



# Old Saybrook Conservation Commission

3Q 2023

## The Trees Around Us

When I was in grade school, my class had to memorize the poem *Trees*, by Joyce Kilmer. The first line reads: *I think that I shall never see a poem lovely as a tree*. Kilmer goes on to describe the allure and comfort of trees. He wrote this poem in the early 1900's, a time very different from today when we've learned so much more about the importance of trees beyond the beauty they provide year round.

Here are some of the key benefits of trees that we know about today:

- Remover of hazardous pollutants from the air we breathe
- Absorb carbon dioxide from the air to store as wood
- Control storm water by intercepting and absorbing rainfall

Expanding on the list above here are some striking facts about one red maple growing over 20 years:

- Removes 3,100 pounds of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere
- Filters 15 pounds of ozone, nitrogen dioxide and sulfur dioxide from the air we breathe
- Intercepts 27,000 gallons of rainfall and avoids 4,800 gallons of runoff

A fairly lofty list for one tree! Multiply that by all the trees in our yards, parks and forests and it's quite obvious why we should try to preserve and protect trees and recognize their importance to the environment. In addition, it's now recommended to allow fallen leaves to remain in garden beds and select piles in your yard to provide shelter for beneficial



insects and small animals during the winter.

Our area has been hit with significant storms over the past decade that has resulted in many toppled trees and caused electricity outages and home/roof damage. You may have observed more active trimming and cutting by our utility companies around power lines and highways to mitigate the impact of downed trees due to storms. And homeowners face challenges from insurance companies to remove potentially hazardous trees in their yards.

So we are presented with reasons to preserve trees and reasons for cutting them down. Doesn't quite fit into the lovely depiction in the poem *Trees*! However, the take away message is be aware of all the benefits a tree provides, to preserve trees and if you need to cut one down, replant it with the right tree or shrub for the space/area. Along with planting native trees, trees can also be categorized as Climate Forward - expected to tolerate changing conditions and Pollinator Powerhouse - those that support a proportionally large number of caterpillar species. Here are a few native trees that fall into both categories: Red Maple, Northern Red Oak, and River Birch. You can contact a licensed arborist who will be happy to help in selection. Do some research on your own - there is a wealth of information available.

We are fortunate to live in the northeast where there is an abundance of trees - we need to ensure they continue to thrive and provide the benefits cited earlier in this article.

# The Beauty and Benefits of Composting

Whether you are a gardener wanting to create your own compost pile or you are a homeowner looking for a better way to dispose of your food scraps, as an Old Saybrook resident, you have options.

## The Importance of Getting Food Scraps Out of the Trash Stream

You may be surprised to learn that much of the trash collected in Connecticut is currently being hauled to out of state landfills. Having to transport our trash to these landfills is costly, both financially and environmentally. It may also surprise you to learn that an estimated 20-30 percent of municipal solid waste consists of food scraps.

Getting food scraps out of the trash stream has enormous environmental benefits. As an example, since food scraps in landfills release methane - a harmful greenhouse gas - removing food waste from the trash stream reduces the amount of methane in the atmosphere. Fortunately, there are at least two ways to get food scraps out of the trash stream: backyard composting and in Old Saybrook, the transfer station's food scraps recovery program.

## Backyard Composting

What a miracle composting is! You put coffee grounds, eggshells, watermelon rinds and more into a compost bin, add grass clippings and dead leaves, and with the proper care, you will end up with humus - the dark, nutrient-rich organic material that forms when animal and plant matter decays. Putting humus in your garden bed enhances the soil's ability to utilize nutrients and water.

There are many resources to help you get started. At a July 2023 talk cosponsored by the Conservation Commission and the Acton Library, UCONN Master Gardener and

Composter Jim Matschulat talked about the importance of healthy soil for the ecosystem and how composted materials replenish the soil. He also gave an overview of different approaches to backyard composting, what to include and exclude from your compost pile, and how to achieve the balance of carbon and nitrogen needed for composting to be successful.

The excellent fact sheets that Jim distributed (including "Backyard Composting" and "Come On! Compost") are available through the UCONN Soil Nutrient Analysis Lab <http://www.soiltesting.cahnr.uconn.edu>, and a PDF copy of the slides from Jim's informative talk can be accessed at [https://www.oldsaybrookct.gov/composting\\_workshop](https://www.oldsaybrookct.gov/composting_workshop) or look on the town website for the Conservation Commission webpage.



