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## Guelph turns over new LEAF

Doug Hallett, Guelph Tribune

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Guelph has become a focus for provincial tree-planting efforts, and a subsidy program that ran successfully for the past two weekends is to be repeated next spring.

Between 40 and 50 Guelphites took advantage of the subsidies for buying native trees and shrubs this month under a pilot program being tested in Guelph and Kitchener.

This was “a very positive” response to the new pilot program, which will be ramped up next spring in hopes of encouraging even more tree purchases in the two cities, said Michelle Bourdeau, manager of the residential planting program at a Toronto-based organization called Local Enhancement & Appreciation of Forests (LEAF).

LEAF is offering the subsidies using funds from the Ontario Power Authority’s conservation fund. One of the benefits of trees is providing shade that helps cool homes, reducing the province’s peak energy demand.

Bourdeau said the OPA chose Guelph and Kitchener for the test for two main reasons. One is that this part of Ontario is seen as “a constraint area,” she said, meaning that the OPA “foresees possible strains in the system” in delivering power to this area. The other reason was that both Guelph and Kitchener have launched energy-saving initiatives in the past, and “it seems to be a market that is very responsive” to such initiatives, she said in an interview Monday.

Spring and fall are the best seasons to plant trees, because the trees can concentrate on root growth rather than producing leaves at those times of year, Bourdeau said. In fact, she said, contrary to common belief about the risk of frost in fall, fall is the best time of year to plant trees.

LEAF partnered with the two cities in the pilot program, which offered a \$20 rebate on select native trees with a regular price of \$100 or greater, and a \$5 rebate on select native shrubs with a regular price of \$20 or greater. There was a limit of five rebates per household.

“I hope we can partner again. It’s a great idea,” Karen McKeown, the City of Guelph’s healthy landscapes technician, said Monday.

LEAF, which worked with staff at two Guelph nurseries on the subsidy program, also created guides to help people select the most appropriate trees for their yards, and then how to care for the trees. The information can also be found online at [www.yourleaf.org/coolcommunities](http://www.yourleaf.org/coolcommunities).

Residents who buy trees, or who have trees planted in front of their property by the city, should be prepared to look after them for a couple of years so that they survive, says Sean Fox, assistant manager of the University of Guelph’s Arboretum.

The general estimate for the life span of urban street trees in North America is just seven years, he said. “For every tree that lasts to 50, there are many that are never watered during the first two summers, and you lose them.”

For trees that are transplanted, especially those near streets, the first couple of years are the most critical time, Fox said in a recent interview. If they get enough water during this period, they can successfully reestablish their roots so that they can search for water better on their own.

“By just doing that little bit to help them along, you end up with big, beautiful trees on your street in the long term.”

It’s wasteful, Fox said, to keep replacing trees instead of caring for them properly until they get established.

The best way to care for transplanted trees, he said, is to give them “a good, deep soaking” once every two weeks. This can be done through trickle watering, or by standing with a hose long enough to let water really sink in around the tree.

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