



A New Year for Trees

We are enjoying a brief winter lull to catch up on the work from last year and to start planning for the seasons ahead. Luckily, there is much to report.

Both in 2017 and 2018, the bulk of our work has been and will be divided between the **Campus Canopy Project** and **Madison Canopy Project**.

For the **Campus Canopy Project**, we worked with the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) to inventory and assess ash trees and risk associated trees for 52 local schools. The goal for the first year was to lay a foundation for management strategies that include geographic priorities and budgets. In brief summary, we mapped and measured approximately 280 ash trees and 63 trees that exhibited some sort of risk associated condition. We also mapped locations for well over 600 future tree-planting sites. With the fieldwork now complete, we are putting the final touches on a final management plan for the MMSD.

In addition to all the data gathering, we also put some trees in the ground! Approximately 280 teachers, students, parents, volunteers and school custodians pitched in to help plant 68 trees at eight separate schools. As one might imagine, school trees present unique challenges particularly in terms of their establishment and maintenance. Through each of these projects, we've been learning how to adjust our approach to species selection, planting location, and partnerships to try to find a healthy balance for both the school landscapes and the trees.

Next year, we look forward to building on the momentum. We have raised funding from multiple sources (more on those below) to expand the inventory process to school districts surrounding Madison and have set a goal of planting **120 trees at Madison schools!**

Madison's south side where 62 trees were planted. Approximately 105 trees were planted through the program's entire 15-neighborhood area. In total, upwards of 700 trees have been planted at homes, schools, and public spaces through the project.

Over the last year, we've realized the importance of expanding the project to new neighborhoods. In areas where we've offered trees for several years, we've seen the demand and resident participation plateau. But in areas where the program recently expanded, the demand for trees is significantly higher. So in 2018, we intend to continue growing the Madison Canopy Project in the Eastmorland and Kennedy Heights neighborhoods. We are aiming for an additional 75 trees.

We see every tree we plant as both an addition to the urban forest canopy and an opportunity to discuss the benefits of the urban forest with ever-wider audiences. For the both Madison Canopy Project and Campus Canopy Project, we have been continually encouraged by the support of the participating communities.



Bare Roots and Gravel Beds: A New Approach to School Tree Planting

Over the coming years, the UTA intends to continue and expand school tree plantings in order to replace hundreds of ash trees that will likely be removed. However, the demand in terms of generally aging canopies over school campuses extends to many more future trees.

In order to respond to this unmet need, the UTA is planning to increase its planting capacity over the coming year by tailoring a program suited to the demands of school projects. In particular, we are beginning to plant bare-root trees as opposed to the containerized trees that we've primarily relied on.

A **bare-root tree** is simply a tree that is dug and then delivered and without soil around its roots. The benefits include a cheaper purchase price, ease of handling (they're lightweight), and a proven record of transplant success. However, as opposed to a containerized or ball-and-burlap tree, a bare-root tree has a limited timeframe for planting. They must be either planted as soon as possible in the spring or stored through the summer and planted in the late fall. So, without a storage system, bare root trees have not been a viable option for our programs.

decision about which method to employ mostly boils down to when the tree will be planted, the species, and the cost. Here is a bunch of **bare-root trees**.



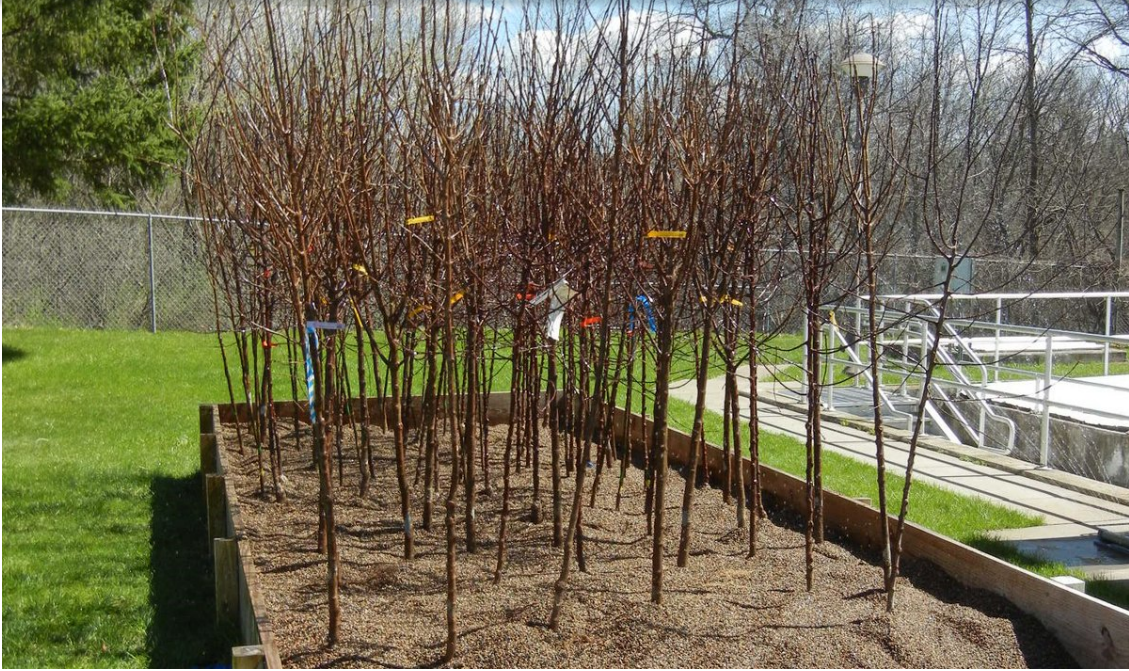
The **containerized trees** pictured here are useful as a planting option through the spring, summer, and fall. This is what we use for the Madison Canopy Project. The main drawback for these is the potential for girdled roots that circle the pot and lead to serious transplant difficulty.



