

THE NEIGHBORHOOD TREE NURSERY

by Gary D. Small

In 1950, a tree holding nursery was planted at the Southern Michigan Prison near Jackson, Michigan. Since that time approximately 5000 trees have been harvested for planting on the City of Jackson streets. Trees were planted in the nursery as 6-8' whips, raised to 1½-1¾" caliper stock, then transplanted to a street location.

With the onslaught of the energy crisis in 1973, phasing out of the prison nursery which was six miles from the center of the City was initiated. During the Spring of 1975 the Neighborhood Nursery concept was developed. The initial objective of a neighborhood nursery was to limit the distance a tree had to be transported from the nursery to its street location. The nurseries were plotted on spacing which would allow harvest with a tree spade. The ultimate goal was to develop three inch caliper trees for planting to the street. The first nursery was located in a densely populated area. The 66' X 132' lot was City owned property which contained a sewer easement. The soil consisted primarily of muck with relatively good drainage. This nursery contained five varieties totaling sixty-five shade trees. Other nursery sites have been established on City Cemetery, City Water Department, City Sewage Treatment property and rights-of-way in which a street was not expected to be constructed. A total of nine neighborhood nurseries are currently in operation.

Species and varieties of trees were selected considering the soil and drainage characteristics of the nursery. A mix of species and varieties of trees was provided to minimize the spread of insects and disease and to allow for a good selection of planting material in each area.

Nursery site selection has been of utmost importance. Many sites were not adequate to grow trees because of rocks and debris, lack of drainage, and the possibility of vandalism to the

trees. This program has stressed the use of previously unused, unsightly vacant lots or undeveloped street rights-of-way. Adjacent residents were contacted prior to planting and in many cases have assisted in mowing of the nurseries.

Each nursery was seeded or left in sod and the trees were planted into augered holes. The nurseries were mowed every week or two depending on grass growth rate. One year after planting, Amizine was applied to control all vegetative growth in an area 2 feet around each tree and sewage sludge was applied as a mulch and fertilizer. Plastic rabbit protectors were placed around all trees at the time of planting.

The neighborhood nursery concept provides many advantages for the community contemplating the establishment of a tree nursery. A superior growth rate can be obtained by proper selection of trees for the nursery, by killing competitive weeds and grass around each tree, and by fertilization. Because these nurseries are generally located along the roadside, inspection and detection of insect and disease problems is simplified. Trees undergo less dessication and other stress because of less transport time to the planting site. Because the neighborhood nursery is characteristically small, trees are more accessible and easier to maintain. Mowing can be scheduled during slow periods or as a low priority work item. The establishment of a Neighborhood Nursery improves the appearance of a community and creates public support for a tree program. In a time when the cost of labor and equipment is skyrocketing, the neighborhood nursery is a concept worthy of consideration.

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