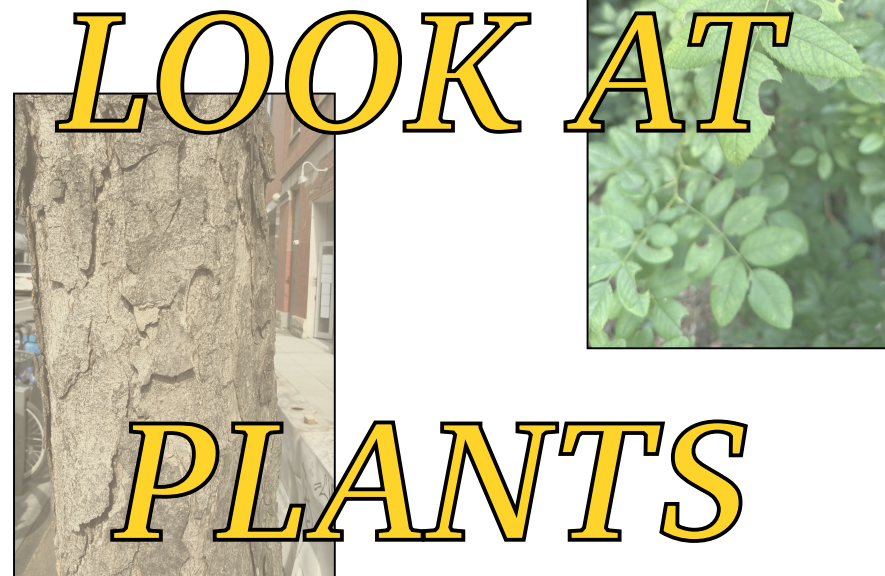


This zine is a publication of the Urban Ecology Library, hosted at Green Oasis Community Garden in the East Village. This collection explores the city as a multi-species community. How can we work together to create a livable world for all?

The Urban Ecology Library is a project of the Urban Ecology Collective. To learn more, visit urbanecologycollective.org.



*Questions to ask while walking in
your neighborhood*

Questions about stewardship

Are the plants healthy? If not, do the plants need more care, or are they not well-adapted to the site conditions?

How do the plants affect human needs and accessibility (flopping over into paths, branches blocking paths, dead branches that might fall on humans)?

Do the plants support wildlife and increase biodiversity, promoting ecological health? (e.g. native vs. non-native species, dense & layered plantings, leaving dead stalks)

How does it affect/how is it affected by other plant communities nearby or outside New York?

How do the plants perform as green infrastructure (e.g. shade, absorbing stormwater, reducing erosion)?

Are the plants part of the local culture? Is it an old and revered tree? Was it planted by neighbors?

Is the planting visually appealing throughout the year?

Just as we might question and improve upon the design of cities — from its curb cuts and bike lanes to its zoning laws — it's also important to interrogate how the city's landscapes functions for the multispecies communities that call it home, including humans. How can the city be made more hospitable to diverse plant life, which in turn sustains all life on Earth?

Meeting your neighbors

Looking at "green space" as plant communities in urban ecosystems



Gerritsen Beach



Brooklyn Botanic Garden



Sponge Park rain garden



6BC Community Garden



Abandoned lot, East Village



Street tree, Greenwich Village

What happens when we meet the plants in our neighborhoods and try to understand what they're up to as the main characters of their own story?

Each of the plant communities pictured above are very different, yet they all live in New York City. By paying attention to and asking questions about the plants around us, we can start to learn about how they make livelihoods in and shape the urban ecosystem we all share.

When you come across a group of plants in your neighborhood, ask yourself the following questions.

Questions about environmental conditions



East Village,
September

Which way is north? Where is the sun? Is sunlight blocked by trees or buildings, shading the area? How does that affect soil moisture?

What is the soil like? Is it fine or coarse, moist or dry, light or dark, sandy or rocky? Is there standing water that doesn't drain?



East Village,
September

Are wood chips, gravel, or leaf litter covering the soil?

Is the soil compacted? Try to press a stick into the soil.

Is the land flat or sloping? Are there bodies of water?



Narrows Botanical
Garden, July



Naval Cemetery
Landscape, June



Serpentine
Commons,
September

Plant identification

Identifying the species of plants is not always straightforward, but can be key to answering many useful questions that might be difficult to observe.

