

University of Toronto | Guest Lecture
16 October 2026

Sacred Trees and Urban Tree Conservation

笠原 功貴 | Isaki Kasahara

Toshi Landscape Co., Ltd.

About Me

笠原 功貴 | Isaki Kasahara

Arborist

Toshi Landscape Co., Ltd.

From Tokyo · Age 29

Fourth year at Toshi Landscape

Camping with my father introduced me to the cool air and filtered light of forests.

Plant research and food-industry sales led me to a career in landscape care.

Today, I work across all three divisions and help develop our organization and systems.



My Path to Arboriculture



01 Childhood

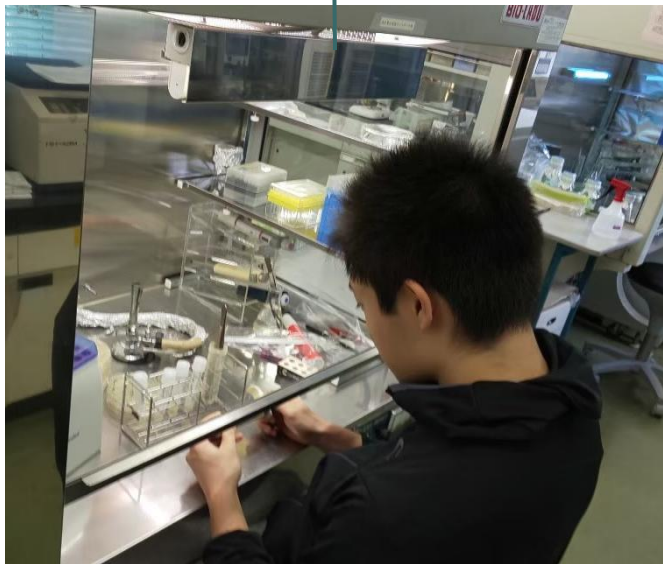
Camping with my father
Nature in everyday life

Cool summer forests and
sunlight through the leaves

Nihon University
College of Bioresource Sciences

Research on the biosynthesis of
phenylpropanoid glycosides
in plants of the tribe Irideae

02 University



Identifying genes; producing compounds in
E. coli and yeast; studying their functions



03 Food Industry

A career in sales
Learning how business works

Contributing to people's health
through food

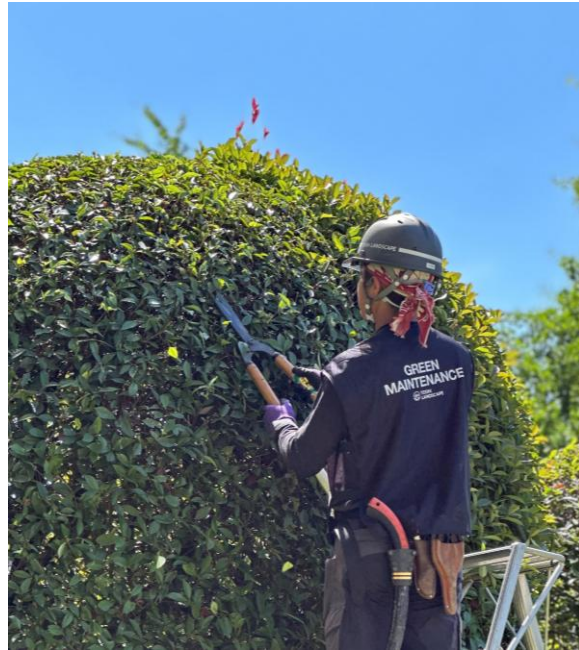
Toshi Landscape
Working directly with living plants

04 Today



Drawn to new challenges and work
that requires judgment as
living things change

My Work Today



Working with Trees in the Field

Planting care, tree assessment and landscape consulting

Hands-on work across all three divisions

Tree climbing for work in tall trees

Turning Assessment into Management

Assessing tree condition to guide pruning and care
Combining field observations with diagnostic instruments

Building the Organization as COO

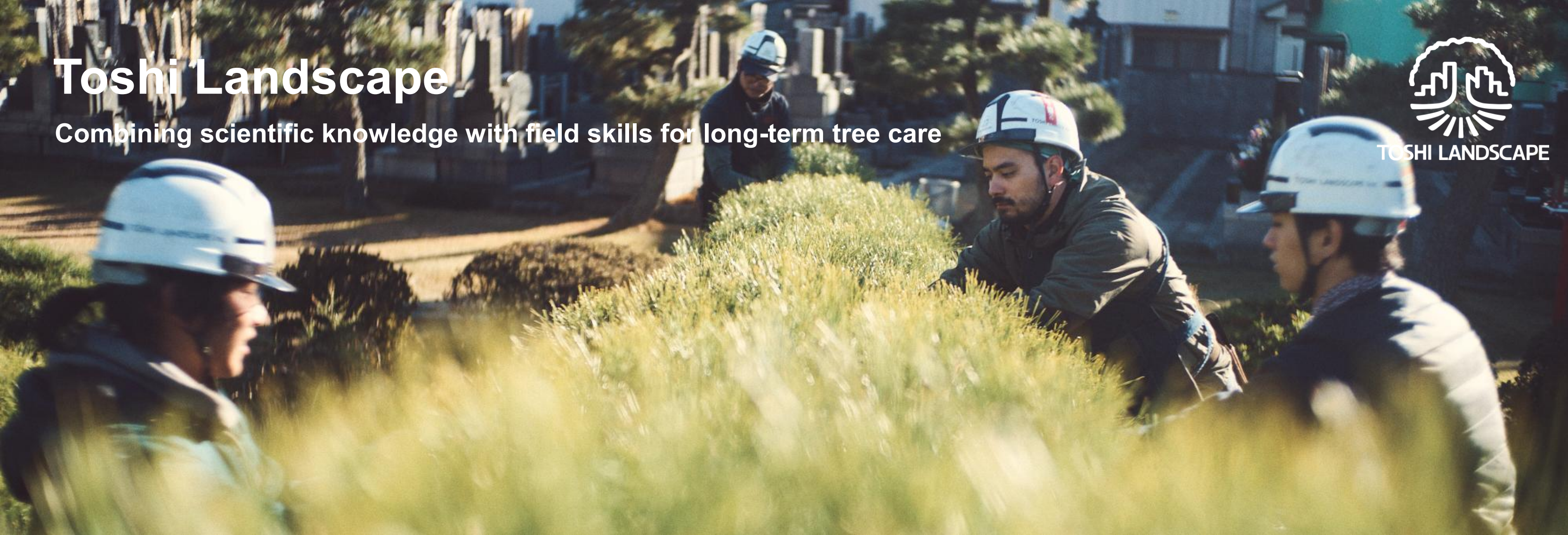
Organizational development, work systems and AI use
Connecting field practice with business management

