

WHAT'S GROWING AT LEAF

2006 ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL YEAR

This year LEAF worked with hundreds of property owners to plant native trees and shrubs in Toronto backyards. Our focus on getting the right tree in the right place helped ensure that trees will not only survive but thrive in their new homes. We also did corrective pruning of some trees planted three to five years ago.



Certified Arborist Todd Irvine does corrective pruning on a birch tree planted in a backyard by LEAF four years ago

Our annual Earth Day planting with Toronto Hydro Corporation and the Taylor Massey Project brought out over 150 volunteers and involved two other corporations along Taylor Massey Creek. Later in the summer we worked with 60 members of Vision Youth, a Chinese youth achievement program, to mulch and maintain previous years' plantings on the site.

We reached over 750 people with information about the

urban forest at 20 community events we attended with our educational display.



Certified Arborist Wendy Strickland leads a tree identification session

We held 20 talks and workshops with over 800 participants on topics such as proper species selection, organic tree care and preventing urban tree stresses.

We organized the second annual Leslieville Tree Festival with Councillor Paula Fletcher and City Parks, Forestry and Recreation. It was the first year for our Wychwood Tree Festival, celebrating our upcoming move in 2008 to the new Green Arts Barns.



Volunteers brave the rain for Earth Day

We held our first Tree Tenders Training courses, offering 10 hours of arboriculture training to 50 participants. Many graduates

will take their knowledge back to their work with other groups such as Friends of the Don East, Evergreen and the City of Toronto.

We launched the Toronto Tree Tours Collaborative in partnership with the Toronto Public Space Committee. Guided tours were held in Leslieville, Eglinton Flats, the Bain Coop, Lawrence Park and St. Lawrence Market, to name just a few.



A Tree Tour with seniors in the St. Lawrence neighbourhood

The Tours, incorporating information on tree identification, tree health, and local history, attracted over 350 participants.

Thanks to the many donors, hundreds of volunteers and the 60 groups we partnered with this year!

Join us for our Annual Celebration and Networking Party in January! See page 3 for details.

SHEET MULCHING — THE EASY WAY TO A NEW GARDEN BED

This time of year, most gardeners are thinking about putting their garden beds to rest for the season, not planning for new beds. But autumn is actually the best time to start new beds using a technique known as sheet mulching or “lasagna gardening”.

In general, adding a layer of decaying organic matter on the soil surface, known as mulch, is one of the best things to do for your garden. In forests, there is a nutrient rich, moisture absorbent bed of decaying forest leaves, twigs and branches, teeming with fungal, microbial and insect life. This natural mulch stores the nutrients contained in organic matter and slowly makes these nutrients available to plants. Mulch also protects soil from drying caused by the sun and wind, as well as from the erosion from rain and water run-off.

Sheet mulching is a simple and highly effective technique to kill weeds without herbicides, improve soil, attract worms and beautify your garden. It is also the best way to get rid of grass and start a low maintenance or native plant garden under existing trees. The sheet mulch can also improve the health of existing trees by reducing competition from grass and other plants and mimicking the natural mulch layer of a forest floor.

Sheet mulching is a better method than digging or tilling soil for starting a new garden, especially around existing trees. Digging and tilling will damage the roots of nearby trees, disturbs the activities of soil organisms and destroys soil structure.

Prepare the site

Little preparation is needed for sheet mulching. Do NOT pull the weeds, grass or whatever vegetation is in the area that you want to get rid of – this is not necessary and will disturb the soil. Simply flatten tall plants to ground level or cut them and leave the clippings in place. The flattened plants and clippings will decay and add nutrients to the soil. Once vegetation in the area is flattened, you can begin to lay down the layers of the sheet mulch directly on top.

Layer #1: Compost

Add a 3 to 6 cm layer of compost, well-rotted manure, or worm castings on top of the existing flattened plants. The compost will stimulate soil life and accelerate the decay of the underlying flattened weeds and grass.

