

Life Lessons Learned From Pears



Volunteers gather around the table where the harvest will ripen

Photo Sophie Braccini

Siamack Sioshansi believes that there are many lessons that can be learned from growing pear trees and harvesting their fruit. Over two weekends in August, about 35 volunteers from Urban Farmers, the non-profit organization that Sioshansi founded about three years ago, harvested hundreds of pounds of pears from private gardens across Lafayette to be donated in the area. In the process, they did more than pick fruit, they participated in a movement that aims at nothing less than shifting our ecological paradigm.

For Sioshansi, fruit trees are the perfect means to affect change. "70 percent of the weight of a fruit tree is made of carbon that the tree extracted from our polluted atmosphere," he explains, "after a few years it will feed

those who planted it, then it will continue to grow and feed a community. Long after those who planted it are gone, it continues to give plentifully if it is taken care of. Fruit trees are a perfect metaphor for life at its best on our planet."

Urban Farmers started the program it calls "A Thousand Trees for Lamorinda" two years ago, and continues to plant, train tree owners, and harvest any extra fruit to give to those in need.

Children are often the most enthusiastic participants in the harvest. "I'm not sure that my six-year old daughter really understood where the fruit was going, but she certainly had fun harvesting," said Nanette Hefferman. In fact it was so much fun that over the two weekends the group collected close to a thousand pound of

pears. "We collected 500 pounds today and just as much last week," said Nooshy Mobasher, a volunteer with Urban Farmers, "we also sent

350 pounds of pears that had fallen on the floor to the Lindsay Wildlife Museum—the 'residents' ate all of them within the week."

Pears are picked green so wildlife does not get at it before humans do, and because it is the best way to get excellent fruit. "Unlike most other fruits, pears ripen from the inside out," explains Sioshansi. "The best pear is produced by picking the fruit hard and then ripening it off the tree for one to two weeks." The problem is that soup kitchens and food banks do not typically have enough space to spread the harvest out and allow the

pears to ripen. Sioshansi called upon Urban Farmers' friends, and a number of families in the community offered their home to ripen the pears on desks, ping pong tables, drying boards, etc. "Once the pears are ready, we pack and deliver them to our partner agencies," he says.

Urban Farmers also runs Backyard Farms, a program where homeowners donate the use of land in their back yards and water where the group grows food. The harvest is shared between the homeowners and those in need. For more information go to www.theurbanfarmers.org.

Moraga Pear and Wine Festival

Saturday, September 24, 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., Moraga Commons Park
Combining both Moraga's pear past and potential wine future, the annual Pear Festival has been renamed and reinvented. The day will include activities for all ages, including wine tasting, bounce houses, artist and business fairs, and service organization and local foundation information booths. Don't miss out on the fabulous pear pies!

Labyrinths: Walking in Circles with a Purpose

By Cathy Dausman

The pace of life in Lamorinda can sometimes make people feel as if they're running in circles. Oddly enough, some seek out another circle to quiet the mind and disconnect. They walk the labyrinth.

Early references to the labyrinth date to ancient Greece. Labyrinth designs show up on ancient coins. In the Middle Ages in Europe churches built labyrinths. Labyrinth designs follow the Chartres, Baltic, Classical, and Concentric manner. A person winding along a 30 foot diameter labyrinth route ends up walking over 100 yards. Technically speaking, a labyrinth is not a maze. A maze has built-in dead ends; a labyrinth always leads the walker to its center. No one gets lost, except in thought, walking a labyrinth.

Labyrinths are found in buildings

and outside, in churches, private backyards and parks. They can be built from rock, lighted candles, groomed from grass or plants, or carved into stone. There is labyrinth art, music, books, workshops, and even labyrinth soaps. There are labyrinth designers, contractors and tours.

An online search referenced 18 labyrinths in a 10 mile radius of Lamorinda. According to www.labyrinthlocator.com, San Francisco's Grace Cathedral has a labyrinth, as does Danville's San Damiano retreat house. A stone labyrinth is located along the Seaview Trail in Tilden Park. Another, Mazarriello's Labyrinth, is in the Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve (Sibley Park). Walnut Avenue United Methodist Church in Walnut Creek has two. ... continued on page B2

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