Toshi Landscape

Combining scientific knowledge with field skills for long-term tree care



TOSHI LANDSCAPE



Established
March 2018
In our ninth year

Team
21 people
As of September 2026

Three Tokyo Bases
Ebisu · Kugahara · Suginami

From private gardens to residential developments and public spaces
Integrating planting care, tree assessment and consulting

Our Three Divisions



**GREEN
MAINTENANCE**

Green Maintenance

Pruning, tall-tree care and planting renewal
Using aerial lifts and rope techniques
From routine care to complex sites



**TREE RISK
ASSESSMENT**

Tree Risk Assessment

Visual and instrument-based assessment
Soil, roots and transplant suitability
Turning findings into management plans



**LANDSCAPE
CONSULTING**

Landscape Consulting

Planting surveys, mainly at residential
developments
Long-term plans, renewal proposals and budgets
Balancing landscape quality and residents' needs

The Great Camphor at Kinomiya Shrine

Atami, Shizuoka, Japan

Camphor tree · *Cinnamomum camphora*

Traditionally said to be over 2,100 years old · Girth approx. 24 m
Designated a National Natural Monument in 1933

Associated with prayers for health, longevity and wishes
When I visited, its scale and presence
made a lasting impression on me.



Prayers and Stories Around the Tree

Walking Around the Trunk

One circuit is said to add a year to your life.
A wish held silently while walking is said to come true.

A Story of Escaping the Axe

According to local tradition, five of the shrine's seven camphor trees were cut down in the late Edo period to fund a fishing-rights dispute. When people tried to cut this tree, a white-haired old man appeared and the saw broke. They took this as a divine message and stopped.



Stories passed between generations can give people a reason to protect a tree.

Trees in Everyday Life in Japan

Experiencing the Seasons

Cherry blossoms and autumn colours

Forests around shrines are known as chinju no mori. Visits for festivals and milestones in life can connect personal memories with particular trees.

People's feelings and beliefs about the same tree can differ.



Community Memory

Passing down the trees of shrines and neighbourhoods



What Is a Shinboku?

A tree treated with special respect because of its religious or historical associations

Yorishiro

A place or object a kami may approach

Kami are sacred beings or presences in Shinto.

Goshintai

An object enshrined as embodying a kami's presence

A tree itself may be enshrined as a goshintai.

A shimenawa rope marks a sacred place or object.

Meanings and practices differ between shrines and communities.



What Makes a Tree Special?

Place

Connections to a shrine or a community



History

Events and local stories



Form

Size, age and shape



Belief

The meanings people attach to it



Species and age alone do not make a tree sacred.

Even trees of the same species and age can mean different things to different communities.
Before planning management, ask about the tree's history and why people value it.

Sacred Trees in Community Life



Prayer and Festivals

Expressing hopes for health and longevity



Everyday Care

Cleaning shrine grounds and replacing sacred ropes



Passing Stories On

Sharing a tree's history and personal memories

How Sacred Trees Are Protected

Heritage Protection

Natural Monument designation

Changes to nationally designated monuments generally require permission.

Check the designation, ownership and procedures for the site.



Everyday Stewardship

Supported by shrines, owners and local people

Who will inspect the tree, care for it and fund its ongoing management?



Sacred status and legal protection are separate matters.

Challenges to Conservation



TOSHI LANDSCAPE

Wind, Drought and Pests

Assess the stresses and damage that affect the tree.

