

Brooklyn Gardener

THE NEWSLETTER OF BROOKLYN GREENBRIDGE • Brooklyn Botanic Garden • SPRING/SUMMER 2004

Let's Treasure Our Trees

There's nothing like waking up to birdsong coming from a tree outside your window, or taking a deep breath of clean air in a forested park. We benefit from Brooklyn's glorious trees in so many ways. Trees

- create privacy
- provide habitat for wildlife
- reduce asthma by trapping dust and absorbing carbon dioxide and pollutants
- minimize heat glare and reflection from buildings
- screen the wind
- lower heating and air-conditioning bills
- diminish stormwater runoff
- warm the soil and protect nearby plants in winter
- increase property value
- attract customers to shopping areas

Best of all, they are beautiful. Seeing trees actually improves our health by helping us relax, which lowers blood pressure. Apparently, *Homo sapiens* just feel better when trees are nearby.

New York City values its 5 million trees at about \$1,000 each, estimating that they contribute \$9.5 million a year to the battle against pollution. So why don't we take better care of our trees? Our tree population is shrinking at an alarming rate. A study released at the National Urban Forest Conference in September 2003 shows that U.S. cities have lost more than 20 percent of their trees over the past ten years. Thousands of trees die annual-



A proud resident cares for a tree on Washington Avenue.

ly due to vandalism, dog waste, poor soil in overcrowded spaces, not enough water, and being hit by cars and trucks. Since 1996, the Asian Longhorned Beetle has caused the destruction of 3,122 hardwood trees in Brooklyn alone. Due to NYC budget cuts,

“What can you do to help? Start by taking care of the trees on your block.”

only about 6,500 trees will be officially planted citywide this year, compared with 10,000 in 2003 and 19,000 in 2000.

What can you do to help? Start by taking care of the trees on your block. Become a certified Citizen Pruner (call 212-227-1887 for more info). Learn to recognize the Asian Longhorned Beetle (see www.uvm.edu/albeetle for more info); to report an infestation, call 1-877-STOPALB. Sign up for our free Street Tree Pit Gardening workshop (info on right). Organize your block association to plant new trees. Report any tree damage to Brooklyn Forestry at 718-768-0223. And come to Making Brooklyn Bloom at Brooklyn Botanic Garden on March 13. This year's theme is Branching Out with Trees. I look forward to seeing you there!

—Robin Simmen, Community Horticulture Program Manager

GREENEST BLOCK IN BROOKLYN CONTEST 2004

- Applications available in March. Contest is open to all residential and business blocks in Brooklyn. Get your block or business association to join in!
- Prize for the neighborhood with the most entries! Deadline to enter is June 1.
- For information and applications, call 718-623-7250.
- Jointly sponsored by Borough President Marty Markowitz and Brooklyn GreenBridge, with support from Independence Community Foundation.

PLEASE POST!



GreenBridge Workshops

Pre-registration is required at least one week in advance for these workshops: call 718-623-7220 to register. Free, but space is limited.

Street Tree Pit Gardening

Tuesday, February 24 * 6-8 pm

Gardening with Children and Youth: For Adult Leaders

Thursday, April 15 * 4-6 pm

Window Box and Container Gardening

Tuesday, April 20 * 6-8 pm, OR

Wednesday, April 21, 6-8 pm

Introduction to Composting in the City

Tuesday, May 11, 6-8 pm

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

For information, call 718-623-7209 unless otherwise noted. Listings are free unless otherwise noted.

March 2 to 31. Photo Exhibit of Winners from 2003 Greenest Block in Brooklyn Contest. at BBG Visitor Center.

March 13. 23rd Annual Making Brooklyn Bloom. 10 am-3:30 pm at BBG.

March 20. Green Thumb “Grow Together.” For info, call 212-788-8070.

April 23. Deadline for ordering Window Box Kits. \$17 each; pick up at BBG May 8.

May 5 and 6. BBG Annual Plant Sale. Free with Garden admission. For info, call 718-623-7200. Members' Sale, May 4.

June 1. Deadline for entering the Greenest Block in Brooklyn Contest. Applications available in March.

SAVE THE DATE!

Making Brooklyn Bloom

Branching Out with Trees

Saturday, March 13, 10 am-3:30 pm

Palm House,
Brooklyn Botanic Garden

Kick off the gardening season with free workshops, exhibits, and tours.

