

VICTORIA NEWS

Community orchards take root in Victoria West



Vic West community orchard co-ordinator Patti Parkhouse, left, and Tayler Krawczyk and Solara Goldwynn of Hatchet and Seed Contracting proudly show off their dusty battle wounds after a solid day's work at the Vic West Community Centre. About 15 fruit and nut saplings will be planted at the site on Sept. 15. Photo by Jane Baigent

By Victoria News

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By [Daniel Palmer - Victoria News](#)

As municipal crews tore up a plot of grass recently at Banfield Park, Patti Parkhouse watched with glee.

Backhoes carved deep trenches into the soil beside the Vic West Community Centre, while more than 30 volunteers stood by with rotting wood, coffee grounds and wheelbarrows full of mulch at the crest of the grassy slope.

“The wood acts like a sponge to absorb the groundwater, and then releases it when we’re in a dry season like we’ve just experienced,” explains Parkhouse. For the past year she has been guiding the creation of a community orchard in her neighbourhood.

In March, Victoria council gave the green light to the Fernwood and Vic West community associations for their participation in the city’s orchard pilot project.

Parks crews are preparing the sites and supplying the fruit and nut trees, while volunteers will be responsible for planting the trees and keeping them healthy, as well as harvesting and distributing the food.

Soon, young apple, pear, plum, fig, chestnut, elderberry and even mulberry trees will neatly line the hugelkulturs, a German term for the rows of easy-to-maintain garden beds.

“It will be totally open to the public. Anyone can go in and pick. We’re hoping people won’t clean out the apple trees on one visit. It will be a cultural experiment,” Parkhouse says.

Both the Vic West and Fernwood community associations are designing the orchards to act as educational beacons for other neighbourhood associations. Parkhouse plans to install signage and run regular classes on tree pruning and tree health.

Curious steps such as intentionally infecting branches with fungi and burying them below the soil help nourish root growth, a process that requires hands-on learning, she says.

The city’s Official Community Plan explicitly encourages urban food production on city and private property as a way to increase food security, and has received enthusiastic support from council.

“It’s been a long time coming for there to be a document like the OCP which is encouraging the cultivation of fruit on public lands,” says Lee Herrin, executive director of the Fernwood Neighbourhood Resource Group.

Fernwood is also co-ordinating a kitchen garden project in conjunction with the orchard project.

“(The orchard) is more symbolic at this point ... but if we do a good job of it and if it does

indeed – to use a bad pun – bear fruit, I think we’ll see a lot more of these projects.”

Herrin expects Fernwood’s trees to be delivered at the end of September.

Back in Vic West, Parkhouse praises the expertise of edible landscaping experts Hatchet & Seed Contracting, who are providing invaluable insight on cultivating the trees. But she stresses the vast majority of work is being done by volunteers, given the project’s tight budget of \$27,000.

Volunteers are still needed for the Vic West tree planting, 10 a.m. to noon on Sept. 15. The event will be followed by a corn roast celebration. To sign up or for more information, email vicwestgarden@yahoo.ca or call 250-590-8922.

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