

Residents' Attitudes Towards Street Trees and Park Trees in New York City

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INTRODUCTION

In 2007, New York City launched the MillionTreesNYC (MTNYC) initiative in which one million trees will be planted across all five boroughs by 2017. MTNYC is encouraging "all New Yorkers" to become involved in the planting and care of newly planted trees along streets, in parks and in natural areas.¹ An examination of people's attitudes toward urban trees can inform the development of educational programs designed to engage different stakeholders.

METHODS

A face to face survey of residents was conducted in Jamaica, Queens in March 2010 and in Canarsie, Brooklyn in May 2010. Residents were asked about their attitudes toward trees and their educational interests related to trees. Survey questions in each neighborhood were specific to the types and locations of trees recently planted by MTNYC; street trees in Jamaica and trees in the natural areas of Canarsie Park. Surveyors stood in three high foot-traffic areas in each study site and approached passersby. Surveying occurred on weekends and weekdays in multiple 1.5-hour intervals at different times of the day. The survey took 5-7 minutes to complete.

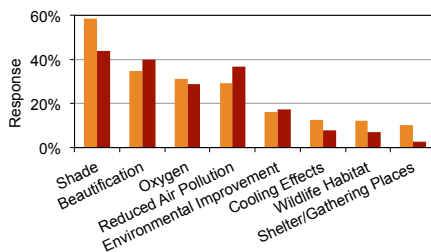
¹ MillionTreesNYC, 2010. "About MillionTreesNYC." www.milliontreesnyc.org/html/about.html. Accessed 10/5/2010.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

In Canarsie, 409 people completed the survey out of 1,388 people approached. In Jamaica, 399 people completed the survey out of 1,357 people approached. The survey response rate in each neighborhood was 29%. The majority of respondents were between the ages of 40-64 (40% in Canarsie; 38% in Jamaica). 38% of respondents in Canarsie, and 37% of respondents in Jamaica were between the ages of 24-44. 51% of respondents were male and 49% were female in Canarsie. In Jamaica, 53% of respondents were male and 47% were female. African-Americans were most represented in the respondent pool (47% in Canarsie; 34% in Jamaica), and Black Carribeans made up 17% of the sample in each neighborhood. Asian was the next highest reported race in Jamaica (17%), followed by Hispanic (14%) and Caucasian (12%). In Canarsie, Caucasian (12%) and Hispanic (9%) were the third and fourth most reported race. 73% and 68% of respondents resided in Canarsie or Jamaica, respectively.

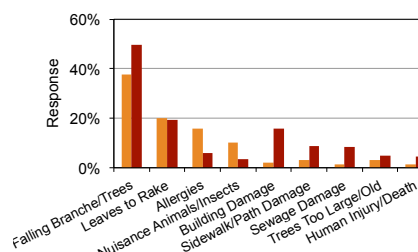
LEGEND: ■ Park Trees (Canarsie Survey) ■ Street Trees (Jamaica Survey)

Fig. 1: What benefits do trees provide?



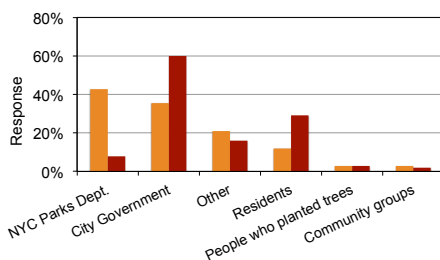
The majority of respondents believe trees provide benefits (96.3% in Canarsie; 94.3% in Jamaica). Shade, beautification and oxygen were frequently mentioned benefits of trees.

Fig. 2: What problems do trees cause?



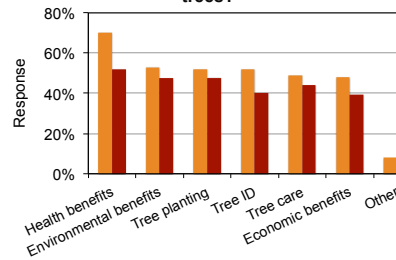
Half of respondents in Canarsie and 61% of respondents in Jamaica reported trees cause problems. Problems caused by trees included falling branches/trees, raking leaves and allergies.

Fig. 3: Who should be responsible for taking care of trees?



The majority of respondents in Canarsie believe the NYC Parks Dept. should be responsible for caring for trees. In Jamaica, 60% of respondents believe city government should be responsible. In NYC, the Parks Department is officially responsible for tree care planting in public areas.

Fig. 4: What would you like to learn about trees?



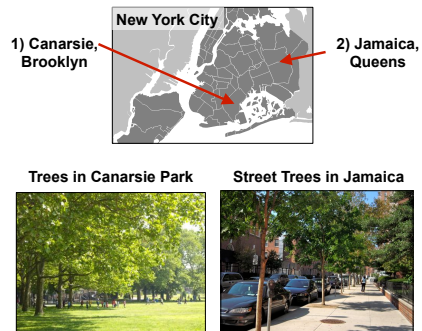
The majority of respondents in both neighborhoods expressed an interest in learning more about trees (59.3% in Canarsie; 60.1% in Jamaica). Learning more about the human health benefits of trees was the topic that most respondents wanted to learn more about.

DISCUSSION

Respondents in Canarsie and Jamaica reported a wide range of benefits and problems associated with park trees and street trees in each neighborhood. Results suggest that respondents are familiar with the basic environmental benefits of trees (i.e. the provision of shade, clean air and oxygen), but not with the human health, community or economic benefits of trees. However, many respondents also reported many problems with urban trees. Falling branches and trees was the most frequently reported problem with the trees in Canarsie Park and with street trees in Jamaica. The majority of respondents believe the city government should take care of trees. Respondents in Canarsie were more likely to correctly identify the NYC Parks Department as the official city agency in charge of tree maintenance in public parks and along city streets. Fewer respondents across both neighborhoods believed residents and community groups should take care of trees, suggesting that residents may not think it is their role to care for the trees in their neighborhood. Nevertheless, many respondents expressed an interest in learning more about trees, especially the human health and environmental benefits of trees.

FUTURE EDUCATION & RESEARCH

The results of this survey have been used to design and implement education activities in both neighborhoods to engage stakeholders in urban forest stewardship. Future research will be conducted on the individual and community level factors that influence stakeholder engagement in stewardship.



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FOR MORE INFORMATION: contact Christine Moskell via email at csn94@cornell.edu or visit www.nyc.cce.cornell.edu to learn more about the research and education associated with this project.



Cornell University
Cooperative Extension-NYC
educators guide
Canarsie residents
on an exploration of
urban trees in their
community in
September 2010.



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