

tree news

& LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to Tree News! We're a newsletter focusing on tree and forest stories as entry points into discussions of environmental justice, ecological orientations in art practice, and climate change adaptation. Tree News will profile trees, people, places and projects to serve as a platform to share resources, build relationships, and develop deeper understandings of the nonhuman world around us.

While developing this newsletter, we became certified Tree Pittsburgh Tree Tenders, connected with local arborists and environmental educators, and volunteered with the Friends of Southside Park restoring a neighborhood forest after a history of clear cutting, coal mining, manufacturing and waste dumping.

In Southside Park, we've excavated car batteries, socks, toys and former foundations: all reminders of the

false boundary between culture and nature, human and non-human. We're often taught that nature is out there - in parks and wilderness areas distinct from urban spaces - rather than everywhere, rather than ourselves. The rush of wind and birdsong come and go in the park, overtaken by the swelling drone of trains below. It's echo reverberates up the hillside and across the Monongahela in a continual reminder of our entanglements.

Urban forests and trees are sources of nourishment. Spring's tender green shoots bring fragrant flowers, herbs, summer fruits and fall harvests. Food exposes the human-nature binary's falsehood. Sun, carbon, and water transubstantiate – organic matter passes into, feeds, and becomes our bodies – as the saying goes, you are what you eat. For the first issue, we've compiled several conversations around foraging and urban harvesting. How can we shift our relations to building familiarity, closeness, and interdependence with plants, animals, human forest lovers, and our local ecosystems? We are only scratching the surface and will share more as we continue to learn.



Erin Mallea & Paper Buck

a conversation

Ginger Brooks Takahashi

February 23, 2021

Ginger Brooks Takahashi is a Pittsburgh-based artist and the cofounder of General Sisters, a neighborhood-driven food justice project in North Braddock, PA. Ginger's collaborative project-based, socially enraged practice is an extension of feminist spaces and queer inquiry, actively building community and nurturing alternative forms of information distribution.

We invited Ginger to tell us more about the intersections of foraging with food and environmental justice, in their work as an artist and organizer.

Ginger: I wanted to start with the maple tree in my yard. I've been tapping it for the last three years and have this long term relationship with it. One of the texts that's been important for me in thinking about maple sugaring is Robin Wall Kimmerer's incredible book *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Kimmerer tells the story about how the creator changed the relationship between the sugar and water in the sap. Originally maple syrup was flowing from the trees. But people just laid down and drank all of the maple syrup. They forgot about their traditions and how to make things. Their relationship to trees was really different because of this direct access to the sugar. So the creator watered down the sap so that humans now have to go through this slow process of tapping and boiling it down to get to the syrup.

Tree News: Can you tell us more about your thinking around foraging? How does it relate to other elements of your artist practice such as community care and movement building?

I see foraging as part of being rooted or getting rooted in a place. In terms of community organizing, nourishment, and care, I think it's about shifting from a human versus nature hierarchy and really thinking about our surroundings – learning what weeds, grasses, and trees grow around us. Robin Wall Kimmerer writes about this in the chapter

"Maple Nation". The trees are another community that we live amongst. This is a huge part of it for me – being rooted in a place with all these other species. As a kid, we would collect seasonal ingredients like fiddlehead ferns, in Oregon, which are an important seasonal ingredient in Japanese food. My mom is Japanese and we would pick fruit from trees and collect ginkgo nuts in public places. Getting rooted in place doesn't have to be a singular place. It's a way of living or traveling. When I was older, I became interested in foraging while touring and traveling with the band MEN. We were going to many different places and learning about food traditions. I wanted to be more rooted in one place. When I moved to Pittsburgh it allowed me the time and the space to do that.

I'm not trying to survive only on foraged foods. Especially living in an urban area where there's so much shared space. These plants, bushes, and trees are shared resources. It's important to forage in moderation and with care – to know that somebody else will come after you and take some. I keep coming back to Kimmerer. She has this foraging ethos to ask permission from the land or plant. It's a moment to check in with yourself to consider how much you actually need.

