

Boston's Food Forest Expansion

by Wendy Nadherny Fachon



The Boston Food Forest Coalition (BFFC) is leading the nation in green space equity and climate resilience. This community land trust has, to date, purchased and started cultivating 10 sites with the intention of developing 30 food forests by 2030. Essentially, food forests are edible parks. These urban food forests are often situated on vacant lots, and unlike community gardens or urban farms, they are designed to mimic ecosystems found in nature, with many vertical layers.

Trees, vines, shrubs, herbaceous plants and root vegetables work symbiotically to produce an abundance of fruit, nuts, tubers and edible greens. The plants shade and cool the land and air, regenerate the soil, provide

habitat for wildlife, beautify neighborhoods and help economically challenged areas become more resilient. Community volunteers work and learn together, choosing what to grow, planning seasonal activities and sharing their harvests with food banks and nonprofit and faith-based meal programs.

The Edgewater Neighborhood Association stewards the quarter-acre Edgewater Food Forest in Mattapan. The park project began with a lot clean up in April 2021. Teams built benches and a raised platform for yoga and performances. The largest trees grow black walnuts, which are difficult to crack, so the community added a walnut-cracking shed and plans events around harvest time. The park is also cultivating

figs, apricots, plums, strawberries, blackberries, golden berries and mushrooms.

Although Boston's food forests are small, they grow a large variety of produce, including Roxbury Russet apples, native blueberries and pawpaws. The city has been selling land to the BFFC's community land trust for \$100 per parcel since 2015 and helps fund initial construction and planting operations. Boston also adopted innovative zoning and permitting ordinances to support these food forest initiatives.

The BFFC, for its part, provides technical assistance and fundraising support. It hires experts for tasks such as soil remediation, invasive plant removal and accessible pathway development, as well as fence and bench installations. Furthermore, the BFFC land trust holds these urban food forests as permanently protected lands. Food forests are now a vital part of the city's open spaces program. This community-driven model assures the maintenance of these spaces without burdening city governments and sets an example for other cities across the country.

Urban food forest parks bring together neighbors, neighborhood associations, community-based organizations and city agencies, in a grassroots effort that responds to the interconnected crises of food security, social equity, climate change and environmental degradation.

The Boston Food Forest Coalition is located at 76 Weld Hill St., Jamaica Plain, MA. For more information, visit BostonFoodForest.org.

Wendy Nadherny Fachon is host of the Story Walking Radio Hour and has produced numerous episodes related to permaculture and food forest gardening. Find these free podcasts at Dreamvisions7radio.com/soil-science-and-bionutrition.