

The *Extraordinary* Tree Men

Trees are remarkable. There are over 80,000 species and they've inhabited our planet for over 350 million years. They provide watersheds to supply drinking water to billions of people, protect cities from storm water runoff, and reduce heating and cooling costs to our homes and buildings by 40 percent. Trees and forests are massive carbon dioxide warehouses, and in return they provide oxygen enabling life on earth. Trees also yield some of the most potent cancer, coronary, and other disease-fighting medicines known to humankind.

Humans and trees are inexorably linked. Children feel it intuitively, and as an adult, if you are blessed, you too feel the deep connection with our wild forests. Every year, however, more and more trees are lost to urbanization. This isn't a new phenomenon—people have been cutting down trees since before the invention of fire. And thankfully, throughout history, there have been men and women who have seen fit to share their joy of trees with the rest of the world.

About sixty years ago, French author Jean Giono wrote a marvelous allegorical story entitled *The Man Who Planted Trees*, the tale of a shepherd who singlehandedly reforested a desolate valley near Provence in the first half of the 20th century. Millions of copies

were distributed in dozens of languages throughout the world, and many readers believed that the tree man of the story, Elzeard Bouffier, really lived. When asked, just prior to his death in 1970, why he wrote the book, Giono answered straight from the heart, responding, "So that people worldwide would love trees!"

Seeds of Change

America's long love affair with trees dates back to Native Americans. For thousands of years they had used trees for more than heat and shelter—eating the inner bark (loaded with a rich supply of vitamin C) to prevent scurvy, chewing twigs of willow (full of acetyl salicylic acid, the backbone of aspirin)

to relieve pain, or tapping maple or birch in the springtime for its sap—rich in sugars—which also served as an alternative to salt, enhancing the flavor of food.

The first famous American tree man was John Chapman, known in legend as *Johnny Appleseed*. He was a pioneer and clever nurseryman who grew apples for cider in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, using his double-hulled canoe to travel the waterways between states. A shrewd businessman, he plowed his profits into procuring more land, and upon his death in 1845, it was revealed that he owned thousands of acres. Philanthropic throughout his life, Chapman was also one of the first Americans to practice conservation.

