

Nature Climate Solutions Toolkit

*Educational resource for any House of Worship or organization
interested in starting their own Natural Climate Solutions Project*



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1.Introduction
- 2.About Native Plants
- 3.Goals of Natural Climate Solutions Projects
- 4.Project Maintenance
- 5.What's Been Done Before: Examples of Past Projects
- 6.Potential Educational Activities
- 7.Resources
 - a.Sample Worship service (Christian)
 - b.Sample Worship service (Jewish)
 - c.Chicago Muslims Green Team Tree Planting Project
 - d.Sample Dedication service (Christian)
 - e.Sample Press Release
 - f.Trees of IL Guide
 - g.USDA native plant gardens
 - h.Community partners: The Nature Conservancy, Sierra Club, Arbor Day Foundation, Savannah Institute
 - i.Tree equity map





Introduction

Did you know that trees and native plants improve air quality and address climate change by pulling excess carbon molecules out of the air, transporting them downward through their branches and storing them safely in the ground?

Most people know that our climate is changing in alarming ways because of pollution. The consequences are becoming clear through extreme weather and shrinking livable habitats for living creatures, including humans (Yale Center for Climate Communication). But fewer people know how to work with natural processes to make things better.

Natural Climate Solutions is one helpful action that communities of faith can take right now.

Partnering with Houses of Worship and Faith Communities to implement Natural Climate solutions is part of Faith in Place's innovative program options.

Faith in Place is a non-profit organization working in Illinois, Wisconsin and Indiana that works with diverse communities to advocate for environmental justice and sustainability, aiming to promote clean energy, sustainable practices and more active communities of faith and spirituality. We provide resources to educate, connect and advocate for a healthier world.

About Native Plants

Native Plants are plants that have evolved over time in a specific region and are adapted to its climate, soil, and geography. Native Plants can sequester, or remove, carbon from the air. This process helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve the health of crops and pollinators. In the Midwest, only a tiny fraction of the original native plant populations remain, with estimates suggesting less than 0.01% of the original tallgrass prairie still exists in places like Illinois.

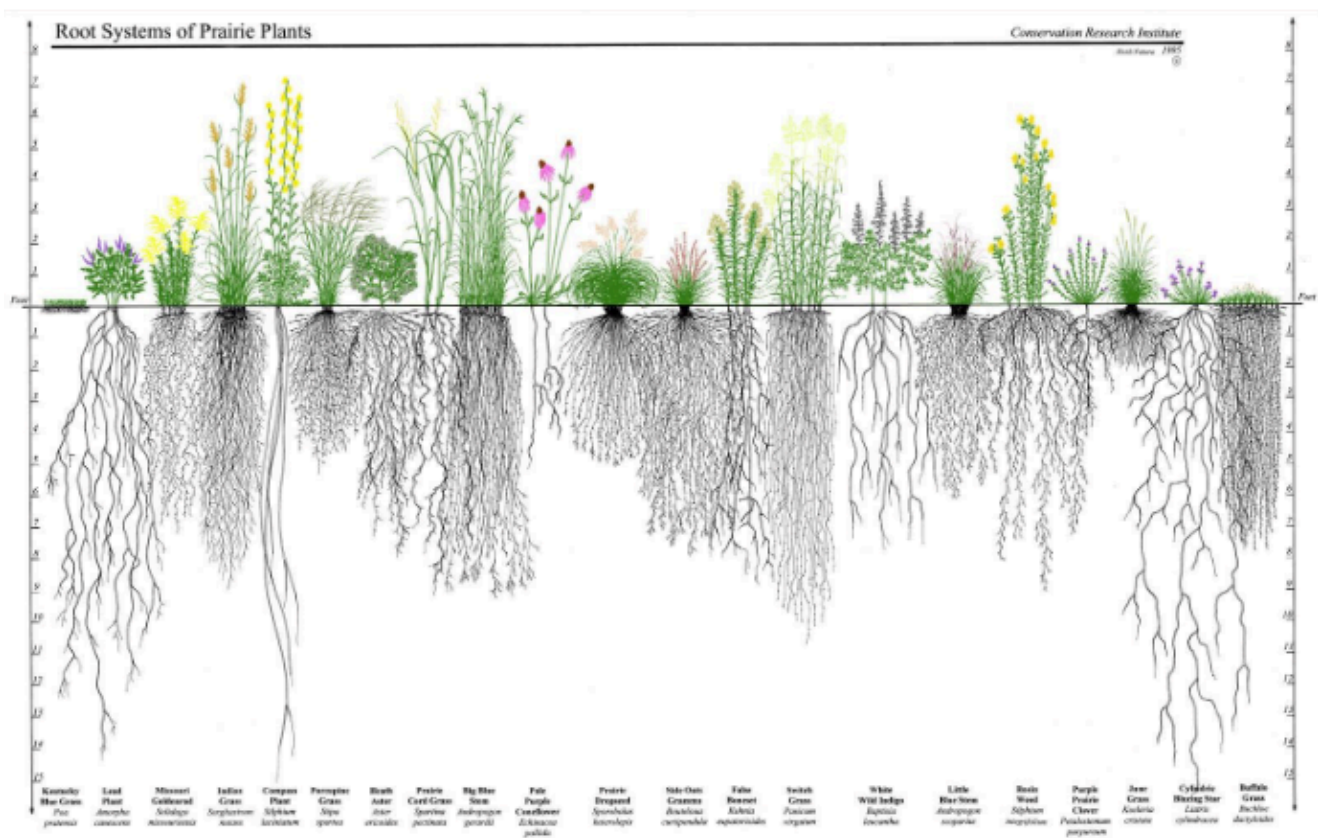
Goals of Natural Climate Solutions Projects (Cont.)

