



TreeCATs 2025

Urban Forest Initiative (UFI)

Student Sustainability Council Grant Final Report

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2. Project Summary

The Urban Forest Initiative (UFI) is a collaborative group of University of Kentucky and Kentucky community stakeholders whose purpose is to promote and protect tree canopies on the UK campus, in Lexington, and throughout Kentucky. We strive to raise awareness of the ecological, social, and economic benefits provided by urban trees.

On December 9, 2024, the SSC awarded UFI \$6,317 to fund TreeCATs (Collegiate and Citizen Arboriculture Training). One of UFI's signature programs, TreeCATs is a five-week, online, interactive workshop intended to hone interest in and knowledge about trees. The 15-hour program offers participants — who are students and residents from across the state — practical, actionable lessons in the field of urban and community forestry and exposes them to the breadth and reach of the many subdisciplines of the field. Topics range from tree identification to the social impacts and health benefits of trees to the role of trees in climate resiliency.



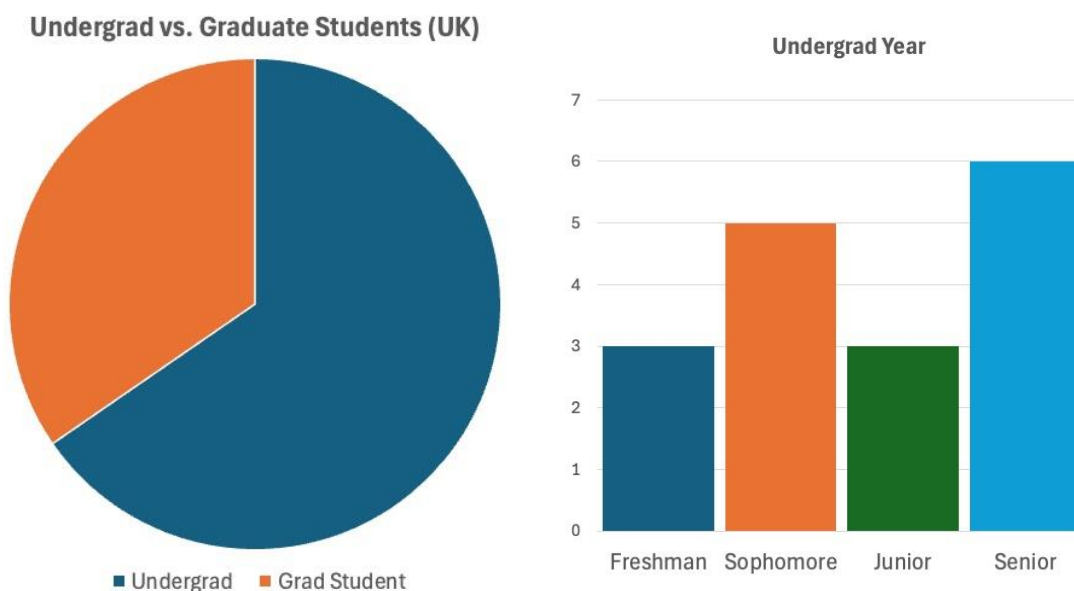
3. Project Impacts and Outcomes

The 2025 TreeCATs workshop was UFI's eighth time hosting this annual series. The TreeCATs promotional poster for this year's TreeCATs series is shown in Appendix 1. The highlights from this year's TreeCATs course are listed below.

