

The Urban Forest

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Chris Schneider, *Horigan Urban Forest Products*

In 1862 Henry David Thoreau spoke on behalf of nature in his essay, “Walking.” Thoreau implies that nature is a deity. He describes it having “absolute freedom and wildness.” He suggests that nature is an autonomous force functioning unpredictably.

If we accept Thoreau’s interpretation of nature, people are inconsequential in nature’s wild path.

Today, human beings live on a densely populated planet with limited resources. With our growing needs and limited resources, we are obligated to maintain not only our built environment, but nature’s wild world as well. With oceans, trees, air, soil, and any other resource, our relationship with nature depends on how well we use and respect it. Think about our forests, not just large stands of trees in remote areas, not just the wild side of nature and our role within it, but our urban forests as well, the trees that stand within our built environment.

By considering our urban forests as a resource, we can better understand our place amid nature’s wild and free enterprise.

How well do we encourage the growth of our urban trees, and how well do we utilize their material? Rooted within our built infrastructure are proud stands of urban trees. These trees use the same air that we breathe. They experience the same weather and feel the same temperature as the humans who walk under their branches. Just as we maintain and restore our buildings or homes, we must care for urban trees in a way that ensures their longevity and their maximum potential for growth. We can act as stewards for our urban trees, rather than as bystanders existing among them. As stewards, we will improve the quality of our trees and reinforce our relationship with the environment.

Fortunately, there are companies already making great strides in developing the quality of our urban forests. They have established themselves as inspiring specialists, caring for and encouraging the growth of urban trees. These master arborists prune, trim, and treat to maintain a vital, high quality resource. Their trade focuses on growth and not removal. For a sustainable environment, the objective is to encourage the growth of urban trees unless nature gives us no alternative. From Thoreau’s perspective, nature is inevitably unpredictable, and as the result of harsh weather or infestation, urban trees do succumb. However, when these trees come to rest on the urban surface, they need not die in vain.

If we are stewards, then we must utilize what wild nature provides. Despite every effort to ensure the welfare of an urban tree, some fall by nature’s hand. In drastic winds, heavy rains, lightning, or infestation urban trees can meet their demise. Then begins the long and perilous journey of decomposition, or even worse, mulching, and urban trees are all but lost. However, as stewards, we can extend the life of an urban tree by using its wood. Rather than cutting lumber exclusively from remote forests, we can use lumber from urban trees. By utilizing the resources that nature provided, our actions are more in harmony.



A portable band saw mill can hew some large logs.

Today, in addition to skilled arborists, there is a select group of urban sawyers. They harvest the many species of fallen urban trees like ash, birch, beech, catalpa, cherry, elm, ginkgo, hackberry, hickory, black locust, honey locust, soft maple, hard maple, white oak, red oak, pine, spruce, sycamore, and black walnut. With modern sawmills and dehumidification kilns, companies with urban sawyers work diligently to cut and dry the material from fallen trees. For every urban tree utilized in the lumber market, one less healthy tree from a remote, stable forest is needed for our day-to-day lumber use. And with growing national interest in green energy and sustainability, people begin to understand that urban lumber is a necessity and not a luxury. As the demand for urban lumber rises, more sawyers are then able to distribute it.

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With milling systems designed around bandsaws, sawyers are able to produce lumber at a high yield and an efficient rate.

From thin and narrow dimensional planks to thick and wide wooden slabs, the goal in producing urban lumber is to extract the maximum amount of serviceable yield. This yield goes into wood products like beams, benches, cabinets, chairs, cladding, desks, doors, framing, flooring, headboards,



Urban trees become very unique and original pieces of lumber

molding, tables, trim, shelving, and more. By becoming such wood products, urban trees extend their lives and communities are sustained. Sawyers seize the opportunity to produce the most unique and original pieces of urban lumber.

Like snowflakes, there are no two trees alike. There are no limits to what we can achieve when we respect our environment and use fully what nature has given us. @

Below: What is the value of timber on your golf course?

