

## Tree Treks

Creating educational, useful, and fun activities in park areas can sometimes be a daunting task. Publicly owned park-land usually will have the tried and true playground, ballpark and pavilion, but beyond those amenities there may not be much more to work with for activities. Coming up with new activities that are educational and fun, using only the amenities found at the park can be a challenging task for anyone. There is another amenity that I forgot to mention: trees. Trees are an amenity that can be found at almost all city parks, or at least the parks in Minnesota. The idea to use these ever-present park staples was presented by a Dayton's Bluff resident to the University of Minnesota's Urban and Community Forestry Department and the City of St. Paul's Park and Recreation Department. He presented the plan to create an educational activity that can be implemented at almost any park as long as there are trees, the Tree Trek.

The Tree Trek is a guided tour, a path that leads the visitor through a park, stopping at each different tree species. At each tree station, there is a "post" with information about that specific tree species, information that includes: the tree's common name as well as its Latin name, the size of the tree at maturity, common traits that the tree exhibits, as well as some common problems often associated with the tree. Along with the information there is also a QR Code that links to a FAQ page for that species of tree. Using any smart device with QR code reading capability allows the user to find more information about the tree they are standing next to. If you are unfamiliar with what a QR code is, it is like a barcode that is found on many of the products you purchase but unlike a barcode it can direct a smart device such as an iPhone or any Android phone to a specific website. Some of these phones may need to have a QR code reader application installed on them before this will work, but once it is installed the user is then directed to the website. Here is one to try

out if you are unfamiliar with this technology.  
tree you can move along to the next tree.



After reading up on the current

This project was created as a way of introducing park users to trees in the park, providing them with some useful information while offering a new park activity. Hopefully this will also bring new users to the parks that may not have been inclined to use the traditional amenities that are present.

Like all things in life, there is some work that needs to go into a project like this. The posts need to be installed near the trees and there will need to be some fashion of signage on the



Image 1



posts (Image 1). For the Mounds Park Tree Trek, we used flat fiberglass posts with custom-printed stickers as signage. These worked well since the posts were 4 inches wide as well as the pre-printed stickers that were affixed directly to the posts. Since no one was in favor of attaching signage to the trees, this was found to be a perfect solution to that problem.

Posts like these can be purchased from online retailers at around \$20.00 a piece and the stickers can be printed at one of many office supply stores for around \$10.00 per sticker. The stickers are weather-resistant and should last for at least 3 years, if not longer.

There is also the task of building a website that can host all of your tree information. Luckily there are free website building websites, such as [Weebly.com](https://www.weebly.com) that help you build your site and host it as well (Image 2). This may sound daunting but it is a straightforward process and



Image 2

very user-friendly. The website you create can be set up a number of ways. The format that was used in the Mounds Park Tree Trek was to use heading pages and within those pages, adding content pages as necessary. Here is an example of what the build page will look like (Image 3).

The image shows a website builder interface. On the left is a vertical list of pages under the heading "Pages". At the top of this list is an orange button labeled "Add Page +". The list includes "Home" (highlighted in blue), "The Trees Along the Trail", and a series of tree species: American Chestnut, American Linden, Amur Cork, Austrian Pine, Bigtooth Aspen, Black Cherry, Black Walnut, Blue Spruce, Bur Oak, Catalpa, Cottonwood, Crabapple, Crimson King Norway M..., Dutch Elm Resistant Elm Vari..., Eastern Redbud, Freeman Maple, Ginkgo, Green Ash, Hackberry, Hawthorn, Honey locust, and Horse Chestnut. On the right is a configuration panel for the selected "Home" page. It has a "Page Name" field containing "Home". Below that is a "Page Layout:" section with four thumbnails: "Tall Header", "Short Header", "No Header", and "Landing Page". The "No Header" layout is selected. Below the thumbnails are two checkboxes: "Hide page in navigation menu" (unchecked) and "Password protect this page" (unchecked). At the bottom of the panel is an "Advanced Settings +" link and three buttons: "Save & Edit" (blue), "Copy Page", and "Delete Page".

Pages **Add Page +**

Home

The Trees Along the Trail

American Chestnut

American Linden

Amur Cork

Austrian Pine

Bigtooth Aspen

Black Cherry

Black Walnut

Blue Spruce

Bur Oak

Catalpa

Cottonwood

Crabapple

Crimson King Norway M...

Dutch Elm Resistant Elm Vari...

Eastern Redbud

Freeman Maple

Ginkgo

Green Ash

Hackberry

Hawthorn

Honey locust

Horse Chestnut

Page Name

Home

Page Layout:

Tall Header Short Header No Header Landing Page

☐ Hide page in navigation menu

☐ Password protect this page

Advanced Settings +

Save & Edit Copy Page Delete Page

Image 3

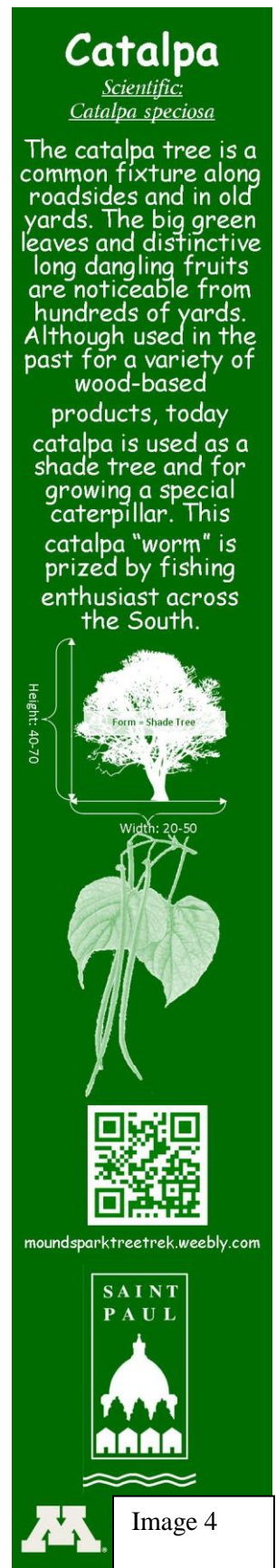
Once your tree's page is completed, you can take the URL to a QR code generator such as, <https://www.the-qrcode-generator.com/>. This will convert the URL into a QR code that can be put on the sticker that will be affixed to the sign.

Creating the signage or the graphics to be used for the stickers can be done many ways. We found that using Microsoft Office Publisher was the easiest. Using this program allowed for the size of the signage to be set at 4" x 18"; since the posts were 4.5" wide, this was the size that was desirable. Since the size of your posts may be larger or smaller, play around with the format that works for you. Here is an example of one of the signs we created (Image 4).

The final stage is to install the signs. Using a specialized post pounder for these flat posts, we were able to position the signs just inside the mulch ring. This ended up being 3' from the trunk of the trees. Some trees may have a larger root flare or exposed roots that will make installation this close to the tree hard to accomplish. In this case, it may be advisable to move the sign out to the point where there is no obstruction from the root system. The goal is not for the posts to be placed in perfect symmetry with the trees but rather to be useable by the park patrons for years to come.

This is a relatively new program so there are questions pertaining to the durability of these posts and stickers as they come up against the elements, vandalism and weed whips. Unfortunately, this question of durability can only be answered as time goes on and the program matures.

If this program sounds like something that your community would like to



look into further, we are happy to answer any questions and offer technical advice. Please feel free to contact Dustin Ellis at [ellis554@umn.edu](mailto:ellis554@umn.edu) with any questions that you may have.