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*Rita Monroe*

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*Augusta's Endangered Forest*  
(Continued from page 47)

information collected, the city will determine how many trees grow on the city right of way, their type, species, age, diameter, and condition. Blount believes that the inventory is the first step toward establishing a solid maintenance plan.

"For instance, if the city has a large population of maples which were planted around the same time and which have a life span of 100 years (a figure he has pulled out of a hat), well then, we would have to plant at least ten trees of that species every year in order to make sure we didn't look up one day and have no maple trees because they'd all died about the same time."

Or the city could face a disaster such as the Dutch Elm disease catastrophe that wiped out the American Elms in the East and Midwest in the early part of the century, or the chestnut blight, which killed off most of the North American chestnut trees. These situations teach us that we must diversify in order to save the tree population, says Blount.

Augusta's tree population is predominantly oak, but there are also quite a few maples. Toward diversification, the city has planted more of the exotic species such as Japanese Pagoda on 10th Street, ginkgos, crape myrtles, and the Chinese pistach. The Trees and Parks Department is careful to choose trees that are urban tolerant, but also considers color and bloom.

"But people pretty much take trees for granted," Blount says. "Most people don't realize that trees are hard working lifeforms that release oxygen so we can breathe better. They also clean the air by catching the pollutants carried by the wind. They're nature's scrub brushes," says Blount. "A city tree is a dirty tree."

"Whether people realize it or not, trees are a part of the city's infrastructure. If you were to picture Augusta, or any other city...without trees or go to a street that has trees, then to one without trees, your reaction will show you that (without trees) it wouldn't be a city where businesses would want to come and set up. It would be a city that would appear to have turned its back on the environment, on aesthetics, on nature." ■

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