

McWhinnie's World



Citizen Arborists Wanted

Enhancing awareness of a precious resource

By Jill McWhinnie

"Would you buy a car, never maintain it, and then wonder why it breaks down? Yet that's how many of us treat our trees," said Steve Mann, president of the Ontario chapter, International Society of Arboriculture.

"We need to monitor the health of our trees and be alert to symptoms, such as premature fall colour and early leaf drop, which signal that the tree is stressed. In the urban landscape, where all leaf and plant debris is removed, the nutrient cycle is interrupted, with the result that the soil can be depleted."

Steve recommends a simple soil test to get a read on what nutrients may be lacking. Nutrients and water are primarily absorbed by the fibrous roots of the trees which are located high in the soil profile, within the top 18 inches below the surface. Turf grass around the base of the tree can compete for nutrients with these fibrous roots.

A woodchip mulch applied at the tree's base, preferably extending to the drip line of the tree, eliminates this competition and restores nutrients as the organic material decays. "We need to maintain trees in a high state of vigour so as to conserve tree resources at all stages of their life cycle. We need to develop a conservation ethic for trees, as we have done for wildlife."

There is increasing recognition of trees as public assets which confer significant environmental benefits. James Lane, area forester with the Region of York, confirms that the public trees in the region have a value in the many millions of dollars. "And, unlike other infrastructure assets such as roads and sewers, trees increase in value as they age."

Trees planted along regional road allowances are typically subjected to harsh growing conditions. James notes that regional street tree assessments done in 2003 indicated that 25 per cent of street trees were in good health and 75 per cent were under stress. In 2009, similar assessment indicated that the reverse was true.

He attributes this dramatic turnaround to better species and tree selection, increasing the size of the planting hole, better bed preparation, increasing the width of mulch at the base of trees, improved watering practices and greater species diversity. Kentucky coffee tree, Ohio buckeye, horse chestnut, ivory silk tree lilac and the Freeman maple (a natural hybrid of silver and native red maples) are being used now in place of Norway maple, the invasive cultivar so prevalent in many street plantings.

York Region residents can gain an in-depth appreciation of what it takes for an urban tree to survive by attending the 15 hour Tree Tender program offered by LEAF (Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests), a non-profit organization dedicated to the improvement and protection of the urban forest. The program offers volunteer "citizen arborists" a good basic understanding of the needs of urban trees and also offers an outdoor component.

"Feedback on the program is overwhelmingly positive," said LEAF executive director, Janet Mackay. "It's really simple stuff, once you understand tree physiology and biology. It's just common sense that will take a tree to maturity." The Tree Tender Program will be held at Rouge River Community Centre in Markham starting Sept. 2. For more details go to the LEAF website at www.yourleaf.org.

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Summer At The Latcham Gallery

By Nancy Hallas

The Latcham Gallery is gearing up for an exciting summer.

Registration for our popular summer art camps is well under way. If your child is looking for a rewarding way to spend a week or two during the summer break, look no further than the gallery. Art camps run Monday to Friday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in our Art Bunker. Seven camps are being offered for children and youth aged 5 to 15.

Each week includes a variety of projects taught by experienced fine art teachers. Campers will also visit the gallery for a tour of the current exhibition and full-day campers will spend supervised lunch hours playing games in the park.

Young people will enjoy a creative experience learning art techniques and exploring a variety of materials and processes while making new friends. For details and a registration form visit www.latchamgallery.ca or call 905-640-8954.

Shelley Painter, an artist and teacher originally from Stouffville, will instruct two half-day camps for artists aged 5 to 9 during the week of July 5. The morning session is

already full, but there are spaces available in the afternoon.

Vicky Talwar will instruct two full-day camps from July 12 to 16 which will focus on children aged 8 to 11. The July 19 to 25 session will be for younger children aged 6 to 9.

Multimedia artist Jenny Wing-Yee Tong will lead a week long camp for ages 8 to 12 from July 26 to 30, and another for ages 7 to 11 from Aug. 16 to 20. Meaghan Monaghan will lead the youth art camp for young people aged 9 to 15 from Aug. 9 to 13.

Latcham Gallery also welcomes two art camp student assistants. Joel Wijeyesekera, a graduate of York University in visual and fine arts, will join us in June, and Zoey Zheng of Stouffville will assist with the July art camps. Zoey is a graduate of the Arts York visual arts program at Unionville High School.

Don't forget to check out the Latcham Gallery's art activity table and information on Main Street on Saturday, July 3 at the Strawberry Festival.

Nancy Hallas is education program coordinator at the Latcham Gallery.



Detail from *The Reins of Chaos* exhibition by Mary Anne Barkhouse on display at the Latcham Gallery until July 17.