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January 2026 Newsletter

Our mission is to inspire and increase canopy, community and climate action.

More info at <https://katestrees.org/>.

Keys to Successful tree establishment

In 2025, the Kate Sessions Commitment (KSC or Kate's Trees) team asked: what makes tree establishment successful? To answer this question, a [literature review](#) was completed, and findings applied to San Diego's local context.

Key #1: Invested Maintenance.

Number of trees planted is often the primary metric used in Urban Forestry expansion grants, resulting in more money being spent on planting trees than maintaining them. By ensuring during the planning phase that adequate watering, maintenance, and monitoring of trees are prioritized in grant applications, tree campaigns bolster their chances of success by keeping trees alive and healthy.



Key #2: Monitoring and Accountability.

Too often, trees don't survive long enough to provide their purported benefits in urban environments. Regular monitoring allows early insights into tree health in the local environment. Community-based tree condition surveys not only introduce the urban forest to participants but provide accountability to tree planting organizations, ensuring that trees receive proper and timely care.

Three tree condition surveys conducted by KSC offer insights into factors affecting tree survival and health across San Diego, for trees planted 3 to 9 years ago in [Logan Heights](#), [Otay Mesa-Nestor](#) and [Bay Terraces](#). Tree condition and growth varied by species, street traffic volume, adjacent land use, parkway width and girdling. Trees on residential streets had highest survival, and grew faster when residents periodically watered the street trees adjacent to their house. Calculation was also made of the benefits lost when trees are stressed or dead, [view 2-page report](#).

Key #3: Community Involvement and Stewardship.

Involving community members early and often is a tenant of equitable public service. By encouraging resident feedback in all planning, planting and post-planting phases, trust and community are fostered. Stewardship activities fill the maintenance and monitoring gaps that tree-planting plans are often unable to fill through funding. Read about more [success factors](#) across the country, and about programs in the [Los Angeles](#) area.

Successful community collaborations



Large-scale tree planting initiatives are not accomplished alone; meaningful collaboration and community engagement are essential to long-term success. This past fall, Kate Sessions Commitment (KSC) strengthened partnerships across San Diego and was proud to participate in multiple community-led tree and stewardship efforts, learn from these organizations and look forward to expanding these efforts.

Kate's team joined Urban Collaborative Projects at their Euclid Stewardship event, supporting restoration efforts along Chollas Creek through the planting of native trees and plants. Supported by a two-year California Transformative Climate Communities planning grant, this work serves the neighborhoods of Chollas View, Emerald Hills, and Lincoln Park and includes an Urban Greening Plan to identify priority areas for tree planting, green space expansion, and community-led maintenance. The goal is to advance cleaner air, neighborhood cooling, and more walkable, resilient communities. [More info.](#)

In Oak Park, KSC helped Groundwork San Diego volunteers plant trees at private residences, with homeowners committing to long-term care. Residents received stipends to offset watering and maintenance costs, reinforcing shared stewardship. Groundwork was recently recognized with the “Outstanding Urban Forestry Education Program” award by the San Diego Regional Urban Forests Council! Learn more about Groundwork’s [urban forestry programs.](#)

KSC also helped [Healthy Day Partners](#) host a fruit tree giveaway at the Linda Vista Community Garden in partnership with Bayside Community Center. In October, 45 fruit trees were distributed to local residents. Participants received hands-on planting demonstrations and take-home care guides to support successful tree establishment. This program will serve as a pilot for future fruit tree giveaways in other communities.





In 2025, Kate's Trees hosted a pilot mulching and stewardship volunteer event! The Pre-Holiday Clean-Up and Beautification event was held at the Skyline Hills Library in December. Volunteers mulched and added compost to 35 trees along Paradise Valley Road, and picked up trash. This event was hosted with the [San Diego Urban Sustainability Coalition](#), who invited numerous local businesses and CBOs to sponsor a toy drive and an open mic in this all-day activation event. Be on the lookout for future KSC volunteer stewardship opportunities!

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