



Welcome to the Summer 2025 issue of the Sunnyvale Urban Forest Advocates (SUFA) newsletter. This quarterly newsletter will keep you informed about how you can participate in SUFA's efforts to increase the tree canopy in Sunnyvale through education, tree plantings, and advocacy.

Rooted in Passion: An Interview with Travis Rios, Sunnyvale's New Urban Forest Manager

Sunnyvale's urban forest just gained a passionate new steward: Travis Rios, the city's new Urban Forest Manager. With deep roots in plant science and a career that spans farms, tech campuses, and habitat restoration, Travis brings both expertise and heart to the role. We learned about his journey, his vision for Sunnyvale's canopy, and how residents can help nurture the trees that define our city's landscape.

From Lawnmowers to Landscapes: A Career Rooted in Growth

"I started mowing lawns and blowing leaves in high school," he shares, "and worked my way through college while earning a Bachelor's in Plant Science with an emphasis in Plant Genetics." That early hands-on experience laid the foundation for a career that now includes certifications in arboriculture, tree risk assessment, wildlife tree care, and water management. After a stint in agriculture—growing everything from onions and tomatoes to citrus—he transitioned back into landscape management, consulting for large HOAs and commercial properties across southern California. Five years ago, he moved to the Bay Area to work on the Google and Meta campuses, where his focus shifted to water resource management and habitat restoration.

"One of my proudest achievements was designing a native California garden that evolved with the seasons and supported pollinators and birds. It was a living system, not just a landscape."

Why Sunnyvale's Trees Matter

What drew him to Sunnyvale? The community's love for its trees.

"What I find most rewarding is the passion residents have for the city's urban canopy. Knowing that our work is appreciated makes me want to work even harder to provide the best possible urban forest."

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Sunnyvale's trees aren't just aesthetic—they're essential. They shade our streets, clean our air, and provide habitat for wildlife. And with a community that values these benefits, the potential for impact is enormous.

A Vision for the Future

His goals for Sunnyvale's urban forest are ambitious and long-term:

Tree Inventory: "We're starting with a full inventory of all city street and park trees. That data will guide our maintenance and development plans."

Diversity & Resilience: "We'll use the inventory to increase species diversity and create uniform canopies that are more resilient to pests and climate change."

Improved Maintenance Cycles: "I want to reduce pruning intervals from 5–7 years to 3–5 years, depending on species."

Carbon Sequestration Innovations: "Beyond tree planting, I'm exploring new ways to capture carbon that also enhance the city's aesthetics and environment."

It's a vision that balances science, sustainability, and community benefit.

How Residents Can Help?

Sunnyvale's largest and most impactful trees aren't in parks—they're in private yards.

"There's a direct link between our canopy and the quality of our air, the heat on our streets, and the habitat available to wildlife. The giants in our yards are vital."

Travis's advice to residents? Learn, share, and preserve.

"Understand the value your trees provide. Talk to your neighbors. Advocate for the canopy. If we preserve the giants, we preserve our future."

Sunnyvale Residents Eligible for a Free Tree!

The Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) in conjunction with Our City Forest (OCF) is providing one free tree to households in Sunnyvale for planting either in their front or backyards.

OCF will plant the tree and care for it (including watering) for three years to ensure its survival and health. There are roughly 250 trees available on a first-come, first-served basis.



To obtain your free tree go to: <https://www.ourcityforest.org/free-trees> and fill out the online application form. Please note that the tree species must be from the [VTA Approved Tree Species List](#) which is derived from Our City Forest's current availability list.

In addition, our city arborist recommends that homeowners avoid choosing maples or poplars due to the potential future threat to those species from the polyphagous shot hole borer - a pest which has recently been discovered in Santa Cruz and San Jose.

For questions, contact Our City Forest at trees@ourcityforest.org

SUFA Tree Walks Going Dormant in October - Sign Up for One Now!

Looking for a fun and engaging way to explore the natural beauty of Sunnyvale? How about a no-cost, private tree walk with your friends or organization?

The Sunnyvale Urban Forest Advocates (SUFA) are thrilled to offer exclusive tree walks for groups at many of our beautiful parks. Whether you are a nature enthusiast, a curious soul, or simply looking for a unique adventure, our tree walks are perfect for you!

Why Join a Tree Walk?

- Connect with Nature: Experience the serene beauty of our parks and learn fascinating facts about the diverse tree species in Sunnyvale.
- Interactive Learning: Our knowledgeable guides will lead you on an educational journey that's both fun and informative.
- Bond with Your Group: Spend quality time with friends, family, or fellow organization members in a refreshing outdoor setting.

How to Get Started: Gather your group of up to twenty people (minimum of five participants) and reach out to us at info@sunnyvaltetrees.org to schedule your tree walk. Tree walks are available from May through October.

Don't miss out on this opportunity to explore and appreciate the natural treasures of Sunnyvale. Contact us today to embark on a memorable tree walk.