This idea of permission and checking in reminds me of another collaborative work where you are activating practices of reciprocity. In *The Aspiration is Decomposition*, you made a composting toilet. Can you tell us more about that project?

Dana Bishop Root and I, as General Sisters, began building soil and composting out of necessity. Our storefront doesn't have plumbing, so we resorted to making a simple composting toilet. There are all these communities out there that recycle urine and human waste to add it back to the soil and build soil nitrogen — not letting these resources go to waste and being thoughtful about our relationships to water systems and clean water.

We did a project at the Kohler Art Center where we organized a community composting humanure system. We had boxes that held five gallon buckets, sawdust to break it down, thermometers to get it to thermophilic temperatures, toilet paper, and instructions on how to build it. We worked with an amazing citizen scientist and soil practitioner, Nance Klehm. She and our community partners constructed beautiful wooden toilet boxes that were exhibited before going back to their sites to be used to collect their waste to build their soil health.



spring forage recipes shared by Melissa Sokulski

Japanese Knotweed Juice

Knotweed was introduced to the US in the 19th century as an ornamental plant and later used to stabilize cleared hillsides and streambanks. Knotweed grows everywhere in Pittsburgh. It's prolific, resilient, and better to forage than vulnerable and native species. Knotweed contains resveratrol, a beneficial nutrient for the heart and brain. Because it's considered an invasive weed, knotweed is often sprayed with herbicides. Make sure it has not been treated with chemicals before foraging. Gather young, tender shoots in April and May.

- Strip leaves from stalks. Stalks are hollow, green and speckled with red.
- Wash and peel the outer layer. Peeling isn't always necessary for juicing. Peel if you are steaming, cooking or if shoots have a tough outer layer.
- Run through juicer with apples for a tart, vibrant green juice. Try adding citrus and other fruit or vegetables.

Garlic Mustard Pesto

Garlic Mustard is an invasive plant, brought to America as a culinary herb in the 1860s. Pull it up from your garden, but don't throw it in the compost! It's a delicious plant, best in early spring. The leaves become bitter as the weather gets hot. You can eat the leaves before and after it flowers, and the flowers and roots are edible – the roots taste like horseradish!

- 2 cups garlic mustard leaves, washed and patted dry
- 1 garlic clove, peeled
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 2 Tbsp pine nuts, lightly roasted (can sub walnuts)
- 3 Tbsp grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 Tbsp lemon juice
- salt to taste

In a food processor, blend garlic and garlic mustard while drizzling in olive oil. Add pine nuts, cheese, lemon juice and blend. Salt to taste.



Image: Self-healing

It seems like water systems are relevant in a number of your recent projects. Can you tell us more about your project with the Nine Mile Run Watershed Association?

When looking through the Nine Mile Run Watershed Association archive, I found a plan for redoing Hunter Park in Wilkinsburg that included daylighting a stream. The term fascinated me. Daylighting is unearthing. I learned that there was an underground network of the stream flowing under Wilkinsburg. I was really drawn to that. Burying a stream cuts off the possibility of having an affective relationship to and living next to flowing water. The project budget didn't allow for daylighting so I started thinking about creating periscopes to see the stream. Then I realized these portals already exist as manholes. The portal is the manhole. Now I'm focused on safely replacing the manhole cover with something that can frame the view and create an open relationship between seeing, smelling and hearing the stream. If you have a stream flowing through your neighborhood, you have a different relationship to water, the larger watershed, and Monongahela River.

The focus on care, nourishment, and relationship building recurs in your work. What role does care play in how you approach and develop projects?

It's embedded in my practice of being responsive to where I'm working. A lot of my work is research based. Research is not only reading and looking into archives, it's also spending time listening and spending time in a community – hearing the concerns of the Wilkinsburg Borough, for example, or listening to the site and looking at the work that's been done. With the stream viewfinders, it's bringing people on a journey of wonder with me, envisioning what's happening underground and the possibility of rebuilding a relationship with the stream. Being in Pittsburgh, I've learned so much about industry and understanding environmental racism in our country and region. The extractive and harmful practices of the hydraulic fracturing industry are clear. But we can also think about research as an extractive process. When caring for ourselves and for the spaces we work in, we can unlearn that extractive mode of work and think about the position we're working from.

interview

David Allen Burns
& Austin Young
∞ Fallen Fruit

endlessorchard.com Image credit: Endless Orchard, website title screen, a project awarded by Creative Capital - Emerging Fields, 2013.

