

## Waste not – want not; everybody wins with gleaning

I remember seeing my very first cherry tree the first summer I lived in Kelowna. It was an such an amazing sight that my eyes actually welled up with tears! You see, cherries just happen to be on my top five list of favourite fruits. I couldn't believe how much fruit grew on a single tree and how lucky was I to be able to take a few steps out my door and eat such beautiful and delicious fruit!

I was even more amazed to learn that many Okanagan residents who own fruit trees do not harvest all the fruit. I thought about how much food goes to waste in the Okanagan – hundred of thousands of pounds. This is very unfortunate considering there are so many people who do not have enough food to eat.

In the winter of 2011, a few other volunteers and I decided it was time to start a gleaning project. Gleaning is when people gather together to harvest fruits and vegetables and then donate the food to organizations that serve people in need, like the food bank. It just made sense to have a gleaning project in the Okanagan – an area that produces so much food. After six months of planning and hard work, the [Central Okanagan Fruit Tree Project](http://www.okanaganfood.com/fruit-tree-project/) (<http://www.okanaganfood.com/fruit-tree-project/>) was born. In our first season, we picked and donated over 5000 pounds of produce to 15 different organizations. Together our volunteers picked cherries, apricots, plums, grapes, apples, and even tomatoes!

It is incredible how the community has embraced the Fruit Tree Project. This year, we are on target to double the amount of fruit donated. We have also partnered with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), whose participants come out with us to pick fruit. The participants love the opportunity to go out on a fruit picking adventure and take fruit home with them. This is also a wonderful opportunity for fresh air, exercise, socialization, healthy food, and increased mental wellbeing.

The Fruit Tree Project and other gleaning projects are important additions to any community because they reduce food waste, keep wildlife out of backyards, and provide food for those in need. Gleaning programs exist in several communities across the Interior Health region. To find out if there is a gleaning program in your community ask your local food bank, volunteer organizations, or other local food programs. Many faith organizations participate in gleaning as well. Find out how you can share the harvest!

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