Layer #2: Weed barrier

Most areas are full of weed seeds lying dormant and waiting for sunlight, moisture and space to sprout. Simply pulling or killing growing weeds will not stop weeds – more seeds will sprout almost as soon as the soil is exposed to moisture and light. The next step in sheet mulching – putting down a weed barrier – will block light from reaching the ground and prevent the germination and eventual emergence of weeds and grass.

The weed barrier is needed only for establishment of the mulch and will break down over time. You can use cardboard, boxboard, 4 to 6 sheets of newspaper, or any other similar biodegradable material. Although the weed barrier forms a physical and light barrier, it is essential that it allows water and air through. Do not use shiny colored paper, such as magazine pages, and make sure all materials are free of tape, staples or other non-biodegradable parts.

Overlap the pieces of the material so they completely cover the ground without any breaks. Make sure to leave a generous opening in the weed barrier around plants you want to keep.

Layer #3: Mulch

The top layer should be a material that will break down over time, but may take a few months or years to do so, such as chipped wood or pieces of bark. This layer should be about 2 to 4 inches deep.

Water well

Now, soak the area well with water. This is essential as it starts the natural process of decomposition.

Plant

If you want to plant into your newly mulched bed, simply pull the mulch back, cut a hole in the cardboard and plant in the soil as you regularly would.

An even easier way is to wait until next spring to plant. This will allow several months for the underlying grass and weeds to break down so you can begin planting. Plus, the cardboard or paper weed barrier will have started to decompose, making it easier to dig through.

Remember when planting around existing trees, the smaller the pot-size of the plants, the smaller the hole you will need to dig, and the less potential for damaging the roots nearby trees.

Maintenance

For the most part maintaining sheet mulch requires only replenishing the top layer. There is no need to lay down the weed barrier layer after the first time. After the garden is initially mulched, leave the fallen leaves and other plant parts that die back every autumn and they will constantly add to the mulch layer. If needed, you can also add a 3 to 6 cm thick layer of compost and more wood chips or bark on top of the existing mulch to replenish it.

TREE OF THE MONTH

Tamarack — *Larix laricina*

Tamarack, also known as Eastern larch, is found in every Canadian province and territory, as far north as the tree line and south into the northern United States. It is the territorial tree of the Northwest Territories.



One of a small number of deciduous conifers, tamaracks usually shed their needles later than other trees shed their leaves. This means that it often snows while the trees still have their brilliant yellow needles, making for a spectacular late-autumn sight!



In the spring, the needles emerge a bright lime-green. On new twigs, the needles develop individually. On older growth, the needles grow in tufts on spur branches. The spur branches are so distinctive that tamaracks can be easily identified even when all the needles have fallen.

Under the midnight sun in the North, the tamarack photosynthesizes almost around the clock in summer to compensate for its lack of needles in winter.

Tamaracks grow up to 20 metres tall, with a straight, slender trunk and narrow, pyramidal crown. They are often found in extremely cold and wet locations and are known to survive temperatures as low as -62 degrees C. Trees in these severe climatic conditions are smaller than further south, often only 5 metres tall.

UPCOMING LEAF EVENTS

Dovercourt Tree Tour and Community Bonfire Saturday December 2nd, 2006, 1:00pm

Join GreenHere and LEAF for a guided tree tour through Dovercourt Park and the surrounding neighbourhood. The tour will be led by LEAF's certified arborist Todd Irvine and local tree advocate Andrea Dawber of GreenHere. Learn about issues facing the urban forest and the many restoration efforts of GreenHere. We'll also cover some of the colorful local history of the area. The Tree Tour will begin at 1:00pm in Dovercourt Park, where local citizen efforts have resulted in many new tree plantings. We'll visit some raised bed plantings on Hallam, historical houses along Gladstone and Westmoreland Ave and stop several times for significant trees and locations of interest. We'll return to Dovercourt Park by 3:00pm for a community bonfire.