Fallen Fruit is an art project that began in Los Angeles by creating maps of public fruit trees. Fallen Fruit investigates interstitial urban spaces, bodies of knowledge, and new forms of citizenship. From protests to proposals for utopian shared spaces, Fallen Fruit's work aims to reconfigure the relationship of sharing and explore understandings of what is considered both public and private.

Fallen Fruit is a collaboration originally conceived in 2004 by David Burns, Matias Viegner and Austin Young. Since 2013, David Burns and Austin Young have continued the collaborative work.

How did Fallen Fruit begin?

Fallen Fruit began as a response to *The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest* open call which posed the question: “Can you use the agency of activism, but without opposition?” We decided to focus our submission in the context of where we live in LA. We were already sharing the fruit we had in our gardens - there is fruit 12 months out of the year. We walked our neighborhood, Silverlake, and discovered that there were over 100 fruit trees in public spaces: along alleys, sidewalks. Often branches of fruit trees on private property were abundantly overhanging fences well into public space. We mapped all of these publicly accessible fruit trees and wrote a text that questions who has a right to the fruit from these trees and who has the right to be in public space. “FALLEN FRUIT” is a quote from Leviticus 19:10, a Roman law not to pick the edges of fields or vineyards and to leave the fallen fruit for strangers or passerbys.

We realized we could be using public space to share resources. We were excited to meet our neighbors. We are so disconnected from each other in LA. We started making maps and began giving tours of the fruit trees. In 2005, we held our first “Public Fruit Jam” at Machine Project Gallery. People brought backyard or street picked fruit to make jam together. This forged new neighborhood connections and became a way to celebrate a local harvest.



Image credit: Public Fruit Map, hand drawn map of ancient Palermo by the artists of all of the public fruit trees, commissioned by Manifesta Biennale 12, Palermo, Sicily, Italy, 2018.

Tell us more about the different areas of the work and how you manage the growth of Fallen Fruit and the Endless Orchard. What part of the work is in focus at the moment?

The Endless Orchard has been in development since 2013. We received a Creative Capital award that funds the project. We created a massive, collaborative online map – a public artwork that you can eat, a huge sharing orchard. The map includes our public artworks and the planting locations we have collected. It's been a longer journey than we imagined. We plan to have fruit tree giveaways at multiple sites around the United States. People can adopt a fruit tree to plant and share on the Endless Orchard.

All of our projects build upon a history of celebrating people and place as well as bringing more beauty into the world. Our work is inherently collaborative, and our projects develop overtime. We work with museums, libraries, historical archives, civic leadership, state, county and local parks, land use and management organizations, and neighborhood groups. We transform neighborhoods, spaces, and hopefully, how we all see and experience the world around us.

What advice do you have for those interested in advocating for public fruit trees and public harvesting and foraging?

Start small, just plant one fruit tree in public space to share with your neighbors. Take bigger steps slowly. Small actions reverberate in large ways.



Image credit: Documentation image, Historic Victorville Public Fruit Park, Victorville, California, 2018.

We believe it is truly necessary to supplement our food supply with local and public “no cost” solutions that do not exploit carbon-based distribution models and big agriculture. As a species we have a responsibility to take bold, measured steps of corrective action to help remediate the aggressive mistakes against humanity and the environment that were caused during the late 20th century. Our dependency on food distribution systems, food stabilizers and additives needs to be balanced with other systems of support – like fruit trees in public parks and along walking paths in neighborhoods around the world. Everyone please stop planting ornamental non-fruit bearing trees (like flowering cherry, flowering plum and similar). The health of our communities is inter-relational and should be approached with an understanding that several resources to guide good choices for everyone is essential – including the birds and the bees! One system will not save the world, it will take many people working together from many different points of view.

What is the process for those that want to participate in the Endless Orchard in their own communities?