These include its light/moisture requirements, reproductive behavior, life cycle, geographic origin, whether it is invasive in your region, and the creatures it has co-evolved with. How do each plant's evolutionary adaptations in its home ecosystem translate to its behavior in this site?

Photo ID apps: iNaturalist, Plant.net. Visual-based with machine learning models. iNaturalist lets you upload pictures for citizen science, and others help verify IDs.

Online maps: The NYC Tree Map aims to ID every tree on streets and in parks.

Books: Field guides and indices, e.g. *Bark: A Field Guide to Trees of the Northeast*, *A Guide to Native Plants of the New York City Region*.

Dichotomous keys: Series of questions that narrow down candidates, e.g. *Tree Finder: A Manual for the Identification of Trees by Their Leaves*.

To confirm an ID, search for field marks for the candidate species. For example, multiflora rose can be differentiated from other roses by its hairy stipules.

Sites: bplant.org, plants.ces.ncsu.edu, wildflower.org

Questions about human intention & interaction

Are the borders of the site defined? Is there fencing? Are there plants that go well past the borders?

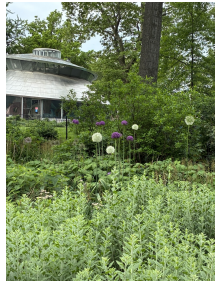
Does the arrangement seem intentionally placed by a human? What was their goal?

How do humans interact with the plants? Looking at flowers, sitting under tree, littering, pruning (look for cleanly cut branches).

Is there signage, art, or sculpture?



Prospect Heights, June



Battery Park, May



Avenue B, September



East Village September



Pugsley Creek Park, March



Crown Heights, August

Questions about plant individuals

What is the form of each plant: tree, shrub, vine, fern, graminoid (grass-like) or forb (an herbaceous plant that's not a graminoid)?

Compare two different plants:

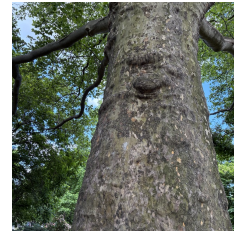
Leaves: margins (edges), thickness, texture, color, hairy/smooth, shiny/matte, veins, shape

Stems or tree trunk: color, thickness, thorns, texture

Roots: Visible? Color, thickness? How far does it spread laterally?

Flowers: color, shape

Fruits: color, size, firmness



McCarren Park, May



Gowanus, August



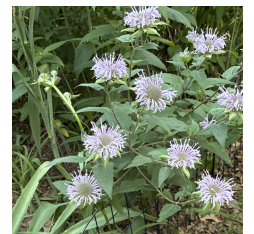
Pier 26, March



Green Oasis Community Garden, September



Lentol Community Garden, September



Tompkins Square Park, June

Habit: Height and width? Does it cast shade on other plants? How is the plant shaped?

Growth: How many of this plant are there? Is the group clumping or sprawling? Scattered unevenly or packed densely? What direction is it growing?



Inwood Hill Park,
May



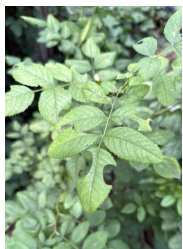
Far Rockaway,
March



Green Oasis
Community
Garden,
September

Are the leaves consumed by insects (full of holes), flowers visited by pollinators, branches visited by birds?

Signs indicating too much/too little moisture or sunlight (e.g browning leaves)?



Tompkins Square
Park, June



Bryant Park, March



Marine Park,
June

Questions about *plant interactions*

How densely and diversely is the site planted? How many layers (height variations) are there?

Are the plants occupying the same niche, or are do they have complementary morphologies?

Do some plants seem to be spreading more aggressively?

Is there bare soil? Why?

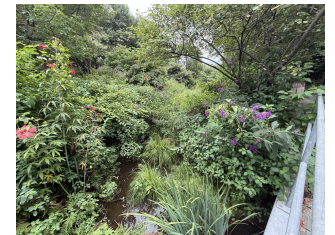
Do different parts of the site look different? Why?



Staten Island,
September



MOMA sculpture
garden



Brooklyn Bridge Park,
August



Greenwood Cemetery,
October



East Village,
September