

# MiSustainable Holland

## About this series

The MiSustainable Holland column is a collection of community voices sharing updates about local sustainability initiatives.

## This Week's Sustainability Framework Theme:

**Environmental Awareness/Action:** Environmental education and integrating environmental practices into our planning will change negative outcomes of the past and improve our future.

## Energy savings take root with free tree program

By Oliver Harmsen  
Holland Board of Public Works

For someone who wants to save energy and water with one simple task, Holland Board of Public Works water and electric customers can sign up for a free tree this August.

Energy Saving Trees is a program of the Arbor Day Foundation that operates in 46 states. This is the sixth year it is being offered in Holland. The sign-up will allow participants to pick out trees to plant in their yard. It is a simple process that greatly benefits the participants and Holland.

This year, four tree species will be available: Norway spruce, north pole arborvitae, red maple, and vernal witchhazel. The program is an opportunity for the community to come together and make Holland thrive one tree at a time. With many trees and benefits, this is the year to start planting for anyone who hasn't participated before.

These trees offer a multitude of benefits for not just the community but for homeowners as well. Planting trees can improve shade and cooling, store carbon, decrease stormwater runoff, and increase property values. Most importantly, these trees are energy efficient.

With the shade they cast, trees can lead to significant energy savings, in addition to improving air quality and reducing air pollution. Taking advantage of the Energy Saving Trees event is important to help better the community and residents' homes and yards.

So, how can this event help save water and energy? To start, when there is heavy rainfall, trees are extremely beneficial. Trees temporarily hold rainwater on their surface, leaves, and branches, allowing more to soak into the ground. When the soil absorbs the rainwater, it creates healthier yards, helping trees thrive and allowing irrigation to become more effective.

In addition, trees absorb excess water, decrease stormwater runoff and flood risk, and protect homes from water damage.

Trees can help save energy too, reducing energy costs through the shade they cast. The Environmental Protection Agency says shaded areas can be 20 to 45 degrees cooler than the peak temperatures of an unshaded area. The shade trees cast onto outdoor and indoor spaces promote energy efficiency and energy cost reduction.

With all these benefits, this program makes sense for homeowners. Sign-up begins Aug. 5 at [arborday.org/HBPW](http://arborday.org/HBPW). Trees can be picked up from the HBPW Service Center, 625 Hastings Ave., 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. on Sept. 14.

The Energy Savings Trees program is win-win, helping residential electric and water customers save energy on their electric bills while also increasing the urban tree canopy of the City of Holland.

■ *Oliver Harmsen is a communications intern at Holland Board of Public Works.*