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Shade Trees on Playgrounds Program Applications Accepted through September 25th

LITTLE ROCK, AR –The Arkansas Department of Agriculture is accepting applications for the 2020 Shade Trees on Playgrounds (STOP) program through September 25th for schools needing additional shade on playgrounds. The STOP program application and program guidelines can be found [here](#).

Selected schools receive five shade trees, mulch, watering supplies, and planting guidelines. Officials with the Arkansas Department of Agriculture’s Forestry Division will help plant the trees during a ceremony with students in the fall.

Urban forestry staff began the STOP program 18 years ago to help lower adult skin cancer risk by reducing childhood exposure to direct sunlight on school playgrounds. Since then, more than 125 Arkansas schools have received trees. The STOP program also provides teachers with a full curriculum about the environmental benefits of trees, how shade reduces skin cancer risks, and tips for keeping trees healthy.

“The STOP program combines hands-on, outdoor experiences with classroom curriculum about the importance of trees and how to care for trees,” says Urban Forestry Program Coordinator, Kristine Kimbro Thomason. “We hope this program not only improves the health of Arkansas students, but also leaves a lasting impression about the value of forests and how to be good stewards of our natural resources.”

Trees are chosen by Arkansas Forestry Division staff to fit the unique region and conditions of each playground. Lacebark elms, oaks, tulip poplars, and black gum trees are common candidates for the program. To participate in the STOP program a school must meet the criteria below:

- Lack shade on a school playground
- Participate in a STOP workshop to be held virtually on October 21st
- Use provided curriculum materials to emphasize the importance of trees during the week leading up to the tree-planting event
- Involve students in tree-related projects that culminate with a tree-planting ceremony
- Hold a tree-planting ceremony prior to January 31st, 2021 (can be held with limited attendance and livestreamed or recorded for later playback to larger audience)
- Be willing to maintain the trees after planting

Applicants may be any public or private Arkansas school serving grades pre-K through 12, or a non-traditional educational facility such as a juvenile detention center, residential childcare institution, or long-term care facility that has a playground in need of more shaded areas.

Learn more about Urban & Community Forestry services and programs at www.agriculture.arkansas.gov/forestry/urban-community-forestry. With program questions, contact Kristine Kimbro Thomason at 479-228-7929 or kristine.thomason@agriculture.arkansas.gov, or Harold Fisher at 501-580-4054 or harold.fisher@agriculture.arkansas.gov.

The Arkansas Department of Agriculture is dedicated to the development and implementation of policies and programs for Arkansas agriculture and forestry to keep its farmers and ranchers competitive in national and international markets while ensuring safe food, fiber, and forest products for the citizens of the state and nation. Visit agriculture.arkansas.gov.