



How to Start an Urban Orchard

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BULLETIN

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Trees for food adds a whole new dimension to urban forestry – and is one more way that trees can benefit the residents of our communities. With the right partnerships, a little planning, and a lot of education, fruit and nut trees can make a huge contribution to the tradition of service already provided by our green canopies.

Trees play a lot of roles in a community. While providing their more traditional services of shade, beauty, stormwater control and energy savings, trees can be selected that also provide a crop of fresh fruit or nuts on public rights-of-way, portions of school grounds and in parks. On private land, urban orchards can be planted on unused lots and church grounds. And, of course, there are residents' yards where a pear tree may work as well in the landscape as yet another maple or linden. The potential, in most climate areas of North America, is almost unlimited.

Alliance for Community Trees (ACTrees) has been a leader in promoting and developing guidelines for the use of food trees and much of the material in this bulletin is the result of their pioneering work. Community GrovesSM is the name of ACTrees' food focus initiative and the movement is growing nationwide.

"Community GrovesSM brings back one of the oldest uses of trees," says Carrie Gallagher, ACTrees Executive Director. "Fruit and nut trees have supported human nutrition for thousands of years. In recent decades, as the population has urbanized, people have lost touch with their food sources – even the ones that can grow right in their front yards." She summarizes the goal of the ACTrees' program, and that of this bulletin, saying, "The pleasure of picking a ripe pear, plum, or persimmon from a tree in (a) yard or neighborhood garden is not just a sweet seasonal joy. It also offers fresh and nutritious food to communities that may lack ready access to quality produce. It educates people about food sources and growing cycles, and about basic tree biology and agriculture. It brings neighbors together to dig and plant and prune and harvest, and to enjoy the delicious bounty of their trees. And it engages residents to alter their landscape, turning vacant lots and derelict spaces into beneficial gardens that can help turn a neighborhood around."

If your community does not include food trees in its urban forestry program, the following pages can serve as a guide to getting started. Whether it is a new initiative of the tree board or helping out another organization, the possibilities range from full-scale orchards to simply encouraging homeowners to plant a food tree.

As incongruous as it may seem at first, restoring one of the earliest uses of trees to our urban landscapes holds the potential of improving human health, fostering greater social interaction, and adding one more benefit to the long list of those resulting from continuous, systematic urban forestry.



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