

How young environmentalists can protect trees and forests

A guide for scouts, environmental clubs and any young people who want to save the trees and forests and the wildlife that depend on them.

Trees provide food and habitat for birds, insects, mammals and other plants. They remove pollutants from air and water. Forests cool the air, creating cooler places to be during heat waves. People like being near trees – hiking through them, climbing them or resting against one with a book or a sketchbook.

Included in this guide



Find trees in your neighborhood



Learn about your local trees and what benefits they bring



“Adopt” a tree or stand of trees



Learn about threats facing trees and forests



Help protect trees and forests in your community

Step 1: Find trees in your neighborhood

Almost everyone lives near trees - maybe they are in your backyard or your neighbors' yards. You can also walk to a park or a public building like a library or city hall.



There are two main types of trees: Evergreen trees such as pine trees have needles on their branches year-round. Deciduous trees like maples have leaves that fall off the branches in the fall and winter. What types of trees will you find in your neighborhood?

Above left to right: Pine trees photo credit Jay Mantri; Maple tree photo credit staff

Part 1: Continued

Observe

Take a walk through your neighborhood and look at the trees.

- What do their leaves look like?
- How far apart are they from each other?
- Measure their diameters by first measuring 4.5 feet up from the ground. Wrap a string or rope tightly around the tree trunk at the 4.5 feet height and then measure the length of the string. That number is the circumference. To find the diameter, divide the circumference by 3.14 or π .
- Take photos of their leaves and bark.
- Make note of any birds, insects or other critters on or near the trees.

Make notes in a notebook of the location of the trees and what you learned about them.



Did you know?

Tracking changes to a tree's diameter over time can tell you about its growth.

Research

Learn about the types of trees that you have in your neighborhood.

- Talk to an arborist, use a book or an app like iNaturalist or the internet (with help from an adult) to identify the tree species and approximate age.
- Visit the location again to observe it at a different time of day and look for other wildlife.
- Visit the tree after a rainstorm or a heavy windstorm.



Above: Measuring a tree via cottonbro studio from Pexels

Below from left to right: Maple leaf via Staff; Oak leaf via FotoRieth from pixabay; Ginkgo leaf via Hermine Sol Moona from Pexels

Part 2: Learn about your local trees and what benefits they bring to your neighborhood

There are hundreds of species of trees that grow in cities and in forests. Different species have different lifespans and produce different types of seeds and leaves that animals use.

Do your research. Make a list of at least ten tree species that grow in your region. Find out what their average lifespan is, how large they can grow and what their ideal growing conditions are. Do they need a lot of water or dry soil? Do they grow better at higher or lower altitudes?

Go on a mission to find these tree species. Some may be growing on your street but others may be in a public forest. Arrange to visit some of these places, bring your camera and your notebook!

Helpful resources:

- The U.S. Forest Service
- Your state's department of agriculture or wildlife agency
- Your city parks and recreation department.



Notebook photo: Dom J from Pexels
Smart phone mockup via Canva
Photo of redwood tree: Staff

Part 3: “Adopt” a tree or stand of trees

Now that you've learned about tree and forest species, make a plan to “adopt” a tree or a stand that you can have a longer term relationship with. A “stand” is a group of trees that are about the same size and age.

Step 1: Identify a tree or group of trees that you can easily visit every month.

This could be a tree at your school, in your neighborhood or at a nearby park. If you live near a public forest, this could be a tree or a stand in that public forest.

Meet with an arborist or a forest ranger who can help you learn about your tree(s). Determine the species, measure the diameter (instructions in Step 1) and figure out the approximate age. Read about that tree species – what kind of climate does it thrive in, how much water does it need, what kind of sunlight is best?

Visit on a regular basis to take photographs and measurements. Make notes on the tree's life cycle - is it growing new leaves or seeds? Are leaves or needles falling? How is it responding to changes in light, temperature, wind and rain? Make note of any critters or signs of critters - do you see birds, insects or small mammals or any traces of them?



Step 4: Get creative

Share what you've learned about your tree(s) in a creative way – write a story from the point of view of your tree, create a mood board or a collage, draw a cartoon on paper or using online tools.

Part 4: Learn about threats facing trees and forests

Using the library or the internet with the help of an adult, look into the threats facing trees and forests.

- **Deforestation** – cutting down forests and replacing them with fields or buildings – is happening across the world, especially in the tropics.
- In other parts of the world, logging companies are cutting down too many trees in the forest, making it hard for the forest to grow back and making it harder for wildlife to survive. This is called **forest degradation**.
- **Climate change** is affecting all living things on Earth, including trees and forests. Climate change is leading to hotter wildfires and is also creating conditions where invasive species, like pine beetles, are more likely to thrive.



Left logging photo: CodiePie via Public Domain

Book recommendations

- *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss
- *How to Change Everything* by Naomi Klein
- *Earth Heroes* by Lily Dyu

Check out our whole list of [nature-themed children's book recommendations](#).

Part 5: Help protect trees and forests in your community

You can convince decision-makers to take actions to protect trees and forests through public education and direct advocacy.

Step 1: Pick the action that is best for your community

- Do you want your school or neighborhood association to plant more trees?
- Should your city parks have more trees?
- Is there too much logging happening in a nearby public forest?

Step 2: Research

Find out as much as you can about past or current projects to plant trees or to protect trees from unnecessary logging.

Part 5: Continued

Step 3: Reach out to the decision makers

Ask for a meeting with the school Principal or a member of the City Council, City parks department or the public forest manager.

Step 4: Prepare your questions for the meeting

Prepare a list of questions to ask. They might include asking how decisions are made, what costs are associated with managing the trees, who else is involved in the decision-making process.

Step 5: Decide on your “ask” and plan

After the meeting, work with an adult to figure out what your next steps will be. Maybe not having enough money is the main barrier to planting more trees and so you want to figure out how to raise money. Maybe there isn't enough public support and so you want to collect petitions from your classmates or neighbors. If you are interested in protecting a public forest, find out if there are nonprofit organizations who are working to protect that same forest. Reach out to ask them how you can help.



Above redwood grove photo credit: Staff
Headers photo credit: Staff

Thanks for helping protect trees and forests!

Have a story to share or want to connect?

Contact us: Emily Kowalski, Outreach & Engagement Manager ekowalski@environmentamerica.org