

Fun Facts about Trees

Introduction

Trees are the longest living organisms on the planet and one of the earth's greatest natural resources. They keep our air supply clean, reduce noise, improve both air and water quality, help prevent erosion, provide food and building materials, provide shade, and help make our landscapes beautiful.

Tree Facts

There are about 20,000 tree species in the world.

Some trees can "talk" to each other. When willows are attacked by webworms and caterpillars, they emit a chemical that alerts nearby willow of the danger. The neighbouring trees then respond by pumping more tannin into their leaves making it difficult for the insects to digest the leaves

The expression 'touch wood' for good luck originated from primitive tree worship when rapping on trees was believed to summon protective spirits from the trees and ward off evil.

In Arnold, California, a tree still stands with a legible inscription carved into it in 1849 by pioneers blazing paths to California during the Gold Rush. The inscription reads "49 Road."

Some 3,500 English oaks were used in the construction of HMS Victory, now moored at Portsmouth.

Hospital patients heal faster, require shorter stays and less painkillers if the room windows faces a treed environment.

Trees increase property values by 5-20% due to their landscaping value.

Britain has some 80% of Europe's 'ancient' trees.

A fully-grown Oak in the UK grows - and sheds - 250,000 leaves every year and produces around 50,000 acorns in a good year.

A healthy mature Birch tree can produce up to 1 million seeds in a good year.

A commercial sized aspen (*Populus tremula*) tree trunk in Canada can be made into about a million matchsticks.

The world's rarest trees are endemics of remote islands, some known only from single wild specimens, such as the St Helena Olive. Britain's own endemic trees include the Bristol Mountain Ash (*Sorbus bristolensis*) which only grows naturally in the Avon Gorge.

The height above sea-level at which trees cannot grow is called the treeline. This changes with latitude and in the Alps is approximately 7000ft, whilst in North Wales it is 1820ft.

It takes approximately 2 tonnes of timber to make 1 tonne of paper. The calorific value of 2 tonnes of timber is the same as 1 tonne of coal.

Trees and the Environment

Trees can induce rainfall by cooling the land and transpiring water into the sky from their leaves. An acre of maple trees can put as much as 20,000 gallons of water into the air each day.

It has been estimated that in 50 years one tree recycles more than £60,000 worth of water, provides £50,000 worth of erosion control, £100,000 worth of air pollution control, and produces £60,000 worth of oxygen.

Two mature trees provide enough oxygen for a family of four.

Trees help reduce the "greenhouse effect" by absorbing carbon dioxide (CO₂). One acre of trees removes 2.6 tons of CO₂ per year.

By cooling the air and ground around them, the shade from trees helps cool the Earth's temperature.

Trees help prevent city flooding by catching raindrops and offsetting runoff caused by buildings and parking lots.

Well situated trees help cut energy costs and consumption by decreasing air conditioning costs by 10-50% & reducing heating costs as much as 4-22% per annum.

One person causes about 10 tons of carbon dioxide to be emitted a year. One tree removes about 1 ton of CO₂ per year.

Record Breaking Trees

Deepest Roots

A Wild Fig tree at Echo Caves, near Ohrigstad, Mpumalanga, South Africa has roots reaching 400 feet deep.

The Fastest Growing Tree

In 1974, it was noted that an *Albizia falcata* in Sabah, Malaysia had grown 35 feet and 3 inches in 13 months or approximately 1.1 inches per day.

The Greatest Girth

In the late 18th century a sweet chestnut on Mount Etna in Sicily, Italy, known as the Tree of the Hundred Horses had a circumference of 190 feet. It has since separated into three parts.

The Largest Tree

The "Lindsey Creek Tree", a coast redwood with a minimum trunk volume of 90,000 cubic feet and a minimum total mass of 3630 tons was the largest known tree until it blew over in a storm in 1905.

The largest living tree is the "General Sherman", a giant sequoia found in the Sequoia National Park in California. It is 275 feet tall with a girth of 102 feet and 8 inches.

The Most Dangerous Tree

The Manchineel Tree of the Caribbean coast and the Florida Everglades secretes an exceptionally poisonous and acid sap. The sap causes blisters on contact with the skin and can cause blindness on contact with the eye.

The Oldest Tree

Methuselah is a Great Basin Bristlecone Pine (*Pinus longaeva*) in the White Mountains of California. It was 4,789 years old when sampled in 1957 by Schulman and Harlan. It is the oldest known non-clonal organism still alive, at some 4,840 years old. It is the oldest known individual tree in the world. The tree is named after the biblical figure Methuselah who is reputed to have lived for 969 years.

Britain's oldest tree is probably the Fortingall Yew in Tayside, which is believed to be over 3000 years old.

The Slowest Growing Tree

A White Cedar located in the Great Lakes area of Canada, is 155 years old and less than 4 inches tall.

The Tallest Tree

In 1872, an Australian Eucalyptus at Watts River, Victoria in Australia was said to measure to 435 feet, but it is speculated that it probably measured to over 500 feet at some point in its life.

The tallest living tree is a Coast Redwood known as the "Mendocino Tree" found in Montgomery State Reserve in California. This tree, which is over 1000 years old, is more than 367 feet and 6 inches tall and still growing.

References, include;

<http://www.unep.org> UN Environmental Programme

<http://www.weekendgardener.net>

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk>

<http://www.rfs.org.uk>