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Selection of Montane forest tree species for urban planting in Nuwara Eliya town

Tree planting in urban areas provide both aesthetic and utilitarian aspects to the landscape. The objective of the present study is to identify the most suitable local trees for avenues and parks in Nuwara Eliya Town. This was selected for this study as it is an area where mature and over mature exotics are prevalent in the urban landscape. These trees need replacement and attention has been focused on using local tree species for replacement.

The status of the urban trees in the landscape was studied by maps and site visits. Special attention was paid to the following roads; Nuwara Eliya Kandy Road, Nuwara Eliya – Badulla Road, Queen Elizabeth Road and Grand Hotel Road. The following observations and measurements were carried out on the avenue trees on these roads; Number of trees present, condition of the trees (age of tree, newly planted or old, badly pruned, prevalence of diseases etc.), distance of trees from the center of the road and spacing between trees etc. Similar assessments and observations were done for open spaces and parks in the Town.

Hakgala Gardens and Nature Reserve and the Galaways Land Sanctuary were used for the selection of the most suitable indigenous or local tree species for planting. Selections were based on the following tree characteristics; presence of color of flush, color and occurrence of flowers, spines and odors etc., total height and girth at breast height, spread of tree, height to the first branch to assess the branching habit of the tree and the spread of the crown. The growth rate was approximated by interviews of relevant personnel.

From the information gathered, the following tree species; *Callophyllum walkeri*, *Cinnamomum ovalifolium*, *Euodia lunu-ankenda*, *Elaeocarpus glandulifer*, *Ficus microcarpa*, *Gordonia ceylanica*, *Acronychia pedunculata*, *Michelia nilagirica*, *Meliosoma pinnata*, *Neolitsea fuscata*, *Acronychia pedunculata*, *Rhododendron arboreum*, *Symplocos cochinchinensis*, *Syzygium assmile*, *Memocylon varians*, *Cyathea crinita* etc. met the requirements to be suitable for urban planting in Nuwara Eliya District. The tree species; *Callophyllum walkeri*, *Rhododendron arboreum*, *Syzygium assimile*, *S. umbrosum*, *S. rotundqafolium*, *S. zeylanicum*, *Memocylon variance*, due to their much slower growth, lower branching habit, higher crown spread are most suitable for planting in parks and open spaces.