

CITY OF TACOMA

Tree Coupon Program

2018-2019 Season Report



Contents

Overview3

2018 – 2019 Season at a Glance

2018 – 2019 Season Results

Annual Metrics for Seasons 2012-2013 through 2018-2019

Looking Ahead6

Coupon Text

Coupon Delivery

Eligibility Funding Criteria and Species Education

2018 – 2019 Tree Coupon Survey Fast Facts8

Species Bought

Planting Locations

Effectiveness

Communication

Opportunity

Neighborhoods

Testimonials9





Overview

The City of Tacoma established its annual Tree Coupon Program for Tacoma residents in 2012, from fall 2012 through winter 2013, or the “2012-2013 season.” In the 2014-2015 season, the Forest Community of Interest of The Puyallup Watershed Initiative partnered with the City by providing grant funding, which allowed for program expansion to Pierce County residents. In the 2018-2019 season, Tacoma Power joined the partnership, which allowed for an increased discount on trees.

Tree Coupons enable individuals to expand the region’s tree canopy through residential tree plantings. Feedback from participants in the program concludes that many would not be able to consider purchasing trees if not for the reduced cost burden offered by this program. Funding and support for this program come from City of Tacoma Surface Water Utility fees, Tacoma Power Renewable and Outreach program funding, the Puyallup Watershed Initiative, and the City of Tacoma Urban Forestry and Tacoma Power Customer Energy Services staff time.

Pierce County residents can receive a discount on trees at local participating nurseries with a coupon they receive through the Tree Coupon Program. The City mails the tree coupons to residents after they apply through an online request form. People redeem the coupons at participating nurseries. Nurseries assume the up-front cost of the discount and invoice the City at the end of the coupon season.

2018 - 2019 Season at a Glance

Location of Recipient	Coupons Requested	Coupons Redeemed	% Redeemed	# of Trees	Avg. Trees Per Coupon	Total Value of Coupons
Tacoma	1,291	441	34.2%	1,098	2.5	\$32,940
Pierce County (excl. Tacoma)	1,148	427	37.2%	1,719	4	\$51,570
TOTAL	2,439	938	38.5%	2,817	3	\$84,510

Table 1. Summary 2018 - 2019 data. Purchase rates indicate the average number of trees bought per coupon redeemed.

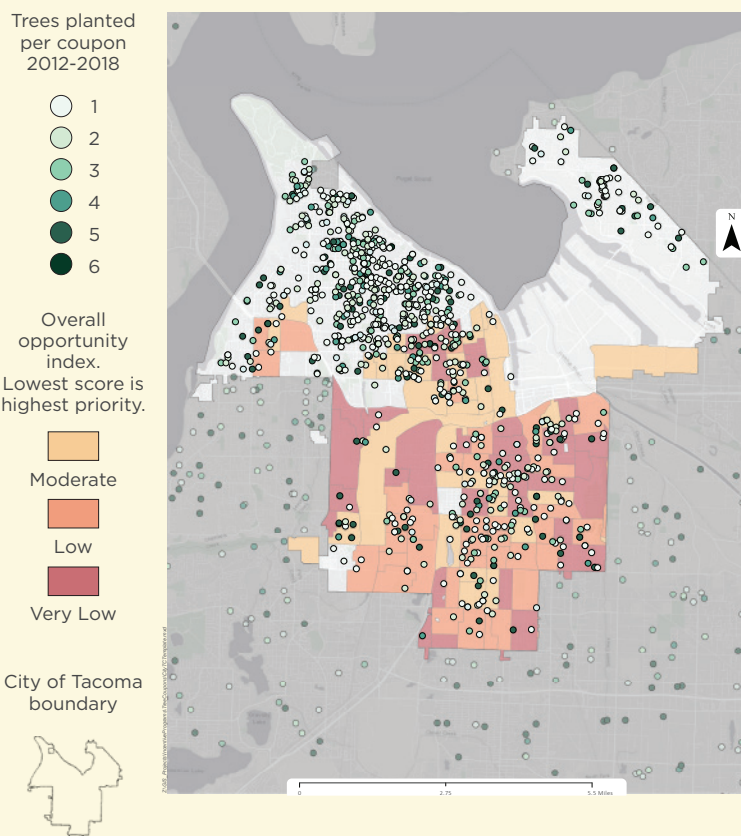
2018 - 2019 Season Results

The 2018-2019 program made it possible to plant 2,817 trees – a fourfold increase from the 2017-2018 season and more than double the number of plantings in program history. Growth is mostly the result of doubling the coupon value from \$15 to \$30 per tree, offering coupons at the point of sale in nurseries, and a significant increase in advertising and social media outreach.

Residents planted trees at 938 households (441 Tacoma, 427 Pierce Co.), which is 135 more households than in program history. Importantly, 324 trees planted in Tacoma went to historically underserved neighborhoods (Map 1).

Map 1.

