



ADOPT-A-PARK-TREE **MANUAL**



THANK YOU FOR CARING FOR OUR PARKS AND TREES!

Healthy trees offer amazing environmental benefits while bringing beauty and nature into our communities. By picking up this guide, you've shown that you care about our urban forest and want to make a difference in the number of healthy trees in our parks and communities. Thank you!

This manual provides a step-by-step guide to **how to start and manage an Adopt-a-Park-Tree program.**

Toronto has over 1600 parks and they are always improved when residents like you get engaged. Connecting with your local park friends group or participating or starting a program like Adopt-a-Park-Tree are great ways to get involved. There are 4 million trees in Toronto's parks, ravines and natural areas. Under an Adopt-a-Park-Tree program, volunteers greatly improve the chance of survival for young, newly-planted park trees with basic tree-tending techniques such as mulching, weeding and regular watering.

Park People and LEAF want to help you make your Adopt-a-Park-Tree Program a success!

We will help connect you with your local councillor and park supervisor so that you can get your program started. We can also provide you with tips for setting up an Adopt-a-Park-Tree web page and for setting up a community consultation. And we can help you with ideas about how to launch your project and share your success with others.

If you are part of a community group working to improve your local park and are enthusiastic to start an Adopt-a-Park-Tree program, LEAF wants to hear from you and support you in your stewardship efforts. Please contact LEAF (info@yourleaf.org) for more information.

By starting Adopt-a-Park-Tree in your park, you'll be joining a growing number of park groups that have successfully helped the trees in their park survive and thrive. Our many thanks to the park groups that have implemented this program and who provided their input into this guide. And particular thanks to

Michaelle McLean of Friends of Trinity Bellwoods Park for initiating this great tree stewardship idea and for helping to compile and write this guide.



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generously supported by:





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How to start your own **ADOPT-A-PARK-TREE** Program

What is ADOPT-A-PARK-TREE?



Adopt-a-Park-Tree is a program where a park friends group becomes the caregiver for young trees planted in the park. Trees need water, especially in the first few years after planting. Without enough water, young trees are at risk of dying before establishing their root system, which takes three to five years.

With an Adopt-a-Park-Tree program, each young tree is adopted by an individual(s) who agrees to regularly water, weed and mulch from May to October for up to five years. Running a volunteer Adopt-a-Park-Tree program can be as much or as little work as you are prepared to put in and each group will find its own level of organization and methods of implementation. The initial setup will require more work than the ongoing running of the program.

Anyone can start an Adopt-a-Park-Tree program and it can vary in size and formality.

Benefits of an Adopt-a-Park-Tree program:

- Trees have a much greater chance of survival
- Adopters become invested in the park and the trees
- Tax dollars are saved because when new trees die, the cost and time invested are wasted
- Healthy young trees will provide the urban canopy for the future

The Key thing is to ensure young trees are well cared for and survive to contribute to the urban tree canopy. The City's Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division is committed to working with community volunteers to protect, maintain, preserve and grow our urban forest.

Whether there are existing young trees in your park or you're looking to have new trees planted, this guide can help you launch a successful Adopt-a-Park-Tree program.

A Successful Adopt-a-Park-Tree Program: Friends of Trinity Bellwoods

Adopt-a-Park-Tree programs in several parks in Toronto are community-initiated and entirely volunteer-run. In Trinity Bellwoods Park, individuals who live close to the park agree to 'adopt' and take care of newly planted trees for the first four years of life. Volunteers take responsibility for mulching in the spring, weekly watering during the summer and keeping the base of the trees free of weeds. The program, which now has over 60 volunteers caring for 90 trees, has also been applied in other city parks.





How to start your own **ADOPT-A- PARK-TREE** Program

1. UNDERSTANDING THE CITY



MEET YOUR CITY COUNCILLOR

It is important to inform your city councillor of your Adopt-a-Park-Tree plans. Most city councillors will be happy to support your efforts. To find out who your city councillor is and get their contact information call 311 or visit Park People's City Contacts page [\[LINK - http://www.parkpeople.ca/resource-categories/city-toronto-contacts \]](http://www.parkpeople.ca/resource-categories/city-toronto-contacts).

