

Community Orchard Proposal

Barbara Alvarez, Justin Barney, Lunia Oriol, Ben Wansten
A²ZERO Ambassadors

Description of Proposed Project

Our A²ZERO Ambassadors team is proposing to create a community orchard that would serve as an education tool, source of locally produced fruit; and a place to gather and enjoy Ann Arbor's parks. The community orchard would ideally be a volunteer-initiated and volunteer-run public project. The objective of the community orchard is to reflect the goals of the carbon neutrality plan, to reduce our collective environmental impact, and to build community resilience.

Benefits of the Community Orchard

The orchard itself would be a positive aesthetic feature of a park and adjacent neighborhoods it occupies. It would produce fruit that could be harvested and consumed by the visitors to the park and encourage them to consider planting fruit trees on their properties. Fruit trees would help provide a healthy habitat for pollinators, beneficial to the entire ecosystem, including the residents' gardens, improving the pollination of plants they themselves are growing.

Involving the community in caring for the orchard guarantees long-term care for the site and creates good stewardship. Proximity to a community center or school would help generate potential volunteers, and realize the educational and recreational opportunities that come from the project.

Stakeholders

The immediate stakeholders are residents of the neighborhood adjacent to the park. For the stakeholders, the benefits of a nearby orchard include opportunities for volunteering outdoors, improved environmental conditions, and fresh fruit.

Orchard Plan

We propose planting 7 semi-dwarf fruit trees: 2 peach trees, 3 pear trees and 2 paw paws. The types of trees have been selected for their relative easy care and maintenance, resilience to pests and diseases, and the evidence of successful cultivation in our area.

Proposed Location

Arbor Oaks Park

Located in the heart of the Bryant/Arbor Oaks/Stoneybrook neighborhood, this 3.24 acre park includes a basketball court, playground, benches, pathways, open fields and picnic tables. There is a short paved loop to roll, walk or run on, and a series of rain gardens along the path. In close proximity there is Bryant Elementary School as well as the Bryant Community Center, which may be potential partners for this project. A big advantage of this park is the presence of a water fountain that may greatly help with seasonal watering of the orchard. We propose to plant the orchard in the open field inside the paved loop.



Commitment

We expect a low-level but long-term commitment, because orchards need long-term care to regularly produce fruit and remain healthy. Once we identify resident volunteers who want to contribute to the project, we will assign them to help with watering, annual fertilizing. For volunteers with horticulture experience, we will assign them long-term pruning. There are many service-oriented and leadership-oriented student and adult groups on University campus and in the City who may be interested in the orchard as a service project. With the volunteers in place who have the intention of remaining in Ann Arbor for the foreseeable future and who have the time to care for the orchard, the project will remain sustainable.

Project Timeline and Phases

Immediate:

The Community Orchard team would be responsible for planting and caring for the trees until resident volunteers are established.

First Year:

- Tree planting and mulching
- Regular watering using watering bags
- Recruitment and training of volunteers

Second Year:

- Checking if all tree survived the winter and, if not, planting replacements
- Regular watering
- Fertilization before "bud break" (based on the initial soil test)
- Mulching
- Weeding throughout the growing season
- Pruning in the late fall
- Installation of tree guards once the use of watering bags is discontinued
- Establishment of fertilization, paw paw pollination, weeding and pruning regimen for the long-term.

Long Term:

Depending on the initial size of trees, it may take 3-5 years for the new trees to fully establish themselves in the soil and bear fruit. Long-term care and maintenance is similar to that in the second year, but it requires a reliable and continuous cohort of volunteers committed to caring for the orchard. Hazard and mitigation measures should also be in place to address neglect, invasive species, diseases, vandalism, and natural disasters. We are not planning to use pesticides for pest management as they are harmful to the environment and people. If pest management is needed, organic measures will be explored.