

#BackyardBiodiversity: Enhancing Urban Canopy Cover

Climate Communications Case Story



Social Influence



Social Norms and Prompts



Visual Storytelling

PROJECT AT-A-GLANCE

Project Title: #BackyardBiodiversity

Location: Southern Ontario

Project Partners: LEAF (Local Enhancement & Appreciation of Forests), Toronto Wildlife Centre, Ontario Power Generation (OPG)

Date: Launched in May, 2018

Climate Issue: Urban heat islands, biodiversity loss, air quality

Action Area: Increasing urban canopy cover, green space, and biodiversity

Behavioural Theme(s): Social Influence, Social Norms and Prompts, Visual Storytelling

Audience: Urban residents, homeowners, gardeners, community groups

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With a little bit of education and a lot of heart, we can achieve peaceful co-existence with wildlife throughout the urban forest, starting with our own backyards!

— LEAF's #BackyardBiodiversity Campaign¹

IMPACT STORY

Southern Ontario faces significant environmental challenges, including urban heat islands, poor air quality, and biodiversity loss. LEAF's #BackyardBiodiversity initiative aims to address these issues by increasing tree canopy cover in urban areas. The program encourages residents to plant native trees and shrubs in their backyards, enhancing local biodiversity and creating greener, cooler urban environments. By partnering with the Toronto Wildlife Centre and Ontario Power Generation, the campaign leverages a robust network to reach and engage homeowners. Community members and social media followers are also encouraged to participate in the campaign by sharing photos on social media of biodiversity in their own backyards. This campaign connects with LEAF's tree planting and education activities.



PROJECT OBJECTIVES INCLUDE...

- Promoting biodiversity in urban settings;
- Increasing urban tree canopy cover; and
- Engaging community members in climate action through tree planting.

COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

- **Social Media Campaigns:** Social media campaigns use platforms like Instagram and X (Twitter) to share images and stories and engage a broader audience with the hashtag #BackyardBiodiversity.
- **Downloadable Resources:** Educational resources provide information on the benefits of native trees and shrubs. For example, a collection of fact sheets including seasonal information for promoting biodiversity is available for download on LEAF's website.
- **Blog:** Additional educational content is shared through blog posts. For example, "Our Top Species Picks for #BackyardBiodiversity" highlights the ecological benefits of native plants like American hazelnut, common ninebark, and bur oak.
- **Partnerships with Local Organizations:** Partnerships and collaborations are used to fund the initiative and broaden the campaign's reach and impact.
- **Workshops and Events:** LEAF hosts planting events, workshops, and webinars to teach residents about tree care and urban biodiversity.
- **Tree Planting Services:** LEAF provides subsidized planting services, offering homeowners consultations with certified arborists to select appropriate native species for their yards.

BEHAVIOURAL STRATEGIES & TAKEAWAYS

- **Social Influence:** Collaborating with community-led organizations and trusted companies helps to promote the initiative and stories of impact, motivating more individuals to join.
- **Social Norms and Prompts:** Highlighting community participation and the collective impact of individual actions fosters a sense of belonging and shared responsibility.
- **Visual Storytelling:** Using before-and-after photos, infographics, and videos helps highlight the transformation of urban spaces and the benefits of increased canopy cover.

SOURCES

Lewis, J. (2024, June 10). Why Southern Ontario needs more trees: The case for increasing canopy cover. Local Enhancement & Appreciation of Forests (LEAF). <https://www.yourleaf.org/blog/justin-lewis/jun-10-2024/why-southern-ontario-needs-more-trees-case-increasing-canopy-cover>

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Marcus, R. (2018, June 7). Toronto Wildlife Centre and LEAF join together on #BackyardBiodiversity campaign. Local Enhancement & Appreciation of Forests (LEAF). <https://www.yourleaf.org/blog/rachel-marcus/jun-07-2018/toronto-wildlife-centre-and-leaf-join-together-backyardbiodiversity-campaign>

CONCLUSION

Social Influence: Collaborating with community-led organizations and trusted companies helps to promote the initiative and stories of impact, motivating more individuals to join. Social Norms and Prompts: Highlighting community participation and the collective impact of individual actions fosters a sense of belonging and shared responsibility. Visual Storytelling: Using before-and-after photos, infographics, and videos helps highlight the transformation of urban spaces and the benefits of increased canopy cover.

MORE CASE STORIES AND RESOURCES ONLINE

This case story was developed by ICLEI Canada through the Ontario Resource Centre for Climate Adaptation (ORCCA) as part of a Climate Communications Toolkit. Find more case stories and additional climate communications resources online at icleicanada.org/project/climate-communications-toolkit

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CLIMATE COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT

