

GROWING FOOD IN HACKNEY TODAY

Often the food we eat is grown thousands of miles away and sometimes transported by plane. These unnecessary 'food miles' mean burning more fuel, releasing more CO₂, and accelerating global warming. Climate change should be of major concern to us all, and we need to look at making changes to the way our food is grown. Growing food locally in cities is one way we can make a real difference.

In spite of its urban setting, a lot of food is grown in Hackney – in allotments, parks and gardens, and at the recently-established Edible Forest Garden at the Tree Nursery on Hackney Marshes; as well as by Growing Communities and Hackney City Farm.

SOURCES OF FOOD IN HACKNEY

Trees and shrubs provide fruit and nuts: apples, pears, mulberries, sweet chestnuts and hazel nuts. Wine, jams and jellies are made from rose hips, crab apples, blackberries, elderberries and rowan berries. **Leaf plants** provide vegetables such as chard and rocket – wild plants which now appear on many menus. **Root vegetables** include horseradish, dandelion, beetroot and carrot. **Herbs**, such as rosemary and thyme, are good for biodiversity. **Honey** is produced in rooftop hives.

WHERE FOOD IS GROWN

Allotments

Allotments are in great demand and waiting lists can be long; but put your name down and, as you wait to get to the top of the list, why not consider volunteering at one of the community growing projects below. That way, you can grow food and learn as you go, and you may well be able to share in the harvest!

Many Hackney residents have allotments outside the Borough – in Waltham Forest and Haringey – because of the demand. Hackney Allotment Society can be contacted at: www.hackneyallotments.org.uk



Above: Schoolchildren receiving expert tuition in the art of planting vegetables in the beds of the Tree Nursery & Edible Forest Garden.

Streets and Housing Estates

Pear, apple, crab apple and rowan trees are planted on many sites, including Stamford Hill and Navarino Mansions, and on some streets in Hackney.

Private Gardens and Window Boxes

024 7630 3517 or www.gardenorganic.org.uk



Below, L-R: Blossom on pear tree, Kingfisher Wood, Hackney Marsh; tomatoes in Growing Communities' polytunnel, Springfield Park; herbs growing in containers, Tree Nursery & Edible Forest Garden; artichoke flowers and the developing leaves. Above: Hackney allotments near the River Lea.



You can volunteer at all the following sites in Hackney. The work helps you to keep fit and to meet other people, as well as making Hackney a greener, healthier place to live in.

Tree Nursery & Edible Forest Garden.

Hackney Marsh User Group (HMUG) volunteers started in 2006 to create an edible forest garden as part of the Tree Nursery on Hackney Marshes. Edible forest gardens comprise trees, shrubs, and perennial and annual species, that provide food for people and wildlife.

Using permaculture principles, species are chosen for the Edible Forest Garden by matching their characteristics and requirements with existing site conditions. Selection is also based on the species' ability to grow together and fulfil a number of functions, such as providing shade, supporting other plants, and adding minerals and nutrients to the soil.

Within the Edible Forest Garden the fruit and nut trees – apple, pear, cherry, plum, walnut, hazel and crab apple – form part of the canopy layer. Below them grow shrubs and perennial herbs tolerant of some shade, with annuals and sun-loving shrubs within open glades or at the edges.

The Edible Forest Garden is open every Tuesday from 12:30–2:30pm and Friday from 9:00–11:00am. Everyone is welcome to join our sessions (children must be accompanied by an adult). We often run free and low-cost skill-sharing workshops. Check the website www.hackneyenvironment.org.uk/TNFG for up-to-date details and to find out more, or phone 07950 539 254 or 07773 553 623.

Find further information about permaculture at: www.naturewise.org.uk and organiclea.org.uk

Parks and Public Open Spaces

Park User Groups and Tree Musketeers have worked with Parks staff to plant fruit trees in many of Hackney's parks and open spaces. Orchards have been planted at Butterfield Green and Springfield Park; fruit trees have been planted on Hackney Marshes and are planned for Hackney Downs in 2008.

Growing Communities

Growing Communities started in 1986 to convert some urban land into flourishing vegetable gardens, which are maintained with the help of volunteers. They now have 0.2 hectares (0.5 acres) of organic market gardens in Hackney, which are the first in London to be certified by the Soil Association.



Top: The Tree Nursery & Edible Forest Garden on Hackney Marsh. Above: Building compost bins from old pallets. Corrugated cardboard suppresses grass on the growing beds.



The food grown is sold through Growing Communities' Veg Box Scheme and is available to people who live or work in Hackney. Seasonal salad crops, plus potatoes and apples from farms in Essex and Kent, are collected from five pick-up points.

Growing Communities have two sites. One, in Springfield Park near the Mansion House, has a polytunnel for growing salad crops and uses part of the Park's greenhouses to extend the growing season and to grow more tender crops such as tomatoes, figs and grapes. The other, in Allens Gardens, has organic fruit trees, and raised beds for growing vegetables. There are volunteer sessions during the week, on Mondays and Tuesdays, and some weekends, on Sundays. Find out more details about volunteering at Growing Communities by phoning 020 7502 7588 or visiting www.growingcommunities.org

Left and above: Growing Communities' organic market garden at Springfield Park.