The largest trees are generally available in ball and burlap (aka B&B). These are heavy and expensive. Planting them either requires some machinery or a willingness to put time in with a shovel. But they are the best way to maintain large trees for an extended period.



Luckily, there have been significant improvements in what are commonly referred to as “**gravel bed nurseries**.” A gravel bed nursery is an irrigated bed or pile of gravel used to store and develop bare root trees for up to 3-6 months. Doing this dramatically increases fibrous root volume, decreasing transplant shock and increasing survivability of the plant. This system is well suited for school plantings because trees can be bought at wholesale prices in the spring and held until the fall when school is in session.



A **typical gravel bed nursery** is basically like a kid's sandbox with regular irrigation.

We look forward to reporting back on how this methods works on these projects. We feel it that can be great way to maximize the value of purchased trees, enable volunteers to take the lead in the planting, and multiply the impact of the planted the planted trees.

Urban Forestry Task Force Forms

The City of Madison recently convened the first meeting of the Urban Forestry Task Force. This group, made of city staff across multiple departments and citizens with an interest in trees, has been formed to review the city's existing tree-related policies, practices, and programs. From this, a series recommendations to the Mayor and Common Council will be made for canopy coverage goal and an action plan for the city covering both public and private trees. Of further interest to the UTA is that Jeremy has been chosen as the committee chair to lead this effort. The work is intended to develop over the coming months and to solicit public input. So please keep an eye on developments and feel free to contact the task force with ideas. We look forward to seeing the collaboration develop. It may well be the basis for significant steps in our local urban forest's future.

Program Support: What Makes this Happen

The majority of the Urban Tree Alliance's work is funded through grants. We also receive significant donations of time and equipment from Urban Tree Management. Private donations round out the budgets for the year. In general, we've been successful in maintaining a cash balance equal to two years of operations. The bulk of our expenditures include trees and planting materials and administrative costs and wages for a part-time director and seasonal project assistant. For the coming year, we'd like to thank all those who have contributed grant funds to support our work; these include:

The Bock Foundation

The Alliant Energy Foundation

The Madison Community Foundation

Likewise, donations from individuals and charitable groups are sincerely appreciated. These are generally unsolicited and represent a true commitment to our local urban forest. Thanks for helping us stick around!

Other UTA News

- The **I-Tree Hydro** results from the Yahara Canopy Project are now available on our website: [here](#). If they're of interest, please check them out and let us know what you think.
- The UTA board completed a **Strategic Plan** for the organization that assesses the capacity current operations and charts futures scenarios for growth or reduction of programs. The UTA assisted in this effort by Ben Williams of the Sol Sort Group.
- We sent out a **survey** to assess the condition of the trees we've planted over the years. In short, we got a good response and things are going pretty well. We were actually hoping to identify more areas for improvement than were apparent. Either way, we're always happy to know how the trees we've helped plant are doing. So please be in touch with questions or thoughts if you have one.
- We're working to develop a few more **volunteer opportunities** than we've been able to organize over the last few years. We've gotten a lot more offers to help than we can generally respond to. On one hand, it's a good problem to have; on the other hand, we'd like to create more chances for more people to be involved. So keep an eye out for events. And let us know if you have program ideas involving our trees...we'd love to play a role enabling your projects.



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The Urban Tree Alliance is a non-profit organization serving the greater Madison, WI area.

Our mission is to preserve and grow the urban forest canopy in a sustainable and innovative manner in partnership with the public.

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