



PORTLAND PARKS & RECREATION™

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TREE WALK PLANNING GUIDE

Leading Your Own Interpretive Walk

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Tree Walk Planning Guide: Leading Your Own Interpretive Walk

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Cover photo:

An interested walk participant takes a closer look at this flowering plum on the Humboldt Tree Team's 2017 interpretive walk. Photo courtesy of Matthew Wordell.

Top photo:

A procession of participants on the Humboldt Tree Team's 2017 interpretive walk. Photo courtesy of Matthew Wordell.

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Commissioner Adena Long
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Sustaining a healthy park and recreation system to make Portland a great place to live, work and play.

Introduction

Your personal experience with nature is probably more meaningful than reading about someone else's. Although books and on-line resources are useful tools for identifying trees, the best and most memorable way to learn about trees is seeing them up close and in person. A tree walk lets people not only see trees but also become familiar with all their dimensions through touch and smell. Walks are also a great way to engage people and to teach city dwellers how they can help trees. This guide will help you plan a well-organized tree walk and customize it to your audience so it is enjoyable, has a lasting impact, and informs participants about issues facing the urban forest.

The following is covered in this guide:

- **Choosing a walk**
- **Ideal times and lengths for different walks**
- **Safety tips**
- **Choosing a Starting and Ending Location**
- **Planning stops**
- **The leader's role**
- **Tips for engaging participants**
- **Key Urban Forestry talking points**



Tree walks provide opportunities to engage all audiences from adults to children.

Choosing a Walk

Tree walks can be based around a wide range of themes. While you can touch on many themes an overarching theme is important. Some common ones include:

- **Invasive trees**
- **Exploring Heritage trees**
- **The history of trees in a specific neighborhood**
- **Pests and pathogens of trees**
- **Identifying problems requiring pruning**
- **Selecting diverse tree species for a healthier urban forest**
- **Trees' role in buffering climate change**

Tree identification walks are especially popular and can include walks to learn:

- **Evergreen trees**
- **Spring or summer flowering trees**
- **Fall color trees**
- **Identifying deciduous trees in winter**
- **Trees that benefit wildlife**
- **Native trees**
- **Trees from a particular region or continent (China, Europe, the eastern USA, etc.)**
- **Trees in a neighborhood park or school ground**
- **A particular family of trees e.g. the oak-beech-chestnut family (Fagaceae), or the dogwood family (Cornaceae)**
- **A single genus of trees e.g. magnolias, ashes, pines, etc.**



Participants on a 2017 tour of historic trees of the Henry E. Dosch Estate in the Hillsdale Neighborhood.



A 2017 tree identification walk in the Rose City Park neighborhood with Julie Fukuda touched on many main points all focused in this specific area.

Walk Duration

- Children's walks should be about an hour.
- For the general public, walks should be 60 to 90 minutes.
- Walks tailored to groups especially interested in a topic, such as visiting arborists or urban forestry students, can be up to 2 hours.

Walk Length

- An average person walks about 3 miles an hour. Factoring in stops to talk about trees, walks should therefore cover no more than 1 to 2 miles. Plan shorter walks for groups that have lots of small children or might be concerned about physical strain.
- Walks with significant uphill portions should be shorter than those all on level ground



A one-mile route with many stops will can easily take an hour. While enthusiasts may desire more, general audiences will often be satisfied.

Starting Times

It's best to start on the hour to avoid confusion, although you can delay your actual start by ten or so minutes as people arrive. Take note though that doing this will cut into your end time. Good start times are:

- **Weekday tours - 10 a.m. or 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. or 7 p.m. (summer)**

This avoids morning or afternoon rush hour and evening (summer) walks accommodate common work schedules.

- **Saturday tours – 9 a.m. up until 1 p.m.**

Saturday tours should conclude no later than 3:30 p.m. since many people have evening plans.

- **Sunday tours – Noon up until 2 p.m.**

Many people attend church, go to brunch or sleep in on Sunday mornings.

Choosing a Starting and Ending Location

It is always best to start a walk at a specific address and give a precise meeting location. For example, if starting a tour at the Belmont Library, clearly indicate if people are to meet inside, at the front door, or, “on the south side of the building along SE Taylor Street.”

