



FRIENDS OF THE EARTH ADELAIDE RECLAIM THE FOOD CHAIN!

# Starting a homegrown fruit and vegetable exchange in your community

In November 2007, Friends of the Earth Adelaide and the Goodwood Goodfood Co-op launched a homegrown fruit and vegetable exchange in the inner south-western suburbs of Adelaide. It's a concept that has been practised formally and informally in communities probably since time began. The basic format of this particular exchange was inspired by the Urban Orchard project initiated by Melbourne's CERES community environment park. Since beginning the exchange in Adelaide, Friends of the Earth has received a strong response from others seeking to start a similar project in their own local communities across Australia. While our exchange is very much a work in progress, what follows is a rough guide on how to start an exchange in your community and reflections on the successes and challenges of our experience.



## Why a homegrown fruit and vegetable exchange?

The Urban Orchard project was initiated in Adelaide by local community members passionate about gardening, good food and building community. Through providing a central space for community members to come together and share their homegrown or gleaned surpluses, the exchange offers a number of strong social and environmental benefits, including

- reducing waste by redistributing surplus fruit, vegetables, herbs and seeds
- cultivating networks within the neighbourhood and building stronger communities
- providing healthy, seasonal food for the community
- sharing valuable skills in gardening and food preparation
- avoiding greenhouse gas emissions by reducing the need for produce transported from outside the local area

## Getting started

### Ingredients

Collaborators - others in your area who are passionate about food, gardening and community

Venue - public space; kitchen facilities;

Infrastructure - table, chairs, signs, sandwich board, labels for food, banners

### Method

1. Talk about the idea with people who you think might be interested in participating. They could be neighbours or friends in your area. If you can find people who are excited by the idea, begin to plan together what you'd like to see as part of the exchange.
2. Brainstorm what venues would be good to hold the exchange at. Ideally, it should be public, easily accessible and open to the involvement of a broad spectrum of participants. It could be a community or farmers' market, it could be in a town square, or in or near a community centre. Consider what facilities it may need to have:
  - toilets
  - a kitchen if you plan on conducting workshops on food preserving
  - does it have its own tables and chairs that you can use, so you don't have to transport them?

Think about what other regular events happen in your community that the exchange could be a part of. In Adelaide, we chose to conduct the exchange at a council-owned community centre that is famous for its food co-ops. We hold the exchange monthly, to coincide with the co-ops and a Local Exchange and Trading System (LETS) Community Market. In Melbourne, the Urban Orchard is part of a weekly organic produce market held at the CERES community environment park.



## Starting a homegrown fruit and vegetable exchange in your community

3. Consider approaching your local council and discussing your idea with them. It's the kind of thing that councils often like to support, and they could be willing to offer support with a venue, publicity, photocopying and advertising. They may already have a similar project running that you could support.

4. Contact local health services, food banks or homeless support organisations in your community to get a sense of what kind of foods they might accept or find useful should the exchange ever get a surplus of produce that can't be distributed or processed among the participants.

5. You may wish to develop a brief questionnaire to distribute in your community (our questionnaire is included as an example). This can serve a number of purposes:

- it begins the process of building a network of contacts interested in the project,
- it gives you a sense of what produce is available when (and thus allows you to get an indication of what workshops will be appropriate and whether the exchange will go into hibernation during certain times of the year),
- it allows people to offer ideas and suggestions for what they'd like to see as part of the project and,
- it promotes the concept.

We distributed the questionnaire through targeted letterboxing (if you can see a fruit tree, put a questionnaire in the letterbox) and through an online survey, promoted through email (you can develop free online surveys at websites like <http://www.surveymonkey.com>). Contact community and school gardens in your area and invite them to participate.

You may also consider what address you want the paper surveys returned to. It could be someone's residential address, or care of the council (with their permission). Consider also providing an option for people on a low income: they can drop it into a box at the council offices if the cost of a stamp is a problem, for example.

Consider also whether you'd like to get the questionnaire translated into other languages. We chose to translate our questionnaire into Italian, Greek, Mandarin and Arabic, as census data showed that these were predominant languages other than English in our area, or that cultural groups that speak these languages regularly use the community centre we planned to use as our venue. Friends of the Earth has a translation service, and may be able to assist with translating your questionnaires.

Consider what kind of membership system you would like. In Adelaide, we've kept the system very informal. We considered the need for a formal membership process (for example, people receiving a membership card once they've registered) but found that people responded well to the idea of self-regulating participation. The responsibility to contribute is on individuals, demonstrating trust that people will "do the right thing". That no one keeps count of how much individuals have taken and brought is something people appreciate. After all, the central idea of the exchange is to share surplus, guided by the simple principle of contributing what you can and taking what you can use - or as CERES' Urban Orchard slogan goes: "donate and take-away". This format ensures that all the food is distributed and that the project remains accessible. No one is excluded from participating if they don't have produce available at a particular time.