GET TO KNOW YOUR PARK SUPERVISOR

The park supervisor is the person in charge of your park and several other parks in your district. Ask your councillor to introduce you to them, call 311 or check the list of park supervisors on Park People's City Contacts page [\[LINK - http://www.parkpeople.ca/resource-categories/city-toronto-contacts \]](http://www.parkpeople.ca/resource-categories/city-toronto-contacts) for their name

and contact information. Establishing a positive and ongoing relationship with your park supervisor is critical. Most park supervisors are familiar with volunteer activities like the Adopt-a-Park-Tree program, but keep in mind that they have their own work and organizing a group of volunteers is not their responsibility. The intent of a program like Adopt-a-Park-Tree is not to create more work for parks staff but to support their work.

CONNECT WITH URBAN FORESTRY

Urban Forestry is a separate branch within the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division. Urban Forestry provides the services needed to protect, maintain and enhance Toronto's existing urban forest. They maintain trees on City property, administer tree bylaws, plant trees in parks and streets, organize public planting events and manage ravines. Contact 311 who will forward

your request to Urban Forestry if you want trees planted for your Adopt-a-Park-Tree program or to report a dead tree that needs replacing. The trees are free and they are planted in the spring or the fall. Urban Forestry has planting maps for all treesplanted in parks, and you can request a copy.

In most cases, Urban Forestry will be planting the trees in your park but there are opportunities for park friends groups to also plant trees. You need to work very closely with city staff and be cautious of where trees are planted. It is very important to coordinate with the park supervisor so that you understand the many different uses of the park. If trees are planted in an area that was previously used for dog walking, sports, etc., conflicts could arise, or tree damage could occur. It is best to pre-empt these problems by observing park use and then working with city staff to plan new plantings accordingly.

2. CREATING A TEAM



RESEARCH

- Find out if your park has a park friends group.
- If there is no park friends group near you, consider starting one. A park friends group makes it easier to run an Adopt-a-Park-Tree program. Park People's [Park Friends Group Guidebook](#) is a great resource to learn how to start a new group.
- Locate other park users to see if they would be interested in participating in an Adopt-a-Park-Tree program.

ORIENTATION MEETING

- This will be your group's first meeting and a chance to explain the Adopt-a-Park-Tree program, responsibilities of adopters and the different roles that need to be filled to make a successful program.
- Create an instruction sheet** for volunteer adopters that includes a welcome and explanation of the program.

This sheet could include:

- Information on the park friends group and why the program was started
- A list of an adopter's responsibilities and instructions on how to look after a young tree
- A map of the park, the adopter's tree number, tree type and year planted
- Contact information of the Adopt-a-Park-Tree program organizer

ORGANIZING THE GROUP

- Be clear about what you're asking adopters to do and realistic about how much individuals can handle. Impress upon them the importance of being committed (trees suffer if they're not). Identify workload and how much time and effort is involved.
- Ensure you have an adequate number of volunteers for the trees in your Adopt-a-Park-Tree program. As finding volunteers takes time, it's best to start with a modest number and build the program with more trees in subsequent years. It is better to have a few adopters-in-waiting than stressed and dying young trees.

- When organizing a group, there are certain responsibilities that the group has to take on in order for the program to succeed. If you decide on a more formal Adopt-a-Park-Tree program you could consider the following positions to fulfill those responsibilities. If you decide to operate on a more informal basis, these responsibilities can be shared among the team.

SEE OVERLEAF FOR RESPONSIBILITIES »



RESPONSIBILITIES

🍃 Park Supervisor Liaison
Having one person as the point person for the park supervisor helps establish rapport and trust, leading to less confusion. This point person would organize for the delivery of mulch each spring for the annual mulching.

🍃 Water Captain(s)
The role of the water captain is to monitor and ensure a consistent water source. A designated water captain for each water source is recommended to spread the workload. The water captain reports problems to the park supervisor liaison who then reports them to the park supervisor.

🍃 Urban Forestry Captain
The role of the urban forestry captain is to ensure the health of the trees in the Adopt-a-Park-Tree program. Adopters who notice a problem with their tree report that information to the urban forestry captain who contacts Urban Forestry to request assistance or replace dead trees.