Noteworthy Impacts

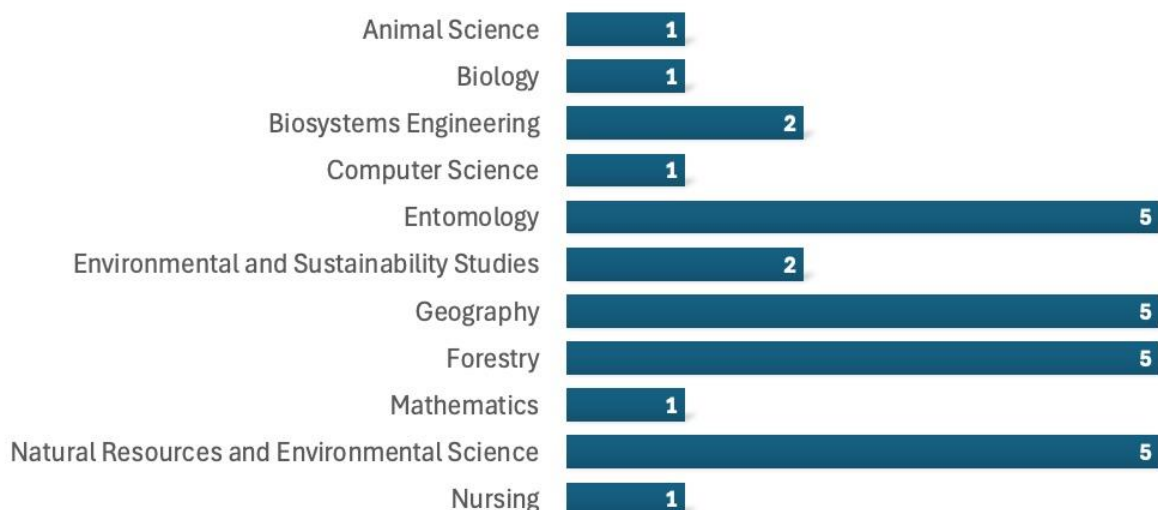
This year, 69 people began the TreeCATs program and 62 participants received certificates of completion, which required perfect attendance and completion of all assignments. This 90% completion rate represents a 230% increase over the 27 participants who completed the program in 2024! University of Kentucky students accounted for 26 of the total graduates (with another participant being an incoming UK freshman in Fall 2025), representing a 173% increase over 2024. Note that SSC's investment in TreeCATs provided stipends for 25 UK student participants, and UFI's other granting sources were able to provide a stipend for the remaining UK student and for the community members that completed the program. Each individual completing the program received a \$220 stipend. Pursuant to one of SSC's three core pillars, economic equity, the \$220 stipend equates to \$14.67 per hour. (See Appendix 7 for a complete list of students.)

Below are charts with statistics on TreeCATs UK student participants





Majors



Because some students listed more than one major or area of study, the numbers in this chart add up to slightly more than the 26 UK student participants in this year's TreeCATs cohort.

The numbers above tell a story not only of increased TreeCATs attendance by UK and other college students and staff, but also of significant increase in interest in urban and community forestry from the broader community. Of the 62 TreeCATs graduates, 36 were not UK students, but instead were members of communities across Kentucky, representing a 300% increase over 2024! Closer to home, a member of the staff of UK Libraries participated. Meanwhile, three students from other colleges and universities (one student each from Eastern Kentucky University, Maysville Community and Technical College, and Western Kentucky Community and Technical College). Communities from across Kentucky were also represented, including 10 members from the Cowan Community Center in Letcher County, and eight members of the Master Gardeners Associations of Marshall and Lyon Counties. The Cowan Community Center and Marshall/Lyon County Master Gardeners met in their respective locales on Friday afternoons to host a TreeCATs “watch party,” which allowed UFI to maximize participation. The involvement of these and other community members allowed UK students to interact with and learn from diverse communities of different ages and geographies, providing notable enrichment to this year’s program.

An additional impact worth highlighting is that the last week of TreeCATs aligned with another Urban Forest Initiative flagship project, Canopy Con 25, a dynamic one-day conference open to the public. This conference promotes the importance of community and urban forestry via a variety of speakers and field demonstrations. The conference was advertised to the TreeCATs cohort, and UFI was able to offer UK students a discounted registration of \$10.00 (versus the standard \$40.00 registration fee). Four UK student members of this year’s TreeCATs cohort



attended. These students' attendance at Canopy Con multiplies the investment of SSC funding granted to UFI for TreeCATs.

Project Outcomes

This year's TreeCATs programming consisted of five weekly three-hour learning sessions, held from 2:00–5:00 p.m. via Zoom for five consecutive Fridays from March 28 through April 24 (see Appendix 2 for an image of one Zoom session). Sessions 1–4 featured 16 speakers (the TreeCATs 2025 schedule can be found in Appendix 3; for a selection of images from speakers' slides, see Appendix 4). Session 5 was reserved for participants to share their final projects with the group (a small selection of final projects is displayed in Appendix 5).