There are many ways to do a Nature Climate Solutions project, but these are the top two:

- Plant native plants
- Plant trees

Lawn may sequester more CO₂ in the very short term, but trees and native grasses lock up more CO₂ more efficiently and for longer term, through their deep root systems, which can also help prevent flooding.

In the image below from Conservation Research Institute (1995), we see the difference in root system depth between grass and native plants in our region. This is part of why planting and mowing grass is not environmentally friendly.



Prairie plants may actually be more effective at sequestration than trees which is why it's good to have a mix of both in your project. Recapturing atmospheric carbon into soil and plant communities is the easiest and least expensive method for mitigating climate change and provides other economic, cultural, and ecological benefits to your community.

Less mowing = less carbon in the atmosphere through burning of fossil fuels.

Project Maintenance

For many Houses of Worship, worries about maintenance of the project in the future is a hindrance to starting a project in the first place.

Many congregations are aging or otherwise cannot reasonably assume that their members will be able to maintain a project—weeding, mulching, trimming, and mowing take time, money, and physical exertion.

So how does Faith in Place recommend looking at the long-term maintenance of a project?

There are a few things to consider:

- **Landscaping Support:** Many landscaping companies will come out and do this kind of work seasonally. You may consider seeking support of a landscaping company into your project to reduce your workload.
- **Adopt-a-Space:** Some houses of worship take turns maintaining space around the building, like an adopt-a-space program. Many hands make light work, and taking ownership for the neatness of the property can increase the appreciation of the land you have to steward.
- **Connect with Youth Volunteers:** Many high schools and civic organizations have service hour requirements for students/members. You might connect with these schools/organizations to coordinate a work day.
- **Ask the Community:** Look to the faith community for help! A house of worship in your community or denomination that has completed a similar project might appreciate an opportunity to help you!
- **Have a Legacy Tree:** Some Green Teams and communities of faith have inaugurated “Legacy Tree” programs, as a way for families or individuals to give a tree to honor special people or recognize life events. These might include the birth of a child or a wedding. In Islam, planting a tree is considered “Sadquatul Jaariya” or ongoing charity.



What's Been Done Before: Examples of Past Projects

Project 1: Mattoon First Presbyterian held a youth-led project during Confirmation. This project yielded 30+ monarch butterflies in its first year:



Project 2: Copper Grove, a project of Copper Creek Church in Champaign, Illinois, led to the creation of a beautiful and functional prairie savannah on what had previously been agricultural land.



Potential Activities:

We encourage Houses of Worship who undertake a Natural Climate Solutions project to connect it to their faith and to the larger issues of Climate Action by including **at least one** of these educational options

1. A movie screening – either virtual or in person – of the 45 minute version of Kiss the Ground. This movie offers a hopeful account of how restoring planting and soil health address the carbon surplus that is causing the global climate crisis. FIP has a DVD which can be shared. FIP staff can also invite farmers who are using restorative practices to serve on a panel to talk about that with viewers.
2. A worship service focused on the relationship between trees and the faith tradition of the community. Further in this toolkit, you'll find sample service ideas and scripture readings that encourage appreciation of the health benefits of trees and nature.
3. You can do a dedication or groundbreaking ceremony. This allows you to share the project with the public. Resource D has an example of a dedication service. Resource E is a sample press release for a groundbreaking ceremony that you can send to your local paper.
4. There's a 33 minute RadioLab podcast with Suzanne Simard, the author of *Intelligent Trees* which introduces us to “an underground network where deals are made and lives are saved (and lost) in a complex web of friendships, rivalries, and business relations. It's a network that scientists are only just beginning to untangle and map, and it's not only turning our understanding of forests upside down, it's leading some researchers to rethink what it means to be intelligent.” The title is “From Tree to Shining Tree” and it can be found here. Another media resource is the trailer to Intelligent Trees Official Trailer
5. The shorter (2 minute) trailer of the film is a very good as a discussion opener. The longer movie is not recommended unless your audience enjoys thorough science.
6. The Uof I Extension Office can provide horticulturalists through the Master Gardener program to give a program about the way to correct way to plant a tree, and the importance and advantages of planting native trees.
7. Some houses of worship have book discussion groups and they might be interested in Richard Powers novel “The Overstory.”