Parks are also excellent locations to start and end your walk. If starting your walk at a park, give an exact location e.g. “Meet at the bleachers at the northwest corner of Alberta Park at NE Ainsworth and NE 19th Avenue.”

Helpful hint: Include a map on fliers and on-line notices. Mark the meeting location with a large X to make it easy for people to find the starting point. Better yet, coordinate with Urban Forestry one to months in advance and arrange a tent or table to welcome your visitors. You will need an extra person to watch the booth or table while the walk is underway.

End tours where they started since people will expect to return to their car, bike or transit stop. Ideal locations have bathrooms that will be open on the day of the tour. If not, always know where nearby public restrooms are in case participants ask.



An Urban Forestry table with an overview, registration, and other tree literature welcomes participants on a walk organized by volunteer Bruce Nelson in the Cully Neighborhood.



An Urban Forestry tent and registration table can help visitors spot the starting location of your tour and provides a gathering place before the walk starts. However, tents and tables require additional logistical planning. Be sure to have extra volunteers and lead time with Urban Forestry Staff if you pursue this option.

Preparing for a Walk

1. Choose the topic.
2. Determine if one of your Tree Team members will lead the walk, if you will ask an outside expert to lead the walk, or if you will collaborate with Urban Forestry to have a staff member lead the walk. If you intend to collaborate with Urban Forestry, be sure to request support at least one month in advance to the walk (preferably 2-3 months in advance).
3. Once you have determined your tour leader, consult with the tour leader to find a suitable starting location near trees to be covered in the talk and/or walk. For instance, if giving a talk on Heritage trees, be sure the starting location is near some.
4. It is the tour leader's responsibility to visit the vicinity of the starting location to map out the specific route. Tour leaders should be sent a map of the general area and take it with them to map the proposed route and planned stops.
 - a. Stops should be planned to avoid loud traffic areas or other sources of loud noise where possible. If unavoidable, consider showing the target tree and then moving to a quieter area farther away to talk about it.
 - b. Pick only trees that can clearly be seen from the public sidewalk or right of way.
5. Walk the proposed route with the tour leader.
 - a. Confirm the location of planned stops and which streets will be traveled.
 - b. Adjust the route as needed to:
 - i. Minimize hazardous street crossings or blocked or missing sidewalks.
 - ii. Conform to the walk's desired length/duration.
 - c. Note any public restrooms, drinking fountains and covered areas to shelter from the rain, or for summer walks any areas of shade.
6. Ensure both the tour leader and the neighborhood organizers have a copy of the final tour map.

Preparing for a Walk (Continued)

7. Determine what handouts will be available. A list of trees being visited is helpful. Include both the common and botanical Latin name of the tree so people can look up more information later if they wish. You may also include the address of the tree, so that people may revisit the tree later. Send any documents to Urban Forestry for printing.

NOTE: Most people won't want to carry multiple documents so keep handouts to one or two. Ideally these will be pocket-sized.

8. Decide if you want people to pre-register. If so, contact Urban Forestry at UFvolunteers@portlandoregon.gov and an Urban Forestry staff member will create a registration for you online. This can be done easily with 'Google Forms', and Urban Forestry will share with you the link to check to see who has registered. Decide if pre-registration precludes drop ins from going on the walk (usually not).

9. You can also contact Urban Forestry to request the use of safety vests for your walk. Make arrangements to get the vests and any materials you requested printed for Urban Forestry.

10. Bring any handouts, Tree Team information, or other projects your team is working on to the walk.

11. Print out a registration sheet and have enough pens and a clip board for people to sign in for the walk.



Weather Issues

Clearly indicate if your walk will take place even if it is raining or snowing. If so, advise participants to “dress for the weather.” In extreme weather, like intense heat or cold, head advisories and cancel your hike. It is not worth having someone injured because of severe weather.

1. Hikes in hot weather

Try to hold hikes on warm days where people have access to drinking water. If possible, route your hike by a working water fountain and encourage people to drink and fill water bottles before starting out.



When it is hot outside make sure participants have water and opportunities to stay cool.

