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For more information on this study, go to www.herl.uiuc.edu or contact the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Human-Environment Research Laboratory, 1103 S. Dorner Dr., Urbana, IL 61801, phone (217) 333-1965. This project was supported by the USDA Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Program on the recommendation of the National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council. Grant #01-DG-11244225-292. Findings do not necessarily reflect the views of the USDA Forest Service.

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Frances E. Kuo and William C. Sullivan, Directors

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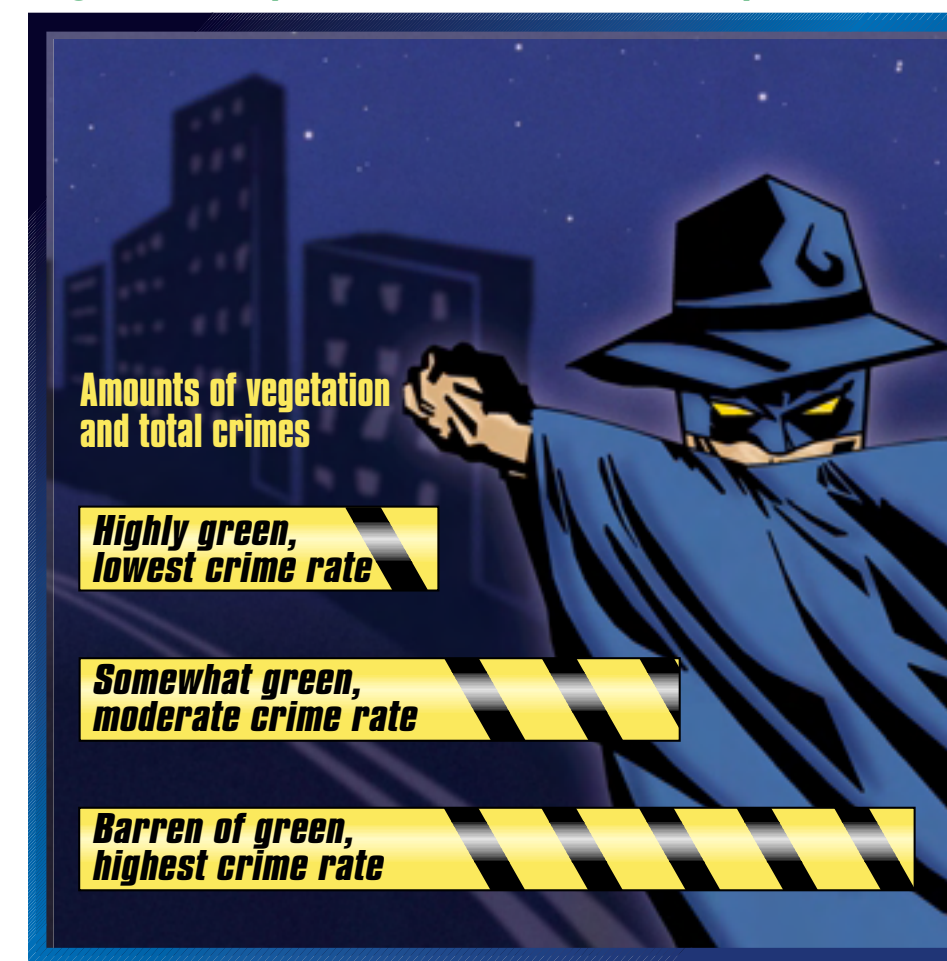


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Green Streets, Not Mean Streets

Vegetation May Cut Crime in the Inner City



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In an inner city neighborhood, the greener the residence, the lower the crime rate.



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Since days of yore, authorities have cleared trees and shrubbery from crime-prone areas to eliminate hiding places for illicit activity. In 1285, King Edward I decreed in the Statute of Winchester that highways be cleared by a width of 200 feet on either side, "...so that no cover for malefactors should be allowed."¹ Seven

centuries later, removing greenery to deter crime is a practice that continues.

In America's inner cities, crime is widespread while greenery is scarce. In urban settings even small patches of green are oases from harsh surroundings. The removal of green where so little exists is keenly felt.

¹Plunknett, T.F.T. (1960). *Edward I and Criminal Law*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.