Available Parks for Tree Walks

Ponderosa, Ortega, Serra, De Anza, Murphy, Lakewood, Washington, and the Sunnyvale Civic Center.





Tree on the Street Interview: The Chinese Elm

We continue our series featuring common Sunnyvale street trees with information about the trees presented in an interview format. These are trees you'll see as you walk or bike through Sunnyvale neighborhoods or parks.

SUFA: Thank you for being willing to be interviewed by Sunnyvale Urban Forest Advocates. First, can I get your full name?

Chinese Elm: Sure! My Latin name is *Ulmus parvifolia*. *Ulmus* being the Latin word for elm and *parvifolia* meaning small-leaved. More commonly we're known as Chinese elm or lacebark elm.

SUFA: Wild guess here, but I'm betting your ancestors are from China.

Chinese Elm: Yes, indeed. But we're also native to Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. In ancient China we were revered for our strength and durability and were often planted in temple gardens and public spaces to symbolize longevity and resilience. And we were often referenced by scholars and poets in their works. Sigh. I'm not sure we get that kind of respect anymore.

SUFA: I think I can also guess why you're known as the lacebark elm. Your bark when it peels off is a lovely orange and olive green. It looks like a jigsaw puzzle! With your amazing bark and lovely weeping shape you really are quite beautiful.

Chinese Elm: Oh, goodness! If trees could blush I'd be turning red now.

SUFA: But you do in the fall, don't you?

Chinese Elm: Well, not here in temperate Sunnyvale but my cohorts in more northerly climes do exhibit fall colors and also lose their leaves. Here, in our fair city, I'm an evergreen tree.

SUFA: You are a tall glass of water as my mother-in-law used to say!

Chinese Elm: Indeed! We Chinese elms are fast growing and can easily get to be 70 – 80 feet tall, but here is a fun fact: some of our smaller cultivars are an excellent choice for bonsai cultivation – especially for beginners. Chinese elm bonsai plants may only get 1 foot high. You can have our beautiful bark, interesting branching, and tiny leaves in miniature!

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SUFA: Amazing! Is there anything else you'd like to share that might interest SUFA readers?

Chinese Elm: Yes, one more thing. We have lovely, papery seeds in the fall called samaras and, when still green, they are edible either raw or cooked. Or, if they've dried, simply rub off the dry wings and eat the seeds inside, again either raw or cooked. Hmmm...Maybe we Chinese elms should be in the running to be included on SUFA's annual Edible Tree Walk.

SUFA: Who knew? Well, thanks! You've been a wealth of information. Lastly, we always ask our tree interviewees what makes them a good tree for the urban forest. What would you say?

Chinese Elm: We are a great urban tree! We can handle pollution, compacted soil, and drought. We're resistant to pests like the elm leaf beetle, the Japanese beetle, and most importantly, Dutch elm disease. Lastly, we are terrific at helping to reduce the urban heat island effect because we are very, very shady. In a good way, of course...



(Clockwise from upper left) The papery and edible samaras; the intricate bark of the Chinese (lacebark) elm; a Chinese elm grown as a bonsai plant; the stately and shady copse of Chinese elms at the entrance to Ponderosa Park.

"Giants Rising" at the Library



In June, SUFA was pleased to sponsor an exclusive screening of the movie "Giants Rising: The Secrets and Superpowers of Redwoods".

Following the movie, Dave Cowman, Director of Land Stewardship for the Sempervirens Fund, answered questions about the movie and how Sempervirens Fund is working to preserve redwood trees.

Recent SUFA Activities



Fourth Annual Edible Tree Walk

Sunnyvale Urban Forest Advocates hosted an Edible Tree Walk on Saturday, July 12. The sixteen participants saw a variety of trees and bushes that produce something edible including some heritage black walnut, avocado and cork trees. (Please don't eat the cork that comes with your wine bottle!)

Following the walk, two local "urban farmers" led an enjoyable discussion over tea and cookies in a backyard food forest.

Participants saw: acacia, almond, apple, apricot, Asian pear, avocado, cactus, cherry, cork oak, fig, grafted fruit- salad trees, gooseberry, grape vines, grapefruit, Japanese maple, Japanese plum, juniper, lemon and lime, liquidambar, loquat, magnolia, mandarin, mulberry, nectarine, New Zealand flax, olive, orange, passion fruit, peach, persimmon, pear, plum, pomegranate, African fern pine, quince, raspberry, boysenberry, blackberry, strawberry tree, and black walnut, plus vegetables, herbs, and edible flowers.

A very special thank you to SUFA volunteer Jenny Purushotma for leading the walk and hosting us with refreshments in her food forest backyard afterwards.

Sunnyvale Celebrates Arbor Day

The City of Sunnyvale and our sister city of Iizuka, Japan continued their years-long tradition of celebrating Arbor Day together with the planting of twelve flowering cherry trees donated by the City of Iizuka.