The Tree Tour will be given in English and translated into Portuguese. Suggested donation \$5 per person. Call LEAF at 416-413-9244 to reserve your spot or register on-line at www.leaftoronto.org/events

LEAF Annual Celebration and Networking Party Wednesday, January 17th, 2007

Gladstone Hotel, 1214 Queen St West, Toronto
7:30pm (doors open @7:00pm)
\$15 advance / \$20 at the door

Learn about LEAF's urban forest achievements over the past year. Then enjoy local ecologist Paul O'Hara's presentation *The Faithful Witness: The Journey of the White Pine in Southern Ontario*. This beautiful, visual journey will take us through time and space to tell the story of our changing landscape through the eyes of the ever-present, majestic white pine. Enjoy a night of casual networking after the presentations with complimentary hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar open until 1:00am. Order your tickets by calling us at 416-413-9244 or email your contact information and number of tickets you want to info@leaftoronto.org Don't miss this opportunity to meet and mingle with like-minded folks who care about our urban forests. Tickets are just \$15 and would make a great Christmas gift!

Shift Your Gift

Make a big difference with a few clicks! Chose from Shift's 50 Top Sustainable Gifts for the holiday season and select LEAF as the non-profit organization that you would like 5% of your purchase to go toward. Gift categories include house wares, health and beauty, apparel, food, and kids and pets. www.shiftyourgift.com

ASK THE ARBORIST

A red osier dogwood shrub I planted recently has become ridden with ants. There is a constant trail of smallish ants traveling to and from the undersides of its leaves. I'm not sure whether this is helpful or disastrous. Do you have any advice?

You may actually have a problem with aphids, which are common on many trees and shrubs.

Ants and aphids have an interesting relationship. Aphids are small insects, usually green, black or yellow in colour (but can also be white, red, orange) that suck sap from plants. The ants basically act as ranchers/farmers of the aphids — protecting them from predators, such as ladybugs, and sometimes even moving them to 'greener pastures' when necessary. In return, aphids release honeydew that ants collect as food for the colony.

Take a closer look at the shrub to see if there are aphids, which generally like to feed on the stem or underside of the leaf. There are over 200 species of aphids and

each species is slightly different. Aphids will not kill a healthy plant but can weaken it, thereby making it more susceptible to pests and disease.



There are a few very easy ways to control aphids. One of the easiest is to use a strong jet of water from your hose to knock the aphids off the shrub. A heavy rainfall can do this to some extent.

The other way to control aphids is to spray them with a mild soap solution. Mix a small amount of liquid soap in a spray bottle of water. Use liquid hand soap rather than dish detergent which is too harsh on the leaves. Cover the aphids with soap spray wherever you

see them. Often they are plentiful on the undersides of leaves and on leaf stems. The soap spray is not a poison for the aphids, but rather works by covering them in a soapy solution which prevents them from breathing. You must make direct contact with the aphids as ingesting the soap will not kill them. This is why soap solutions are safe for the good insects that you don't want to kill.

Soap can be drying to the plant, so I suggest washing the shrub down with your hose about 15 to 20 minutes after the applying the soap spray. This will also help dislodge any aphids that may have avoided your soap spray.

The City of Toronto has a great factsheet that provides more information on aphids and their control. It can be found at www.toronto.ca/trees/pdfs/factsheets/Aphids_fs.pdf

Wendy Strickland is a certified arborist with a Masters of Forest Conservation. She manages LEAF's Backyard Planting Program.

SUPPORT TORONTO'S URBAN FOREST

We rely on your support to continue our work. Donors who give \$25 per year receive our seasonal newsletter. Donations of \$50 or more are recognized with a special set of five buttons featuring five native tree leaves drawn by a local artist. Send us the form below or donate on-line at www.leaf.toronto.org/donate



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Yes! I would like to support LEAF with the following donation:

\$25__ \$50__ \$100__ Other \$_____

I do NOT require a tax receipt (make cheque payable to "LEAF")

I DO require a tax receipt (make cheque payable to our charitable partner "Phoenix Community Works Foundation")

OR I would like to pay by VISA (please supply information below and indicate above whether tax receipt is required)

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Please return to LEAF, 73 Bathurst St, Suite 305, Toronto, ON, M5V 2P6