

GEORGIA TREE CONFERENCE

*Cultivating Innovation: Tools & Techniques to
Support Community Forests*

Unicoi State Park Conference Center - Helen, Ga

Agenda

November 10

5:00 Pre-conference social at Axebilly's

November 11

7:00 Registration and Breakfast

8:00 Opening Session

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Matt Carpenter, Executive Director, Georgia Tree Council

Tree Innovations: New and Underutilized Cultivars/Species for Community Forest Plantings

Dan Whitehead, Hortsource; Christine Flood, Buck Jones Nursery; Scott Offen, Staff Arborist, Bold Spring Nursery

Gain insight into the process for developing new tree selections and hear from nursery professionals about promising new tree introductions and their favorite underutilized species and cultivars for Georgia's community forests.

9:15 Breakout sessions

Tragedy Turns to Art for a Cause

Thom Suddreth, woodworker and artist

How a trip to hurricane-ravaged Middle Georgia helped an artist gain a new perspective and turned his art into one with a focus on the people most affected by the storm.

What IS that? Invasive tree pest identification and management strategies in Georgia's urban forests

Dr. David Coyle, Clemson University, Associate Professor, Forest Health and Invasive Species

Georgia's urban forests are now home to several pests, many of which are invasive species. This talk will cover the identification and management strategies of tree pests such as the Asian longhorned beetle, spotted lanternfly, and crape myrtle bark scale. We will also cover pests that live in trees, including the Joro spider and yellow-legged hornet, as well as invasive species that are likely to invade Georgia's urban forests in the future.

Panel Discussion: Arbor Day Celebrations and Tree Giveaways to Grow Community Engagement

Beryl Budd, Arborist, City of Oxford; David Shostak, City Arborist, City of Alpharetta; Tiffany Bowen, Manager, Keep Warner Robins Beautiful; Shawn Diddie, City of Statesboro

Arbor Day celebrations and tree giveaway events can engage the public and build awareness of the value trees bring to communities. Panelists will share lessons learned and advice for hosting impactful community events.

The Third Stage: What Happens After Removal

Paul Hickman, Founder/CEO, Urban Ashes

This session follows a Georgia street tree through its full lifecycle, from planting, through decades of care, to removal, and what happens to the wood after removal. At each stage, we put real numbers behind the decision, including the cost to remove and dispose of a public tree.

The session closes with the missing piece that completes the system and brings urban forestry full circle: treating the wood from removed trees as part of urban forest management rather than simply as a disposal expense. Participants will leave with practical ordinance and contract language they can use now and update to reference the new ISA guidance when it is published. The goal is simple: carry good urban forest management through the full lifecycle of the tree, including what happens to the wood after the tree comes down.

Panel Discussion: Arbor Day Celebrations and Tree Giveaways to Grow Community Engagement

Beryl Budd, Arborist, City of Oxford; David Shostak, City Arborist, City of Alpharetta; Tiffany Bowen, Manager, Keep Warner Robins Beautiful; Shawn Diddie, City of Statesboro

Arbor Day celebrations and tree giveaway events can engage the public and build awareness of the value trees bring to communities. Panelists will share lessons learned and advice for hosting impactful community events.

10:15 Break

10:30 Breakout sessions

See Beyond the Bark - GPR and Trees

Joshua Horwitz, Xylo Logics

Take a deep dive into how GPR is applied to trees to collect information and see the speed, accuracy, and ease of use to gather level 3 tree assessment data at Level 1 prices. This technology provides comprehensive data for better stakeholder decision making and smarter spending and asset management.

The Dark Arts of Urban Soils

Mateo Fennell, Athens Clarke County

Through a blend of storytelling and practical demonstrations, Mateo explores the often-overlooked underground world of soil. Dig into what actually makes good soil, why urban soils are so difficult for trees, and what we can do to improve them. Examine soil texture, compaction, drainage, oxygen, organic matter, and the surprisingly complex relationship between roots, water, air, and (most importantly) the organisms living beneath our feet. Look at common mistakes made during development/construction, practical ways to protect and restore soils, and lessons from renowned urban soil expert Jim Urban, including his approach to soil testing and evaluating soil. Expect stories, experiments, dirt, sand, and a new appreciation for the hidden half of the urban forest.