While some studies have shown that vegetation is related to crime and fear of crime, a study in an urban neighborhood suggests the opposite. University of Illinois researchers Frances E. Kuo and William C. Sullivan tested the common wisdom that in the inner city, barren spaces are safer than green ones.

Residents living in greener surroundings report lower levels of fear, fewer incivilities and less violent behavior.

They compared crime rates for inner-city apartment buildings with varying amounts of vegetation and found that the greener the surroundings, the fewer crimes occurred against people and property. Far from shielding criminals, such greenery seems to shield against them.

Why Greenery May Cut Crime

No studies have been done to determine whether crime rates are actually higher in densely vegetated areas. Two studies have shown that criminals use dense vegetation such as shrubs, underbrush and dense woods to conceal their activities. Other studies have found that dense vegetation in some settings evokes fear and fear of crime, especially when it blocks views. However, not all greenery blocks views.

Widely spaced high-canopy trees, flowers, grass and low-growing shrubs do not block views, shield crime or create the type of surroundings that promote fear. In the inner city, vegetation that allows for visibility seems to promote safety. Factors combine to explain why this is so.

We're watching and we care. Green spaces bring people together outdoors. The conspicuous presence of people increases surveillance, which discourages criminals. More people outdoors means that threatening behavior is more likely to

be observed. At the same time, potential criminals sense that they are being noticed and watched. The green and groomed appearance of an apartment building is itself a cue that residents and owners care about a property, and watch over it and each other.

We're calm. A large body of research indicates that time spent in nature lessens mental fatigue, inattentiveness, irritability and impulsivity—states of mind that psychologists recognize as precursors to violence. Greenery helps people to relax and renew, reducing aggression and increasing calm.

About the Study

The study by Kuo and Sullivan was the first to use police crime reports to examine the relationship between crime rates and vegetation in the inner city. Analyzed were two years of police data on property and violent crimes for 98 apartment buildings in a public housing development in Chicago. Buildings included in the study were similar in size, number of residents and amount of common outdoor space. Chicago Police Department year-end Uniform Crime Reports were analyzed. The reports summarized the specific crimes that were reported for each address.

Residents were predominantly African American, unemployed and receiving public assistance. They were generally uninvolved in landscaping decisions and their apartments were randomly assigned, so no relationship existed between the residents and the amount of greenery in the space outside their home.

Aerial and ground-level photos of the residences' common outdoor areas were used to record the amounts of greenery, which were then assessed and rated on a scale ranging from barren to fully covered by green tree canopy.

Green Streets, Not Mean Streets

Compared with apartment buildings that had little or no greenery, **buildings with high levels of greenery had roughly half as many crimes** (48 percent fewer property crimes and 56 percent fewer violent crimes) as buildings with no greenery. Even buildings with medium amounts of greenery had 42 percent fewer total crimes (40 percent fewer property crimes and 44 percent fewer violent crimes). **Apartment buildings landscaped with greenery were clearly less crime-prone than barren ones.**

The results support prior studies that found that inner-city residents who live in green surroundings experience fewer quality-of-life crimes, such as littering and graffiti, as well as fewer incivilities, such as noisy or disruptive neighbors. The results are also consistent with prior studies in which people reported feeling safer in residential areas that contained greenery.

"In poor, urban neighborhoods it appears that greenery not only creates a better environment, it also creates a safer environment," said Frances E. Kuo, assistant professor and co-director of the Human-Environment Research Laboratory at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. "The meanest streets are not the greenest streets."

Green spaces are gathering places that create close-knit communities and improve well-being—and in doing so, they increase safety. In inner-city neighborhoods, tall trees and open, grassy areas that preserve visibility are recommended as potential deterrents to crime.



The fewer the number of trees surrounding residential buildings, the higher the number of reported crimes.

Greenery helps people to relax and renew, reducing aggression and increasing calm.

Ideas for Property Owners, City Residents and Public Safety Officers

- ❑ Think twice before removing trees or greenery for security reasons. Greenery that preserves visibility may promote safety.
- ❑ Landscape urban apartment buildings with tall trees, grass, groundcover, low-growing shrubs and flowers. Such spaces unite neighbors and may inhibit criminals.
- ❑ Spend time daily in the green outdoors. Doing so helps refresh the mind, and dissolve anxiety and tension.
- ❑ Support tree planting and tree care in the inner city. In harsh environments, a little green goes a long way.