Branches and Trunk

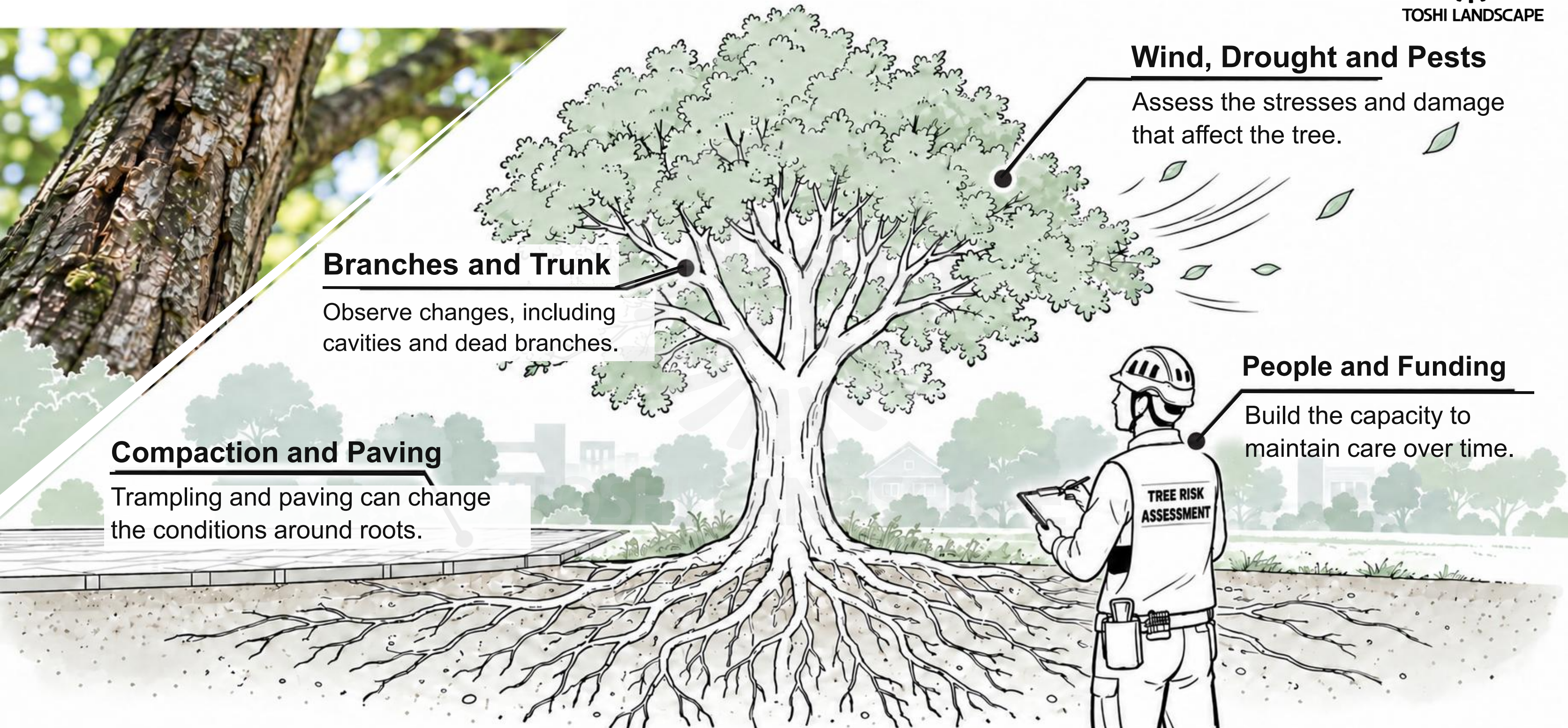
Observe changes, including cavities and dead branches.

Compaction and Paving

Trampling and paving can change the conditions around roots.

People and Funding

Build the capacity to maintain care over time.



People Who Care for Trees

Tree-care Specialists

Assessment and tree care



Site Managers

Management decisions and daily responses



Forestry and Conservation Specialists

Understanding the surrounding environment



Local Communities

Noticing changes and passing on memories



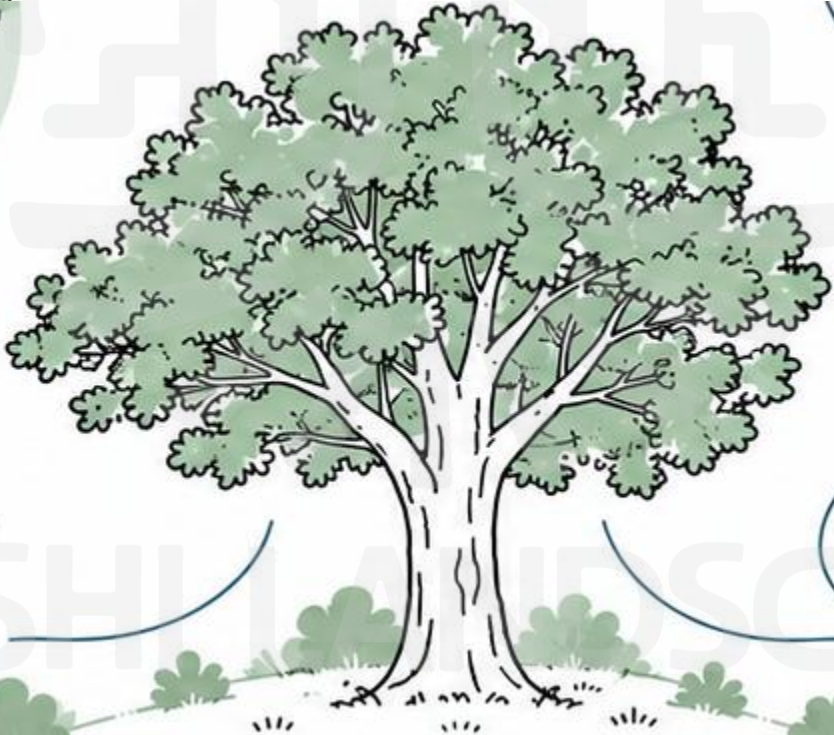
Public Authorities

Linking protection, regulation and support



Information Connects These Roles

Share tree condition, community priorities and necessary work to agree on a management plan.



Garyu no Matsu at Jushoin Temple

Practical care for a culturally important old tree at a Buddhist temple

Edogawa, Tokyo, Japan

Japanese black pine · Estimated age: approx. 500 years

Height approx. 5 m · Crown spread: 16.5 m east–west / 18.4 m north–south

Registered ward Natural Monument · Landscape Important Tree

**A storm in the Taisho period is said to have broken its trunk.
Its low, spreading form gives it the name “reclining dragon.”**

We prune it annually and also carry out soil improvement.

Learning Through Annual Care



TOSHI LANDSCAPE

Caring for the pine at Jushoin

Annual pruning manages branches and tree form.

What We Observe Over Time

Shoot growth, foliage colour and branch dieback

Compare observations each year and respond to the tree's condition.