2. Hikes in cold, rainy weather

People can quickly become hypothermic if wet. If participants who are not dressed for the weather get drenched on a cool day you may need to shorten the hike or make a temporary stop in a warm building, such as a library or coffee shop. Know that in Portland almost all events are canceled in an ice storm or if snow is forecast.



Keep an eye on the forecast for rain. Encourage participants to dress for changing weather and be prepared if you have a sudden downpour during your tour.

Safety

Tree walks are usually low-risk activities but pay attention to a few obvious hazards so participants are kept safe.

1. Crossing streets

Vehicular traffic is the single biggest threat, so minimize contact between walkers and vehicles.

- a. Plan the route to keep street crossings to a minimum.
- b. Always try to cross streets at intersections with traffic lights and walk signals or at a marked pedestrian crosswalk.
- c. Don't set out until you are assured all vehicles are stopped. At crosswalks make eye contact with oncoming drivers to be sure they know you intend to cross. Look out for bicyclists; not all may stop for pedestrians or red lights.
- d. Gather all participants at crossings, then give a clear verbal and visual signal when it is safe to cross. Make sure everyone crosses promptly and watches for vehicles making turns.
- e. Remember that vehicles exiting driveways and buildings may not see passersby on the sidewalk. Keep a close eye and ear out for drivers who are exiting or entering across your path and warn participants to also be on the lookout.

2. Trip hazards

The second biggest risk is tripping over objects on the path or uneven pavement.

- a. Keep an eye on the path ahead and alert participants loudly to:
 - i. holes
 - ii. crumbling pavement
 - iii. loose gravel
 - iv. garbage or other debris
 - v. excrement



Take your time to cross roads safely. Plan crossings at crosswalks and lighted intersections (if possible).

Safety

(Continued)

3. Overhead obstacles

Watch for low-hanging branches, blackberry canes or other obstructions that could scratch or poke passersby and warn participants so they can avoid them.

4. Animals

Many participants enjoy bringing pets along on walks. While this is welcome, kindly remind pet owners to keep their animals on leash and well-behaved. Not all dogs or wildlife that you may encounter will be friendly. Be cautious around any dogs that are encountered outside your group and alert others.

- a. Do not approach or pet a dog without first checking owner to see if such attention will be welcomed.
- b. Make sure dog owners understand that the group will have other people and potentially dogs, and request they keep their animals controlled.
- c. Move away from barking or aggressive dogs but avoid running, which may trigger a predatory lunge.

5. Other humans

Homeowners or other onlookers may be curious about what your group is doing so feel free to succinctly identify your group and your mission. Avoid being drawn into lengthy discussions with passersby – it takes time away from the walk.

- a. In the rare instance that you meet an actively hostile person or someone who appears threatening:
 - i. Explain that your group is “only here to see the trees” and move participants away.
 - ii. If the person follows and appears dangerous or shows a weapon, call 9-1-1, being sure to note your exact location.

(Upper) With many participants, everyone, including dogs, needs to respect each other. Always ask permission before petting someone's dog.

(Lower) Many participants like to bring their dogs along but request owners keep their dogs leashed



Starting Your Walk

1. Arrive 30 - 40 minutes before the walk to set up registration, refreshments, and any other handouts. Be ready to welcome people at least 15 minutes before the walk's advertised start.
2. Welcome people as they arrive and invite them to sign the check in sheet.
 - a. Know that some people may be hesitant to approach so reach out to people in the vicinity to let them know this is the such-and-such a tour check-in point.
 - b. Give people any handouts so they can be reading through them before the walk starts.
- 3 Encourage early arrivals to use the restrooms and get water if available. Don't be afraid to engage participants in conversations or ask for them to help. Simply asking how they heard about the event, what they are hoping to learn, what neighborhood they are from, or if they are involved in other tree related projects is an easy way to have them open up.
4. At the advertised time, get participants' attention and announce that the Tree Walk is starting.
5. Introduce yourself and your Tree Team and give a bit of your background. Introduce the tour leader or guest collaborator and describe why they are qualified to lead this walk.
6. Go around the group (depending on size) and ask people's name, where they are from and what they hope to get out of the tour.
 - a. This gives time for late comers to check in.
 - b. It also helps you tailor remarks to the interests and backgrounds of the participants. For example, if you have participants from the eastern U.S. and will be encountering a tree from their home region, you can ask if they recognize that tree.
7. Briefly explain what the walk will cover, connecting to any of the expectations people voiced in the group introductions.
8. Announce the approximate length and duration of the walk, difficulty level, and whether there will be drinking water or bathrooms on the walk.
9. Explain that today's tour is part of a series of free walks available through Portland Parks & Recreation Urban Forestry. Mention any co-sponsors (the neighborhood tree stewards, etc.)

