

Live Free and Dig

with the Littleton Garden Club

Hugged a tree?

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Littleton Garden Club

Have you ever hugged a tree? Perhaps you should! The next time you fill your lungs and take a breath of air, thank a tree for the oxygen. The next time you sit under the shade on a hot summer day, thank a tree.

When you celebrate Christmas and your home fills with the smell of pine, thank a tree. The next time you fill up with water at the spring on Old Franconia Road, thank the trees that filter the water and make it healthy and drinkable.

If you enjoy watching birds, chipmunks, and squirrels, thank a tree for providing their habitat. If you walk for health and peace, thank a tree that gives you that solace and beauty. Oh yes, and what if there was no more maple syrup? Thank a tree as you eat those pancakes!

Since 2013, the United Nations has declared March 21 the "International Day of Forests." There has never been any material more useful than wood, and this day is to recognize the importance of trees in our lives.

As a child, I read a book by Shel Silverstein called "The Giving Tree," a story about a little boy and a tree. The tree gives this little boy everything - fruit, branches, and a trunk for climbing - to make him happy. In the end, when the tree has been cut down and is only a stump, and the boy is now an old man, the tree gives him a place to sit down and rest, and the boy is happy, and the tree is happy.

Do you know that trees talk to each other? They can communicate through networks created by their root systems, called the "wood

wide web." Trees share information about water, drought, disease, and insect attacks, and other trees respond when they receive these messages.

Trees are not loners. They are communal, similar to an insect colony, and the real activity happens underground. Trees share sunlight, and if one tree dies, the others start to die as well.

Trees eat the greenhouse gases that cause climate change. Older trees store much more carbon than younger trees, so we need to protect older trees.

Trees boost our mental health, helping us avoid anxiety and depression. New hospitals being built today always have rooms with windows to the outside. It is believed that a view of the outdoors helps patients recover quickly. I have even heard doctors

write prescriptions for "forest bathing," time spent engaging with the natural world and going for a walk in the woods.

I belong to the Indian River Neighborhood Association in Florida where we have lived. Their latest email advertises "Free Trees to Stop Intensive Hurricanes. Plant a tree!" It lists added benefits: cooling our planet, saving our manatees, fish, birds, and lagoons, and providing a safe habitat for people and wildlife.

The message is loud and clear. It does not matter where you live on this planet; if you plant a tree and take care of the trees, you will be helping our environment take care of all living things, especially each other.

For more information about the club and our meetings, please visit www.littletonnhgardenclub.org.