Care Continues Beyond a Single Intervention

Practical management and ongoing observation

Branch condition and form



Illustration: pruning and observation concepts



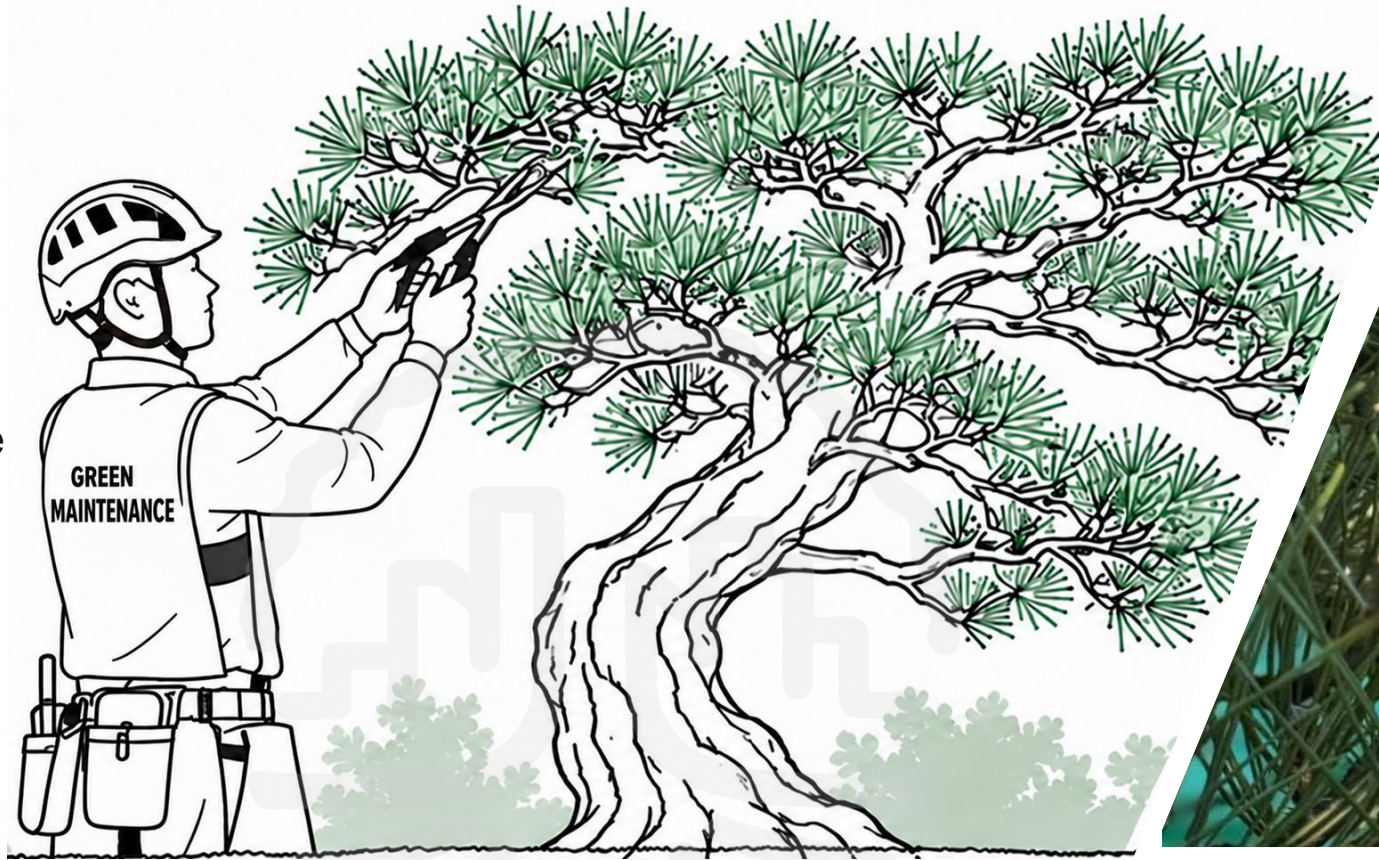
Caring for the Crown and Root Environment



TOSHI LANDSCAPE

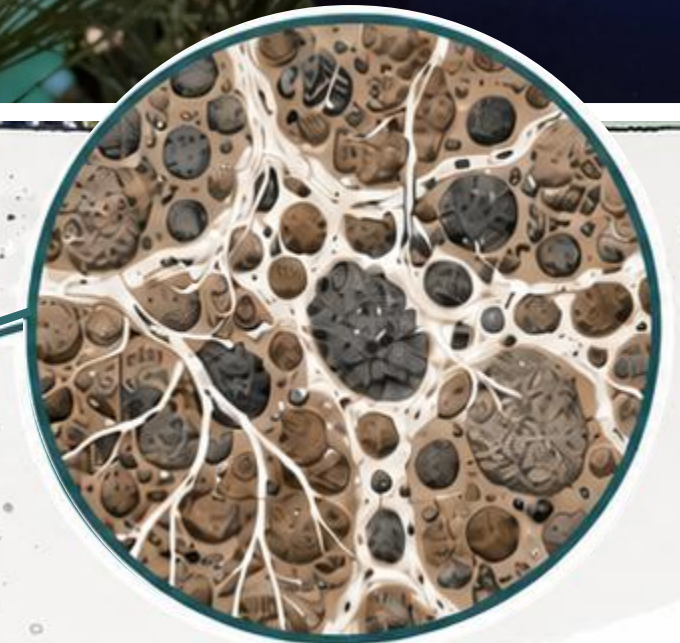
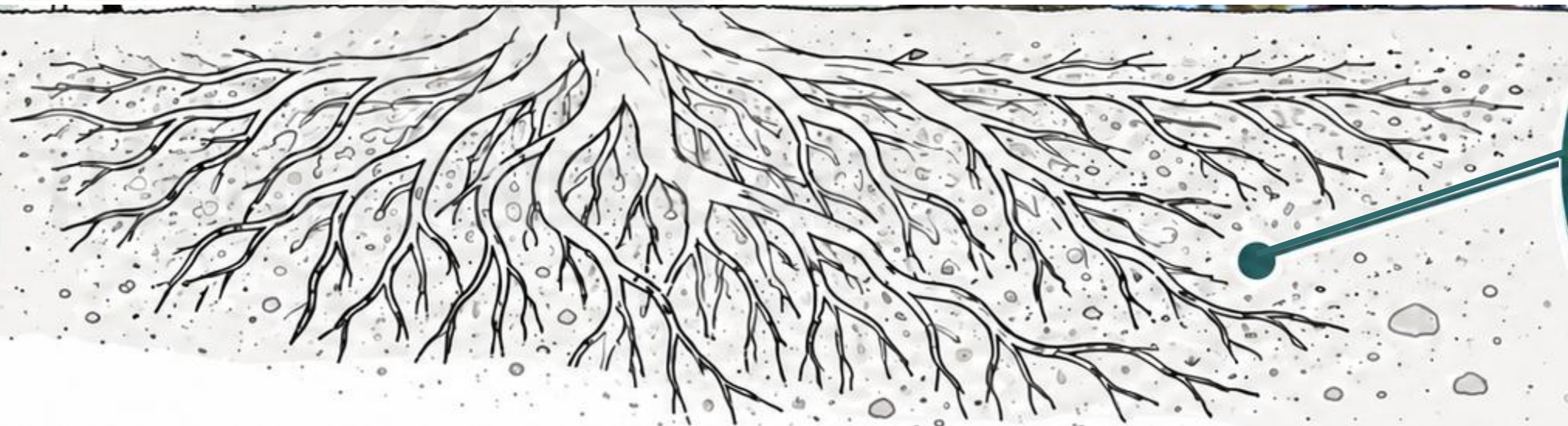
Above Ground

