



Forage Foray

EVER WONDER WHAT TO DO WITH ALL THOSE EXTRA PLUMS, APRICOTS, LEMONS AND FIGS YOU CAN'T POSSIBLY GET AROUND TO EATING? Share the bounty.

Forage Oakland (www.forageoakland.blogspot.com), a neighborhood produce networking effort, makes it so easy. Started in mid-April by Asiya Wadud, 26, of Oakland, the project harvests and exchanges crops from local neighborhoods. Folks with too many ripening peaches, avocados, blackberries or pluots, for instance, can e-mail or call Wadud, telling her what they have to give and what they'd like in return for their edibles. Wadud then schedules a time to pedal her basketed bike over with a buddy or two, picker in hand, to retrieve the perishables that will be bartered, and she later delivers the requested foodstuff, identified with a Forage Oakland card. The model allows gardeners with ready-to-harvest goods to trade for later-producing herbs, fruits or vegetables.

"When you sign up, you let me know what you have and what you'd like to receive," she says. "And then in exchange, we'll leave something. It's sort of a pledge in that way."

A former Edible Schoolyard worker who now bartends at Chez Pansse,

Wadud moved to Oakland from Washington, D.C., in 2004, and is the daughter of a prolific gardener. What has amazed her here, she says, is the long growing season, the number of residents with fruit trees and the amount of wasted seasonal produce. Thus her idea to spread the surplus.

"Even if there's a family of four and they have a beautiful Santa Rosa plum tree, there is no way they'll be able to use all the fruit that it produces. I was just trying to think of creative ways of reusing it and redistributing it," she says. "I decided the most sustainable way would be doing outright barter."

So far, she has about 50 to 60 takers willing to share their edibles, from avocados and apples to persimmons and pomegranates. Wadud also scouts for produce on her bike and isn't shy about asking for harvest permission. Ultimately her goal is to stock a free, centrally located produce stand to enhance areas that lack grocery stores.

"I've just met so many interesting people since I started this project," she says. "No one has said no to my harvesting of their surplus fruit, which is great. They really just want their fruit to go somewhere to be eaten."

—Judith M. Gallman