6. Once you have the basic details of your exchange sorted out (venue, regularity, starting and finishing times, starting date), start promoting it to the contacts you've collected through the questionnaire, through the council or community centres, relevant community groups (permaculture groups, seed savers, rare fruit societies, Slow Food) and your local media. Getting local media coverage will give your exchange extra exposure and may draw in further participants.

7. Consider what equipment you might need to have at the exchange, and begin to assemble a basic kit. It might include an eye-catching banner to be hung along the front of the table, or a sandwich board, plenty of surveys or flyers about the event for people to take, a contact list for people to leave their names and details and some kind of list where people can volunteer to set-up or pack-up at future exchanges. We also have a blackboard available where people can write what they hope to bring next month, and have also been planning to make reusable labels for all the produce indicating the area it was grown and its 'food miles' (for example: "Grapes, Black Forest, 400 metres (transported by bike!)").

8. On the day, talk to curious passers-by, chat, eat good food and share ideas for what to do with artichokes. Don't feel any pressure to rush into having a spectacular program of workshops scheduled from the very beginning. Let it grow, and see what direction it takes. We're four months into our exchange in Adelaide, and we're still to have a proper workshop. However, we can always guarantee delicious fresh fruit and scintillating conversation! One of the exciting by-products of such a community event is that it ends up being an informal skills exchange, as people inevitably share how they've grown a particular thing, or how to prepare some other mysterious herb or vegetable.

There are also a number of unexpected opportunities such a project might attract. As the reputation of the exchange has grown, we've also begun to receive invitations from local farmers or land-owners who don't have the time or capacity to harvest a particular crop, but are happy for us to come and ensure it doesn't go to waste. As the project grows, it might eventually be held fortnightly, alternating between the community centre and a local farmers' market. Perhaps most unexpectedly, in 2008 the WOMADelaide world music festival invited us to conduct a fruit and vegetable exchange and workshop there.

9. As the project grows, think about developing some kind of roster system for setting up, monitoring and packing up the stall. This will ensure that the responsibilities for running the project are shared over a greater amount of people, cultivating broader community involvement and ownership of the exchange.

Good luck! We welcome any further feedback or ideas and look forward to hearing how you go!

#### **For more information**

##### **Friends of the Earth Adelaide**

<http://www.adelaide.foe.org.au>

##### **CERES (Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies)**

<http://www.ceres.org.au>

Friends of the Earth Adelaide is a vibrant and independent for social change through the support of its members and donors. You can support Friends of the Earth by becoming a member - visit our website, or call us on 08 8227 1399 for details.



**Questionnaire**

Your responses to the following questions are important in helping to shape The Urban Orchard. All information will remain strictly confidential.

What fruit, vegetables, herbs or seeds do you have that you'd like to share or exchange?	About how much surplus would you get from these? (bunches, buckets, kilograms...)	Around what time of year do you get your surplus from each?

**What skills would you like to learn more about?**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Growing food              | <input type="checkbox"/> Wine-making                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Looking after fruit trees | <input type="checkbox"/> Olive oil pressing                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Picking and harvesting    | <input type="checkbox"/> Gardening advice                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pruning                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Compost-making                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Preserving                | <input type="checkbox"/> Preparing food with local ingredients |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jam-making                | <input type="checkbox"/> Other .....                           |

**What skills do you have that you'd like to share?**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Growing food              | <input type="checkbox"/> Wine-making                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Looking after fruit trees | <input type="checkbox"/> Olive oil pressing                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Picking and harvesting    | <input type="checkbox"/> Gardening advice                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pruning                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Compost-making                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Preserving                | <input type="checkbox"/> Preparing food with local ingredients |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jam-making                | <input type="checkbox"/> Other .....                           |

**Do you need assistance in harvesting and/or transporting your surplus produce?**

- Yes, I'd like help with harvesting  
 Yes, I'd like help with transporting

**What suggestions do you have for The Urban Orchard?**

**Name:** .....

**Address:** .....  
.....  
.....  
**Postcode:** .....

**Phone:** ..... **Mobile:** .....

**Email:** .....

- How would you prefer to be contacted?**
- Email  
 Phone  
 Mail

**Please return completed questionnaire to:** The Urban Orchard, Friends of the Earth Adelaide, c/- Conservation Council of SA, Level 1, 157 Franklin Street, Adelaide SA 5000 or email to [joel.catchlove@foe.org.au](mailto:joel.catchlove@foe.org.au).