

## 'It's like a place of healing': the growth of America's food forests

**Level:** Intermediate

### 1 Warmer

a. Predict the article by reading the title and the subtitle.

- What do you think this article will be about?

### 2 Reading the article carefully

a. Now, read the article and see if your predictions were right. Is there anything interesting in this article? Why? Why not?

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***There are more than 70 'food forests' in the US as part of a growing movement to deal with food insecurity and promote city farming***

**Mike Jordan**

**Sat 8 May 2021**

- 1 America's biggest "food forest" is just a short drive from the world's busiest airport, Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson, but there is a calm as you walk on the dirt paths around its large green spaces.
- 2 Food forests are part of the wider food justice and city farming movement and are different from community gardens in many ways. They usually receive money from the government or other organisations, depend on volunteers, and focus on plants that grow all year round. How they work to give out food can be different, but they all try to improve access to food, a challenge that existed before the pandemic, but which became worse with Covid-19.
- 3 Organisers in the Atlanta Urban Food Forest say that they deliver the food to the neighbourhoods that the food forest is intended to support, and it's not open to the public apart from volunteer workers. It is located in Atlanta's south side Lakewood community, less than five miles from the city centre. Lakewood is a food desert, as defined by the USDA, and the nearest store with healthy food options takes 20 minutes to get to using public transportation. Most shops in the area sell far more sweets and processed and canned foods than fresh fruits or vegetables.
- 4 Celeste Lomax, from the Brown Mills forest, believes education is key to the forest's success. "We're teaching people how to heal themselves with the foods we eat... This is a health and wellness place. It's so much more than just free food." Food access has been a challenge in the city for a long time. A June 2017 report stated that food insecurity rates were above 25% in downtown Atlanta and in two other counties, where mainly people of colour with lower incomes live.

**'A living system'**

- 5 According to a 2019 report, throughout the US, around 35.2m people lived with food insecurity; another 2020 investigation found the number was one in four, which adds up to around 81 million people. The study also found differences in the food system for families of different races: Black families reported to be facing hunger four times more often than white families.
- 6 The first public food forest opened in North Carolina in 1997, and by 2018 there were more than 70 in the United States. Expert, Michael Muehlbauer, says food forests work like a natural forest by including trees and other plants that grow all year to produce food. This creates a living system with many benefits for animals, for the environment, and opportunities for education and for the community to get together.
- 7 The role of community and volunteers is very important to keep these projects alive. Elise Evans, a volunteer of Food Forest Collective says "At first I thought I would learn about permaculture, but in the end, it was a vivid experience with energy from people of all backgrounds. So, I ended up making friends and stayed for the people, which is a story of many people at the Beacon Food Forest."

**'This is so much bigger than us'**

- 8 "This is so much bigger than us," Lomax said. "We thought we were just gardening but it's grown to be so much more. It's like a place of healing. I've had a lady cry because she was able to release stress in this place. That's when I said, "Wow, this place is really magical. It takes a village to raise a child, but it takes a community to change the world."

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### 3 Writing an email of enquiry

**a. Work with a partner and answer the questions below.**

1. What is the overall idea of the text? Circle the correct sentence a-c.
  - a) In many places in the USA, people are learning how to live in the forest and eat what grows there naturally.
  - b) Food forests across the USA are providing better access to healthy food and community to many people who need this.
  - c) Volunteers are helping to plant trees and grow back forests in many cities across the USA.
2. According to the article, what best describes a volunteer's experience? Circle the correct sentence a-c.
  - a) An opportunity to build friendships with people from different backgrounds while learning more about how things grow.
  - b) It's a great place to work, plus you get free food!
  - c) A wonderful opportunity for people who enjoy working with animals and the environment.

**b. Think about the experience of volunteering at a food forest. Answer the questions below.**

1. Do you think you would like to work with plants? Or would you prefer to work in a different department like food distribution?
2. What would you like to know about the Food Forest programme? Think of at least two questions.
3. What would you want to know more about a volunteer position?

**c. Use your ideas from B. to write an email of enquiry to a Food Forest. Use the handy phrases to help you.**

#### Handy Phrases for Writing Enquiries

##### Opening

Dear (name) / Sir or Madam,

I am writing to enquire about ...

I have read ... and would like to ...

I am interested in ...

##### Asking for information

It is not clear to me if ... / I cannot understand if ...

I would like more details about / I would like further information about ...

##### Closing

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

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### 4 Optional homework

**a. Research a volunteer position.**

Think about volunteer work that you would be interested in. Do research online to find organisations that need help. Then, write an email of enquiry, requesting more information about the volunteer position.