

Celebrating Trees

By Kate Bowditch

This spring, I have begun to see things in my neighborhood differently. Whether I am strolling along a sidewalk, watching soccer in a park, or stuck in traffic, I check out the trees. I look at their feet and try to imagine how far their roots reach out, burrowing under roads and down cracks, hunting for moisture. I look up to see whether their canopies are full, whether they have lots of sucker growth, signs of rot. I look at their scars and their bark. I try to guess how old they are, and what their surroundings might have been like when they were planted. Or worse, what it will be like when they die. It's a new perspective.

This has been a great tree-filled spring for me. I went on my second tree walk with Brookline's tree warden Tom Brady, an hour and a half of pure pleasure and learning. I also stopped in on the Massachusetts Arborists Association's amazing arbor day celebration at Larz Anderson Park and watched hundreds of the state's top arborists in trees, on cranes, in buckets and slings, all donating their time and expertise to prune and plant and tend to our grand trees. I have trees on the brain.

All the news is not good. Brookline's glorious tree legacy is stressed by drought, pavement, soil compaction, development. Many of the hundred-plus year old trees, even those in our parks, will die in the next decade or two. The hemlocks that so define some parts of town may be wiped out by wooly adelgid infestation. In my own yard, we have lost a beloved Japanese maple to a vascular disease, a hemlock hedge to wooly adelgid, and are losing the battle to save an old dogwood.

But in my yard, we try to do what the town does: we keep planting, every new tree a gift to the years ahead. We try new species, new locations, new watering techniques. We won't know for years whether we made the right choices, but we keep trying anyway.

In a fast-changing world, where most decisions are made based on very near-term results, this spring's tree activities have brought home for me what a great pleasure it is to do work that is, as Tom Brady says, patient and uncertain, but filled with hope for the future. Brookline is blessed with trees, as well as a dedicated tree-planting committee made up of citizen volunteers who devote their free time to ensuring that Brookline continues its long tradition of planting and caring for its trees. Trees may seem expensive, but in the long-term they give us benefits that far exceed their costs. We are right to tend to them, and to plant, year after year, the trees that our grandchildren will enjoy.

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