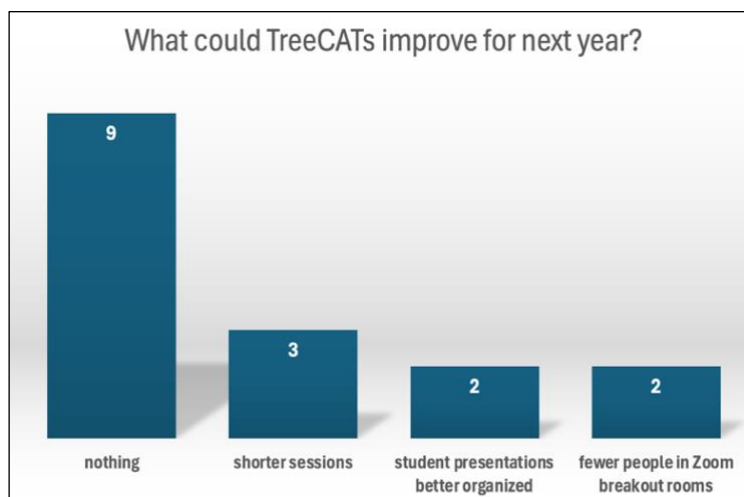
UFI made improvements to this year's curriculum based directly on feedback received from the 2024 cohort. First, UFI prioritized more opportunities for interaction with the facilitator and guest speakers. Also included were several small-group discussion sessions during which participants discussed and brainstormed various topics in Zoom "breakout rooms." Several in-the-field talks and demonstrations were also featured; two were prerecorded, while another consisted of a live presentation from the field.

Survey Results

UFI requested feedback from this year's TreeCATs workshop participants with a Qualtrics survey (see Appendix 6 for survey questions) and received 22 responses. When asked if their involvement in TreeCATs increased their *interest* in urban and community forestry, all but one respondent replied affirmatively. A majority of respondents, 13 of 22, said that TreeCATs made them realize that urban and community forestry could be a part of their career path.

When asked to name their favorite topics of TreeCATs 2025, the favorite was tree identification basics, followed by the role of trees in city planning, and the psychological and health benefits of trees. Several topics that have been standard TreeCATs content were not mentioned in this year's survey responses, including common tree pests and urban trees and water, suggesting that UFI consider the effectiveness of the topics covered on an annual basis.

When asked in the survey what we should consider improving, the most common response was "nothing" — appearing in nine responses, three times more than any other response. This is not to say that participants had no





opinions about what could be improved. Three people said they would prefer that seminar sessions be shorter than three hours, while two people each said the sharing of final presentations could have been more organized, and that smaller breakout rooms would have been preferable. We are considering this input as we plan TreeCATs 2026.

4. Financial Summary

Category	Item Name	Awarded by SSC	Requested outside SSC	Funding Source	Actual Cost	SSC Expenditures
Personnel: UFI Coordinator	UFI Coordinator Ignazio Graziosi to develop and deliver workshop	\$0.00	\$2,400.00	USDA-LSR funding to UFI; in hand	\$2,400.00	\$0.00
Personnel: UFI Outreach Coordinator	UFI Staff to develop and deliver workshop, 100 hours of UFI employee Carly Cecil, plus fringe	\$817.00	\$818.00	USDA-LSR funding to UFI; in hand	\$1,635.00	\$817.00
Workshop stipends	Stipends for UK student workshop participants: \$220 x25 students	\$5500.00	\$220.00	USDA-LSR funding to UFI; in hand	\$5,750.00 ^a	\$5,500.00
Total		\$6317.00	\$3,438.00		\$9,785.00	\$6,317.00

^a As noted on p. 2, 26 UK students were awarded certificates of completion and received the \$220 stipend. UFI requested and received funding from SSC for 25 UK student stipends. UFI paid for the additional student stipend from other sources, which also covered other TreeCATs 2025 expenses not covered by this SSC grant.



5. TreeCATs 2025 Summary

The eighth year of TreeCATs proved to be the largest and most successful to date. There were 62 participants who received certificates of completion, which included 26 UK students. The grant from SSC provided funding for 25 of those students. This year's cohort had unprecedented participation from residents in eastern and western Kentucky, as these two groups convened for TreeCATs "watch parties," thereby expanding urban and community forestry engagement to communities beyond the greater Lexington area. The larger numbers of participants from diverse backgrounds enriched this year's cohort in many ways.

