

Great Community Spirit at National Tree Day 2009

More than 140 enthusiastic volunteers from Hackett and surrounding suburbs joined by Ms Caroline Le Couteur MLA, Minister for Planning Andrew Barr and Senator Gary Humphries celebrated National Tree Day 2009 on Sunday, 2 August by planting over 300 local trees on Mount Majura. Local schools joined in the celebration. On Friday, 31 July, as part of the National Tree School Day, students, teachers and parents of the Hackett Blue Gum School planted more than 100 trees and kinder garden students of Majura Primary School lent a hand to water the young trees.

Thank you to all who helped to make the planting a pleasant experience and great success. Thanks in particular to seven ADFA cadets who volunteered their free time between exams and term leave to dig over 400 planting holes, to the Rotary Club of Canberra North who provided a free BBQ for participants, to Greening Australia for raising the seedlings from locally collected seeds, to Parks, Conservation and Lands for providing crucial on-site support, and to the North Canberra Community Council and the Molonglo Catchment Group for financial support.

Friends of Mount Majura (FoMM), Mount Ainslie Weeders, Watson Woodland Working Group and Hackett Community Association joined forces for the massive workload involved in preparation and planning for the event. The degraded Majura paddock was checked thoroughly for hazardous materials prior to the event and given a clean bill of health by the Environment Protection Authority. Before the official start of the event members of the parkCare groups worked tirelessly to mark and pre-water the holes, set up watering stations, prepare water crystals, distribute tree-guards, stakes, weed shields and seedlings.

After a cold breeze blew away the fog, eager volunteers wearing old clothes, boots, warm clothes and gardening gloves, began arriving before 10.30am, carrying an assortment of buckets, trowels and mattocks. The energetic and enthusiastic coordinator, Waltraud Pix (dressed in white and iridescent orange) showed the onsite planting advisers (dressed in iridescent yellow vests), how to successfully plant a seedling. At 11am, ACT Labor MLA Andrew Barr enthusiastically assisted Waltraud in another tree-planting demonstration watched by a large crowd. Senator Garry Humphries and ACT Greens MLA Caroline Le Couteur later joined the volunteers to plant their share of seedlings.

Planting advisers circulated and gave individual help to inexperienced tree planters to give the seedlings the best possible chance of surviving. Five different species of trees were planted: Blakely's Red Gum (*Eucalyptus blakelyi*), Apple Box (*Eucalyptus bridgesiana*), Brittle Gum (*Eucalyptus mannifera*), Yellow Box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*) and Silver Wattle (*Acacia dealbata*).

Written instructions were also provided: it is vitally important to mix a handful of jelly-like water crystals into the soil at the bottom of the hole then add more soil, and not to force or pull seedlings out but to tap the pot hard until it is loose, Place seedling in the centre of the hole and fill it in until the potting mix and roots are completely covered. The soil is then gently pressed down to remove air pockets, and watered well. The water should stay in the planting hole, and not run off. The tree and weed guards keep the seedling sheltered and protected from weeds, the weather and animals.

Muddy and dusty volunteers chatted and warmed up with hot drinks provided by ACT Park rangers, and sausages or vegetarian kebabs barbequed by Rotary volunteers. Everyone went home satisfied that they had learned to plant trees with a good chance of surviving, and that they had played a vital role towards restoring this section of Mt Majura to open woodland which will eventually support more native birds and animals.

Jenni Marsh

2 August 2009