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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 8/29/2023**

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## **Shade Trees on Playgrounds Program Accepting School Applications through September 15**

**LITTLE ROCK, AR** – The Arkansas Department of Agriculture’s Forestry Division (Forestry Division) is accepting applications for the 2023 Shade Trees on Playground (STOP) program through September 15, 2023. Arkansas schools needing additional shade on playgrounds can find the STOP program application and guidelines at [agriculture.arkansas.gov/forestry/urban-community-forestry/stop-program/](https://agriculture.arkansas.gov/forestry/urban-community-forestry/stop-program/).

Selected schools receive up to five Arkansas native shade trees, mulch, watering supplies, and planting guidelines. Forestry Division staff will help plant the trees during a ceremony with students this fall.

The STOP program began 21 years ago to help lower adult skin care risk by reducing childhood exposure to direct sunlight on school playgrounds. Since then, approximately 165 Arkansas schools have received trees. The STOP program also provides teachers with curriculum resources 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,” said Kristine Kimbro, Urban and Community Forestry Coordinator. “We hope this program not only improves the health of Arkansas students but also leaves a lasting impression about the value of community trees and how to be good stewards of our natural resources.”

Trees native to Arkansas are chosen by Forestry Division staff to fit the region and conditions of each playground. Sycamores, oaks, tulip poplars, and black gum trees are common species for the program.

To participate in the STOP program, a school must meet the criteria below:

- Have a lack of shade on a school playground.
- Participate in a STOP workshop to be held virtually on October 2, 2023.
- Use provided curriculum resource materials to emphasize the importance of trees during the week(s) leading up to the planting event.
- Involve students in tree-related projects that culminate with a school-wide planting ceremony.
- Hold a planting ceremony prior to December 21, 2023.
- Have a plan for maintaining 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.

Learn more about the STOP program at [agriculture.arkansas.gov/forestry/urban-community-forestry/stop-program/](https://agriculture.arkansas.gov/forestry/urban-community-forestry/stop-program/). For more information, please contact Kristine Kimbro at [kristine.kimbro@agriculture.arkansas.gov](mailto:kristine.kimbro@agriculture.arkansas.gov) or Harold Fisher at [harold.fisher@agriculture.arkansas.gov](mailto:harold.fisher@agriculture.arkansas.gov).

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