Based on feedback from the Qualtrics survey, UFI will continue to enhance the TreeCATs program and will continue to provide connections between people while promoting urban and community forestry across the Commonwealth. The success of this year's program would not have been possible without funding from the SSC.




6. Appendices

Appendix 1: 2025 TreeCATs Promotion Flyer

The Urban Forest Initiative (UFI)

TreeCATs 2025


Collegiate and Citizen Arboriculture Training




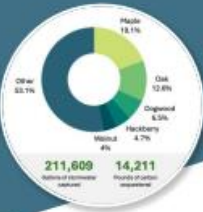
Gain knowledge of the trees and greenspaces around us from urban and community forestry experts through a 15 hour course on Zoom and hands-on assignments outdoors

5 Fridays, March 28th - April 25th, 2-5pm

- Trees and Urban Planning
- Tree Identification
- Trees and Social Justice
- Trees and Human Health
- Local Tree Canopy Initiatives
- Landscape Design and Trees
- Tree Health and Care
- Trees and Climate Resiliency






<https://ufi.ca.uky.edu/treecats>


211,609
Number of trees planted

14,211
Number of trees planted







Apply Today!

Applications close Sunday March 2nd 2025



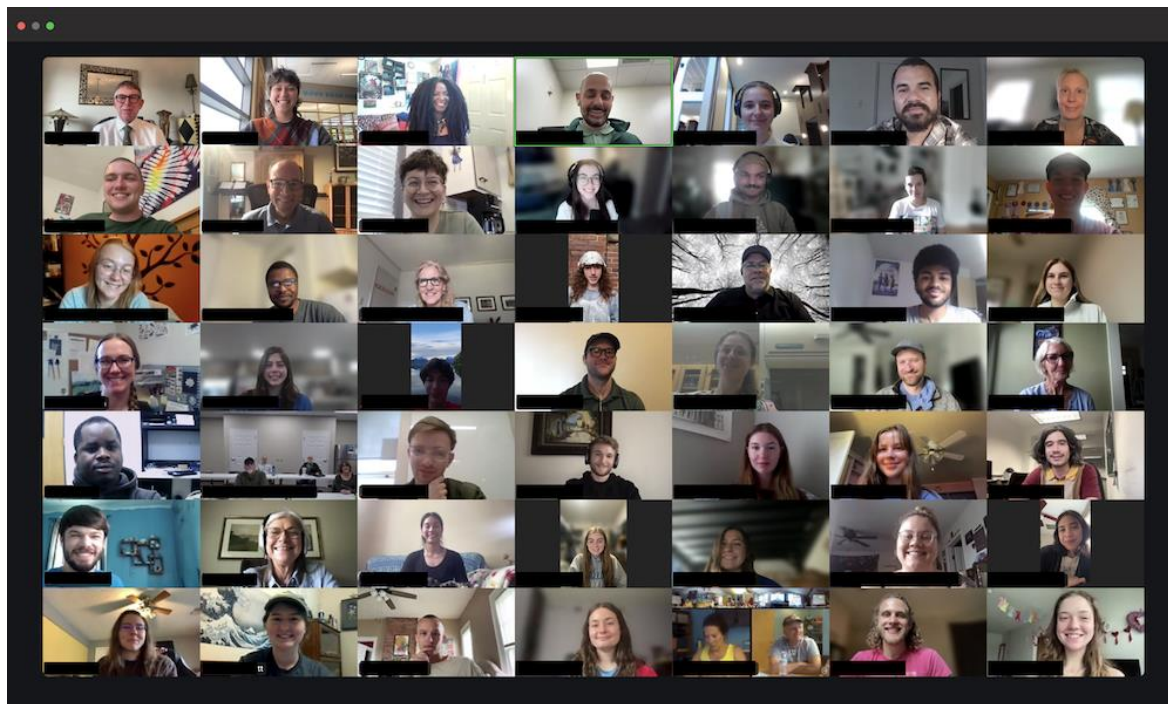
\$220 stipend and certificate of completion
Open to students and non-students

Martin-Gatton
College of Agriculture,
Food and Environment



Appendix 2: Screenshot of Zoom session



A screenshot of participants — as many as Zoom would let us see at once — on the final day of TreeCATs 2025



