LAMORINDA WEEKLY | Over 700 Trees Planted by Local Suburban Farmi...ganization helps community care for and harvest trees for charity



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Organization helps community care for and harvest trees for charity Submitted by Ashley Hagin



Three years ago, The Urban Farmers - the Lafayette suburban farming group - challenged the Lamorinda community to plant 1,000 fruit trees within five years. Since then, the group has succeeded in planting 720 trees around the county, the majority of which are in Lamorinda. As word of the organization's goal has spread, trees have been popping up in Danville, Alamo, Walnut Creek, and Concord as well.

The planting of fruit trees in local backyards is an important step on the path to hunger relief in the community. "If you plant an apple tree in your backyard, in a few years it will start producing fruit in large volume. An apple tree can put out 200 to 300 apples a year," says Siamack Sioshansi, executive director of The Urban Farmers. "After your family eats, cans, and gives away all that you want, in most cases you will still have fruit to donate."

To enable both novice and experienced residents to grow fresh, flavorful fruit, the organization provides free workshops on how to plant trees bought through their program. After teaching homeowners how to plant the trees, the organization services them on a communal basis,

Lamorinda residents prepare to harvest pears during a family day. Photo Siamack Sioshansi

pruning and spraying to save busy homeowners from having to become tree experts. The organization also harvests the excess fruit to donate to local food banks - in a typical day, volunteers visit four to five homes and harvest between 500 and 1,000 pounds of fruit.

Still, for those who want to learn how to care for their own trees, The Urban Farmers also offers pruning classes and workshops. "A few people can learn enough at a workshop to get out there and prune their trees," says Sioshansi. "Most others, including the most confident gardeners, don't feel comfortable pruning a tree. One of my friends said pruning is like swimming: You can't learn by talking about it."

To raise that comfort level, the organization is in the final stages of planning two orchards - 125 trees in Danville and 27 trees in Lafayette - for training purposes. "This way, homeowners who want to learn can come out and make as many cuts, under supervision, as they need until they feel they can swim to the other end, at home," Sioshansi says. The orchards will be planted in early February; families and individuals are invited to participate.

The Urban Farmers' group fruit tree purchase is now open and will run through Feb. 6. Visit www. theurbanfarmers.org or www.facebook.com/theurbanfarmers.org for more information about upcoming events.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

