



Percent Green Space

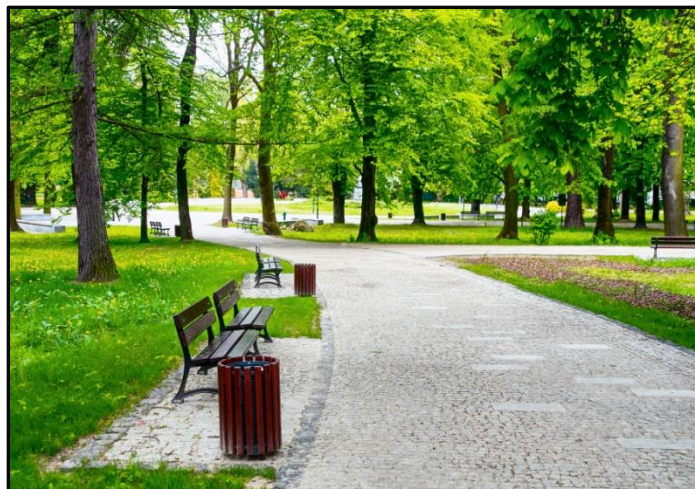
This EnviroAtlas community map illustrates the percent of total land within each census block group that is covered by vegetation, or [green space](#). Green space may include trees, lawns and gardens, crop land, and forested wetlands.

Why is green space important?

People often recreate in green space, which provides opportunities to socialize with others, participate in physical activity, and engage with nature. These vegetated areas provide cooling effects that help stabilize both micro- and macro-climates. Green spaces also act as sponges that absorb and slowly release water, helping to mitigate natural hazards such as floods.

People prefer to spend time outdoors in green rather than barren areas because they are more aesthetically pleasing and are often more hospitable on hot days. Those who live close to green spaces may use them more and increase their time spent in physical activity. This outcome positively affects health by increasing physical fitness, reducing depression and anxiety, and improving cognitive function, among other benefits. People who frequent common green spaces close to their homes can have increased social ties and are more likely to participate in neighborly activities. Green spaces also provide opportunities to engage with nature through window views. Simply viewing nature through a window may lower stress levels, increase cognitive performance, and aid in healing.

Green spaces are generally cooler and more shaded than other areas in the same vicinity and thus can offer a reprieve from extreme summer temperatures. This cooling effect is created by shading and evapotranspiration and often extends beyond the green space itself, increasing with [parcel](#) size and the amount of woody vegetation. During heat events, some green spaces can significantly reduce local [ambient](#) air temperatures, helping to reduce stress, hospital admissions, and mortality associated with extreme heat.



In addition, green space helps to regulate the flow of water through a [watershed](#) by intercepting, absorbing, and slowly releasing water. This “sponge” effect can reduce adverse impacts of stormwater runoff such as stream bank erosion, sediment transport, and the frequency and severity of floods and drought. The lack of significant green space in and around communities can result in more frequent and/or severe flooding, potentially resulting in adverse health effects associated with these events.

EnviroAtlas provides a measure of percent green space to facilitate comparisons across community block groups of widely varying size. More information on the natural benefits provided by specific green spaces can be found in the Riparian, Tree, Wetland, and Park fact sheets.

How can I use this information?

The map, Percent Green Space, can be used by citizens, planners, and public health professionals to identify neighborhoods that have a high level of green space overall and those underserved neighborhoods that may benefit from enhancement.

When overlaid with these maps, socioeconomic layers within EnviroAtlas can highlight the distribution of green space for disproportionately vulnerable groups. The documented benefits of physical and visual access to green space are particularly important to children and the elderly for health protection and promotion. Neighborhood green space may be particularly beneficial to populations with limited outdoor access beyond their residential settings.



How were the data for this map created?

This map is based on the [land cover](#) data derived for each EnviroAtlas community. The land cover data was created from one-meter aerial photography through remote-sensing methods. Land cover that is considered green space includes all land that is vegetated; it excludes barren land, water, and impervious surfaces. This calculation was summarized by 2010 U.S. Census block group boundaries.

What are the limitations of these data?

All of the EnviroAtlas community maps that are based on land cover use remotely-sensed data. Remotely-sensed data in EnviroAtlas have been derived from imagery and have not been verified. These data are estimates and are inherently imperfect. This map is not meant to be used for inferring numbers or types of residents that are at risk for developing specific health conditions. It is not currently known what percent of green space is ideal or what represents the minimum percent required to provide various ecosystem services. For more information on the limitations of the underlying land cover data, please see the metadata associated with the land cover map for each relevant community.

Selected Publications

- Armson, D., P. Stringer, and R. Ennos. 2012. [The effect of tree shade and grass on surface and globe temperatures in an urban area](#). *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* 11(3): 245–255.
- Bowler, D.E., L. Buyung-Ali, T.M. Knight, and A.S. Pullin. 2010. [Urban greening to cool towns and cities: A systematic review of the empirical evidence](#). *Landscape and Urban Planning* 97(2010): 147–155.
- Giles-Corti, B., M.H. Broomhall, M. Knuiman, C. Collins, K. Douglas, K. Ng, A. Lange, and R.J. Donovan. 2005. [Increasing walking: How important is distance to, attractiveness, and size of public open space?](#) *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 28(2, Supplement 2): 169–176.
- Kuo F., W.C. Sullivan, R.L. Coley, and L. Brunson. 1998. [Fertile ground for community: Inner-city neighborhood common spaces](#). *American Journal of Community Psychology* 26(6): 823–851.
- Kweon, B.S., W.C. Sullivan, and A.R. Wiley. 1998. [Green common spaces and the social integration of inner-city older adults](#). *Environment and Behavior* 30(6): 832–858.
- McPherson, G, J.R. Simpson, P.J. Peper, S.E. Maco, and Q. Xiao. 2005. [Municipal forest benefits and costs in five US cities](#). *Journal of Forestry* 103: 411–416.
- Solecki, W.D., C. Rosenzweig, L. Parshall, G. Pope, M. Clark, J. Cox, M. Weinke. 2005. [Mitigation of the heat island effect in urban New Jersey](#). *Environmental Hazards* 6(1): 39–49.
- Ulrich, R.S. 1984. [View through a window may influence recovery from surgery](#). *Science* 224(4647): 420–421.
- Wells, N.M. 2000. [At home with nature: Effects of “greenness” on children’s cognitive functioning](#). *Environment and Behavior* 32(6): 775–795.

How can I access these data?

EnviroAtlas data can be viewed in the interactive map, accessed through web services, or downloaded. The EnviroAtlas land cover maps created for each community are available under the Supplemental Maps tab in the interactive map table of contents.

Where can I get more information?

There are numerous resources on green space and its potential health benefits; a selection of these resources is listed below. In-depth information on the relationships between urban ecosystems, such as green space and human health and well-being, can be found in EPA’s [Eco-Health Relationship Browser](#). For additional information on the data creation process, access the metadata for the data layer from the drop down menu on the interactive map table of contents and click again on metadata at the bottom of the metadata summary page for more details. To ask specific questions about these data, please contact the [EnviroAtlas Team](#).

Acknowledgments

The data for Percent Green Space were generated by Alexandra Sears, EPA Student Services Contractor. The fact sheet was created by Jessica Daniel, EPA Student Services Contractor, and Laura Jackson, EPA.