Appendix 3: 2025 TreeCATs Schedule

- **Day 1: Introduction to TreeCATs and UCF programs**
 - 2:00–2:10 • Welcome/Introductions to TreeCATs. Program Overview
 - 2:10–2:30 • "The TreeCATs program and TreeCATs veterans' experiences" Christina Hoddinott and Michael Barnes (Berea College), Graciela Martinez (UFI)
 - 2:30–2:50 • "Community forestry in Kentucky." Chris Wiedemann, Kentucky Division of Forestry
 - 2:50–3:15 • Presentation of participants (via photo of trees each submitted to Canvas)
 - 3:15–3:25 • Break
 - 3:25–3:45 • "Grassroots efforts at tree canopy engagement in Lexington." Michael Potapov (Trees Lexington)
 - 3:45–4:05 • "Tree canopy on the UK Campus." Nic Williamson (UK Facility Management)
 - 4:05–4:35 • Presentation of participants
 - 4:35–4:45 • "The Urban Forest Initiative and ways to get involved." Ignazio Graziosi (UFI)
 - 4:45–5:00 • Wrap up of the day and instructions for assignments #1 and #2
- **Day 2: All About Trees**
 - 2:00–2:15 • Introduction to Day 2, review assignment #1
 - 2:15–2:25 • "The benefits of trees and how to assess them." Ignazio Graziosi (UFI)
 - 2:25–2:45 • "Tree identification basics." Billy Thomas (UK Forestry Extension)
 - 2:45–3:20 • Breakout group discussion
 - 3:20–3:30 • Break
 - 3:30–3:50 • "Common and emerging diseases of trees." Julie Beale (Director & Diagnostician, UK Plant Disease Diagnostic Lab)
 - 3:45–4:05 • "Common and emerging insect pests of trees." Jonathan Larson (UK Entomology)
 - 4:35–4:50 • Breakout group discussion
 - 4:55–5:00 • Wrap up, check progress on assignment #2, and instructions for the final project
- **Day 3: Planning and Designing Urban Forests**
 - 2:00–2:20 • Introduction to Day 3, review assignment #2
 - 2:20–2:40 • "The Role of Trees in Urban Planning." Lynn Roche Phillips (UK Geography)
 - 2:40–3:00 • "Trees and landscape design." Ned Crankshaw (UK College of Design)
 - 3:00–3:20 • Breakout group discussion
 - 3:20–3:30 • Break



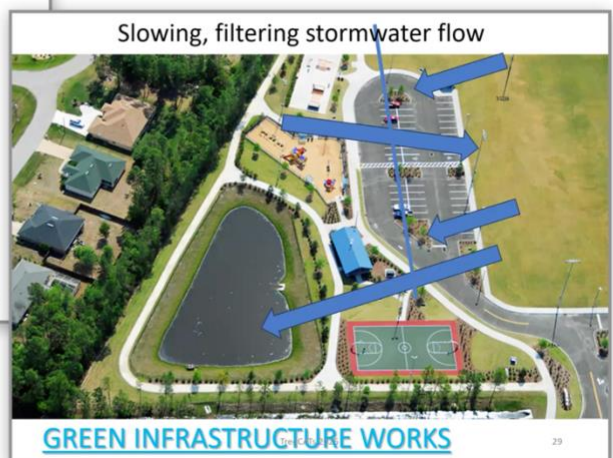
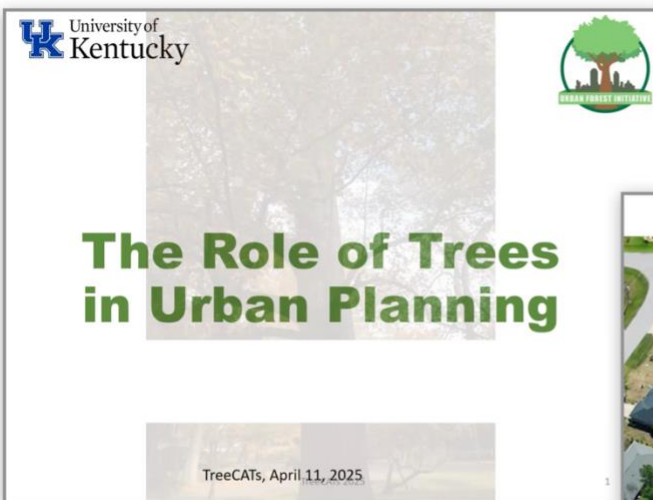
- 3:30-3:50 • "Trees in a changing climate: winners and losers." Jacob Muller (Assistant Professor of Silviculture Extension and Climate Adaptation, UK College of Agriculture, Food and Environment)
- 3:50-4:10 • "Challenges in tree care in urban environments." Dave Leonard (Arbor Advocate)
- 4:10-4:30 • Group discussion
- 4:30-4:45 • "Citizen Science Tree Tracking with Adventure Scientists." Allison Ormsby, PhD (Adventure Scientists)
- 4:45-5:00 • Wrap up and assignment #3
- **Day 4: Trees and People**
 - 2:00–2:15 • Introduction to Day 4, review assignment #3
 - 2:15-2:35 • "Trees as Medicine" with Connie Jennings, M.D. (Integrative Medicine, UK HealthCare)
 - 2:35-2:55 • "Parks and Recreation's Natural Areas: Public Urban Forests in Lexington" with Jennifer Hubbard (Superintendent of Natural Areas, LFUCG Parks & Rec)
 - 2:55-3:30 • Group Discussion
 - 3:30-3:40 • Break
 - 3:40-4:00 • "Urban water and trees, and food forests in Lexington" with Nachie Braga (Geomancer Permaculture)
 - 4:00-4:20 • "Trees in a small community. One tree at a time!" with Melanie Reason (Sprocket Paducah)
 - 4:20-4:40 • Group discussion
 - 4:50-5:00 • Wrap up, final project, certificate and stipend, survey
- **Day 5: Final Project Presentations**



