

Conservation Kaleidoscope

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Urban Forest Fun Exploring Trees Through Hands-On Learning

Teaching the Teachers

A partnership between the St. Joseph County Soil & Water Conservation District, Shirley Heinze Land Trust, Indiana Department of Natural Resources, and the City of South Bend's Urban Tree Canopy Initiative brought another successful **Project Learning Tree** workshop to South Bend this summer.

On July 30th, teachers, plant professionals, college interns, and curious community members came together to explore fun and meaningful ways to connect people with trees. Participants spent the day tapping into their inner child—acting out a tree's life cycle, becoming the "inner workings" of a trunk, racing to keep up as a fast-paced "tree factory," and competing for popsicle-stick resources in a mini-forest ecosystem. These hands-on activities sparked plenty of laughter, learning, and thoughtful conversations about local tree species and the essential role trees play in urban environments.

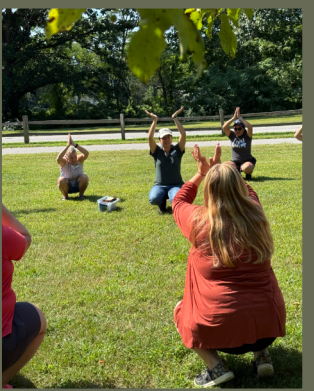
While the activities were a highlight, many attendees said the best part of the day was meeting like-minded people who share a passion for bringing the beauty and importance of trees to their communities.

To learn more about the award-winning Project Learning Tree program, visit www.plt.org/.

Teaching the Students

The St. Joseph County Soil & Water Conservation District also offers a variety of tree-focused environmental education programs for local schools. Lessons range from introductory tree activities for lower elementary students to deeper explorations for high schoolers on topics like how trees support schoolyard health, improve air and water quality, and strengthen local ecosystems through native species.

For more information on our programs, visit www.stjosephswcd.org/education to submit a program request form, or contact our Educator, Shelley, at education@stjosephswcd.org.



Protecting Soil
Preserving Water
Serving Community

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Planting Trees the Right Way

All too often, trees are placed in a hole and simply expected to survive. But trees are a valuable investment, and taking a few thoughtful steps can give your new tree the best chance not just to live, but to thrive. Here are some tips to help you avoid common planting mistakes.

Choose the Right Tree

Make sure the tree you select is suited for your location. Consider your hardiness zone, soil type, and the available space—these factors play a big role in long-term tree health.

Skip the Fertilizer

New trees rely on healthy root development, and fertilizer can damage young roots or push too much top growth too soon. Whenever possible, use only the native soil as backfill.

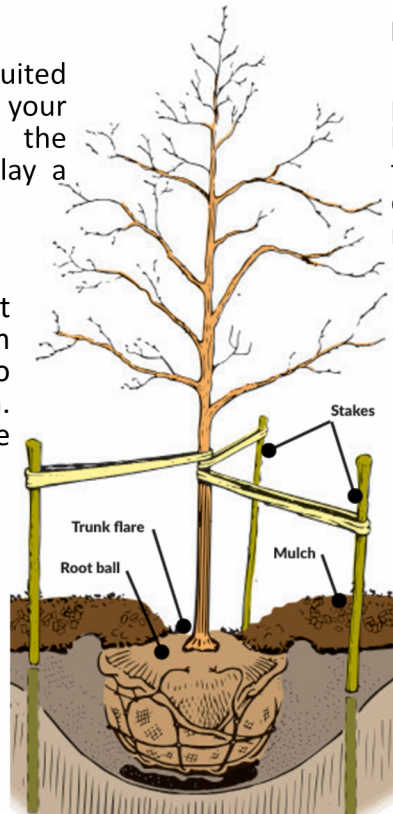
Water Wisely

Water is essential, but too much can be harmful. Water thoroughly at planting, then check regularly to be sure the soil stays moist. Aim for slow, deep waterings rather than frequent shallow ones.

Stake Only When Necessary

Stake your tree only if it struggles against strong winds. If staking is needed, keep the ties loose enough for the trunk to move—this natural movement helps the tree develop stability.

By following these simple guidelines, you'll give your tree the strong start it needs to grow and flourish for many years to come.



Planting Depth

Locate the trunk flare before planting. This is the area where the base of the trunk widens. The trunk flare must remain exposed to ensure proper oxygen flow and reduce the risk of trunk rot.