Resources



Resource A

This is an example of a Christian worship service which has ties trees to the faith tradition of the congregation:

Opening Prayer:

Lord, we come this day, having seen the miracles of everyday creation in our world. We have enjoyed both the bright sunshine and the gentle rains. We have marveled over the beauty of flowers and the complexity of your creation. Make our hearts ready to receive your word for us, that we may go forth from this place ready to joyfully serve you all of our days. AMEN.

Potential Scripture:

Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15

Mark 4:26-34

Mark 4:24-26

Sample Discussion:

The world has 46% fewer trees than it did less than when the industrial revolution began. 90% of the world's native forests are gone. Which is horrifying. Tragic. Like the cross, in a way. But the cross is both a sign of sin and a reminder that sin can be overcome – that a new way of life is possible in Christ Jesus. And we are invited into community in order to realize that life together. We can join with each other and with communities to consider and value and celebrate the goodness of Creation and the blessing God has given us through these wonderful creatures – the trees.

Even closer – Four houses of worship in East Central Illinois have planted native trees and plants in a field reclaimed from agricultural production, in an empty center city lot and along a busy street in a pretty red city as part of a Natural Climate Solutions initiative Faith in Place got funded by the Lumpkin Family Foundation. I'm super excited about the Burr Oaks and Buck Eyes and Paw Paws popping up! I know these efforts to restore and be good stewards of the Earth are small. But I'm hopeful. They are like a seed, the smallest of seeds, perhaps the smallest of mustard seeds, which planted by faith grows to be a mighty tree, putting out branches to offer shade and a place for the birds of the air to safely make their nest. Followers of Jesus know that small things, undertaken with love, are part of a much larger thing that God is doing in the world. Let's encourage each other to be active participants in this work! We are so blessed. By planting and nurturing and protecting the blessing given to us in Creation, we walk with God.

Resource B

This is a collection of resources for celebrating the Jewish festival of TuBiShvat, by Bayit's Liturgical Arts Working Group. Learn more at yourbayit.org

CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Birthday of the Trees, illustration by Steve Silbert 1

A Blessing: FOR PLANTING THE FUTURE, R. David Evan Markus 3

A Blessing: OF BIRTHDAYS, BREATH, AND BLESSINGS, R. Dara Lithwick 4

Fruit of the Tree, illustration by R. Allie Fischman 4

INSTRUCTION, R. Rachel Barenblat 6

A BLESSING FOR A TREE IN THE CITY, Trisha Arlin 7

A Tree in the City, illustration by Steve Silbert 8

FOUR TREES, R. Rachel Barenblat 9

Tree of Life, illustration by Steve Silbert 10

BREATHING OUT, BREATHING IN, R. David Evan Markus 11

TREE: A GUIDED MEDITATION, Trisha Arlin; illustration by Steve Silbert 12

PREPARING, R. Sonja K. Pilz, PhD 13

TO 2030 / 5790, R. Dara Lithwick 14-15

Those Who Sow in Tears will Reap in Joy, illustration by R. Allie Fischman 16

ZOONOSIS, R. Sonja K. Pilz, PhD 17

Connected, illustration by R. Allie Fischman 18

ROOTING, R. David Evan Markus 19

MAPLE MY LOVE, R. Dara Lithwick 20-21

Maple, illustration by R. Allie Fischman 22

Collection co-created by Bayit's Liturgical Arts Working Group.

The full collection is available here: <https://yourbayit.org/connections/>



Resource C

Chicago Green Muslims: <https://chicagomuslimsgreenteam.org/>

The Green Muslim's Tree Planting initiative and partnership with Our Roots Chicago, which aims to improve Tree Equity in the city, is a resource for Muslim congregations.

Sara (sara@chicagomuslimgreenteam.org) has a program of slides about the benefits of trees that which she is willing to share with Muslim congregations. This is a sample of the connections between this faith tradition and natural climate solutions.