Appendix 4: Speaker Presentations



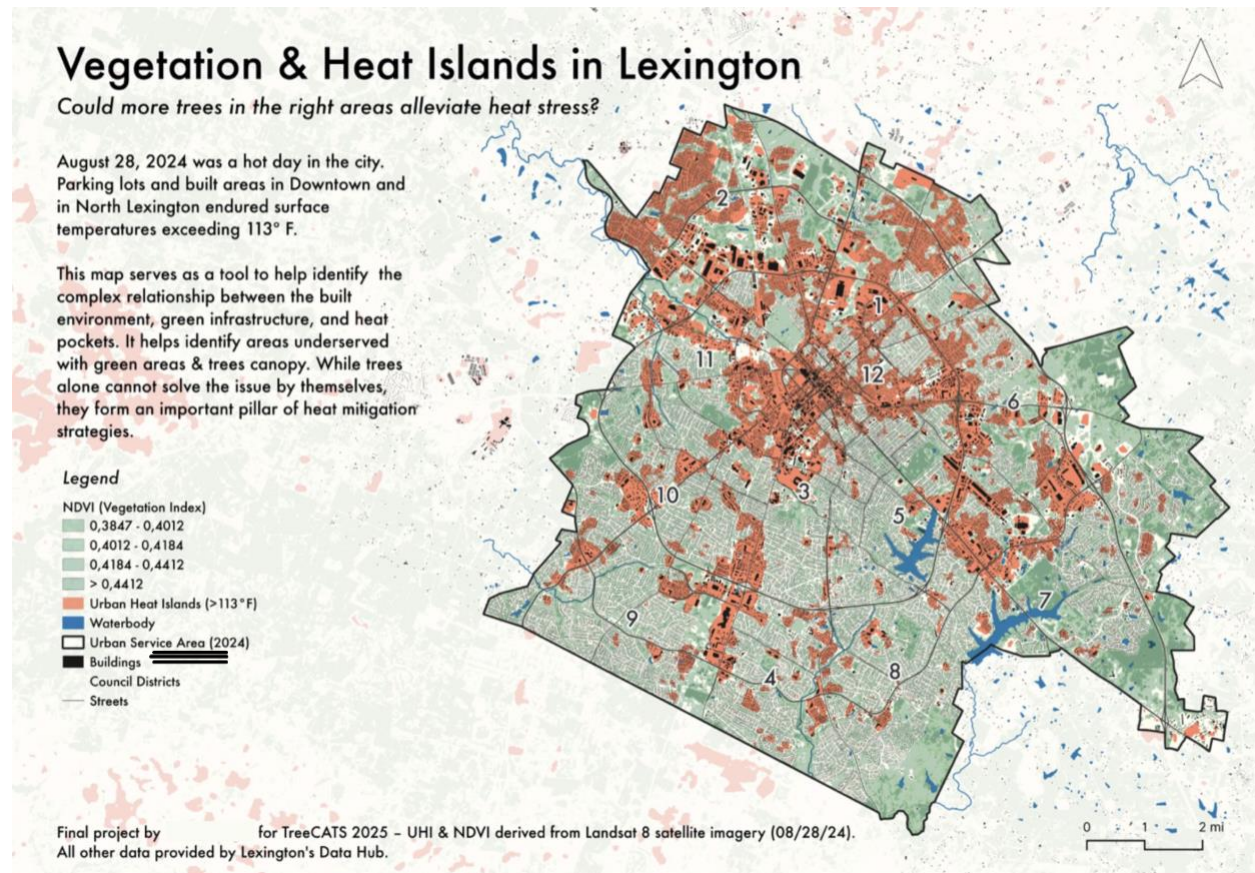
Screen shot from "Tree Identification Basics" presentation



