

## Integrate shade trees and planting areas surrounding playgrounds



**Inspiration:** Pollinator friendly planting areas can attract bees, birds, and butterflies to strengthen pollinator pathways



**Inspiration:** Sensory gardens can help connect children to the natural world and invite curiosity and learning



Image Credit: Seattle Parks & Rec, Greenwood Park, Seattle WA

**Inspiration:** Protect existing trees and plant shade trees surrounding playgrounds for comfortable use throughout the seasons

### Background & Rationale

- *Nature is fun!* was the most well-supported guiding principle by community engagement participants. Words including “nature, natural, and trees” were commonly mentioned by community engagement participants when asked to describe their ideal outdoor play area.
- Many public engagement participants (30%) identified weather or seasonal conditions (not enough shade or activities we can do year round) as one of the key things that make it hard for participants to enjoy park playgrounds.
- Trees and vegetation help to foster biodiversity, support pollinators, and provide ecosystem services including carbon sequestration and oxygen release, water conservation, shade, and erosion prevention.
- Trees and planting areas can provide play and educational value.
- Time spent in natural areas has been proven to provide physical and cognitive benefits for children including the ability to soothe the mind from stressful sensory triggers and encourage focused attention.

### Design Standards:

- Protect existing trees and vegetation wherever possible. Site and plan playground improvements to work around the drip-line of existing trees (see Standard 2). When planning playground improvements in close proximity to existing trees, consult a Certified Arborist for tree protection and management measures.
- For all Community, Neighbourhood, and Nature Parks, plant new shade trees surrounding the playground area (see Standard 9). Refer to the Shade Lookbook for suggested shade tree plant species (see Appendix A).
- Plan planting areas to provide permeable buffers between playground areas and other park elements. Plant low-growing species surrounding the play area to support clear sight lines to and through the space.
- Plan planting areas in coordination with the overall grading and drainage strategy of the site. Consider potential for integrated stormwater management strategies including rain gardens, bio-filtration ponds, and bioswales.
- Plan planting areas according to the micro-climate conditions of the site, including aspect, soil moisture, and wind exposure.
- Integrate non-toxic, drought tolerant, native, pollinator-friendly planting materials.
- Provide a mix of evergreen and perennial plant material, with varied colour and interest throughout the seasons

## Design Standards (cont'd)

- Provide plant materials with play and sensory value. Consider plants that have different scents, textures, and unique shapes, forms, or foliage.
- When planting is added near playgrounds, prioritize resources to maintain these areas to a high standard.
- Provide 450mm minimum depth of top soil for shrubs and 600mm minimum depth top soil for trees. Provide 75mm deep layer of bark mulch. Follow the Canadian Landscape Standard for selection, installation, and maintenance of new plant materials.
- Provide low-flow irrigation to support planting material through the establishment period and beyond.
- Consider integration of “live planted elements” in the play area including willow tunnels and living fences.
- Consider opportunities for urban agriculture next to playground areas, including raised beds and opportunities for universal gardening and horticultural therapy.

### Additional Considerations

Seek opportunities to collaborate with K'ómoks First Nation to integrate traditional plants that are culturally significant to the community. Add educational signage to identify why the plant material is important, including Indigenous names and cultural plant uses.

