

# Urban Forests—Making the Forestry Connection for Urban Youth

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LEAF—Learning, Experiences, & Activities in Forestry

## Meaningful learning

The words, “When am I ever going to use this in real life?” are uttered in algebra classrooms across the country. A student who doesn’t see the connection between the things they are asked to learn and their own lives will likely question the need to learn it at all. When asked to learn about a forest that is miles away, students may not understand their connection to it or its importance to them. An urban forest, on the other hand, is an up-close opportunity to make that meaningful connection for students who may have only seen pictures of forests far away.

It’s human nature that the things we are most eager to learn are the things that are relevant to our lives. The urban forest just out your back door can be a wonderful teaching tool and relevant starting point to learn about all of our forests and other ecosystems.

## Making the connection

The LEAF program (Learning, Experiences, & Activities in Forestry) is making use of the subjects of urban forests and urban forestry to help K–12 students in Wisconsin connect to all forests. The *LEAF Urban Forest Lesson Guide* supplements existing educational materials for teachers. The guide covers a variety of subjects, but the main goals of the lessons are to:

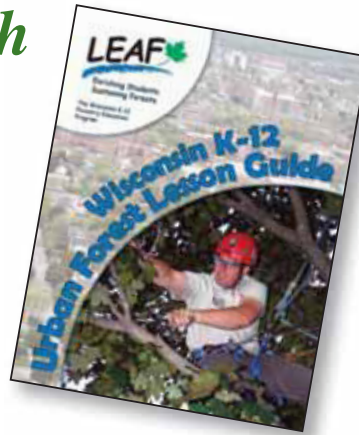
- define the urban forest
- list the benefits of urban forests
- explain how and why we manage urban forests
- tell students how they can get involved

An important part of each lesson is a conclusion activity, “Beyond the Urban Forest.” These activities ask students to reflect on what they just learned about a familiar place and use that knowledge to try to understand an unfamiliar place. For instance, in the 5- to 8-grade lesson about management, biodiversity and invasive species, students are asked to create a presentation about how the local invasive species they learned about could impact rural forests farther away.

## Going in reverse

If you’re starting to think this guide is just for Milwaukee students, stop! Just as the skeptics in urban areas wonder what a forest miles away has to do with them, those who don’t live in, or don’t think they live in, urban areas may wonder why they should care about urban forests.

The “Beyond the Urban Forest” conclusion can easily be modified to become an introduction to the lesson. In less-urban schools, discussing the potentially more



familiar rural forest first allows those students to start with what’s relevant to them. Then they can move on to learning about the value of urban forests.

## Get the guide

- Do you know a K–12 teacher who could use this material? The *LEAF Urban Forest Lesson Guide* is online for free download. Its intended audience is K–12 teachers, but we encourage anyone who is invited into classrooms to use it. To get the guide, go to [www.uwsp.edu/cnr/leaf/Educators/lg\\_urban.aspx](http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/leaf/Educators/lg_urban.aspx).
- Is there a school in your area that would like a LEAF workshop? Our workshops can be a few hours long to a full 12-hour, for-credit course. Teachers learn forestry background and tips for using the lesson materials.
- Need suggestions for educational activities for your Arbor Day celebrations, or have suggestions to share? Please contact Sarah Gilbert at [Sarah.Gilbert@uwsp.edu](mailto:Sarah.Gilbert@uwsp.edu) or 715-346-4924. For more information about LEAF, go to [www.uwsp.edu/cnr/leaf](http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/leaf).

Student examines cicada on tree.



Photo: LEAF