

Saving the planet - one tree at a time

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Tree-loving Melo "Mel" Dominguez sees herself as a soldier in the fight to save the planet.

She feels well armed for the task as a graduate of a Tucson Botanical Gardens program that aims to grow the urban forest in Tucson.

Dominguez got there by first participating in Art Lab Border Biosphere Exploration. The Rillito River Project program inspires artists to interpret how climate change affects the local environment.

The multimedia artist talked to children about what she learned in the project. Out of those talks grew the idea to fashion a tree with leaves cut from empty juice pouches.

She invited children to write their names on the leaves, plus terms she shared with them such as "good eating habits," "climate change" and "watershed."

Biosphere 2 installed the piece as part of "The Art of All Possibilities" exhibit that runs through February.

"I feel like I needed to build an army that knew about the desert," Dominguez says of her work with the kids.

Then this fall Dominguez was selected for a pilot educational program to certify people in urban forestry.

The idea is to **train residents on everything about trees so that they can help the community grow more trees**, says Abby Moore, director of education for Tucson Botanical Gardens.

The effort **includes doing a survey of trees maintained by the city**.

"We want to look at where we are and make plans on how to expand and maintain our urban forest," says Moore.

The 13 initial graduates learned **tree biology, species identification and tree care, including planting, watering, pruning and diagnosing disease**.

From the program, Dominguez learned how to shape her yard to passively harvest rainwater. "I learned about French drains," she says. "I'm doing things to my own landscape to catch water."

But far beyond the gardening applications, Dominguez is energized to share this information and encourage people to plant and care for trees.

"They do a lot for us people," she says. "I feel I can do something back."

"I want to be part of the new world where we take care of the planet."

Next session in february

Tucson Botanical Gardens will launch the next session of its Urban Forestry Certificate program in February.

Participants will spend 10 weeks in lectures and hands-on activities that help sustain an urban forest, which is made up of all the privately and publicly owned trees in a metropolitan area.

They also will do community service projects such as planting trees in public places.

While details are not yet available, Tucson Botanical Gardens will charge around \$200 for the certification, which was developed with the city of Tucson and the Garden District Neighborhood Association.

Applications will be available in January. For more information, contact Abby Moore, the gardens' director of education, at 326-9686, ext. 39, or go online at tucsonbotanical.org

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