Pruning and crown care



Below Ground

Improving the soil environment



At Jushoin, soil improvement complements pruning.

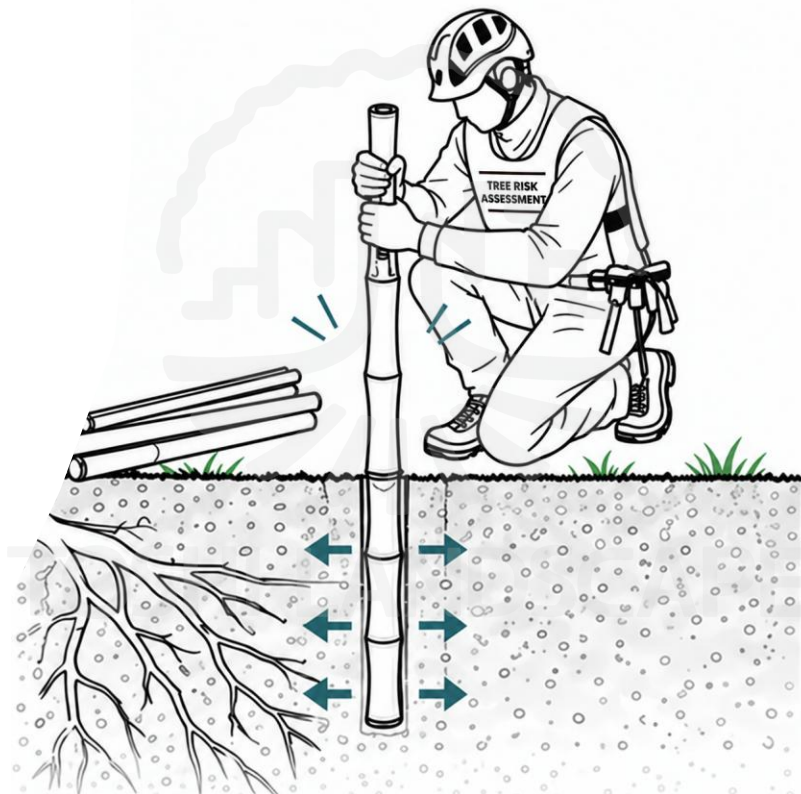
Roots respire and absorb water and nutrients. We assess soil compaction, aeration and drainage to support root growth.

Three Approaches to Soil Improvement

1 Split-bamboo Insertion

Air and water movement

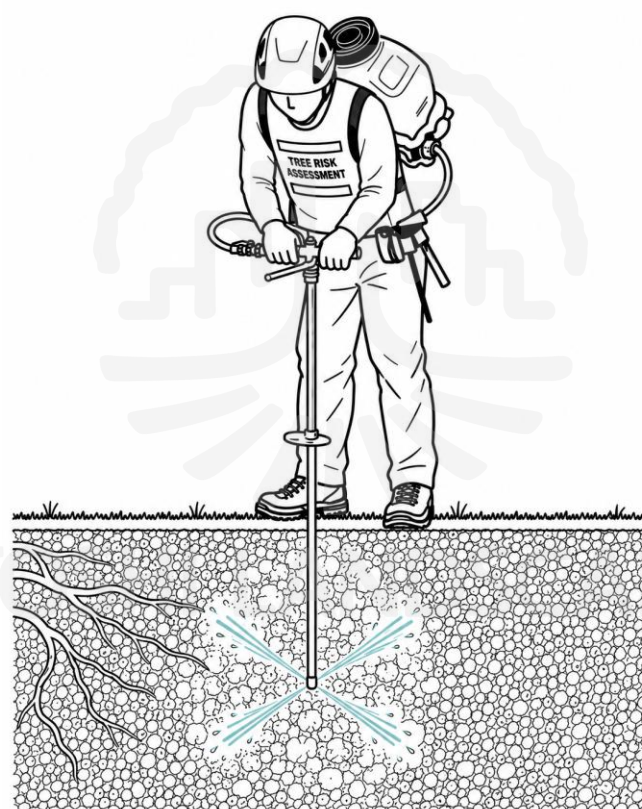
Prepared bamboo is inserted into soil; soil amendments are placed around it.



