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[HOME](#) › [FOOD](#) ›

A Plum Idea



Photo: Not Far From The Tree & Arjie de Chavez

Urban Harvesters Changing Attitudes to Wasted Food

Helena Moncrieff

Canada's urban harvesters are ahead of the curve. Armed with picking poles and a healthy appetite, they've been scouring our cities for years, plucking unwanted fruit from backyards and boulevards.

It's become an influential activity. In its forecast of trends for 2015, Nesta UK, an independent charity with a mission to help bring great ideas to life, predicts [gleaning will change our attitude to food waste](#).

[Not Far From The Tree](#) (NFFTT) founder Laura Reinsborough couldn't agree more. She and the more than one thousand volunteer harvesters in Toronto have been picking surplus fruit from private yards since 2008. The organization picked 22,440 pounds of fruit in 2013 and shared it with food banks, shelters and community kitchens. If that sounds like a lot of fruit, imagine this: an estimated 1.5 million pounds of fruit grows on trees, bushes and vines in Toronto.

Households have become smaller, there are fewer full-time homemakers, and many of us have lost the skills to process large quantities of fruit. Homeowners call the harvesters to help. "This is good, healthy fruit growing from urban branches. All that's needed is the organizing power to make sure the fruit gets picked and shared. This simple act has a profound impact: transforming a potential waste into a delicious asset for the whole community."

NFFTT covers Canada's biggest city but it followed a well-established path up the ladder. [The first program of its kind](#) started more than a decade ago in Victoria, B.C., a community with a rich history of fruit growing dating back to the 1800s.

Similar organizations are flourishing in [Vancouver](#), [Calgary](#), [Edmonton](#), [Winnipeg](#), [Hamilton](#), [Ottawa](#), [Montreal](#), and many other communities in between. Each follows a formula for sharing fruit among the volunteer pickers, the property owners, the organization and a community agency in need of food. Some can and jam, others run workshops or sell products including trees.

In Toronto, the mission to rescue what's already growing extends to doing no harm. NFFTT is committed to limiting its carbon footprint by transporting fruit only by bicycle. Supreme Gleaners, leaders of the harvests, pedal up to 200 pounds of fruit from backyard to agency across streetcar tracks and busy city streets. That takes a lot of attitude.

Not Far From the Tree's Founder and Director, Laura Reinsborough, will be a part of The Green Living Show's expert panel: [Appetite for Change](#), which look at ways to reduce food waste, taking place on Saturday March 28, 2015 at 12:45pm. See what else is happening at this year's food feature, [The Mindful Plate: Delicious Ways to Shrink Your Foodprint!](#)



Helena Moncrieff is a freelance writer researching a book on urban fruit.