

Vancouver seeks stewards for fruit, nut trees

Parks staff developing programs to help people manage and harvest growing urban orchard

BY RANDY SHORE, VANCOUVER SUN MARCH 2, 2013



Vancouver council and the city's park board are developing plans to plant 150,000 more trees - including food-bearing nut and fruit trees - on the city's boulevards.

Photograph by: Jenelle Schneider, Vancouver Sun Files, Vancouver Sun

Help wanted: Stewards needed for the city's existing fruit trees and the thousands more trees to come as part of Vancouver's Greenest City Action Plan.

Park board staff are vetting applications from homeowners and community groups eager to take part in a pilot project to plant residential boulevards with fruit trees. But many of the city's existing fruit and nut orchards - in Falaise Park, Ross Park, Memorial West Park and some boulevard stands - have no formal stewards.

Vancouver council and the park board are committed to planting 150,000 more trees on the city's boulevards and parks by 2020 and have instructed staff to include food-bearing fruit and nut trees where feasible.

Policy is the easy part. Fruit trees require pruning, pest control, watering and harvesting and they can be a stinking menace when fruit is left to fall and rot.

A recent attempt to establish an orchard on a residential boulevard was abandoned when some residents on the block objected to the plan.

Residents have to be in agreement before any planting takes place, said director of parks Bill Harding.

"With fruit and nut trees, we don't want people sabotaging trees or getting into conflict with their neighbours," said Harding. "We don't want to get people fighting over a couple of trees."

Only a handful of the city's 1,000-plus fruit and nut trees in parks and on boulevards have formal stewards to care for them, according to city arborist Bill Manning.

Collingwood Neighbourhood House cares for fruit trees in Slocan Park and trees in the city's community gardens are well maintained, said Manning.

Some of the most abundant fruit crops are picked by the volunteer-run Vancouver Fruit Tree Project.

"They have a good sense of where the most valuable fruit is and they are looking after those trees," he said. "Some informal groups have popped up to care for trees in some parks, but we are still looking for groups to take on the orchards we established recently in Falaise, Memorial West and Ross Park in a more formal way."

Plans to plant more orchards and food-bearing trees are being incorporated into the city's Urban Forest Management Plan due to come to Vancouver Council in draft form this June.

Harding believes the city's community gardens are the "best and easiest" place to plant fruit trees with the greatest likelihood of attracting committed, enthusiastic stewards.

"Those people are there all the time and they view the trees as a natural extension of their gardens," he said.

Parks staff are preparing a program to train volunteer fruit tree stewards in pest management and pruning as new orchards and boulevard stands are established, Harding said.

"Caring for fruit trees is a slow process and it can take years to get a good crop, so people lose interest," said Manning. "It can be a lot of work and it's difficult."

Groups and individuals interested in taking on stewardship of existing fruit and nut trees in parks and on boulevards can contact Manning at bill.manning@vancouver.ca.

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