

Cities are Planting Trees — Why Not Make Them Fruit Trees?

Garrison Hines would spend all of his time growing food if he could.



The ironworker from Philadelphia developed a passion for farming in 2018 when an urban gardener showed him a mulberry tree, which produces fruit similar to blackberries. Although Hines had visited an apple orchard as a kid, that mulberry was the first tree he realized could be harvested near his home. They're all around the city, the gardener told him. Hines had no idea.

Working on various urban greening projects through a job-training program helped Hines “see the city in a way I’d never seen Philadelphia before.” To him, it became a place that could produce a bounty of food, particularly in neighborhoods like North Philly, where he grew up. After volunteering at [Philadelphia Orchard Project](#), Hines planted his own orchard in 2021. “I already had the site that I wanted to use in mind,” he says. “[It] has been an empty lot my entire life.” Today, he and community volunteers tend to 14 different fruit trees — from apple to elderberry — on that transformed piece of land.

With fruit trees in almost every neighborhood, Philadelphia provides a roadmap for others to follow. A residential tree-giveaway program, a community-informed strategic plan for tree cover, and collaboration with the nonprofit Philadelphia Orchard Project (POP) are just a few ways the city is working to bring food-bearing trees to neighborhoods most in need.

“We really did hear from residents that food-bearing trees are important,” says Marisa Wilson, the urban forestry community organizer with Philadelphia’s parks and recreation department.

“My dream is that residents have the resources they need to pursue food production in the ways that best benefit them and connect them to their neighbors, culture, and ancestors,” says Wilson.

She and others doing this work believe in a future where trees are abundant and where everyday people steward them. They see residents filling backyards, parks, and vacant lots with berries, bushes, and vines — tapping into their lineages to find points of connection to the process of tending, harvesting, and preparing the abundance. If their vision becomes reality, cities will be lined with food-bearing trees, children will pick peaches and apples on their way to school, and all will thrive beneath a canopy of green.