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Urban Woodland Understory Characteristics in Relation to Aesthetic and Recreational Preference

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Abstract: Urban woodlands provide aesthetic experiences and recreational opportunities for people. The characteristics of vegetation are closely linked to these benefits. However, previous research has primarily focused on the effects of trees on aesthetic preference, while less research has involved the understory. This paper explored the relationship between understory characteristics and aesthetic or recreational preference. Twenty one images were rated for preference by participants (n=184) on a five-point scale. Except for the original picture, these images were created using the photomontage method that manipulated understory height, the flowers and the path of the original picture. Results indicated that: (1) concerning aesthetic preference, all vegetated images were preferred more than the paved image, but for recreational preference, the paved image was preferred over the vegetated images; (2) the height of understory vegetation had a significant influence on aesthetic and recreational preference; (3) flowers and path increased aesthetic and recreational preference significantly. These results suggest that, in management of woodland, (1) maintaining the understory vegetation in middle height (0.5–1.0m) or in full-mixed heights (low+ middle+ tall) (2) increasing shade-tolerance flowers and constructing a winding path in woodland would be preferred by the public.

Key words: aesthetic preference; management; recreational preference; understory; urban woodlands.

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