

# THE STAR

This copy is for your personal non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies of Toronto Star content for distribution to colleagues, clients or customers, or inquire about permissions/licensing, please go to: [www.TorontoStarReprints.com](http://www.TorontoStarReprints.com)

COMMENTARY

OPINION

## Earth Week message: Protect Toronto's trees

By Reese Halter

🚩 Mon., April 22, 2013 | ⌚ 3 min. read

There are more than 7 million trees spread liberally throughout 629 square kilometres of Toronto and its breathtaking ravines. Magnificent 100-year-old maples, oaks, walnuts, spruce, tupelos, basswoods and others make the city attractive and more livable. After a long and very cloudy winter, the lush, verdant greens of the newly emerged broadleaves add magnificent texture to the city's neighbourhoods, bringing smiles to millions of Torontonians faces.

Climate change is making Toronto's trees more important than ever, and [Earth Day](#) is a good time to reiterate the need to safeguard the city's existing trees and to promote the planting of thousands more to help protect and future-proof the city.

It's not just a matter of planting sapling to replace the old trees, it's each homeowner and shopkeeper taking on the responsibility to tend young trees and maintain old ones. Climate change is bringing more droughts that kill trees. So that means residences and businesses of Toronto need to lend a helping hand by watering city trees regularly. (Water can be harvested easily from rooftops of homes and nearby buildings and stored in large tanks until trees require it.)

Trees are crucial for all towns and cities, globally. Let me tell you why:

Every tree in the world participates in many biological processes, but the most notable one is photosynthesis: tree leaves absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, mix it with water, convert it into sugar using the sun's energy and give off oxygen as a by-product. Carbon is stored in the wood during the process. In fact, trees are the greatest CO<sub>2</sub> warehouses on Earth. For every metric ton of wood created, 1.5 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> is absorbed and 1 metric ton of oxygen is released.

Economists and biologists are united in seeing trees as vital to ensure a sustainable future in the face of climate change, rising air pollution and a burgeoning global population. In fact, scientists are now able to place an economic value on the importance of healthy trees and the services they provide Toronto. It's called "ecosystem services" and Toronto's urban trees are worth \$3 billion a year.

Trees save the city tens of millions of dollars in stormwater runoff protection. Trees catch rainfall and billions of roots absorb water and regulate its flow to sewers. Mature trees placed strategically around homes, schools, and factories reduce both heating and cooling costs by as much as 40 per cent.

Moreover, mature trees improve air quality by filtering Toronto's air: Ravines and parks absorb 85 per cent of the city's air pollution. One mature tree produces enough oxygen in a year for a family of four.

Trees also provide a tremendous noise buffer, and offer a habitat for a host of urban critters, including honeybees. They even help improve property values by up to 20 per cent. Interestingly, studies show that consumers shopping on streets lined with mature

trees tend to shop longer and spend more.

Sadly, many older Toronto trees are under siege from emerald ash borers and Asian long-horned beetles. The good news is that the [City of Toronto urban forest renewal program](#) has committed millions of dollars to reforest the city, protecting its citizens from the onslaught of extreme weather.

Climate change is a citizens' issue; each of us is required to lend a helping hand. That means taking ownership of our urban trees, including watering them during dry summers.

During this [Earth Week](#), please consider planting a fruit tree in your yard. It will provide an important source of nectar and pollen for the urban bees, and in return delicious autumn bounty for your family and neighbours.

***Reese Halter is a broadcaster, biologist and author of [The Incomparable Honeybee](#).***

---

Copyright owned or licensed by Toronto Star Newspapers Limited. All rights reserved. Republication or distribution of this content is expressly prohibited without the prior written consent of Toronto Star Newspapers Limited and/or its licensors. To order copies of Toronto Star articles, please go to: [www.TorontoStarReprints.com](http://www.TorontoStarReprints.com)

---