🍃 Adopter Liaison
The adopter liaison is the point-person for the adopters, dealing with questions and issues and managing the annual list of tree adopters. There may be one or two very keen adopters who want to adopt more than one tree, while others may want to adopt a tree as part of a team and collectively care for one tree. Regardless of how many adopters per tree, it is important that the adopter liaison has a point of contact for each tree.

🍃 Water Equipment Coordinator
This volunteer manages the purchasing and installing of the watering equipment (bundle buggies, watering jugs, locks, chains, etc.) as well as maintenance and storage of equipment in winter.

🍃 Volunteer Coordinator
This person finds and maintains volunteers for the program. They may also assist in finding holiday subs to fill in for volunteers who go on vacation to ensure ongoing care.

INDIVIDUAL ADOPT-A-PARK- TREE VOLUNTEER RESPONSIBILITIES

- 🍃 Annual mulching around the tree's base (this would usually be at the group's annual launch of the program where the City brings a pile of mulch). It is important to ensure that the mulch is not piled too high against the tree.
- 🍃 Keeping the base of the tree free of weeds.
- 🍃 Weekly watering and ensuring the tree receives 5 gallons of water when there hasn't been a minimum of 1" of rain per 7-days.
- 🍃 Finding a holiday sub to tend the tree if they are away.



MARKETING

Be sure to reach out and market the program to get more people involved:

- 🍃 Your councillor may be able to do a mailing for you or mention the program and your contact information in one of their regular eBulletins.
- 🍃 Reach out to all park users including parents with young children, dog owners, seniors, joggers and sports enthusiasts. All of them have a stake in the park's well-being and the simple act of caring for a tree can be an appealing way to give back.
- 🍃 Set up a table to advertise the program at any park events.
- 🍃 Put up flyers in the park and surrounding neighbourhood.
- 🍃 Contact other community groups that use the neighbouring community centre, recreations centre meeting rooms, etc.
- 🍃 Contact local resident and ratepayer groups.
- 🍃 Put a notice in a local community newspaper and invite the local media to special events you plan.

3. SITE TOUR



Organize the adopters to go on a site tour of the park with your park supervisor. You may want to address:

- How the program will work
- Where the water sources are and who to contact if the water is turned off
- The best way to contact the park supervisor
- How to get free mulch from the city
- Who to contact at Urban Forestry to report tree health problems or replace dead trees and for a list of trees species in the park

MAP AND MASTER LIST OF THE TREES

Each adopter should select his or her own tree from a map of the park’s trees, which can be obtained from Urban Forestry. The map is used to tag each tree with its own number and species.

An online Google map can also be an immensely useful tool and it is fairly simple to create. If you keep the editing ability to one or two people but make the map public you will avoid accidental tampering with the map. Mark all the trees on your map (they don’t have to be exact). Differentiate



trees that are adopted and not adopted with different icons so it is easy to identify which still need adopters. The map can be used to show potential adopters where non-adopted trees are, but also to adopters who forget where their tree is located.

Create a master list of the numbered trees, year planted, and the adopter’s name, email, and phone number. The list will also be used every spring to check if adopters are on-board for another season.



Tree #	Tree Type	Year Planted	Adopter Name(s)	Contact Email	Confirmed for this yr?	Notes

4. CARING FOR YOUR TREE



MULCHING

For an annual mulching, you will need:

- A pile of mulch
- Gloves
- Wheelbarrows
- Buckets
- Shovels



Example of a good mulch, doughnut



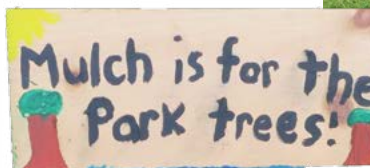
Example of bad mulch, piled too high

Proper mulching technique:

- Use 6 to 8 small buckets of mulch
- Place around the base of the trunk in a doughnut shape, ensuring mulch is not piled up against or touching the base of the tree (this can cause rot of the bark)
- Make the doughnut hole (centre) about 8" in diameter so that water is captured near the base and soak into the roots

Mulch is important to:

- Capture water and ensure it soaks in rather than runs away
- Prevent water loss from soil through evaporation
- Insulate the fledgling roots during their winter hibernation
- Keep weeds down
- Discourage damage by weed whackers



WATERING

It is generally best practice for adopters to water their trees once a week in order to ensure they get enough. It is difficult (but not impossible) to over-water young trees and in times of high heat and drought, especially in the first year of transplanting when watering more than once a week is optimal.