Discover Your Urban Forest: Engaging Communities Through Project Learning Tree

Alyx Hawes, Georgia Project Learning Tree Coordinator, UGA Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources

Discover how Project Learning Tree can support urban forestry education and community engagement. This interactive session will introduce participants to PLT and its environmental education resources, including a hands-on activity from the Discover Your Urban Forest Activity Collection. Participants will experience an activity firsthand and explore additional resources that can be used to connect youth, educators, and community members with the trees and urban forests around them.

Field trip: Re-establishing Stream Bank Buffers in Urban Areas

Nathan Eason, County Extension Agent, UGA Extension – White County

Steven Patrick, County Extension Agent, UGA Extension – Habersham County

Urban sprawl causes daily stream bank degradation with limited oversight. This breakout session will cover species selection, site considerations, and site usage plans for rehabilitating stream and riverbanks. Learn about community partners and available resources that can assist with remediation projects, as well as efforts to provide diverse native plant material for a fraction of the cost. Attendees will visit a recently managed stream bank buffer restoration site in Helen.

12:00 Excellence in Urban Forestry Awards Luncheon

1:30 Table Talks

Take part in productive dialogue with community & urban forestry peers from around the state. Attendees will take part in three small-group discussions during the session. Look at the topic listed on each table, and join a conversation relevant to your work and interests!

2:30 Panel Discussion

Building Successful Community Forestry Programs and Projects

Jayme Smith, Executive Director, City of Colquitt Downtown Development Authority; Dorothy McDaniel, Executive Director, Trees Columbus

Learn how these communities are leveraging their resources to build programs, policies, and partnerships that sustain community forests.

3:30 General Session

From the Battlefield to the Tree Canopy

Zach Van Otteren, Kennedy Pond Conservancy

4:15 Visit Exhibitor Booths

5:00 Silent Auction & Reception

November 11

8:00 Breakfast

9:00 Breakout sessions

From Readiness to Restoration to Recovery

Kerry Bridges, Region Executive, Georgia Power

Hurricane Helene made historic impacts on Georgia communities and Georgia Power's electric grid. Hurricane Helene left behind devastation that will alter the tree canopy of Eastern Georgia and Western South Carolina for years to come. Learn about the immediate response, long-term recovery efforts, and preparation for future storms.

Tree Board Roundtable

Alicia Holloway, Outreach Coordinator, Georgia Tree Council

Tree board members and municipal tree board liaisons attending the conference are invited to share successes and find solutions through networking with their peers from communities across the state.

Nature and Human Health Connection: What It Means for Our Community Forests

Mondira Bardhan, Ph.D., Clinical Assistant Professor, UGA Warnell School of Forestry & Natural Resources

Trees and natural spaces shape our health in ways that go far beyond making our communities greener. They can provide relief from extreme heat, create opportunities to connect and recharge, and support our physical and mental well-being. This presentation will take a closer look at these connections, share stories and findings from my research, and explore why trees matter for healthier communities. The insights will offer another way to think about the value of community forests and the people they serve.

10:00 General Session

What to Pack in Your Toolkit for Engaging the Public in Urban Forest Management

Ignazio Graziosi, Ph.D, UGA Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, Assistant Professor

Involving community members in decision-making for urban tree canopy management is essential. This session will provide examples of public engagement topics, tools for communicating, public engagement programming options, and ways to measure impact.

11:00 Keynote

Reframing Trees: Leveraging the Lesser-Appreciated Benefits of Urban Trees

Paul Ries, Ph.D, Director and Senior Instructor, Graduate Certificate in Urban Forestry, Oregon State University

Research showing the values and benefits of urban trees has increased exponentially in the last 30 years, allowing us to prove that urban trees are more than niceties – they are necessities. This presentation focuses on studies that illuminate the true impact of trees on our quality of life, human health, and economic well-being of our communities, and how we can leverage this information to advance our efforts.

12:00 Closing Remarks

Mel Sparrow, Executive Director, Georgia Tree Council

12:15 Adjourn