

# Adopt a street tree

By Penny Cherubino

THROUGHOUT THE CITY THERE are what Jackie Blombach, Co-President of the Garden Club of the Back Bay, calls "abandoned tree pits."

These are filled with trash and weeds. Their soil is so compacted that water can't reach tree roots, and the lack of plants or mulch lets the sun bake away any moisture on the surface.

On May 13th, a crew of Garden Club volunteers, organized by Sherley Gardner-Smith and Janet Younker, demonstrated the dramatic change that a person can make by caring for a tree near their home or workplace.

This crew set off at Fairfield Street and worked its way down both sides of Beacon towards Arlington.

The women raked trash, pulled weeds, aerated soil, clipped suckers, and mulched. Before the morning was over, they left behind rows of street trees that looked fresh, clean, and well tended.

"We can't do every tree pit in the city," said Blombach. But,

the organization hopes to demonstrate what can be done, and inspire other Bostonians to adopt and care for a street tree.

As they worked, the gardeners stopped to admire, but didn't touch, tree enclosures that were already beautiful and blooming because they had caregivers.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Blombach outlined the steps needed to maintain a healthy street tree.

First remove all the trash, weeds, and old mulch. This will give you a good view of the soil and tree roots. Then, gently loosen the soil with a cultivator being careful not to damage large tree roots.

Add a thin layer of mulch. "Most people use too much mulch on the tree pits," said Blombach. She recommends about an inch of mulch and stressed that you should pull mulch back 3-4 inches from the tree, leaving a circle of bare soil around the bark.

## ADDING PLANTS

"Certainly, we would encourage anybody to plant it with annuals



As part of cleaning up this tree pit, Catherine Bordon, Elisabeth Lay, and Nancy Devereaux obtained permission from an abutting property owner to remove a fence that was posing a danger to pedestrians.

or perennials," said Blombach. "If you find a little pocket of dirt, you can plant something... treat it like a little container garden."

## DO NOT FERTILIZE

One thing that these knowledgeable volunteers didn't do was fertilize. The city's tree guide is very explicit on this, "Do not fertilize. Slow-release fertilizer is added to the soil for new street trees. In addition, never fertilize a tree during mid-to-late-summer," the guide says.

## WATER THE TREE

The final step for healthy trees is watering.

The city recommends you do this about once a week from "spring thaw to winter freeze." Young trees need careful watering for the first 2-3 years. Older trees need approximately 20 gallons, or hand water by running a hose at low pressure for 20 minutes.

And, when we have a heat wave, increase the water to about 15 gallons every few days.

Blombach estimated that it would take one person an hour for the initial clean up and then 15-30 minutes a week to maintain one tree.

## TREE FENCES

The Garden Club also has a pro-

gram that makes it easy to install a tree fence to protect a tree.

"The price is \$950 per fence, which includes procurement of all necessary approvals, review of final plans, site analysis, dimension adjustments, and installation."

Details are available at [www.gardenclubbackbay.org](http://www.gardenclubbackbay.org). "Comparable fences, if purchased separately, could cost in excess of \$2,000."

The Garden Club hopes to make this clean up an annual event.

Each year they'll pick a street and do a few blocks to show just how much difference a little effort by a small group of volunteers can make.



Nancy Devereaux demonstrated the correct method of mulching a tree pit as she begins to pull mulch back 3-4 inches from the tree.

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