It is so simple: just plant a fruit tree on the boundary of public space. For example next to the sidewalk, along a fence, in a parkway, or on your front lawn. And then map it on endlessorchard.com. Make a sign when the fruit is ripe that says, “this fruit is for sharing, take what you need and leave some for others.” We also have a [sign you can download from the website](#). Generosity begets generosity. It is human nature to share what you have. We only get selfish out of fear based ideas. The official launch of the Endless Orchard project will be in October, 2021. We are going to celebrate with a world wide call to action to transform the boundaries of public space by adding public fruit trees to cities and neighborhoods all around the world. Everyone can participate.

The pandemic has made racialized, classed, and gendered inequalities sharper and more visible, for many Americans. For others it has vindicated long standing knowledge. How have the social and economic contradictions and dynamics impacted your vision, and goals for the work you do?

PEOPLE TO THE POWER. People first. All of the people. The young. The old. The moms. The dads. The gay. The straight. The languages of the planet. The religions of the world. The colors of the rainbow. We simply believe that people are amazing and beautiful. We believe that people have the power and strength and determination to save the planet, protect animals and plants, and heal the damages done in recent generations.



Image credit: Documentation images from public participatory projects, Endless Orchard Fruit Tree Adoption and Lemonade Stand; Culver City, San Francisco, Riverside, New Orleans, Los Angeles, Greensborough, and San Bernardino, 2014-2018.





***or how to make
jam with friends**

Fallen Fruit's Public Fruit Jam*

The best jams are made with a combination of fruit. Feel free to experiment. The jams are made in two stages: prep and cooking.

We think of making jam as a collaboration. The ingredients can be anything. Think about unusual jams, the kinds you never see in a store, like apple pumpkin jam or quince and pear with lavender. Basically all fruits can be jammed, even peppers!

As you make the jam, you will notice the structure of the fruit and its variations. Most fruit has natural pectins, but strawberries, blueberries, and ripe blackberries have none. Very ripe fruit has less pectin than underripe fruit, so if the fruit is overripe, add about 25% underripe fruit if you have some available. Cut the fruit into small pieces or crush the large pieces. Most fruits are somewhat acidic, and fruits that have low acid, such as figs, should have lemon juice added to help them set.



Image credit: Documentation image, Public Fruit Jam, Stoneview Nature Center, Los Angeles, California, 2017. Photo credit: Paul Turang

**There are many edible fruiting
trees and shrubs in Pittsburgh:
hackberry, mulberry, serviceberry,
plum, paradise apple, peach,
common apple, black cherry,
raspberry, blackberry and more.**

Prep

The basic combination for the jam is about ratios -- one medium sized bowl of fruit (about 5 cups), $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of pectin and 5 cups of sugar. The fruit should be cut into very small pieces, with seeds and stems removed. Sugar is an excellent preserving agent, contributes flavor and aids in jelling. Keeping these proportions is essential.

Process

Put fruit and pectin into a bowl, bring to a boil (stir continually don't let any burn on the bottom of the pot (add water or fruit juice as needed). As the fruit cooks it will break down and become easier to stir (about 10-15 minutes over medium-high heat). Once it comes to an active boil and the fruit is broken down to your preference then add the sugar. The sugar will immediately transform the fruit into a syrup it will quickly look like molten lava. Again continue to stir the jam and bring it to a second active boil. The best flavor comes from the least cooking. *Note: Cooking too long will not make a better jam!*

Completion

When the jam has boiled a second time, carefully spoon it into jars using a jam funnel if you have one available. A trick to get a proper vacuum seal on the jam jars is to turn the jars over so the lid is on the bottom immediately after filling each jar, this heats the lid to food-safety temperature and will create the seal as it cools down. Apply labels and write the ingredients on the lid. *Note: These jars will not be fully sterilized, so be mindful about long-term storage.*

Public Fruit Jam courtesy of David Allen Burns and Austin Young / Fallen Fruit.

Image credit (reverse): Fallen Fruit, NATURAL HISTORY: Native plants, repeat pattern of indigenous plants photographed and created by the artists at Royal Botanical Gardens Victoria - Cranbourne, Melbourne, Australia, archival pigments on fabric, 2020.