

Can You Find a Shaded Parking Spot?



If you are like me, on these hot days, you will look a little harder to find that one shaded spot at the local store's parking lot. I can't think of any parking lots that always have a tree-shaded place for your car.

The term urban heat island is becoming more popular lately. It is used to describe a city area that is at a warmer temperature than the surrounding rural areas. When people modify an urban surface it will result in a diverse microclimate, and without proper large tree cover, it will contribute to the urban heat island effect. Parking lots occupy about 10% of the land in many of our communities. With large shade trees occupying these lots, air temperatures can be brought down by at least 4-8 degrees. The trees also relieve the open, barrenness of parking areas, and soften the look of large buildings, making communities look more friendly and inviting.

Communities statewide must be more proactive and develop ordinances like many of the larger communities throughout the U.S. have done. Parking lot shading ordinances can be found in many large metropolitan areas. They require businesses to have 50% shading on their lots within 15 years of issuing a development permit. By shading our parking lots, we can reduce the heat absorbed by the asphalt. This will cool our cars and lower the rate of evaporation from gas tanks, and hoses. Trees can actually reduce surface temperatures by as much as 36 degrees F.

The fact is many of our large parking lots are unused. It is estimated that around 25% of all empty spaces are excess parking spaces that could be converted to tree planters or other non-impervious surfaces. By reducing the amount of impervious surfaces in our parking lots, we can reduce polluted runoff such as oil and grease, and the size and costs of stormwater facilities needed.

Assistance, along with a listing of tree species selection, is available through the SD Department of Agriculture, Division of Resource Conservation and Forestry or the Center for Urban Forest Research, Davis, CA.

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