



An America 250 SAR Program



LIBERTY TREE

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

Handbook and Activity Guide



*A program of the America 250th Anniversary Committee
Cherokee Chapter Georgia Society, NSSAR*

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Overview

The Liberty Tree Environmental Education Program is a free, hands-on community service project developed by members of the Cherokee Chapter Georgia Society, Sons of the American Revolution. The program, informally known as **LEEP**, was developed to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. **LEEP** was officially recognized by the 250th Anniversary Committee, National Society Sons of the American Revolution in 2019. We were fortunate to have had NSSAR President General Larry Guzy present when the membership of the Cherokee Chapter voted to adopt the Liberty Tree Environmental Education Program.

SAR Chapter members in historic dress discuss the many environmental benefits, economic value and cultural significance of America's trees and forests. Hands-on presentations demonstrate a wide variety of old and new wooden tools and products. The origin and role of Liberty Trees during the American Revolutionary War period are specifically highlighted.

Whenever possible, presentations are followed by a Liberty Tree planting ceremony. Only locally native tree species are planted. A permanent commemorative plaque identifying the tree and recognizing the 250th Anniversary celebration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence is included.

LEEP is easily adapted to a wide range of audiences and settings. Initially, the program was most often presented as an enrichment activity for 4th and 5th grade elementary school classes. During the COVID era, the program has been very successfully presented entirely outdoors, especially in municipal and county parks. Additional opportunities for sharing *LEEP* include botanical gardens, libraries and other public spaces.

A Cherokee Chapter goal of planting 76 Liberty Trees by America's 250th Anniversary celebration in 2026 has been set.

Honoring our Past...Growing our Future. You can Help!

Learning Objectives aka Big Ideas

Whether your *LEEP* presentation will be given to elementary school students, adult garden club members, local SAR/DAR members or the general public, the core content is built on the same three (3) primary learning objectives:

1)Trees were important then...The establishment, survival and growth of the early American Colonies was almost entirely dependent upon forest resources and wood products. Liberty Trees later became symbols of freedom and independence for the Colonists.

2)Trees are important now...Today, trees and forests remain critically important for wood-based products and chemicals, climate moderation, environmental health and recreation.

3)Trees will be even more important in the future...In a more developed and crowded world, mature, native forests will provide increasingly vital environmental and social benefits.



“We are at a critical point of losing so many species from local ecosystems that their ability to produce the oxygen, clean water, flood control, pollination, pest control and carbon storage...the ecosystem services that sustain us will become seriously compromised.” Doug Tallamy

Planning for the Event

Most Local SAR Chapters should be able to easily plan and deliver LEEP presentations and tree plantings by engaging current members. Compatriots with experience presenting *Traveling Trunk* programs, gardeners and those involved with other America 250 activities may be especially qualified and interested. ***Joining forces with other nearby chapters and NSDAR Chapters brings more talent and resources to the table and can increase the potential for a successful event.***

Many schools, local parks and other public places encourage well-planned educational activities and often welcome the opportunity to add a Liberty Tree to their grounds. Garden clubs and historical societies are often very interested in the hands-on presentation, but may not have the outdoor space needed for a Liberty Tree planting.

While the logistics of every presentation will vary, the following should always be considered:

- 1. Who is your audience? Age/grade level, special accommodations?***
- 2. How many attendees including teachers, sponsors and guests?***
- 3. Will there be more than one presentation? Inside or outside?***
- 4. Will there be a Liberty Tree planting? If yes, together with all team members determine a specific planting location for a locally native tree species. Consider above and below ground utilities, exposure to sun, shade, prevailing wind and access to water. Engage the assistance of a local arborist, nurseryman or other knowledgeable individual regarding native tree selection and purchase. A #7 or #10 gallon container grown tree is large enough to make an immediate impact and have a good chance of surviving.***

Note: While container grown trees can be planted throughout the year, it is better to plant in the fall through early spring to promote root growth prior to the summer months.

Presentation

Trees were important then... Trees have played a vital role in America's economy and culture from the time of our earliest settlements. Vast forests provided most of the resources needed by the colonists. In addition to food and clothing from woodland plants and animals, forests provided timber for cabins and homes. Barrels, buckets, bowls, tools, tool handles and many more necessary everyday items were crafted from wood.