Urban Forestry is and its Mission

The start of every talk should explain:

a. Urban Forestry is a division within the City of Portland's Parks & Recreation bureau.

Urban Forestry's mission is "to manage and ensure Portland's urban forest infrastructure for current and future generations."

"To manage and ensure Portland's urban forest infrastructure for current and future generations."

b. Urban Forestry Has Three Different Components:

i. Regulation & Management:

UF issues permits for planting and removal of street trees and removal of large trees on private land when not part of a building or remodeling permit. UF manages all trees in parks, oversees the City's heritage tree program, and educates and involves the public on issues facing Portland's urban forest.

Tree Permits

ii. Forestry Operations:

UF responds to tree emergencies, does maintenance work on heritage trees and park trees, and works with local arborist companies to make sure there is a high standard of tree care.

Tree Maintenance

iii. Science & Outreach:

UF involved the public in the street tree and park tree inventory, works with tree teams to put on neighborhood workshops, works with schools to plant trees with elementary students, hosts a 5-session course on urban forestry, and more! Let participants know to contact you if they want more info.

Tree Information

Tips for a more lively walk

1. Have people moving by 10 minutes after the scheduled start time.
2. Encourage participants to join you in making observations, when possible invite them to share their insight/experience. In essence, offer to share the stage.
3. The first stop should ideally be within 5 minutes.
4. Give people an indication of where you are in the tour e.g. “This tree marks our halfway point” or “This is the next to last tree we will be stopping at”, etc.
5. Engage the senses. Invite participants to:
 - a. Touch the texture of leaves, needles or bark.
 - b. Smell flowers or crushed leaves and describe the aroma.
 - c. Look carefully at individual leaves, fruits or nuts and report if edges are smooth or serrated, if surfaces are smooth or hairy, or if there are differences in color between top and bottom sides of leaves.
6. Thank participants at the end of the tour and ask them to fill out a feedback survey “that helps us improve our programming to match your needs and suggestions.” Mention any similar walks in the near future with date/time and location, and mention the Urban Forestry web address:
www.portlandoregon.gov/trees



Invite other community members to speak along the tour. By sharing the stage you make the walk participatory and more inviting to others.



Encourage everyone to touch and feel the leaves and bark.



The unique smells of some trees also engage the senses and help participants connect to your interpretive content.

Answering Questions

A main reason for going on a guided walk is the chance to interact and ask questions, so be welcoming of any that are asked.

1. Structure your remarks to allow ample time for questions.
2. Have people ask questions as they occur to them – don't save questions for the end of the tour unless someone is asking so many as to become a distraction.
3. Repeat questions before answering so the group can hear.
4. If an interesting question is asked while the group is walking, consider answering it at the next stop, or point out a specific example when the entire group can hear the answer.
5. As appropriate, take advantage of questions to weave in some of your key messages.
6. If you don't know the answer to a question, don't guess.
 - a. If you know where the participant may find an answer, suggest that resource.
 - b. Ask if someone else in the audience knows the answer.

Provide plenty of examples in your answer; ideally, exactly as it relates to a tree.



Encourage your audience to ask questions. When they do, it is one sign of their active engagement.



If someone asks about something you will cover later, thank them for the question and note you will have an example and answer later on the walk.



Difficult Questions

1. If someone asks so many questions it becomes distracting or annoying to the group, say in a firm but friendly manner something like “You have a lot of questions which I’ll be happy to address one-on-one at the end of the tour but in the interest of time let’s:

- a. move on to other people’s questions
- b. move on to some remarks you want to make about a tree

2. If someone’s question contains a false premise or incorrect information, correct the premise when answering the question.

- a. For example, if someone says, “Since maple trees are the best trees for fall color, which one should I get for my yard?”

