

Restoration on the Smallest Scale

by Paul and Sherry Cummings

What can I as an individual do to help my neighbor? What can I do to help myself and those around me? What can I do to help my grandchildren? What can I do to ensure that the future people on this earth will be able to enjoy life? What can I do to help the world survive the long haul?

The answer to all of these questions is to go outside and plant something. Plant a tree. Plant a shrub. Plant ground cover. Plant anything—and you will be providing for your future and the future of others.



It seems we can do little about feeding all of the hungry people in the world, but we can make it a better place to live in. Land is being denuded at an alarming rate, not just in the United States, but all over the world. It is being done not only in the name of housing and industrial development, but also in the name of agriculture. Trees are being cut and plants are being bulldozed faster than you can imagine.

There is nothing that you can do personally about the clearing of the Brazilian rain forest, the island of Haiti, or the African continent. But you can start the movement toward a worldwide planting program. Go out in your own yard and plant something.

Plants purify the air we breathe and conserve water and energy. They have the effect of binding the soil together and holding it in place to prevent erosion. Plant enough trees and you can reduce your air conditioning requirements by as much as 50% during the hottest parts of the year. Even grass or ground cover will have a cooling effect on the area above or around it. The bigger the plant, the more cooling effect it will have. An acre of grass gives off 2,400 gallons of water every hot summer day, having the cooling effect of a 140,000 lb. air conditioner. If you don't think that grass makes a difference, try standing in a grassy area and then in a sandy area at a given air temperature. If a little grass

makes a little difference, then shrubs and trees will make a great deal of difference. One mature tree, for example, can produce a cooling effect equal to a ten-room-size air conditioner running 20 hours a day.

Shade isn't the only benefit we derive from an effective planting. Trees and plants result in friendlier neighborhoods because people don't have to stay inside to be comfortable. Landscaping not only makes your home and area look much better, but it can increase your property value by up to 10%. More importantly, it is the beginning of our air quality improvement program which will keep down dust and noise levels and increase the amount of oxygen available.

Then, when you have done all you can do in your own yard, don't stop there; start working on your neighbor, and then the town where you live. Let's get all the streets lined with trees. Keep planting until all of the sidewalks, parking lots, and roadways are shaded.

The trees you plant in your own yard and your own city will have an effect on the world at large. As the plant population expands so that the entire North American continent is covered with oxygen-producing factories, the rest of the globe will benefit.

It's not an easy task. Despite the known values of plants, I have heard officials object to tree planting because a car might run off the road

and hit it, and the city/county/state could be sued. (A lot of people are either suing or being sued.) You have probably heard about trees creating a lot of litter which costs the taxpayer more money for clean-up and disposal. (Why do all tree leaves have to be picked up? The earth is made more fertile by decaying tree leaves.) Bureaucrats have a million reasons for not planting trees, shrubs, or ground cover. Each new one is as inane as the last.

Private property owners can be just as bad. They complain that trees and shrubs get in the way of their lawnmower or the person who does their lawn maintenance. Trees are filthy, they drop their leaves all the time. "I wouldn't have fruit trees because they attract rats." Trees block the view, the sun, the wind, or whatever, and besides that, they attract bugs.

It is too bad that so many people have never been in an unattended forest where Mother Nature has provided a shady canopy of trees and a beautiful blend of shrubs and ground cover, where the leaf litter controls the growth of tall grasses and provides the walking space where you can roam freely enjoying its beauty. The forest space is cool, the view is pleasant in every direction, and nobody ever thought of using a lawnmower to control the grasses. The habitat created provides for the life of many creatures including the human variety. The insects feed on the leaves, seeds, flowers, etc., and the birds and a few other creatures feed on the insects. The food chain is working for all of us, as the larger of nature's creatures become food for the human animal.

So let's get started on this planting crusade. Remember, when you are out to save the world, you'll have to overcome a lot of difficulties.

The planting of trees and shrubs is effective whether the plant is exotic, naturalized, or native. They all do the same job of helping provide us with an atmosphere of fresh air and sunshine. The exotic plant can cost more in the long run by requiring more of your personal time and money to ensure its survival. The native plant has been surviving in this habitat without you for many years and will continue to do so for the life of the earth—if we don't mess it up.

The moral of this story is to plant all you can, and if you want to be most cost effective, plant native plants.