*And it is He who sends down rain
from the sky, and We produce
thereby the growth of all things. We
produce from it greenery from
which We produce grains arranged
in Layers. And from the palm trees
- of emerging fruit are clusters
hanging low. And [We produce]
gardens of grapevines and olives
and pomegranates, similar yet
varied. Look at [each of] its fruit
when it yields and [at] its ripening.
Indeed in that signs for a people
who believe.*

Holy Quran, Al An'am 6:99

PLANTS



Plants play a vital role in the environmental well-being of all communities. They absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen from within their leaves, provide habitats for a plethora of organisms, and are a source of both food and medicines. The Quran includes passages that describe luscious gardens and trees in the heavens, highlighting their significance in both this life and the afterlife. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) warns us about harming plants unnecessarily and encourages us to plant trees as a form of charity.

- Sarah

Resource D

Sample Dedication Service (Christian)

Let us pray.

You have richly blessed us, O God, with the beauty of this earth and all that grows from its soil. As we consider the variety and color around us, we receive it from Your hand with gratitude. We see these plants and trees and good soil as an expression of Your creativity and Your love for us.

In the beginning, You placed us in this garden to care for it and to live in harmony with all that You have made. You are always present with us, sustaining us and providing for us. May we be good stewards of all you have given, take time to enjoy the goodness here in central Illinois, and appreciate the holiness of this natural world. May we be co-creators with You, as we tend this land and re-purpose plastics in useful ways.

Speak to us in this time, through scripture, through music, through the fellowship, and especially through this garden, that we may listen in reverence and joy. I pray these things in the name of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Sample Scripture:

SCRIPTURE - Psalm 19:1-6

SCRIPTURE - Psalm 104:24-30



Resource D

Sample Press Release: **First Presbyterian Church of Mattoon to Host a Prayer Garden Dedication and Environmental Documentary Screening**

MATTOON, IL--The First Presbyterian Church of Mattoon is dedicating their Prayer Garden, a natural climate solutions project co-organized and funded by Faith in Place, on Sunday, September 19 at 2:00 p.m. and will host an open screening of the educational environmental documentary, *Kiss the Ground* immediately following the dedication.

The church received a \$9,000 subaward grant from Faith in Place, funded through the Lumpkin Family Foundation, to launch a natural climate solutions project in early 2021. This funding was used by the church to create a prayer garden with trees and native plants on their property, located at the western corner of Charleston Ave. and 1st Street.

Faith in Place is a multifaith environmental justice non-profit that works with communities of faith across Illinois to educate, connect and advocate for healthier communities. The organization works to establish Green Teams in houses of worship, working with diverse faith leaders to educate their unique faith communities on energy and climate change, sustainable food and land use, water preservation, advocacy and youth engagement.

This project utilized nature-based climate strategies to help capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and improve air quality. Since many houses of worship have unutilized land that they maintain every month, nature-based climate projects like a prayer garden is an easy way people of faith can help take action on climate change.

While Alwerdt's Gardens created the design and planting of the garden, maintenance of the prayer garden will be maintained by members of the First Presbyterian Church's Green Team.

Immediately following the dedication, First Presbyterian Church will host a screening of *Kiss the Ground*, an educational documentary discussing the immense benefits of regenerating the world's soils—including the potential to rapidly stabilize Earth's climate, restore lost ecosystems and create abundant food supplies.

Resource D (cont.)

“The planting and tending of this Prayer Garden and the educational event following the dedication shows that our house of worship cares about the environment and building healthier communities,” said Pastor Matthew Froeschle.

“We are excited for this opportunity to teach about good environmental stewardship here in Mattoon, and to add another beautiful space for prayer and meditation that helps preserve the natural wonders that are unique to Illinois,” he added.

Contact the church office at (217)-234-6722 for more information on the event.

Faith in Place empowers Illinois people of all faiths to be leaders in caring for the Earth, providing resources to educate, connect, and advocate for healthier communities. We operate from local offices serving Chicago, the North and West Suburbs of Chicago, Lake County, Central Illinois, and Southern Illinois, while implementing our five program areas – **Energy & Climate**, [Sustainable Food & Land Use](#), [Water Preservation](#), [Advocacy](#), and [Youth Leadership & Empowerment](#) – in close collaboration with our 358 faith partners and 222 Green Teams.

Example of News Coverage



Trees of IL Guide

Native Trees in Illinois

Submitted by: Tami Austin Illinois Extension Master Naturalist – Jefferson County



USDA Native Plant Gardens

Learn more:

https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/Native_Plant_Materials/Native_Gardening/index.shtml

Community Partners

- [The Nature Conservancy](#)
- [Sierra Club](#)
- [Arbor Day Foundation](#)
- [Savannah Institute](#)

Tree Equity Map

Tree Equity Score Map

