



Top 10 Ways to Grow your Canopy



Trees are good for Iowa communities big and small. Trees do so much for us from cooling the air, sequestering carbon, providing homes for animals, and providing oxygen. Trees that grow in Iowa communities are part of a community forest. Iowans who live in and around towns live in a forest. No need to strap on your hiking boots when you can walk in a forest just by stepping out the front door.

Community trees can't grow on their own, they need people to ensure they thrive. Want more trees in your town? Pick out a few (or all!) of the tips below and you'll be on your way to tree-mendous tree growth.

Assess tree canopy cover and set a goal

- 1** Imagine for a moment that you are a bird flying high above a city, looking down over that city. The tree leaves and branches covering the ground is our tree canopy. Ideally, contributing branches would create a high, cohesive arc- covering you where you need it most. The Iowa DNR has a goal to increase the tree canopy throughout the state by 3% over the next 30 years. With a goal set, we can now take steps to reach it.

Create a management or master plan

- 2** With a goal in mind, identify resources available to reach that goal. Some communities create an urban forest master plan that serves as a guide. In your plan, include the people who can help – both private and public entities, financial resources, sites to target tree plantings, and more.

Implement or improve tree ordinances

- 3** Ordinances provide the framework for community cooperation. An ordinance focused on trees will provide guidance on the protection, preservation, and planting of trees. An ordinance can be fairly basic, just covering trees on public property, to more rigorous with more focus on private property trees and tree preservation.

Evaluate planning and development guidelines

- 4** A growing community may have new residential, commercial, or industrial developments with various zoning requirements. These new areas create a blank canvas for new trees, and planting at time of development means future generations will enjoy the trees. Strong tree preservation requirements before development happens will protect existing trees, one of the most important ways to protect tree canopy.

Plant a diverse mix of trees in the public rights-of-way, parks, and wooded areas

- 5** To achieve an umbrella of tree cover, communities should plant trees in all types of public spaces. The right-of-way, the grassy strip between the sidewalk and the street, are ideal places to plant because trees here slow water, cool pavement, slow traffic. Trees in parks and woodlands provide wildlife habitat, shaded recreation and a great place to have a picnic. Increasing tree diversity can also help prepare for invasive pests. Wherever you plant, make sure to plant many different types of trees.

Consider residential planting incentive programs

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Much of the land in a community is privately held by residents. In order to reach your tree canopy growth goal, trees must be planted on private property as well as public. Residential tree programs can look like bulk trees sales, discounted tree purchase programs, or seedlings giveaways.

Encourage planting programs for all private property

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In most towns, 60-70% of the land is on private property like residential homes, rentals, schools, churches, nursing homes, and businesses. Consider engaging these entities in tree planting efforts. Some local business may even want to sponsor tree planting in your town.

Engage the community in planting, young tree maintenance, and education

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Planting trees directly benefits people. Include volunteers, school groups, civic organizations, and others in the planning and planting of trees. They and future generations will sit under the shade they create. These same volunteers can help water trees during their establishment. Organizations like Trees Forever and the Iowa DNR can help provide education on tree planting and care.

Manage and eliminate invasive plants

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Invasive plants wreak havoc if left unchecked. Invasive trees like Norway maple and Siberian elm can be weak-wooded, brittle, and escape into Iowa's woodlands. Invasive shrubs like barberry and burning bush, while pretty, have a dark side when they escape and crowd out native species. Many of these invasive plants start their lives in towns, so do your part to control and remove them before they cause problems elsewhere.

Keep it fun!

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Tree planting is a joyful and optimistic activity, so have some fun! Host a biggest tree or a tree photo competition. Create a tree-themed outdoor activity like a bike ride or a fall foliage walk. Encourage your community to garner designations and awards like Tree City USA and others. These types of activities bring attention to trees and encourage a tree ethic within your communities.





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