(If available, display and discuss historic wooden items.)



Large trees in towns all across the Colonies were popular meeting places. In 1765, a group of patriots who were very strongly opposed to the **Stamp Act** planned protests at an old elm tree in Boston. Soon, a copper plate appeared on the tree naming it the “Tree of Liberty.”

Colonial America was covered with tall, strong pine trees that were just right for building sailing ships and ship masts. England had already cut most of its forests and was soon dependent on the American colonies for large trees. In order to claim the best trees for England, a symbol was cut on the tallest trees with an axe to show that it belonged to the King. This was called the **King's Mark**.

On April 14, 1772 an early act of resistance to British rule in the Colonies happened when a Royal sheriff visited a sawmill in New Hampshire. The owners refused to pay fines on logs with the Kings Mark. A group of local men started a strong protest now called **The Pine Tree Riot**, which some say was the real start of the Revolutionary War.

Trees are important now... In addition to wood and food products, trees give us hundreds of other by-products including paint, varnish, asphalt, adhesives, lacquer, printing inks, carbon paper, fungicides, latex, rubber, soaps, disinfectants, polishes and many more everyday items.

(Display and discuss contemporary wooden items and products.)



Ask: Is there anything else in this room that came from a tree? How about paper, pencils, books, boxes, desks, tables, lunch bags, apples, bananas and more! ***What may be the most important thing that we all get from trees and plants? Clean air to breathe!***

Ask: How do trees help us breathe? Trees need three basic things to live: water, sunlight, and carbon dioxide. Through the process of photosynthesis, carbon dioxide from the air is absorbed by plant leaves and oxygen is released. Water and minerals from the soil are taken up by the roots. Chlorophyll in the leaves captures sunlight and glucose is made. ***Trees and plants are our perfect partners!***

Ask: What else do trees give us? Trees can help reduce global warming by absorbing carbon dioxide. Trees also help prevent soil and wind erosion and keep the earth a healthy and beautiful place to live. ***Trees will be even more important in the future!***

Liberty Tree Planting

As you prepare the site for planting, keep the tree moist and shaded. Plan to pre-dig the planting hole. After the LEEP presentation participants can gather around the tree for a short planting ceremony.

Dig a hole 2-3 times as wide and a few inches deeper than the root ball. The hole should be slightly tapered, wider at the top and somewhat bowl shaped. Do not dig the hole too deep.

Carefully score the bottom and sides of the root ball with a utility knife or other sharp knife. Do not remove more soil than needed to expose the outer roots.

Mound some loose soil in the bottom of the hole and place the root ball on top of the mound. Fill the hole with loosened soil, firmly tamping it down with your foot. The top of the ball should be 1-2 inches above the surrounding grade.

Build a circular berm around the outer edge of the planting area approximately 4' across. Slowly water, thoroughly wetting all of the soil. Mulch heavily with aged wood chips or other composted organic mulch.

A permanent marker can be installed within the mulched area commemorating the tree and the event. Correct tree genus and species, planting date and the 250th Anniversary logo should all be included.

Drive 3, wooden 2" x 2" x 5' stakes evenly around the mulch ring for protection from lawnmowers. The stakes can also be used with arbor tape as needed to anchor the tree. ***Do not let the tree dry out during the first year after planting!***

Materials needed: Well grown, locally native tree (#7 or #10 gallon container) garden spade or shovel, organic mulch, water hose or watering can, 3 wooden 2" x 2" x 5' stakes and commemorative marker.

Lead a discussion about what the tree will need to grow healthy and strong. Point out that a newly planted tree is most vulnerable during the first few years of its life. Regular watering, scouting for insects and pests, and annual light fertilizing will go far to get a young tree off to a good start!



Resources



Project Learning Tree® is an award-winning environmental education program designed for teachers and other educators, parents, and community leaders. PLT is a program of the [Sustainable Forestry Initiative](#)



The Georgia Native Plant Society (GNPS) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the stewardship and conservation of Georgia's native plants and their habitats. <https://gnps.org/>



The Georgia Forestry Commission has assembled a collection of resources for educators. Check out various education programs, research and fact sheets, training and workshops, Georgia species and habitats, plus tree advocacy groups. <https://gatrees.org/contact/>