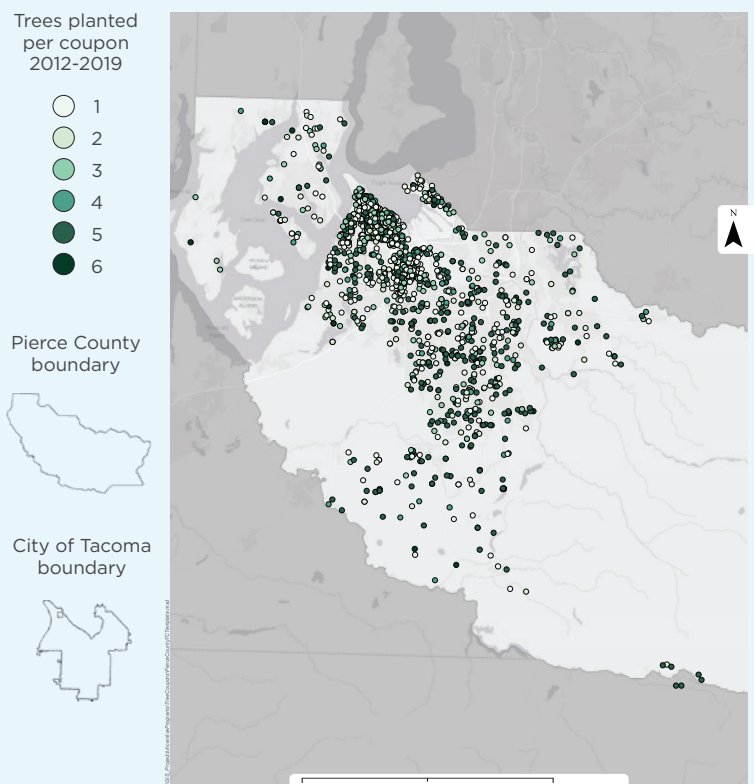
City of Tacoma 2012-2019 Tree Coupon Redemptions



Map 1. Trees planted per coupon in Tacoma and in its historically underserved neighborhoods.

Map 2.

Pierce County 2012-2019 Tree Coupon Redemptions



Map 2. Trees planted throughout Pierce County.



Annual Metrics for Seasons 2012-2013 through 2018-2019

Year	Coupons Requested	Coupons Redeemed	# of Nurseries	# of Trees	Total Value of Coupons	% Redeemed	Avg. Trees Per Coupon
2012-2013	255	33	2	40	\$ 970	12.0%	1.21
2013-2014	345	118	3	171	\$ 4,510	34.2%	1.44
2014-2015 ¹	634 ¹	152	2	290	\$ 5,450	24.0%	1.90
2015-2016 ²	3482	85	3	200	\$ 3,000	24.4%	2.35
2016-2017	639	195	5	461	\$ 6,915	30.5%	2.36
2017-2018	796	220	5	511	\$ 7,665	27.6%	2.32
2018-2019	2,439	938	6	2,817	\$84,510	38.5%	3.25
TOTAL	5,456	1,741		4,490	\$113,020	Avg. 27.3%	Avg. 2.1%

Table 2. Summary program history of trees bought and dollars reinvested.

¹ In 2014-2015, number of coupons distributed spiked due to unauthorized copying of coupons.

² In 2015-2016, coupon requests and redemptions slumped due to lack of staff capacity.

Looking Ahead (Recommendations for the 2019-2020 season)

When considering the challenges of increasing a region's tree canopy, the Tree Coupon model proves effective. A significant portion of Pierce County's land area is residential - for instance, single-family residential comprise 46% of Tacoma's land area - and there's no parallel program to distribute trees to these residential properties. Without the program, many households wouldn't consider trees attainable as items to buy.

If our target is a significant increase in regional canopy cover, we must work to reduce barriers of participation for property owners.

Coupon Text

Needs and Challenges

- During the season, there were many instances of multiple coupon requests per household under the names of different individuals.

Recommendation

- Correct the language on the coupon from "limit one coupon per customer" to "limit one coupon per property," to clarify original intent.



Coupon Delivery

Needs and Challenges

We received feedback from participating nurseries that handing out coupons at the point of sale became overwhelming at times, due to the volume of information recipients must provide. Additionally, coupons redeemed at various events and venues got inconsistently recorded.

Coupon distribution is relatively labor-intensive, with over 500 hours of staff time spent on coupon distribution alone. However, the principal limitation of an all-digital coupon is some participating nurseries operate in a very low-tech environment without the appropriate technology and system to redeem digital coupons at the point of sale.

Recommendations

- Make coupons available online only to minimize entry errors, streamline processes, and reduce both City and retailer staff time spent handling coupons and sign-up sheets.
- Allow real-time verification of addresses through GIS, reducing the amount of ineligible entries.
- Reduce printing and mailing costs and associated labor with digital coupons.
- Keep a small reserve of paper coupons and postcards for people with limited Internet access.

