

Athletic Turf Core Pages

Why are most people blind to the benefits of turfgrass and natural greenspace?

13 Mar, 2012

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Athletic Turf News



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Show this photo to most urban dwellers and ask them what they see, and they will most likely respond a doe with two fawns. It is very unlikely they will mention trees, grass, leaves, etc.

If you are involved in any aspect of the Green Industry, it's likely you are much more aware of turfgrass, trees and landscaping than the average person. But it might surprise you to know that a good number of people don't seem to see plants at all, let alone appreciate the environmental benefits they have to offer. In fact, some researchers suggest that many urban dwellers suffer from what is called "plant blindness."

From a scientific point of view, plant blindness isn't a visual disease, nor is it a physical disability; it is an inability to be aware of the plants around you. The term "plant blindness" was first introduced by Wandersee and Schlusser in 1998. Their definition of the term: "The inability to see or notice the plants in one's own environment, leading to:

- The inability to recognize the importance of plants in the biosphere, and in human affairs.
- The inability to appreciate the aesthetic and unique biological features of the life forms belonging to the plant kingdom.
- The misguided, anthropocentric ranking of plants as inferior to animals, leading to the erroneous conclusion that they are unworthy of human consideration.



Doe with Twins by Glenda Powers

Taking this observation a step further, it would seem only logical that if most people in urban areas don't pay much attention to plants, and suffer from so-called "plant blindness," they are less likely to realize or even consider the benefits that plants have to offer.

Although there is considerable research and valid evidence to suggest that natural turfgrass lawns, landscaped gardens and natural landscapes provide considerable benefits to humans, including reduced stress, greater concentration, better health, improved recovery time from illness, etc., the public seems to be unaware of such benefits. They are even less aware of the substantial environmental benefits that plants offer.

The latter became especially apparent several years ago when [Project Evergreen](#) conducted a nationwide survey* as part of its ongoing work in assessing awareness of the benefits provided by well-maintained urban landscapes (both public and private). Then-Executive Director Den Gardner noted, "It's not surprising that more education is needed to fully appreciate all dimensions of the value green space has for our society."

Among other things, Gardner noted that, "... only 50 percent of those surveyed agreed that landscaping was important in reducing energy costs. In the same way, there seems to be a lack of knowledge of the role green space can play in helping to regulate air quality. Forty percent of survey respondents either disagreed or said they 'didn't know' that trees, shrubs and turfgrass remove pollutants from the air."

Other findings in the survey that seem to suggest a blindness to the benefits of plants:

- Psychologists have found that access to plants and green spaces provides a sense of rest and allows workers to be more productive: 45% agree; 55% disagree, don't know or have no opinion.
- When landscaping is developed in a neighborhood, there is a decrease in vandalism: 30% agree; 70% disagree, don't know or have no opinion.
- Trees shading homes can reduce attic temperatures by as much as 40 degrees: 45% agree; 55% disagree, don't know or have no opinion.
- Improving landscaping can reduce energy costs: 30% agree; 70% disagree, don't know or have no opinion.
- Green space within a city helps regulate air quality: 55% agree; 45% disagree, don't know or have no opinion.

A knowledgeable public would have agreed wholeheartedly with the five statements above, all of which are true. Why didn't they? The answer may be two-fold: on one hand there's the issue of plant blindness; for most people, plants are merely part of the background of their everyday life and seem to go unnoticed. On the other hand, there seems to be a lack of education when it comes to the basic benefits of plants and green space.

The challenge for all of us in the Green Industry, whether we are responsible for sports fields, golf courses, or involved in any aspect of landscaping, is to do a better job of sharing information and educating the public. The only way to eliminate "plant blindness" is by illuminating the facts.

REFERENCE

ISSN 0032-0919

PLANT SCIENCE

The Botanical Society of America: The Society for ALL Plant Biologists
BULLETIN

SPRING 2001 VOLUME 47 NUMBER 1- Plant Blindness

<http://www.botany.org/bsa/psb/2001/psb47-1.pdf>

*Conducted March 2006 by Dr. Gene Brown, [Market Intellect](#)

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