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## FEATURE



### In Our Own Backyards

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Once upon a time, the intersection of St. Clair and Spadina was surrounded by farmland that fed the citizens of Toronto. be subdivided and sold off, early European newcomers who settled in the then-rural area often planted small orchards as Today, remnants of those fruit trees are often looked upon with confusion or annoyance. Many of us would never think to eat apples growing in our yard. Instead, and take them to the curb. If we think falling fruit from trees on city-owned land near our homes poses a safety hazard, there's a city bylaw in place that lets us remove the trees for good.

Laura Reinsborough, who lives in the St. Clair neighbourhood, wants to help change Torontonians' relationship with fruit trees and provide local residents and food be and locally grown produce to boot. The recent York University environmental studies grad is starting an organization called Not Far From the Tree. Her aim is to mi with fruit tree owners who don't have the time to harvest their trees' bounty. One third of the fruit will go to the owners; another third will go to the volunteers and to local community organizations, such as food banks and shelters.

"There are tonnes of native species that are grown in the city that we don't tend to value as food sources," Reinsborough says. "A lot of people think of stuff grow drive to the supermarket and buy apples from Chile because it's a safer bet."

Reinsborough, a self-described fruit-tree-growing novice, was inspired to start Not Far From the Tree after working as a volunteer fruit picker at Spadina Museum I she would help harvest nearly 30 varieties of heritage apples and other fruit, including plums and pears, to sell at the Green Barns Farmers' Market. Actually selling vegetables that also grow in the property's heritage gardens) was a new idea for the provincially and municipally owned museum, though previous owners of the pi

"There are only two staff here so we don't really have time to look after [harvesting the all of the fruit] properly," explains Heritage Horticulturalist Wendy Woodwoi delivery of much of the fruit to other heritage sites, such as Colborne Lodge, Woodworth admits, "There was generally more fruit than we could use; a lot of it end

Reinsborough says that among the best things about selling the very locally grown food at the farmers' market were the resulting conversations. "People would see apples and say, 'Can you eat that?' And I would explain, well I picked it and biked it over this morning. It's from 1.3 kilometres away.... So then people would bite in the flavour was amazing."

But the importance of growing local food — and by doing so, decreasing consumers' reliance on fruit shipped in from another country or continent, using up tonnes the only motivation behind the project.

That so many people are going hungry in the city when nutritious food growing in our backyards is left uneaten is also a driving force. "There is enough food for eve Reinsborough. "The problem is distribution. The problem is politics, the global economics of it. We can start addressing that on a very small scale."

With the help of others active in Toronto's local food scene and organizations such as LEAF (Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests), who have expressed Reinsborough on an "edible tree tour," Reinsborough also hopes to "reclaim fading knowledge."

"I mean, I had never picked an apple until the first day of the market," she says. Luckily, she can also glean advice from groups who have started similar projects in Hamilton, Victoria and Vancouver. "Growing apples organically is difficult. Sometimes it works with neglect, but if you want one that's comparable to the ones that you get at a supermarket, then it's an art."

Overall, Reinsborough hopes Not Far From the Tree will help people see "part of the puzzle," when it comes to the food production cycle. "The idea isn't that if we have a backyard then we're going to sustain ourselves. This is just one way of opening up discussion," she says. "So when you hear that local farmland is being threatened, it's a problem."

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