

Utilizing Urban Wood to Construct Raised Gardens

The People's Garden Incorporates Urban Wood Products

The Challenge

Urban communities constantly face a dilemma: What do we do with the wood waste created by street and park maintenance activities? Most urban wood waste either ends up in a landfill or is processed into mulch. Many urban areas are interested in using their wood waste to create value-added products for city projects.

The Solution

Urban wood waste was recycled and put to good use in the Nation's Capitol. On Earth Day 2009, U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack unveiled the first phase of the People's Garden on the grounds of the USDA headquarters at the Jamie L. Whitten Building in Washington, DC. A landscape architect for the Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry unit of the U.S. Forest Service joined a colleague from the Natural Resources Conservation Service and a landscape architecture student intern to develop the site plan, which will eventually cover 6 acres. The site will include children's gardens, a memorial walk, an education plaza, stormwater tree pits, and a green roof.

While creating the Phase I Organic Vegetable Garden, the designers contacted the District of Columbia's Urban Forestry Administration about using recycled urban wood on the site. The Urban Forestry Administration provided logs from locust trees, which decay more slowly in soil than most trees, and red oaks. The logs were then taken to a facility and milled into beams for raised garden beds, stepping planks, and trellises for the People's Garden.

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments staff coordinated the milling. This group received a grant



Urban red oak and locust trees were used to construct raised beds in the People's Garden in Washington, DC.

from the Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry Wood Education and Resource Center to identify ways to utilize urban wood and keep it out of the landfill. The site's developers will provide onsite information that highlights the use of urban wood in the garden.

Resulting Benefits

- Using black locust and red oak logs to create value-added products from urban wood that would otherwise have been processed into mulch or dumped into a landfill
- Storing carbon in the wood
- Encouraging the public to reuse and recycle wood
- Strengthening collaborative partnerships with USDA and Washington, DC, agencies

Sharing Success

The project is providing national exposure about the opportunities to recycle urban wood. The Whitten Building is the only government office building with frontage on the National Mall, which is visited by 25 million people every year.

"Our hope is that with the People's Garden, we not only have USDA facilities expand garden opportunities but [that] people and communities take a look at churches or schools or even vacant lots...converting them into something that may be trash ridden today but could be a beautiful garden tomorrow."

—Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack



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