## Food Scraps Recovery

A food scraps recovery program at the transfer station aims to reduce the amount of trash transported to landfills. Contributing to the food scraps recovery program couldn't be easier. Countertop compost pails can be purchased at the transfer station or at the Selectman's Office. The food scraps recovery program accepts all food waste, including meat and dairy products which are usually not recommended for backyard compost piles. When your countertop pail is full, bring it to the transfer station and empty it into one of the food scrap bins. From there, the company Blue Earth Compost collects the food scraps and brings them to Quantum Biopower where the food scraps are turned into biofuel.

Between backyard composting and the food scraps recovery program, everyone can make a major contribution to improving the environment.

# Precious Water

With the gradual but significant changes in the environment and prevailing weather conditions, it is worth our attention to be considerate of the conservation of water. Water resources are generally ample in Connecticut with widespread flooding and prolonged droughts being infrequent; however, considerable changes in weather can occur over short periods of time. During periods of minimal precipitation, the recommendations of our public water supplier for appropriate levels of water use should be followed. Using water resources wisely helps save water, money, and energy.

During dry periods of minimal precipitation, surface waters and aquifers used for public water supplies are slow to recharge and thus replenish the water being consumed by local consumers. To maintain uninterrupted water service, households are asked to conserve water so that the remaining supply may be extended until local rainfall patterns improve and water supplies are restored to normal levels. By reducing our usage, consumers will allow the system to save water that can be provided in future months should the dry conditions persist.

In the United States, more than three hundred billion gallons of water are used each day with nine billion gallons of water alone consumed daily for residential outdoor

water functions primarily landscape irrigation. It's estimated that about half of this irrigation water is wasted partly due to overwatering, system leaks, and watering impervious surfaces.

Accomplishing water conservation can be as simple as not letting water run as we wash and refraining from lengthy showers. Also the reduction of water consumption can be reduced or eliminated in watering lawns, washing automobiles, and filling ponds or pools. By choosing low-water, native plants for your landscaping, employing conservative watering and washing techniques, and maintaining your irrigation system and pool properly, there are numerous ways to be respectful of this finite resource and making your time in the great outdoors more water efficient. Also consider installing a rain barrel - a great way to recycle the rain water that comes off your roof.

Extending the availability of water during periods of dry weather is a community responsibility. We should all be aware of and sensitive to the requests for conservation and follow local requests and recommendations. We need to value this wonderful substance and not use it unnecessarily!

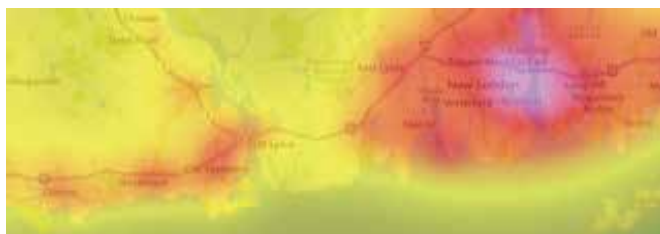
## Do you want to help wildlife? Turn off your lights!

It may seem harmless, especially now that LED and solar technology have entered the picture, but light pollution has serious negative impacts on many living things. Outdoor lighting that is too bright, poorly shielded and directed, or simply left on when unnecessary, disrupts many creatures that are active at night. Migrating birds and insects can be drawn off-course, and beneficial insects that should be foraging or mating can be drawn to light instead. Animals that use the cover of dark for protection are exposed to danger; for instance resting shorebirds are exposed to predators by outdoor lighting nearby. Light pollution can also hurt pollination and decrease crop yields.

Good lighting design aims low, shields the light to direct it exactly where needed, and turns off when not required. Consider the impacts carefully if you use decorative lighting, keeping the lighting low and dim and turning it off when you are not actively enjoying it. Low and filtered

UV wavelengths are less harmful. Take the time to tweak those motion-sensor lights to only turn on when and where needed and to turn off shortly thereafter.