2 Water-pressure Treatment

Loosening soil with water

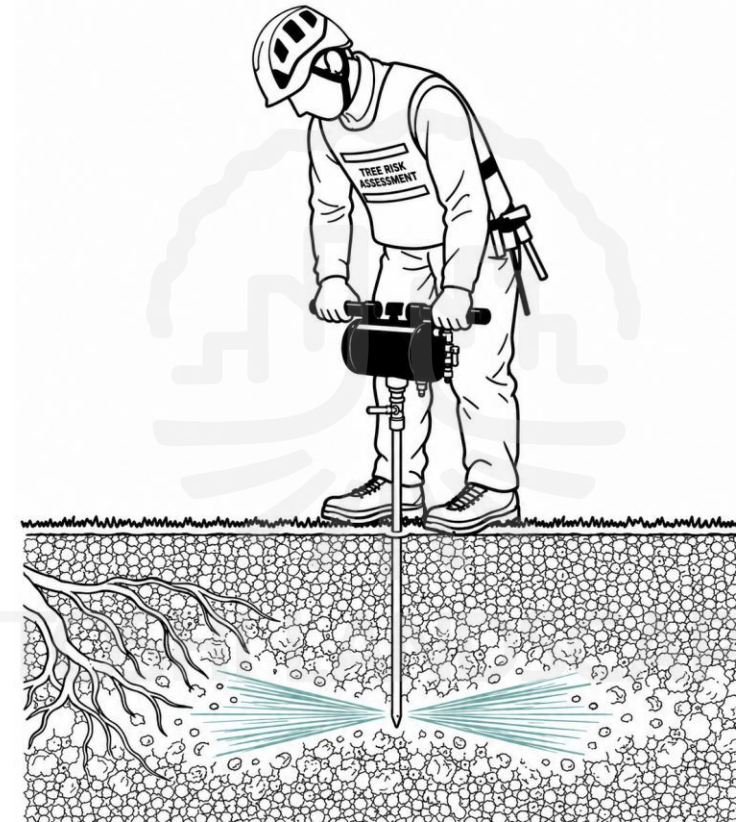
Jets from an inserted nozzle loosen the surrounding soil.



3 Compressed-air Aeration

Improving soil aeration

Compressed air is used to loosen compacted soil.



Choose the method to suit the soil and roots.

Tree Work at Height



Tree Climbing

Assess tree condition and suitable rope anchor points.

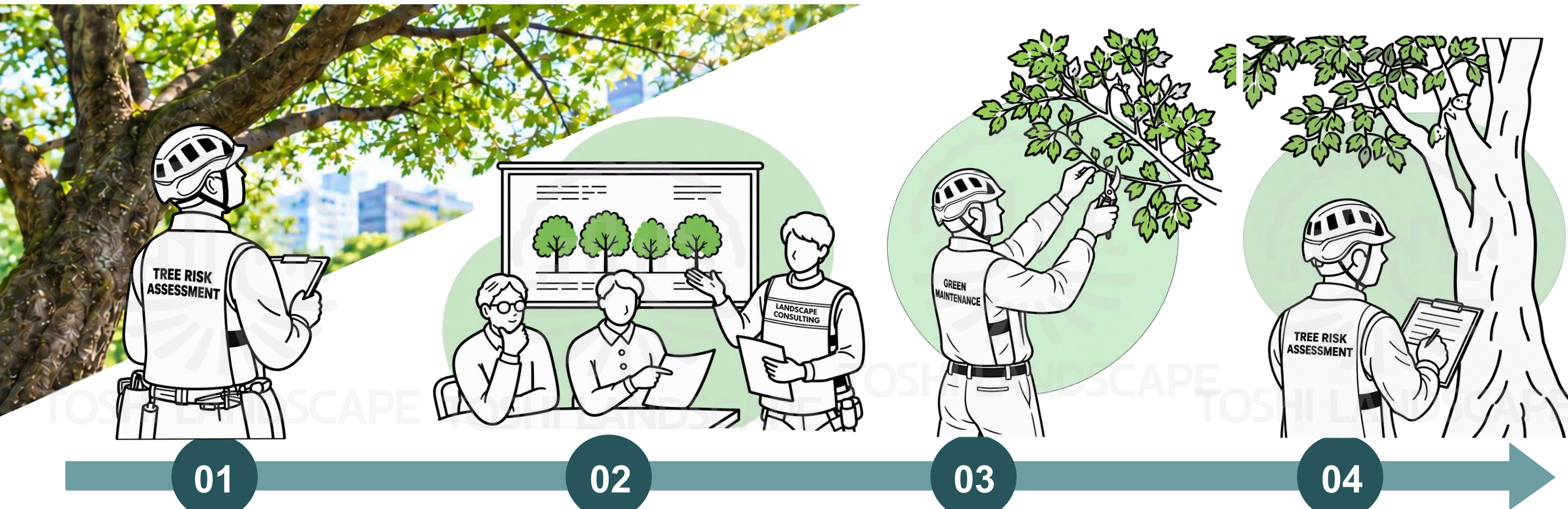
Choose a suitable method for deadwood removal and pruning.

Consider the tree's condition and the locations of people and buildings.

Aerial Lift

Check access, set-up space and the work area.

From Assessment to Ongoing Care



Assess

Examine branches, trunk, roots and how the site is used.

Decide

Identify values to retain and risks to address.

Act

Agree on tasks and responsibilities. Carry out the plan.

Review

Compare photos and records. Update the management plan.

A continuing cycle of care

The Great Ginkgo at Akasaka Hikawa Shrine

Akasaka, Minato, Tokyo, Japan

Ginkgo · Ginkgo biloba

Estimated age: approx. 400 years* · Girth approx. 7.5 m

Believed to predate the shrine's move to this site.