Eligibility Funding Criteria and Species Education

Needs and Challenges

Two primary objectives of the Tree Coupon Program meet the fiscal accountability criteria of our primary funders. First, the City of Tacoma Surface Water utility considers the tree canopy to reduce stormwater flows into our municipal stormwater system, especially during periods of extremes in rainfall. Second, Tacoma Power considers the tree canopy to reduce peak energy demands during the summer by providing shade and cooling to single-family residential properties, thus lessening the need for air conditioning units. Fruit trees and small tree species, however, don't provide as much stormwater attenuation or shade to reduce home temperatures.

The beginning of the program had a tiered discount system based on desirable trees. However, the system became too burdensome for the nurseries to administer correctly, which resulted in a lot of errors and additional staff time.

Recommendations

- Make the program simple and clear for the public and nurseries to navigate but consider the desired program outcomes.
- Limit the types of eligible trees to increase the benefits to our power and surface water utilities.
- Focus the pursuit of desirable trees on education rather than more program restrictions.



2018 – 2019 Tree Coupon Survey Fast Facts

For the first time in August 2019, we surveyed people who redeemed their tree coupons to understand the types of trees they bought, where they planted their trees, tree survival, and how they care for their trees, and their communication preferences. We sent 723 surveys and received 228 responses for a 31.5% response rate*.

Each year we will continue to survey people who redeem their tree coupons, as well as those who receive but did not redeem them, to inform our continuous improvement of the program.

Species Bought



16%
Conifers



36%
Shade Trees



28%
Flowering Trees



18%
Fruit Trees



2%
Shrubs

Planting Locations



44%
Front yard



64%
Back yard



15%
Curbside/Parking



13%
Other

Effectiveness



97% Recommend the Tree Coupon Program.

Communication



61% Learned about the program through digital tools.



84% Liked the educational postcards that came with the tree coupons. (Pictured on page 5.)

Opportunity



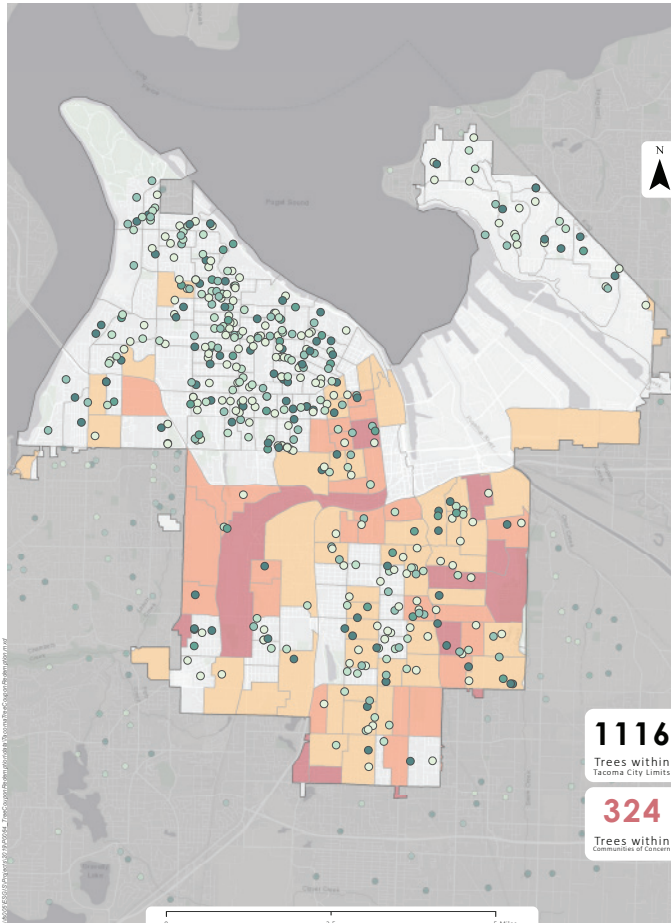
71% Wouldn't have planted trees without the coupon.

*This information represents the survey responses ONLY from people who participated in the 2018-2019 program.

Neighborhoods

The number of trees planted in underserved neighborhoods that align with the Tacoma Equity Index.

Tacoma Tree Coupon Redemptions



Trees planted per coupon 2012-2018

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6

Overall opportunity index. Lowest score is highest priority.

- Moderate
- Low
- Very Low

City of Tacoma boundary



Testimonials



"This is a fantastic program! We love our trees. We had been wanting to add trees to our yard but felt it was cost prohibitive. This program gave us the incentive to do it!"



"Great program for seniors like us who live on fixed incomes and love to garden and improve our landscape."



"I am thrilled to have been involved. I love positive, constructive programs for the community. My son picked out our tree as a gift for his 5th birthday, so our whole family participated. Keep it up!"



"Please do this again! Trees are so expensive and as a new homeowner with lots of expenses it was so helpful to be able to buy some gorgeous trees at a discounted price."



"The coupons pushed us to actually get the trees chosen and in the ground. We would have waited longer if there wasn't such a clear timeline to it all. Thank you!"



"Really appreciate not only the coupons but all the information that came with! Helped me make a good choice and intent to use the information to buy additional trees in the future."