



Growing Urban Resilience: The Miyawaki Tiny Forest

The Concept

Urban areas often have limited space for nature, while expanding built surfaces reduce biodiversity and increase urban heat. Tiny Forests create dense and diverse pockets of native woodland within relatively small areas. By planting different native species and vegetation layers closely together, they encourage rapid growth and the development of resilient ecosystems. Even in small spaces, these forests can enhance biodiversity, provide cooling, improve local environmental conditions and bring nature closer to urban communities. The concept shows how small interventions can help restore natural processes within densely built environments.

Japan in Focus

The Tiny Forest concept can be traced back to Japan in the 1970s, where efforts to restore native forests explored a different approach to conventional tree planting. Rather than relying on a few selected species, the approach sought to recreate the diverse vegetation naturally suited to each location. Early applications demonstrated how dense planting of native trees and shrubs could help restore resilient forest ecosystems, even on degraded and modified land. The method was first applied at industrial sites and later expanded to universities, public spaces, and other locations across Japan. Over time, this locally rooted approach attracted international attention, allowing the idea to travel beyond Japan and be adapted to different climates and urban environments.

How it works:



Developed by Japanese plant ecologist Professor Akira Miyawaki, the method begins by identifying the native trees and shrubs naturally suited to the local climate, soil, and ecosystem. The soil is prepared to support healthy growth, and a diverse mix of native species, representing different layers of a natural forest, is planted closely together. This dense planting encourages competition for light and space, helping vegetation grow quickly and develop a complex forest structure. During the first years, the young forest requires watering and maintenance, but as it matures, natural processes increasingly take over, allowing the ecosystem to become more self-sustaining. Miyawaki's approach demonstrates that restoring a forest is not simply about planting trees, but about recreating a diverse ecosystem rooted in local nature. Even great things begin with a tiny first step.



Sources: <https://earthwatch.org.uk/toolsresources/miyawaki-research-network/>

The Travelling Idea

What began as an approach to restoring native forests in Japan can inspire communities elsewhere. The idea is not to recreate a Japanese forest, but to adapt the underlying principle to local conditions: use native vegetation, work with natural processes, and create diverse ecosystems suited to each place.

Takeaway



Small spaces can grow into thriving forests. By working with native nature, communities can create greener, more resilient places.

