apartment buildings with trees in close proximity to them reported greater effectiveness and less procrastination in dealing with major troubles in their lives, than those women who lived in identical but barren buildings. As the study notes, "it seems that trees help poor inner city residents cope better with the demands of living in poverty, feel more hopeful about the future, and manage their most important problems more effectively."

The University of Illinois has done numerous other studies as well. Among them, researchers there found that people felt safer in areas with trees, children were twice as likely to play in such an area, and children and adults were more likely to interact together in landscaped areas. While none of these findings are all that surprising, they are important.

Thus, while the public's attention remains largely focused on the scientific benefit trees provide, there are other benefits that are equally, if not more important. To take advantage of these findings, though, it is important that trees are planted wherever humans live or interact. Therefore, the next time you unhappily look outside of your home or office and see a barren landscape, consider planting a tree. It may improve your state of mind instantly.