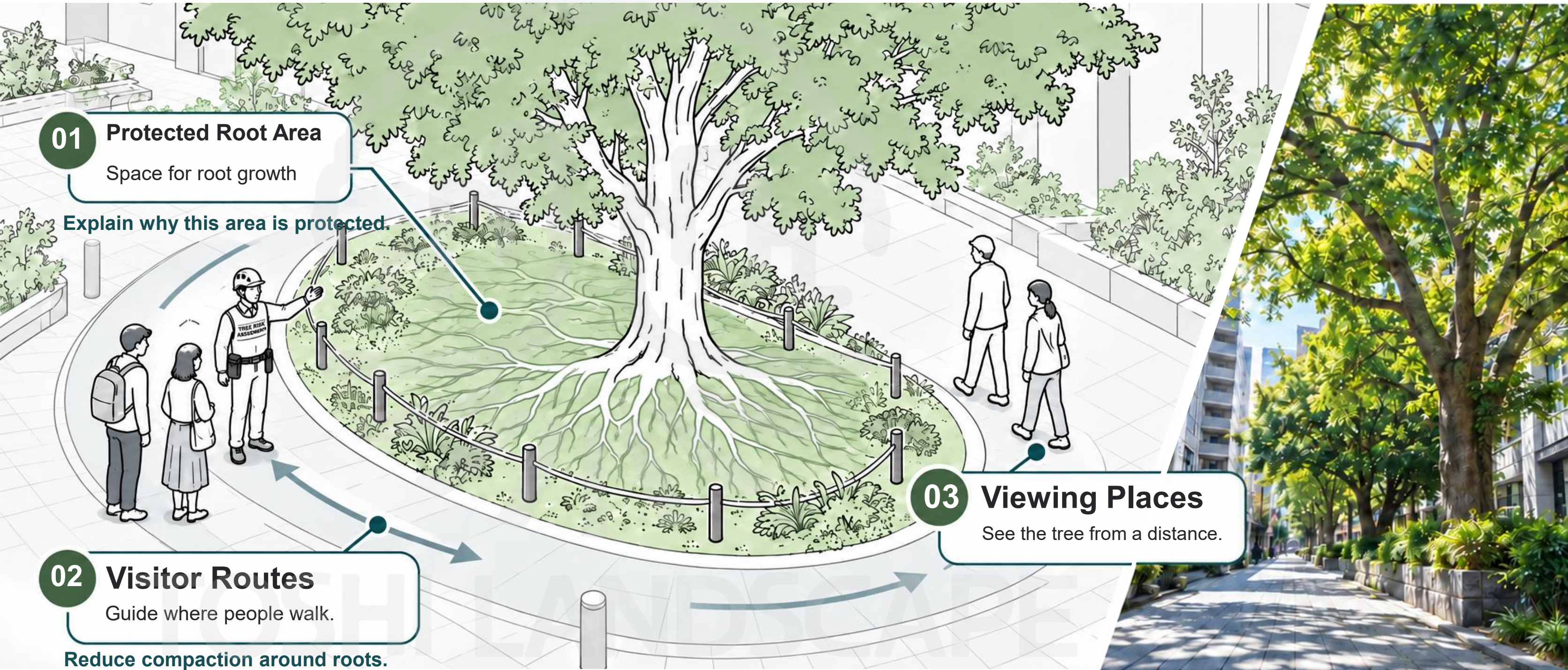
Much of its trunk was burned during the 1945 air raids.

Its autumn foliage continues to connect the community with its history.

A case introduced through publicly available sources

*Age follows the shrine's Japanese-language account.

Public Access and Root Protection



Combine visitor access with a protected growing environment.

Toronto's

Heritage Red Oak

76 Coral Gable Drive

Protecting one tree led to
land acquisition and a park plan.

The City describes it as over 250 years old.
It stood in the backyard of a private home.

A case connecting tree conservation
with land and its future public use.

Based on publicly available sources



How Public Interest Supports Conservation



01 Community Advocacy



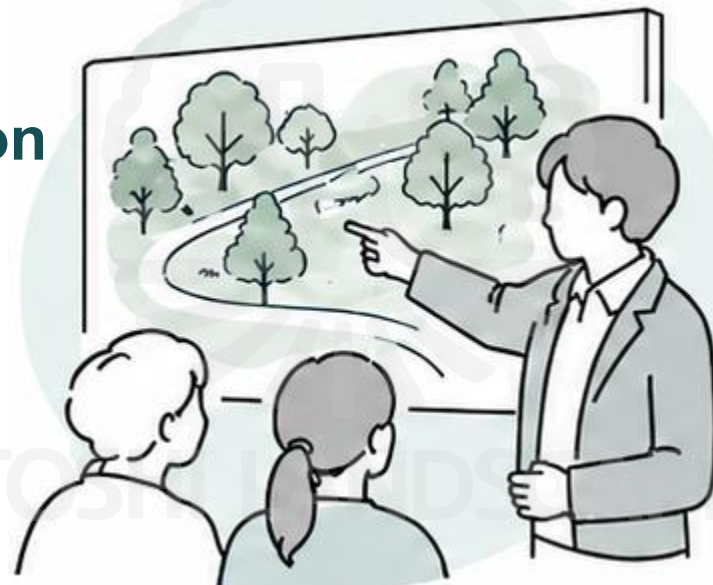
02 Donations



03 Land Acquisition



04 Park Planning



City update, July 2026
House removed; detailed design completed

Park completion planned for autumn 2027

**Concern for a tree can lead to donations and land protection.
Long-term conservation also needs funding and a management system.**

Photo: an example of dialogue about trees, not the Toronto project / Diagram: conservation process

Source: City of Toronto, consulted October 2026

Zapis: Sacred Trees in Serbia



[Zapis oak in Tulež, Serbia](#)

Photo: [Zblagojevic](#) / Wikimedia Commons / CC BY-SA 4.0 / Cropped

A Gathering Place

For prayer and community life

Serbian Orthodox Christianity

Connected with local traditions

Local Differences

Tree species and rituals vary.

Research in central Serbia describes crosses carved into trunks and prayers beneath trees. Beliefs against felling or damage have helped protect these trees.

Based on publicly available sources

Reference: Cvetković et al. (2007)



Japan and Serbia: Similarities and Differences



Japan: Shinboku

Religious Context

Shinto and local histories
Reverence for nature and associations with kami

Community Life

Prayer, festivals and everyday care
A place of meaning for local people

Serbia: Zapis

Serbian Orthodoxy and local traditions
A meeting place and a setting for prayer

Prayer, festivals and community gatherings
A symbol of community and social connection

Shared Lessons

Shared: gathering around trees and passing on memory
Different: religious contexts and rituals
Conservation begins with dialogue in each community.

Understanding a Tree's Value

Tree Condition

Scientific observation and assessment



Local Meaning

History, memory and belief



People and Place

People who use the space and those who provide care



Combine assessment with conversations in the community.
Consider safety, cultural value and access when planning management.