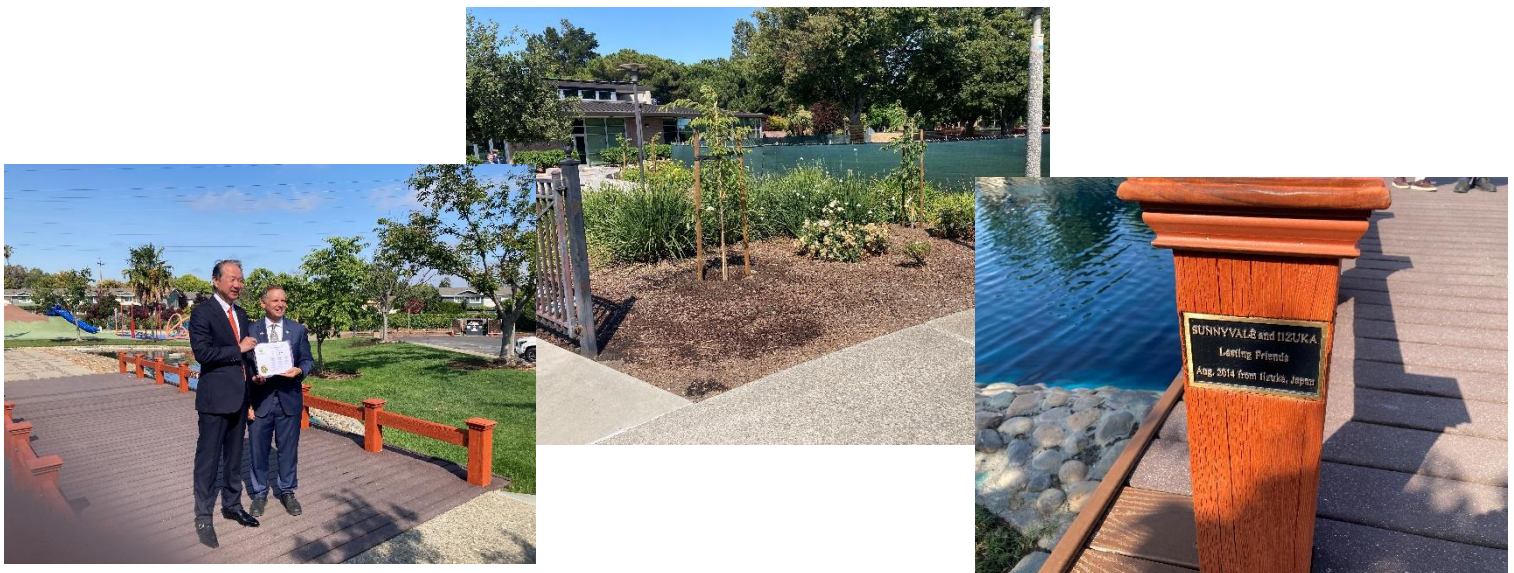
In past years, multiple cherry trees have been planted with the assistance of Braly Elementary School students in adjoining Braly Park. However, this year a single ceremonial tree was planted in the park.

The Braly Park playground has undergone some major upgrades during the past year continuing to reflect its Japanese theme. A walkway bridge has been constructed over an ornamental pond and at this year's ceremony a plaque was placed on this bridge and a certificate presented by Sunnyvale Mayor Klein to Iizuka Mayor Takei signifying our ongoing sister city relationship.

The day's ceremony then moved to the Sunnyvale Community Center where an additional ceremonial tree was planted by dignitaries of each city in the walkway between the Community Center and the Athletic Activities building.

This event was attended by Mayors Klein and Takei, Ron Zielinske and Jay Yamanaga (President and Vice-President, of the Sunnyvale Sister City Association). Linda Sell (Vice-Mayor), Tim Kirby (Sunnyvale City Manager), Sarah Johnson-Rios (Assistant City Manager), Jim Stark, (Director of Public Works) and City Council members Murali Srinivsan and Richard Mehlinger. The remaining cherry trees were planted around the Community Center patio area overlooking the water feature.

As soon as the Community Center remodel is complete, stop by and look for the newest additions to our urban forest courtesy of our generous sister city.





Trees Need Water (but not as much as you may think!)

August, September, and even early October can be hot in the Bay Area and trees, whether they are newly-planted or mature, need regular watering. However, there is a common misconception that trees need a lot of water (and therefore I shouldn't plant any!).

Young trees actually need only 10-15 gallons per week for three years and the same amount every other week from years 4-5. Fifteen gallons is roughly equivalent to two toilet flushes from an old toilet and about 10 flushes from the new water-saving toilets.

Use the link below to see how much and how often to water newly-planted or mature trees as well the variety of ways that you can get water to your tree.

<https://canopy.org/tree-info/caring-for-trees/trees-and-water/watering-guidelines/>**

Trees provide us with so many benefits to our health and the health of the planet. Let's keep them alive!

**Watering guidelines courtesy of Canopy - a non-profit expanding the urban forest in Palo Alto and beyond.

Visit us at: www.sunnyvaletrees.org

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