

Edible Community

## It Takes a Village Harvest

BY STACY BRISCOE | OCTOBER 26, 2017



### *Backyard Bounty Serves the Valley of Heart*

Once upon a time, the South Bay landscape was lined with more apple orchards than Apple computers. It was a time when Santa Clara Valley was called the Valley of Heart's Delight, and San Jose, the Garden City. As the area transitioned to what we now know as Silicon Valley, and industry moved from agriculture to technology, residential homes took the place of the rolling farms and fields.

Although streets are no longer lined with prune yards or blossoming cherry orchards, many homeowners have inherited one or more fruit-bearing trees on their property. This can be a blessing, but it can also be a burden: So abundant are some trees that folks can't always find a use for all the fruit produced. Fruits fall to the ground to rot, are picked only to be forgotten or end up in green bins awaiting the next trash pickup.

Enter Village Harvest.



"People often don't understand the fruit trees they've inherited," says Craig Diserens, co-founder of Village Harvest, a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating local residents on how to harvest their own fruit and put it to good use. "Home fruit trees are generally easy to pick, but people have to understand what it is, how to pick it and how to use it."

Diserens and his wife, Joni, founded Village Harvest back in 2001, when they gathered a group of 22 Palo Alto volunteers and picked over 1,200 pounds of citrus fruit in one neighborhood, donating it to a local food bank. Since its inception 16 years ago, the organization has expanded to include over 4,000 volunteers who harvest in neighborhoods throughout the mid-Peninsula and as far south as Santa Cruz. Collectively, Village Harvest has gathered more than two million pounds of fruit for such

charities as Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara and San Mateo County, Sacred Heart Community Service in San Jose, and St. Anthony's Padua Dining Room in Menlo Park.

When creating Village Harvest, Diserens says his “aha moment” came when he realized just how many people in his immediate surroundings were in need of fresh produce. In fact, according to statistics he gathered from Second Harvest Food Bank, one in 10 people in Silicon Valley are receiving food assistance. “There’s a large percentage of low-income families and seniors who are struggling to live in an expensive place,” says Diserens. And so the basis of Village Harvest is to act as the missing link between excessive food abundance and those who don’t have enough.



Village Harvest conducts between 10 and 20 harvests each month, with local volunteers visiting four to five homes per harvest in a designated neighborhood where they pick, gather and box as much fruit as the homeowners are willing to give. The focus is on assisting homeowners who aren’t able to harvest their own fruit trees: seniors, those with disabilities or those with so many trees they can’t physically pick them all themselves. Indeed, some properties in the Santa Cruz hills contain small orchards of their own.

Anyone can sign up to volunteer via the Village Harvest website, where the organization’s event calendar lists the dates and locations of each month’s scheduled harvests. Volunteers are welcome to sign up for more than one event—in fact, several do. As Diserens points out, the notion of helping those in need acts as the initial attraction but because it’s an active and social experience, one where people can cultivate friendships, Village Harvest maintains many regular weekly volunteers. “Plus, it’s fun,” he adds. “What we do is easy, there are lots of different aspects, lots of different jobs, and everyone appreciates it because it takes all those little pieces to make a successful harvest.”

And it is this combination of sharing food, friendship and fun that means Santa Clara Valley still really is The Valley of the Heart’s Delight.

---

*If you have a fruit tree with bounty to share or would like to volunteer to help pick fruit, visit **VillageHarvest.org** and sign up for a local harvest.*

Article from Edible Silicon Valley at <https://ediblesiliconvalley.ediblecommunities.com/think/it-takes-village-harvest>

Copyright ©2020 Edible Silicon Valley. All rights reserved