

“Branching Out”



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“You have to decide!” I cannot tell you how many times I have heard this phrase throughout my life. Coming from my mother, mostly, when I was debating whether or not to quit acrobatics, dance, soccer, basketball, volleyball, etc. By now, you’re probably thinking that I can’t stick with anything for very long. I’m just going to say before you have this horrible mental image of me, that, no, it wasn’t commitment issues that made me give up these activities, but more the fact that I am “athletically challenged” so to speak. What I lack in athletic abilities, however, I make up for in passion. Sure, I may have trouble picking a side to defend for most of my opinion-based research papers, but I hate to see every fact, or notion not being brought to life, and considered. This is part of the reason I hold trees so near and dear to my heart. The entire lifecycle of a tree combines my two favorite fields of study: medicine, and agriculture. When it comes to trees, I don’t have to decide.

Trees are the basic foundation of every living thing. They take in large quantities of carbon dioxide that could otherwise be harmful to us, and convert it to something we rely most heavily on: oxygen. Without trees, we could not breathe, therefore, destroying the possibility of our existence. Not only do trees create oxygen, but they are also an established “safe haven” for many animals. Providing homes, and sources of food for a various array of living things, trees definitely hold a significant importance in our lives. Trees offer protection from destructive ultraviolet rays from the sun. Without their shade, we are more likely to contract serious illnesses, like skin melanoma, sun poisoning, and even lupus.

Trees not only provide shade as a way of treating illnesses, but they have been proven to provide relief from hurtful symptoms of many diseases. Many treatments for various types of cancer include the use of trees, or tree-like plants. Take the Moringa Oleifera tree, for example. Numerous medical studies conducted by various research centers have resulted in discovering this tree's abilities to treat over 300 diseases! This cleverly nicknamed, "Miracle Tree", produces a rare combination of zeatin, (a potent antioxidant), beta-sitosterol, (a nutrient that blocks cholesterol formation and also acts as an anti-inflammatory compound), and kaempferol, (a very important nutrient that promotes healthy body cellular function). Overall, this tree provides 36 natural anti-inflammatory agents, and 46 different antioxidants. According to an article published on Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center's website, "In vitro and animal studies indicate that the leaf, seed, and root extracts of Moringa Oleifera have anticancer, hypoglycemic, anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, antifungal, antiviral, and anti-sickling effects. They may also protect against Alzheimer's disease, stomach ulcers, help lower cholesterol levels, and promote wound healing." I don't know about you folks, but myself, and my family, have been personally affected by each of the above mentioned ailments at least once in my life, and I've only been on this earth for sixteen short years. If one tree can accomplish all of these things, why can't we spend a small portion of our free-time to simply plant, and/or care for one tree?

Small steps like planting a seedling yearly, or even just spreading awareness of our diminishing tree population in our local forests, can make all the difference in the world.

There are so many values and virtues trees can share with the inhabitants of not only Missouri, but also across our nation. Not only do trees provide us with shelter, shade, oxygen, fuel, and even food, but they also aid us in preventing pollution from destroying our planet. As tree roots grow deeper into the soil, they anchor the tree, and help to slow storm water runoff. Trees also help to prevent soil erosion by cleaning the soil of harmful substances. The term “phytoremediation” is a fancier way of saying that trees can absorb dangerous chemicals and harmful substances that have somehow made their way into the soil. Trees are actually able to either store the harmful pollutants, or change them into a less dangerous form. Other major roles trees take on are the tasks of filtering sewage and farm chemicals, reducing the effects of animal wastes, cleaning roadside spills, and cleaning water runoff into streams. Controlling noise pollution, acting as a carbon sink, and even regulating the climate are just a few other examples of ways that trees are beneficial to our existence.

More towards the beauty, and personal gain side of trees, it is proven that real estate values can increase as much as 15% in any given neighborhood when trees beautify the area. In most people’s opinion, it is more enjoyable to look out window and see a stunning sea of green, than it is to see concrete buildings, and congested roadways.

I am so fortunate to have been raised in an area where trees are greatly appreciated for their contributions to our everyday lives. Some of my fondest memories come from the times spent climbing trees with my cousins on my great-grandparents’ farm, playing in my treehouse with my two sisters, swinging from the tire swing in our backyard, and

even chasing our “mostly-free-range” turkeys back into their pen from their inevitable routine of roosting in the oak tree above our chicken coop.

Some things we do take for granted, but one of the leading necessities we tend to overlook is the very existence of the tree. We build our homes with them. We keep our families warm with them. We write on them on a daily basis. We use them to do our work. How can we expect something so vital to us to keep functioning, if we partake in such damaging activities as carelessly throwing a lit cigarette butt into a patch of dry leaves, or not taking the time to create a fire break when constructing the ever-so common bonfire in the fall. We must be more aware of our actions if we’re going to have the slightest chance of saving the trees.

“I am the Lorax. I speak for the trees-I speak for the trees, for the trees have no tongues. And I’m asking you sir at the top of my lungs...” (Seuss)

Please. Like many events in history, simply ignoring the fact that our trees are dying will not solve the problem. We must consider the consequences before it is too late.

A world without trees would be unbearably hot. A world without trees would contain no oxygen, and as a result, no living things. A world without trees would be overrun by water pollution. A world without trees would contain significant amounts of soil pollution. A world without trees would be contaminated by air, and noise pollution. A world without trees would be depressing, dangerous, and overall, a world I would not want to live in.

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I certify that this speech was written by Grace Horsefield of the Cuba FFA Chapter.
