



S.E.T. for socio-economic growth

National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF)

media release

Arbor Week 2023: Trees as lifelines in a changing world

What makes tree planting of paramount importance? In the face of escalating climate change, global pandemics, and social unrest, the importance of planting trees cannot be underestimated. Trees are fundamental to life. They are ecosystem engineers for the great forests, providing habitat for innumerable plant and animal species. They help to filter rainwater and improve water quality and provide a host of other ecosystem services.

South Africa (SA) is now in Heritage Month and in Arbor Week, 29 August to 4 September 2023, a nationwide celebration of trees, environmental conservation, and community engagement. Currently, individuals, organisations, and communities across the country are coming together to plant trees and promote a sustainable future. The 2023 theme, "Forests and Health," underscores the critical connection between healthy forests and the well-being of our communities.

Plant Health award winner: [Prof Michael Wingfield](#), a specialist in plant pathology and entomology, is a Professor at the Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute (FABI); and Adviser to the Executive, University of Pretoria (UP). Prof Wingfield received the 2020 [Special Annual Theme Award: Plant Health](#), at the prestigious [NSTF-South32 Awards](#).

Wingfield emphasises the significance of preserving trees. He has made a lifetime's worth of contributions to the identification and management of plant diseases, as well as the education and mentorship of very large numbers of plant pathologists and entomologists globally. In fact, he is considered the person responsible for developing the field of tree health in SA. Prof Wingfield says people need to understand that plant health and human health are deeply interconnected.



He says: “The devastation of forests due to alien invasive pests and pathogens impacts quality of life, access to water, clean air, and other ecosystem services”. Prof Wingfield contends he sees many similarities between tree health and the COVID-19 pandemic. Trees, like people, live for long time periods. When they encounter novel pests, they are without defence systems to fight them.

About the NSTF: The [National Science and Technology Forum \(NSTF\)](#) observes this important week aimed at celebrating the beauty and importance of trees. NSTF is an independent non-profit [stakeholder body and network](#) – a civil-society forum of [organisations involved in science, engineering, technology \(SET\) and innovation in SA](#). We urge people from all aspects of the community to get involved by preserving and planting trees.

Read about previous and related [NSTF Discussion Forums](#):

- [Climate Change Just Transition Framework](#), 08 April 2022
- [Plant health in SA – threats to biosecurity, biodiversity and food security](#), 10 – 11 June 2021

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- YouTube: [National Science and Technology Forum \(NSTF\)](#)
- TikTok: [nstf_sa](#)

References/Sources:

<https://www.dffe.gov.za/event/deptactivity/2023arbormonthcampaign#objectives>

<https://www.southafrica.com/blog/national-arbor-week-in-south-africa/>

<https://trees.org.za/the-importance-of-planting-trees/#:~:text=They%20are%20ecosystem%20engineers%20for,key%20tenet%20of%20green%20infrastructure>

<https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/32472/WF20EN.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

[Arbor Week 2023 | South African Government \(www.gov.za\)](#)

About the NSTF

The National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF), established in 1995:

- is a broadly-representative stakeholder body for all science, engineering and technology (SET) and innovation organisations in South Africa
- gathers stakeholders around burning issues of national and global interest, across the public and private sectors, including matters of public policy
- includes a network of professional societies in SET and STEM education (STEM = science, technology, engineering and mathematics) - the NSTF proSET membership sector.
- recognises, awards and profiles the outstanding contributions of individuals and groups to SET and innovation through the prestigious NSTF Awards
- runs and supports collaborative projects and youth outreach, including recognition of top performance in mathematics and science, role modelling, bursary and STEM career information
- runs and supports the STEMulator.org which attracts youth and educators to Explore>Discover>Learn the world of STEM including careers. (Established by NSTF proSET)

For more information

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