Screenshots from Day 3 presentation on the role of trees in urban planning



Appendix 5: Final Project Samples



Participant Final Project, example 1: Vegetation & Heat Islands in Lexington mapping project, showing the correspondence between tree canopy and summer high temperatures.

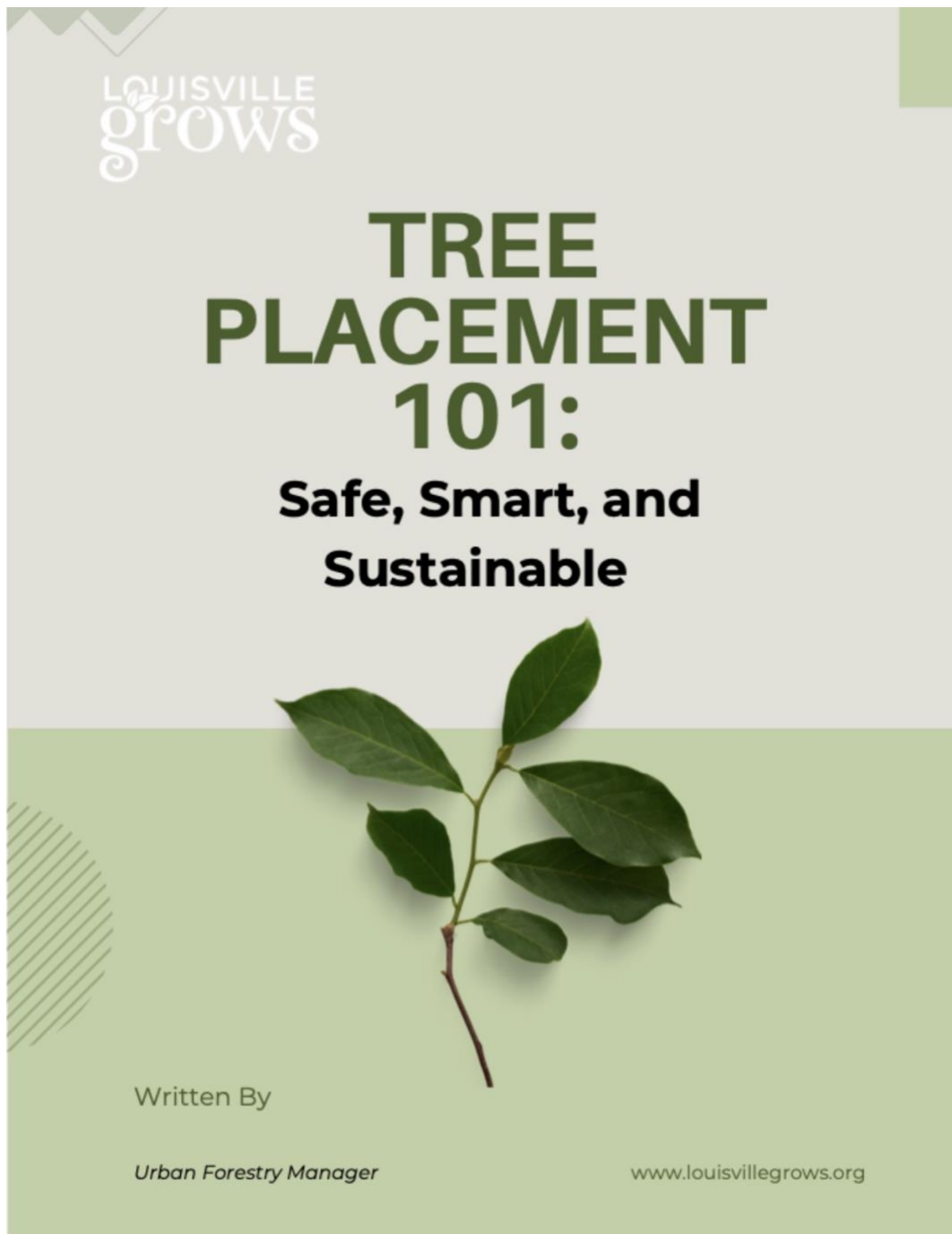


TREE BINGO

Help out our city's tree canopy by completing these events!

 clean up a creek	 protect topsoil	 learn the animals in your trees	 share a tree event online	 climb a tree
 invite a friend to a planting event	 register for TreeCATS 2026!	 go on a tree walk	 adopt a tree	 learn the eco benefits of your favorite tree
 plant 3 trees	 create tree art	 TREE SPACE!	 join a tree org	 reduce paper use
 learn to mulch	 connect with tree lovers	 build a tree fort	 schedule a "date" with a tree	 learn a tree's name
 attend an UFI event	 attend reforest the bluegrass	 check your trees for invasive pests	 start a tree photo collage	 plant a tree

Participant Final Project, example 2: Tree Bingo game that encourages tree planting and tree care and awareness of the benefits of trees



Participant Final Project, example 3: Education pamphlet developed for use by Louisville Grows.



Appendix 6: Feedback Survey Questions

1. TreeCATs broadened my perspective on what is involved in urban and community forestry.
 - a. Agree
 - b. Neutral
 - c. Disagree
2. TreeCATs increased my interest in urban and community forestry.
 - a. Agree
 - b. Neutral
 - c. Disagree
3. TreeCATs made me realize that urban and community forestry could be a part of my career path.
 - a. Agree
 - b. Neutral
 - c. Disagree
4. The stipend provided for completing TreeCATs was adequate for the amount of time I spent.
 - a. Agree
 - b. Neutral
 - c. Disagree
5. What was the most challenging thing about completing TreeCATs 2025, and why?
