



What property owners should know about **Trees and crime**

How do trees affect crime?

Our study shows how trees can affect criminal behavior. Specifically, we found that criminals are less likely to target houses that have street trees (trees on the strip of vegetation between sidewalk and street) or large yard trees (trees on a house's lot).

In contrast, criminals are more likely to target houses without street trees in front or with small trees in their yards.

Main Findings

Houses with **street trees** are less prone to crime.

Houses with **large yard trees** are less prone to crime.

Houses with **smaller yard trees** are more prone to crime.

How did the study work?



Photo by Geof Donovan

Houses with large street trees are less prone to crime.

We studied 2,813 single-family homes in Southeast Portland. Using site visits and aerial photographs, we recorded the number, size, and location of trees around each house. Since trees are not the only factors that affect crime, we also collected data about each house's value, age, size, lot size, and condition, as well as a range of external features, such as fences, hedges, and nearby streetlights. Finally, we noted whether the property owner used deterrent measures (such as a neighborhood watch sticker or alarm system). We then used statistical tools to relate the presence of trees to crime occurrence between 2005 and 2007.

Why does tree size affect crime?

Smaller trees may attract criminals by blocking views and providing places to hide. Street trees and larger yard trees, on the other hand, keep views open, and don't provide low foliage where criminals can hide.

Clear views alone don't explain why street trees and large lot trees reduce crime. To understand this dimension of our study, it may be useful to look at other property-based research (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fixing_Broken_Windows), which has shown that areas with signs of neglect—broken windows, litter, etc.—tend to be more crime-prone than well-maintained areas. Trees, in contrast, may deter crime by signaling to potential criminals that a house is well cared for and closely watched.

Factors that increase crime

- . small trees
- . house age (older homes)
- . corner lots
- . view-obstructing barriers (such as solid fences)

How can property owners use trees to prevent crime?

- When planting **new trees**, choose species and locations that will maintain a clear view between sidewalks and windows.
- Prune **existing trees** and shrubs to avoid blocking views.
- Plant and maintain **street trees**.

For more suggestions about managing the environment around your house to reduce crime, see the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design website, www.cpted.net.

Urban trees conserve energy, control stormwater, increase property value, and look nice. With the right placement, species selection, and maintenance, they can also help prevent crime.

Factors that decrease crime

- . street trees
- . large lot trees
- . previous crimes within 100 meters
- . streetlights
- . neighborhood watch stickers
- . alarm systems

For more information

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