Dig the Correct Hole

Remember the trunk flare should sit at the soil surface. Your planting hole should be no deeper than the root ball, but two to three times wider. This wider hole encourages strong root growth.

Mulch Carefully

Mulch helps retain soil moisture, but keep it away from the trunk flare. Add two to three inches of mulch around the tree, leaving a one- to two-inch gap around the flare to prevent rot.

Hoosier Riverwatch Training



Hoosier Riverwatch is a state-sponsored volunteer water-quality monitoring program that empowers Indiana residents to become active stewards of the state's water resources. Our Environmental Educator, Shelley, is a certified instructor and will lead a basic workshop in October. This eight-hour session will teach participants how to monitor local streams through hands-on activities such as collecting macro invertebrates and assessing stream characteristics.

If you're ready to get your feet wet, join us on Friday, October 16th, as Shelley walks us through the ins and outs of stream monitoring. This free workshop will take place at The Res. Registration is required. Use

the QR code or visit <https://bit.ly/4gcfNrK>. If you have any questions, contact Shelley at education@stjosephswcd.org, or call 574-936-2024 x4.



Benefits of Fall Planting



After the cold and gloom of the winter, most of us are excited for the warmth of spring and getting back into our gardens. Traditionally, this has been the most popular time to plant. We hit the garden centers and load up our carts with all of the fresh, bright colors of spring. But here are a few reasons why you should consider **fall planting!**

Stronger Roots

Planting in the fall gives plants time to establish strong root systems well before the challenges of summer heat. Cooler air paired with warm soil temperatures encourages root growth through the fall and into early winter. Stronger, deeper root systems promotes stronger spring growth.

Less Heat Stress

New plantings can struggle in the intense heat of the summer. The mild temperatures of the fall reduces stress. Plants have time to settle in, conserve energy, and direct focus on their root systems.

Natural Moisture

While we are seeing a lot of rain this year, typically summers are much drier and we have to irrigate. The consistent rainfall that often happens through the fall provides gentle moisture.

Whether you're adding trees, shrubs, or perennials, autumn offers natural conditions that set plants up for long-term success! Take a walk through your yard, consider your long-term goals, and choose a spot for new plants this fall!



Fall Plant Sales

Mishawaka Parks Greenhouse Plant Sale

Saturday, September 19, 2026

10 am to 1 pm

MEF Community Greenhouse

104 E. Broadway St, Mishawaka

houseplants, mums, cool season veggies

Wild Ones Plant Sale

Saturday, October 3, 2026

9 am to 2 pm

Pinhook Park

2801 Riverside Drive, South Bend

native plants



SMIPP Land Stewards Invasive Species Removal Support Group *Upcoming Dates*

Tuesday, September 1, 2026

5:30 PM ~ Mishawaka

Wednesday, November 4

5:30 PM ~ Plymouth

Visit the Land Stewards page on the SMIPP website
for more information and to register.

www.SMIPP.org



Change Service Requested

St. Joseph County Soil & Water Conservation Partnership

St. Joseph County SWCD Partnership Staff

Sarah Longenecker, SWCD
Misty Sorchevich, SWCD
Shelley Chaffee, SWCD
Andrea Baker NRCS

SWCD Supervisors:

Chris Matthys, Chairman
Nathaniel Ness, Vice Chairman
Marty Lappin
Jacob Hogan
John Doods

SWCD Associate Supervisors:

Ryan Lee
Dave Vandewalle
Chuck Lehman
Randy Matthys
Richard Schmidt
Dave Straughn
Dru Wrasse
Mike Burkholder
Scott Laidig
Joe Gregory

SWCD Honorary Members:

Keith Lineback

Farm Service Agency Staff

Gideon Nobbe, CED
Devan Harrell
Diane Stichter
Michael Cuff

Calendar



Tree Program
with Elementary Students
Fall 2025

September

1st - SMIPP Land Stewards
7th - Labor Day - Office Closed
15th - Board Meeting
19th - Mishawaka Plant Sale
25th - Rum Village Weed Warriors

October

3rd - Wild Ones Plant Sale
12th - Columbus Day - Office Closed
16th - Hoosier Riverwatch Training
20th - Breakfast with a Forester
20th - Board Meeting
23rd - Rum Village Weed Warriors

Go Green!

Choose to get your newsletter by email! Use the QR code to email us at info@stjosephswcd.org. Be sure to include your mailing address!