Newly planted young trees take three to five years to recover from transplant shock and develop a new root system deep enough to survive during periods of little rain. A widely accepted minimum watering standard is 1" (2.5cm) of rain per week or 5 gallons (20 litres) of water. However, in the first year of transplanting and during high heat and drought trees benefit from more watering.

Adopters should find someone else to water their tree if they are going to be away for more than a week. This is crucial during the hottest summer months. If the adopter doesn't have a friend who can cover for them, the volunteer coordinator should assist in finding someone.

ANNUAL CALENDAR CHECKLIST

EARLY-SPRING

- ☐ Contact adopters to confirm their ongoing participation
- ☐ Find replacement adopters if people have moved away or can no longer participate in the program

MID-SPRING:

- ☐ Contact the park supervisor to find out when the water will be turned on and get a pile of mulch delivered
- ☐ Set a spring date for the annual launch of the program with tree mulching

LATE-SPRING May or early June (depending on weather):

- ☐ Organize watering equipment
- ☐ Alert the adopters that the season has started

SUMMER SEASON:

- ☐ Adopters work independently, maintaining their own schedules
- ☐ Communicate with adopters in case of excess rain (water less) or drought conditions (water more)

LATE FALL (depending on weather):

- ☐ The season ends in October when the water is shut off
- ☐ Inform adopters that the season is over, thank them and report on how the season went



5. TOOLS



ACCESSING MULCH

Mulch is a critical part of the Adopt-a-Park-Tree program. Ask your park supervisor for a free pile of mulch, which can be spread around trees by adopters at an annual spring Adopt-a-Park-Tree launch event.

WATER SOURCE

Toronto's parks usually have at least one water outlet and many have old or still in use irrigation systems, but they are locked for safety reasons and to prevent theft. The critical thing you need from the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division is access to that water source.

WATERING EQUIPMENT

The basic watering equipment used for the Adopt-a-Park-Tree program is simple and inexpensive.



BUNDLE BUGGIES

Cost: \$25 (approx.)

The small buggies fit two 10 litre jugs neatly. More than 25 litres and the buggy will break under the weight of the load.

WATER JUGS

Two 10 litre plastic water jugs

Their shape makes them a perfect fit for two to sit side by side in the bundle buggy. 20 litres (5 gallons) is the recommended weekly watering for a young tree.

RUBBER HOSE WITH A SHUT-OFF LEVER

Cost: \$7 – \$15

Water controls are usually behind locked doors so the water supply will be constantly on. You will therefore need a shut-off valve on your hose. Ensure the hose and tap outlet are the same size. A short length of hose (3 feet) should be sufficient for transferring water from the outlet to a water jug (prevents coiling).

LOCKS & CHAIN

Cost: Locks \$7, Chain \$10

Lock down the buggies near the water source using a simple combination lock and heavy chain. To prevent rust and avoid yearly replacement use WD40 on the locks twice a year in the spring and summer.

USING THE TOOLS

1. Fill the jugs with water from a hose.



2. Tip the whole buggy on its side to let the water seep into the ground around the tree.



3. Label the jugs



4. Use a simple lock and chain to secure the watering equipment



5. Install rubber hose with a shut-off lever.



6. FUNDING

The costs of an Adopt-a-Park-Tree using this model are modest because the program is run by volunteers with the trees, water and mulch provided by the City. The watering equipment will cost between \$50 and \$400 depending on the number of water sources that need to be equipped.

To cover the cost of the program:

- Organize fundraisers with the park friends group
- Ask for a small donation from adopters
- Get equipment donated from local businesses
- Ask for any donations of used equipment

7. CHALLENGES

WATER SOURCE STOPS WORKING:

Your water source may be turned off farther 'upstream' by other city crews. Contact your park supervisor to reconnect it.

VANDALISM:

Call 311 if trees have been vandalized. City staff will determine whether the damage can be mitigated by proper pruning, or if they need to be replaced in the next planting season.

A TREE SHOWS SIGNS OF BAD-HEALTH OR DIES:

Trees can be vulnerable to insects, fungus and disease. If you notice any tree health issues, call 311 and they will contact the city's Forest Health Care group.