Point out that:

- While many maples do have great fall color, they are over-planted in Portland and are at high risk in the future from a new pest called the Asian longhorn beetle which has escaped in eastern North America.
- There are many good alternatives to maples for red or orange fall color, such as tupelos, persimmons, American smoketrees, and several oaks.
- If after considering the alternatives one still insists on a maple, then ones providing good fall color which have done well in Portland and are less common include trident maple (*Acer buergerianum*), paperbark maple (*Acer griseum*), three-flowered maple (*Acer triflorum*) and Korean maple (*Acer pseudosieboldianum*).



Do your best to answer each question, but be aware of your limited time. Move on and offer to answer questions after if necessary.



When addressing difficult questions and suggesting alternatives, be as specific as possible. Use your walk as an opportunity to point out specifics like these colorful tupelos.



Avoid Arguments

Keep your talking points based on evidence and not opinion. If someone wants to argue, be polite and simply acknowledge that there are differing views. This is an infrequent occurrence and do not be discouraged if it happens.

If a participant disagrees with a response, either concede that there are different viewpoints on the subject (if such exist), or reaffirm your information in a non-accusatory way, such as:

1. **“The best evidence to date suggests...”**
2. **“The current scientific consensus is...”**
3. **“Experiences may be different in other regions but in Portland our urban foresters have found...”**
4. **“Although these trees were recommended only a few years ago, because of X Urban Forestry now believes they are less appropriate...”**

Avoid arguments and embrace the fact that occasionally not everyone will agree with your points.



Embrace Universal Interpretation and Engagement

You are an information agent and an interpreter. You must do a careful dance between supplying the information people want, education about trees, and cultivating an appreciation for the topic:

1. Assume most people have no idea what Urban Forestry is or why urban trees are important.

- a. You first need to get visitors to care ABOUT trees before you can get them to care FOR trees.
- b. Find a universal concept.
- c. Use one of these as a tangible link to that concept.

Examples:

- If it is hot outside: Are you thirsty? Did you know that our young trees are thirsty too? They need 15 gallons of water per week in the summer.
- If it's very sunny, or if you are under a shade of a tree: Wouldn't it be nice to be under a tree? Or isn't it nice that this tree is keeping it cool here? Trees significantly lower ambient temperature in the city.
- Do you like clean air? Urban trees help clean our air and filter the air we breathe.
- Ask them about their favorite tree and where is located. Even if it is not in Portland you have made a personal connection to your work, and you may see one along your walk.

2. If this your only interaction, at least you have relayed important information to the visitor.

3. By being personally relevant to the visitor, you likely will open up opportunities to engage.



A great way to connect participants to the Ginkgo tree is to relate the bi-lobed leaf to the bi-lobes of our brain and the fact that this tree has medicinal properties for memory.

Key Urban Forestry Talking Points

1. Tree of heaven

Keep an eye out for a tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*). When you find one, point out that this is the worst invasive tree in Portland (briefly explain why) and should always be removed when a seedling pops up.

Further explain that almost all volunteer tree seedlings that spring up in urban yards are likely to be undesirable invasives that should promptly be removed.

2. Maples

Ask people to notice how many maples there are along the route. Point out that a little over a quarter of all of Portland's street trees are maples. They are the most common type of tree here and seriously over-planted, representing more than one in 4 of all Portland street trees (28%).

No more than 10% of a city's trees should be made up of any one genus (the old standard was 20%). By either standard, maples are over-planted. So Portland is encouraging more diverse plantings.

The most common maple – Norway – has proven invasive and is no longer allowed to be planted, but other maples.

Explain that maples are the favorite tree of the Asian longhorn beetle, which has been ravaging parts of eastern North America and for which the only remedy is to cut down all susceptible trees within a wide quarantine area, whether infected or not. As a port city with lots of trade with Asia (which is home to this pest), Portland has been warned that it is at high risk from an Asian longhorn beetle outbreak, so maples are now considered a high-risk street tree.



On almost any walk, you can point out the invasive Tree of heaven (above) and the ubiquitous maple (below).