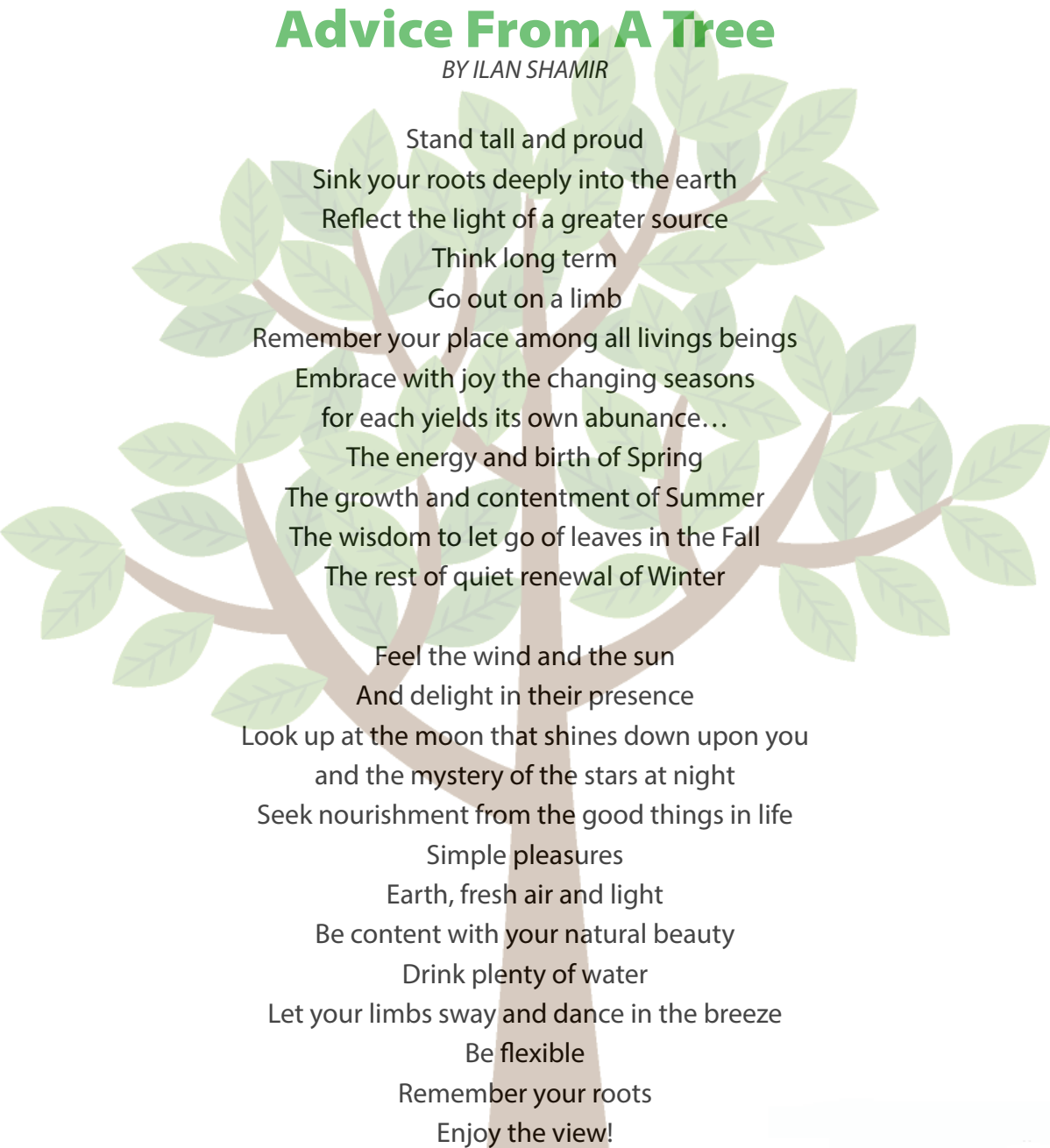
Humans need darkness at night as well to sleep properly, but also to enjoy the awesome beauty of the night sky, the activity of fireflies, the flitting of a bat across the cobalt sky. So give some thought to your use of outdoor lighting. Help make Old Saybrook a little dimmer at night - it's one of the easiest things you can do to help!



Shoreline light pollution from [lightpollutionmap.info](http://lightpollutionmap.info)

# Advice From A Tree

BY ILAN SHAMIR



Stand tall and proud  
Sink your roots deeply into the earth  
Reflect the light of a greater source  
Think long term  
Go out on a limb  
Remember your place among all living beings  
Embrace with joy the changing seasons  
for each yields its own abundance...  
The energy and birth of Spring  
The growth and contentment of Summer  
The wisdom to let go of leaves in the Fall  
The rest of quiet renewal of Winter  
  
Feel the wind and the sun  
And delight in their presence  
Look up at the moon that shines down upon you  
and the mystery of the stars at night  
Seek nourishment from the good things in life  
Simple pleasures  
Earth, fresh air and light  
Be content with your natural beauty  
Drink plenty of water  
Let your limbs sway and dance in the breeze  
Be flexible  
Remember your roots  
Enjoy the view!

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