

Bountiful Backyards hosts first Durham fruit school

Spring season brings Piedmont Fruit School to SEEDS community garden

By Abby Moore
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Bradford pears are blossoming, daffodils are blooming and the bees are buzzing with a clear message – spring is here in Durham. Bountiful Backyards, along with SEEDS, welcomed the season with the first Piedmont Fruit School on March 17 and 18.

Fruit tree lovers united Saturday and Sunday at a site on Woodburn Road and at SEEDS community garden to learn from Asheville-based fruit tree instructor Bill Whipple. Attendees learned how to plant, prune and protect various trees and vines, including apples, pears, cherries, peaches and even kiwis.

“It’s all about site selection and soil,” Whipple says as he instructs students how to maintain peach trees.

The fruit school is one of several events Bountiful Backyards hosts to help educate the Durham community on gardening. Keith Shaljian, founder of Bountiful Backyards, says the focus is community involvement.

“We want to get people to grow more in their own communities,” Shaljian says. “We focus on education and community benefit.”

“With a club, you share a subculture and find people to connect with who share the same passions.”

-Bill Whipple, fruit school instructor

Shaljian, who spent several years working in the restaurant business, started Bountiful Backyards five years ago with his brother Mike, with the desire to provide the Durham community with healthy and sustainable food through gardens. Since then, the cooperative has created 12 community gardens and serviced over 200 houses.

Bountiful Backyards offers services such as garden installation, maintenance, consultations and classes at Durham Technical Community College.



Fruit school instructor Bill Whipple explains the importance of soil to fruit school attendees. (Staff photo by Abby Moore)

“As our revenue increases, we have the ability to do more stuff in the community and focus less on selling our services,” Shaljian says.

Shaljian says many of their events, like the fruit school, are funded by suggested donation, and some are free. “No one is ever turned away,” he adds.

Instructor Bill Whipple says fruit schools are important for the education they provide, but that they don’t always encourage community growth. In Asheville, this issue led to the creation of the Buncombe Fruit and Nut Club, a volunteer group that seeks to bring edible public gardens to the city and surrounding areas.

“We were able to create community with the club,” Whipple says. “With a club, you share a subculture and find people to connect with who share the same passions.”

Durham resident Jenny Barwick attended the fruit school on Saturday. Barwick, who has several unplanted apple trees, says the fruit school gave her a lot of ideas.

“I learned tons of stuff,” Barwick says. “I discovered I have the perfect environment for pawpaw trees.”

Shaljian hopes events like the fruit school will encourage Durham resi-

dents to produce their own food.

“We want to give the Northeast Central Durham community access to farming so they need less from the industrial arena,” Shaljian says. “Because it’s not just about food. This is just one way to get people out to talk about bigger issues.”

Bountiful Backyards is hosting an organic vegetable garden workshop on Saturday, April 7. To register, or for more information, go to www.bountiful-backyards.com/spring2012workshops.

Want to learn more?

SEEDS: www.seedsnc.org

Bountiful Backyards: www.bountifulbackyards.com

Bill Whipple: www.barkslip.com

Buncombe Fruit and Nut Club: buncombefruitnuts.blogspot.com