

# NOT FAR FROM THE TREE

T.O.'s first community orchard is seeding a fresh fruit revolution

BY ENZO DIMATTEO AUGUST 19, 2009 1:20 AM



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Community orchards have been around in the UK for three decades, but the idea of a "commons" where fruit is grown, harvested and shared, is newer to North American cities.

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Toronto planted its first community orchard at Ben Nobleman Park, across the street from the Eglinton West subway, in June.

Nine trees were planted, three each of cherry, plum and pear, with five more slated for the fall.

The inspiration? A pre-industrial idea that citizens have rights to the shared use of city-owned land. Pretty democratic.

Of course, it was bound to spark a backlash. Where will the children play? Can fruit grown in the smoggy city be safe to eat?

Fortunately, eco justice prevailed. Other neighbourhoods are biting at the opportunity to sow their own local food uprising. Got the itch?

## COMMUNITY GROWS A NATURAL

- Many parts of Toronto north of St. Clair were once dotted with orchards. A few surviving stands, those that weren't bulldozed to make room for post-World War II housing, can still be

spotted in backyards.

## FEEDING THE FOOD CHAIN

- The current recession has brought home the idea that cities, too, need to find ways to provide healthy, sustainable food for the masses. In Philadelphia, abandoned inner-city lots are being turned into orchards and helping to feed locals and supply food banks.

## THE POLITICS OF PLANTING

- Community orchards aren't just about making nice with the birds and bees. They're the archetypal gathering place (think pioneer days) where food as well as fresh ideas (think Isaac Newton) are shared during the growing season and at harvest.

## BEARING FRUIT

- The ripple effects of the Ben Nobleman Park experiment are already being felt. A number of community groups have contacted the parks and forestry department about planting their own orchards.

## NEXT UP

Growing for Green, the group behind Ben Nobleman, launches another first: a garden-sharing initiative. [sharingbackyardstoronto.ca](http://sharingbackyardstoronto.ca)