PEOPLE DON'T WATER THEIR TREE:

If someone isn't watering their tree, speak to them, find out what the issue is. Find a new adopter if they can no longer fulfill their commitment.

8. LINKS TO HELPFUL RESOURCE MATERIALS

<http://www.mccormickpark.ca/adopt-a-tree/>

<http://www.trinitybellwoods.ca/adopt-a-tree/about-aat.html>

<http://www.yourleaf.org/leaf-resources>

<http://www.yourleaf.org/blog/helen-godfrey/2012-08-23/keeping-bayview-buckets>

Consult the City of Toronto's Shade Policy Guidelines for helpful information about strategically placing trees for shade. <http://www.toronto.ca/health/tcpc/shade.htm>

http://www.toronto.ca/health/tcpc/pdf/guidelines_supplement.pdf

<http://www.parkpeople.ca/resource-categories/park-group-help-centre>

<http://www.toronto.ca/trees>

<http://www.toronto.ca/parks>

Toronto Park People's Park Friends Guidebook: <http://www.parkpeople.ca/resource-categories/guidebook>

ABOUT OUR GROUPS



LEAF is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the protection and improvement of the urban forest. We help residents plant the right tree in the place through our subsidized **Backyard Tree Planting Program**. Our **Tree Tenders Volunteer Training Program** offers 14 hours of indoor/outdoor instruction from tree experts at a subsidized cost of \$50 per person. We also hold guided **Tree Tours** at diverse locations throughout the city and host other special events like the annual **Leslieville Tree Festival**. Check www.yourleaf.org for **event dates** and extensive **tree care** resources.



TORONTO PARK PEOPLE advocates for better parks by facilitating neighbourhood engagement in parks, building a network of local community park groups and highlighting the importance of good parks to the well being of all residents of Toronto. We offer tools and resources (LINK - <http://www.parkpeople.ca/resource-categories/park-group-help-centre>) that help park volunteers become better stewards for their local parks as well as partner with funders to provide financial assistance to support projects in our parks (LINK - <http://www.parkpeople.ca/node/220>). We also bring park friends together for our Park Talks and annual Park Summits (LINK - <http://www.parkpeople.ca/events>) to share what they know and to collaborate on projects and issues that improve parks for all. Together, we recommend policies and practices that recognize how parks contribute to the social and economic health of cities. Learn more about how we can help you in your park and stay in touch with park issues and developments at www.parkpeople.ca.

THE FRIENDS OF TRINITY BELLWOODS

THE FRIENDS OF TRINITY BELLWOODS ADOPT-A-TREE PROGRAM grew organically when neighbours of the park noticed newly planted saplings were dying because of a lack of regular watering. They realized city staff were often stretched too thin to maintain sufficient watering for young trees and just started carrying buckets of water into the park. The next time the city planted trees in the park, volunteers got organized so they could cover each other during vacation times. They also started a mailing list and approached Parks, Forestry and Recreation for assistance with water outlets. They now have over 60 volunteers who water, weed and annually mulch some 90 park saplings. The Friends of Trinity Bellwoods model has one person care for one tree so it's not a lot of work when shared amongst a group of people. Because volunteers water their tree independently it's also an initiative that doesn't require the coordination of large meetings.

10-POINT CHECKLIST FOR SUCCESS



This manual provides a step-by-step process of **how to start and manage an Adopt-a-Park-Tree program**.

Once you have a core group of neighbours (two to five people) who are committed to this initiative, use this 10-point checklist of what you will need for a successful Adopt-a-Park-Tree program:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. The support of your city councillor | <input type="checkbox"/> 7. Watering equipment such as short hose lengths, bundle buggies, water jugs, locks, chains |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. The support of your local park supervisor | <input type="checkbox"/> 8. An email list of park users and neighbours or some other way of letting them know about the program |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Seasonal water sources not too far from the trees | <input type="checkbox"/> 9. A core group of volunteer adopters, ideally one per tree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. One volunteer to be the point person for contact with your park supervisor | <input type="checkbox"/> 10. A sense of realism about how much you and your group can take on |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5. A simple map of the trees in your program (paper, online) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6. Some modest funds to buy equipment (\$50 to \$400 depending on size of program) | |



Local Enhancement & Appreciation of Forests
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