Old Trees as Living Habitats

Bark, Cavities, Branches and Leaf Litter

These features can provide habitats for many organisms.
Consider ecological value alongside public safety.

Bark crevices and cavities
can provide places for organisms to live.

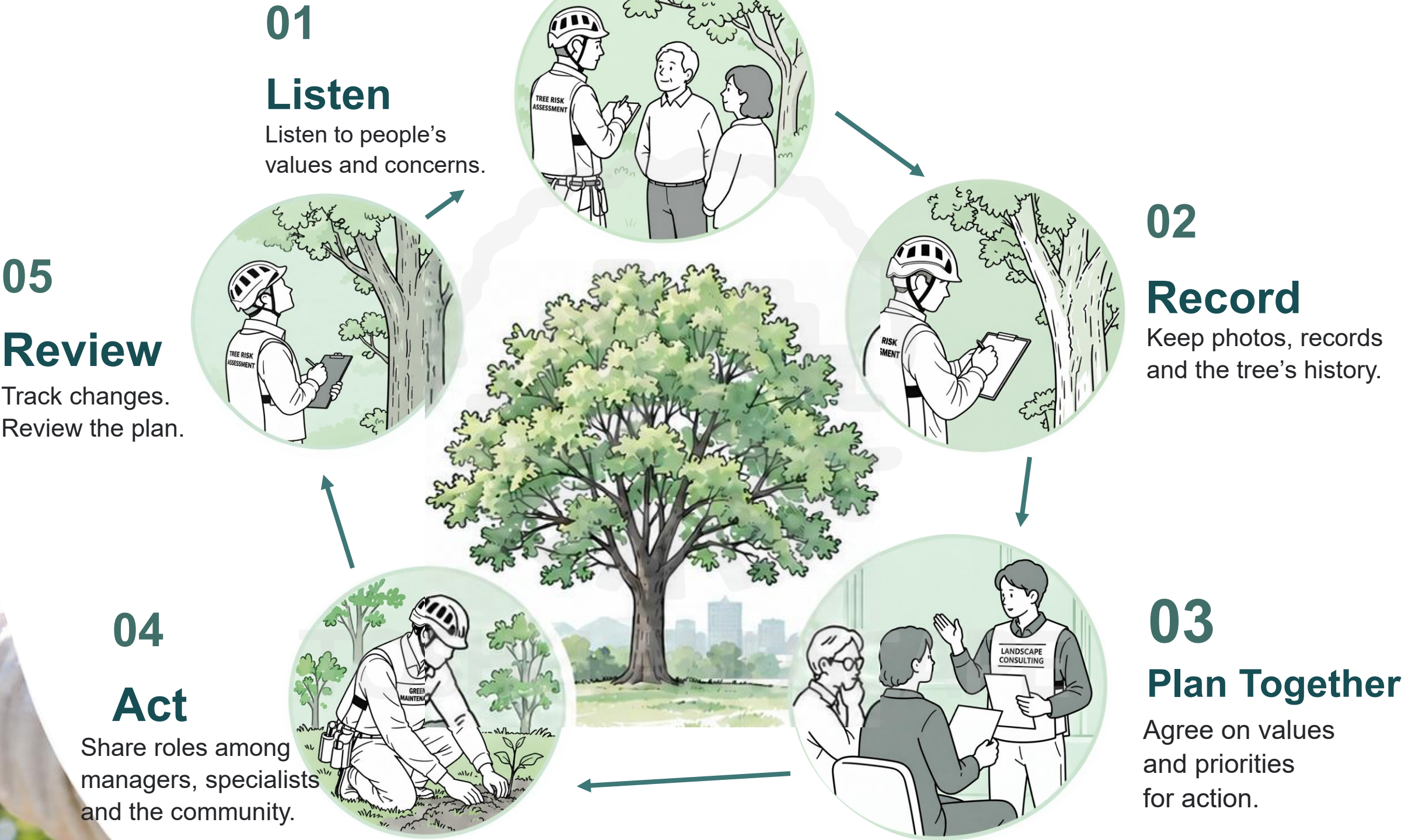


Foliage, fallen leaves and dead wood
can also provide habitat.



Consider how the site is used when deciding what to retain and how to manage it.

Sustaining Care with the Community



Lessons for Future Urban Foresters



TOSHI LANDSCAPE

01

Understand the Tree and Its Local Meaning

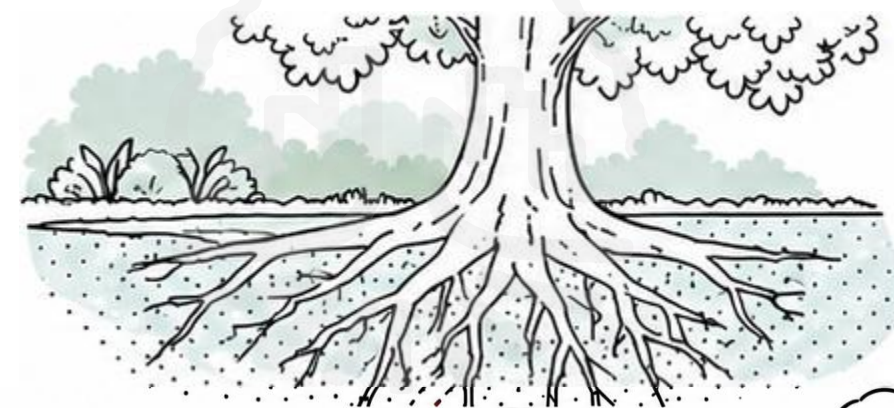
Ask why people value it, as well as measuring its condition.



02

Look Beyond the Crown

Consider the roots, soil and surrounding environment.



03

Sustain the People and Systems of Care

Continue observation and dialogue beyond a single intervention.





TOSHI LANDSCAPE

**Which tree in your community
would you like to pass on
to the next generation?**

Thank you

笠原 功貴 | Isaki Kasahara · Arborist
Toshi Landscape Co., Ltd.