

Rethinking 'Grab 'N Go'

Graduate project aims to increase food security

Ever wish you had remembered to pack a snack for a stroll on the bike path? Soon, you need not look much further than the public fruit trees scattered around Athens, which are growing in number thanks to a few of OHIO's own.

This May, Environmental Studies graduate student Lori Gromen, in partnership with professor of Nutrition Dr. David Holben, Community Food Initiatives (CFI), and the City of Athens, will carry out the planting of 25 fruit trees on city property in an effort to increase the

availability of healthful food in the community. The fruit tree plantings are funded as part of Dr. Holben's larger ECOhio Garden project (see "Profile" in this issue).

In considering planting sites, Gromen took into account soil, sunlight, and water availability. She also considered issues like cross-pollination so that the cultivars would sustain each other. She sought to match fruit trees to locations, putting the hardiest (mulberry) in the most isolated spots, such as Southside Park, where deer are the most prevalent visitors; and the more sensitive (cherry) in locations where there is greater likelihood for resident care.

Gromen was particularly excited to discover a planting site on the northern side of Arts West off of West State Street where the position of the building creates a nice microclimate—one protected from harsh winds, but still allowing for plenty of

sunlight—presenting the possibility of planting peach trees and berry bushes. Highland Park, she said, is another excellent site, because of its dark, rich soil and good drainage; it will soon be home to currants and gooseberries.

Partnering with the university's grounds crew, fruit trees will also appear at the Child Development Center (CDC) and the OHIO Ecohouse, where CDC's garden savvy tots will benefit from fresh seasonal pears and cherries. Meanwhile, OHIO Ecohouse residents will add persimmons, pears, and berries to their regime of food self-sufficiency.

Gromen is pleased that her project will contribute to the food security of Athens residents.

"There are a lot of folks in Athens who enjoy feeding themselves from their backyard garden. But most of them don't have room for an orchard." Another component of Gromen's project was to map the fruit trees already thriving on Athens public property in order to raise awareness about the fresh, nutritious food readily available to residents. Citizens need only follow the map to a healthy, convenient snack, courtesy of mother nature.

Gromen conducted much of her research on foot, identifying mulberries along the bike path, apples near the community garden, and pawpaws in Sells Park. The CFI Web site will soon host a Google Map which has information regarding location, fruit type, and ripening facts. This map will be updated on a regular basis as more fruit trees are planted and may someday even contain information about nut trees and other wild edibles.

By: Kim Criner

Visit athensfruittrees.blogspot.com for Gromen's map of public fruit trees in Athens.