6. What is the best thing about the TreeCATs 2024 program?
7. What were your two favorite presentations/presenters in TreeCATs?
8. Would you have attended TreeCATs if it had been offered during the Fall semester (September)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No, please explain
9. Please write a comment or suggestion for improving the UFI TreeCATs program.



Appendix 7: UK Student Recipients of SSC-Funded Stipend

	Name	Year	Area of Study
1	Adeshina Adewinle	graduate student	Entomology & Biology
2	Megan Anaskevich	senior	Forestry
3	Maire Birdwell (Moya)	senior	Geography
4	Faith Boa	graduate student	Entomology
5	Cardell Franklin Bonslater, III	sophomore	Forestry
6	Eva Russo Collins	sophomore	Biosystems Engineering
7	Aleksandra Craine	graduate student	Geography
8	Daniel Dilger	graduate student	Geography
9	Bailey DiOrio	sophomore	Biosystems Engineering
10	Marianna Grabova	freshman	Natural Resources and Environmental Science
11	Nicholas Moore Gray	senior	Natural Resources and Environmental Science
12	Molly Hunt	freshman	Nursing
13	Kara Riley Hurst	junior	Natural Resources and Environmental Science
14	Morgan Knutsen	graduate student	Entomology
15	Ellie McCabe	graduate student	Entomology
16	Sophia McKay	junior	Geography & Environmental and Sustainability Studies
17	Evan Meyers	senior	Mathematics & Computer Science
18	Jordan Morrison	graduate student	Applied Environmental and Sustainability Studies
19	Isaac Oluwatimilehin	graduate student	Geography
20	Emily Perez	freshman	Forestry
21	Benjamin Rains	sophomore	Forestry
22	Alex Reichert	senior	Forestry
23	Mario Reyes	graduate student	Entomology
24	Sabrina Vaught	senior	Natural Resources and Environmental Science
25	Allie Zastrow	sophomore	Animal Science

Note: A 26th UK student was paid for by another UFI funding source.