

Get the buzz on your native trees, shrubs and bees

By Brock Weir

If you have ever been curious about some of the hidden gems in your local 'urban forest,' head over to Machell Park this Saturday for the Tree Tenders Stewardship Day.

Hosted by LEAF, in association with the Town of Aurora and Region of York, it is a chance to get your hands dirty and learn about native trees, shrubs and bees which can be found - or, perhaps more accurately, should be found - in your own back yards.

Set for 10 a.m. to 12 noon on July 22, the LEAF crew returns to Machell Park to give a bit of tender loving care to native trees and shrubs planted last year as part of an effort to naturalize the shoreline of the nearby creek.

'Last year, we hosted a National Forest Week celebration there and what we did was invite members of the community to come out and we did a big National Forest Week celebration,' says LEAF's Tooba Shakel. 'We did a demonstration for all of the participants on how to properly plant a tree if they were to plant a tree in their own back yard, the proper steps, how to mulch the tree, and how they can participate in our back yard tree planting program.'

'Machell Park was selected by our Town of Aurora partners because they have been doing restoration work along both sides of the waterway and naturalizing those areas to add more native trees and shrubs to improve habitat and provide habitat for local wildlife and support the local urban forest.'

LEAF became involved with both the Town and the Region of York to support education surrounding the local urban forests and native tree planting, particularly in light of the ravages being caused by the invasive Emerald Ash Borer beetle, which is on track to decimating all untreated ash trees in its path.

Their efforts include working with residents on how they can plant diverse species throughout York Region to support, grow and fill in gaps in the urban forest the dead ash trees will leave behind.

'We're returning to the site this year and we're inviting the community again to come out and learn about the restoration work that took place last year, what we did what we did, why people need to help us, and how they can take what they're learning into their own back yard to plant and grow their own native trees and shrubs.'

Events get underway at 10 a.m. with a tour of the site, an in-depth look at restoration efforts, a talk about the native species that have been planted along the creek, and how people can select some of these species for their own back yard [and] which species are ideally suited for their own individual backyard conditions.'

Following these opening events, there will be tree care demonstrations, tree and plant identification, and then hands-on work to remove invasive species and spread mulch around young trees and shrubs.

'That will be more of a work party,' says Ms. Shakel, noting it is a perfect opportunity for high school students as well to collect their community service hours. 'Everyone is going to get all the material and training. It is a family friendly event. You're getting an educational tour and get to spend some time and getting your hands dirty with your family.'

'This is going to be an event where we're going to do a pop-up for our Bees love Trees campaign. This year we are working with Ontario Power Generation to basically promote the message on how trees are really great for supporting our native bee population. We're also going to be highlighting some native trees that we have already planted that are already supporting our native bee population. Come and learn about how you can support our native pollinators!'

The Tree Tenders Stewardship Day takes place rain or shine this Saturday, July 22, from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. Wear long pants and close-toed shoes, and bring sunscreen, sunglasses, a hat and water just in case. Refreshments will be provided. Pre-registration is recommended by visiting www.yourleaf.org/event/2017-07-22/tree-tenders-stewardship-day-machell-park-aurora.