Key Urban Forestry Talking Points (Continued)

3. Species Diversity

The massive street tree inventory project, which concluded in 2016, has shown us that over half our trees are in only two families – the maple-horse chestnut family and the rose family. That’s alarming because urban forests face many threats and new pests and diseases are emerging with increasing frequency.

To ensure that no one outbreak will wipe out a significant number of trees, Urban Forestry encourages Portlanders to plant a wide variety of trees from many different families and genera. So Urban Forestry has been adding lots of new trees to our approved street tree list, and approving lots of investigational plantings to test how they do in Portland. Examples include:

- i. bambooleaf oak (*Quercus myrsinifolia*)
- ii. Asian persimmon (*Diospyros kaki*)
- iii. Thornless male osage orange (*Maclura pomifera* ‘White Shield’)

4. Importance of evergreens

Diversity of functional type is also important. Urban Forestry’s street tree inventory has shown that street trees in Portland are overwhelmingly (93.5%) deciduous (they lose their leaves in winter). In most east side neighborhoods, the number of evergreen trees is less than 5%.

This is a problem because most of our rain falls in winter when deciduous trees are leafless, so evergreens do a better job of intercepting our rainfall. That is why Urban Forestry is encouraging the planting of more evergreens, including broad-leaf evergreen trees, such as bay laurel (*Laurus nobilis*) and evergreen magnolia.



Take a moment to note areas of healthy species diversity (above) and the year-long benefits of evergreen trees (below).



Key Urban Forestry Talking Points (Continued)

5. Watering

If you see trees that are dead or dying from lack of water, point out that Portland has dry summers and that many trees are from summer-rainfall areas and can easily become stressed or die unless regularly watered until fairly mature (3 to 5 years).

If your tree is from a summer-rainfall area, water regularly until year 5, and give deep monthly summer waterings from year 5 to 10 or beyond to encourage more rapid growth.

Urban Forestry urges people to also consider planting drought-tolerant trees that can get by in our dry summer climate after one or two years of establishment watering. Good examples include:

- a. Oregon white oak (the native *Quercus garryana*)
- b. Ponderosa pine (the native Willamette Valley variety *Pinus ponderosa* var. *benthamiana*)
- c. Chinese pistache (*Pistacia chinensis*)
- d. Evergreen oaks from California, the American Southwest and Mexico, such as:
 - i. Interior live oak (*Quercus wislizenii*)
 - ii. Canyon live oak (*Quercus chrysolepis*)
 - iii. Sliverleaf oak (*Quercus hypoleucoides*)
 - iv. Monterrey oak (*Quercus polymorpha*)



Watering is so critical for new trees. You can often find a both good (above) and bad (below) examples of summer watering. It is best to point them out and encourage others to water trees 15 gallons a week.



Key Urban Forestry Talking Points (Continued)

6. Pruning

Young tree pruning is essential.

A \$.25 cut today will avoid a \$250 cut in a few years or a \$2,500 cut in decades.

If you see trees with:

Suckers:

Point out that no permit is needed to cut out suckers.

Co-dominant trunks:

Explain how this makes the tree more vulnerable to splitting apart as it grows larger. Point out that early pruning to remove co-dominant stems is one of the best preventive acts tree owners can take to avoid future failures. Explain that Urban Forestry is sponsoring lots of workshops where young street trees get this early corrective pruning by volunteers under staff supervision.

7. Other Talking Points

There are many other talking points you may wish to cover in your walk, including how trees offset energy costs by providing shade, provide storm water management, reduce traffic and crime, increase community wellness (see: Dr. Geoffrey Donovan with USFS, Dr. William Sullivan at University of Illinois), provide habitat and food for pollinators, birds, and wildlife.



Young tree pruning is essential for long term health and helps maximize your investment (above and below).



Conclusion



At the end of your walk thank participants and give them a call to action. This could simply be to water their trees or help a neighbor rake the leaves. For people that are interested in getting involved mention:

- **Upcoming walks or other events**
- **The Neighborhood Tree Stewards Course**
- **Neighborhood Tree Teams**

Sharing your knowledge and love of trees with others is critical for the overall health of the community's forest. The content of your walk will be reinforced by the trees that you visited and by engaging your participant's senses you will likely have made lasting connections with your audience. Congratulations and take a bow!

Have any questions?
Email Urban Forsetry

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