

NORTH DAKOTA

NORTH DAKOTA FOREST SERVICE

Consumer demand for healthy, locally grown foods has resulted in development of community orchards across North Dakota. The orchards foster community spirit by bringing people together to plant and nurture the orchards and by providing fresh food for schools, residents, and those in need.

While apples remain a favorite, a surprisingly wide variety of fruits can grow and produce abundant harvests in the northern plains. Since 2006, the Northern Hardy Fruit Evaluation project at NDSU-Carrington¹ has evaluated both common and unusual crops to determine selections that are desirable, hardy and productive in North Dakota.

Hardy cultivars of cherries, plums, pears and peaches are now common North Dakota orchard fruits. Fruit-bearing shrubs including Aronia and currants are gaining popularity for their high nutritive value. While blueberries cannot thrive in North Dakota's alkaline soils, honeyberries (*Lonicera sp.*) have proven to be a sweet and tasty replacement. Local consumers enjoy fruit fresh and a handful of commercial wineries across the state have learned to make use of the fruit, too.

The North Dakota Department of Agriculture has enabled dozens of community groups and schools to plant gardens and orchards with ND Community Orchard grants² with awards up to \$7,500. Additional funding from the ND Forest Service supports many of the same plantings.³

Valley City converted barren lots into the Hi-Line Prairie Gardens and Orchard Project. With the support of an America the Beautiful Program Development grant from the ND Forest Service, a master plan was developed for the 4-acre site. Located adjacent to a sports and recreation complex and within blocks of schools, a nursing home and assisted living facilities, the location has evolved into an attractive, colorful retreat with community and educational value. The orchard features 52 different fruit-producing trees and shrubs and is the result of the collaborative efforts of the city, local beautification and Boy Scout groups, and Valley City State University. In pay-it-forward fashion, volunteers from the Valley City project helped establish a community orchard in a vacant lot in nearby Litchville.



Haskaps, or honeyberries, are a sweet and tasty alternative to blueberries and grow well in North Dakota. *Photo Credit: Kathy Wiederholt.*



Dragonfly Garden at United Tribes Technical College. *Photo Credit: Gerri Makay.*

United Tribes Technical College (UTTC) near Bismarck established an orchard as part of the Dragonfly Garden on campus. Harvesting and using the fruit provides hands-on experience for students in the Culinary Arts and Nutrition program. The garden is a source of food and education for families both on and off campus. Additional fruit trees are planted to celebrate the graduation of culinary students. These efforts contributed to UTTC becoming one of the first tribal campuses certified as a Tree Campus USA.

¹ <https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/CarringtonREC/northern-hardy-fruit-evaluation-project>

² <https://www.nd.gov/ndda/marketing-information-division/local-foods/community-orchard-project>

³ <https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/publications/lawns-gardens-trees/starting-a-community-orchard-in-north-dakota>

FOR MORE INFORMATION

North Dakota Forest Service, Community Forestry Program
<https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/ndfs/programs-and-services/community-forestry>