Free, but you must register at 10 am on the day of the event.

Spotlight on... Rainwater Harvesting

Back in 2002, a drought emergency pushed many community gardens to the brink of extinction. For the first time in twenty years, community gardeners were denied permission to use fire hydrants, relied upon by most community gardens as their primary water source. This crisis led New Yorkers to put our heads together and rediscover rainwater harvesting, the ancient practice of catching and holding rain for later use.

At community gardens that harvest rainwater, rain is gathered from the rooftops of adjacent buildings by diverting it from their gutters and is stored in tanks in the gardens. A 1-inch rainfall on a 1,000-square-foot roof produces 600 gallons of water. The tanks are mosquito proof, so the standing water does not encourage West Nile virus. Because rainwater is chlorine free, it is better than tap water for plant growth. And it's free!

Rainwater harvesting also helps reduce the demand on the city's upstate freshwater supply and the pollution in our local waterways. Here's how: Most urban rainwater isn't absorbed by the ground; instead it rolls into the nearest storm drain, picking up contaminants along the way. In NYC, a combined sewer system uses the same pipes to transport both household waste and stormwater to sewage treatment plants. During heavy rains, the sewer system overloads and untreated sewage spills into our rivers and estuaries. By reducing the amount of rainwater entering the sewer system, we limit the environmental damage from combined sewer overflows.

With the help of the Water Resources Group, an open collaboration of community gardening and environmental organizations, rainwater harvesting systems have now been built as demonstration sites in twenty NYC community gardens, including nine in Brooklyn. For more information about how to build a rainwater harvesting system, call (718) 623-7209. School groups are also invited to call to set up field trips to see rainwater harvesting systems at work in these gardens.

—Robin Simmen, *Community Horticulture Program Manager*

From the Heap... Waste Not, Want Not

Composting has been central to the work of Brooklyn GreenBridge, even after city budget cuts eliminated many of the services we all loved, like our compost givebacks with 1000 people! Last year, we launched a new program in **organic waste prevention** with support from the NYC City Council. Brooklyn GreenBridge was one of seven programs supported by Inform, Inc., a citywide environmental group that the City Council designated to coordinate the effort.

It is exciting to report that we were able to support the diversion of nearly 90 tons of organic materials from the NYC waste stream in less than a year!

How was this done? Certainly many of you helped us in crucial ways. Brooklyn GreenBridge Master Composters offered volunteer hours at the following events:

- **Christmas Tree Recycling with Green-Wood Cemetery.** Over 500 trees were chipped, mulched, and given to the public. Green-Wood has continued to make mulch (over a ton) available to the community. We also assisted Prospect Park Alliance in their annual event.

- **Brush Chipping in Community Gardens.** Nearly 10 tons of brush, brought in by people from their backyards, were chipped and then given back to the community gardens.

- **Grass mulching.** We sponsored an educational campaign to encourage grass recycling by mailing a "how-to" packet to over 10,000 Brooklyn residents. About 1,000 people and institutions responded. Over half committed themselves to grass recycling, which amounts to over 40 tons of waste diverted; others were already recycling their grass.

To carry out this campaign, Clifford Rose joined us as Community Coordinator. We wish to thank everyone who assisted in the effort, especially Thomas Outerbridge from CityGreen, our Master Composters, the host sites for the "Bring Your Brush" days (including the Girl Scouts Friendship Garden at Gerritsen Beach, and the 6/15 Green and Green Acres community gardens), Green-Wood Cemetery, Prospect Park Alliance, the NYC Department of Sanitation, and Eve Martinez from Inform.

— Ellen Kirby, *Director*



Master Composter Cliff Rose weighs mulch.

Free WOOD CHIPS at Green-Wood cemetery

Green-Wood Cemetery keeps a pile of free wood chips for the public to pick up inside its gate at Fifth Avenue and 25th Street in Brooklyn. The security guard will show you where to go. The gate is open daily from 8 am to 5 pm. Call (718)768-7300 for more information.

GREENBRIDGE STAFF

Ellen Kirby, *Director* | Robin Simmen, *Community Horticulture Program Manager & Newsletter Editor*
Brooklyn Botanic Garden • 1000 Washington Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11225 • (718) 623-7250 or 623-7209

Brooklyn Botanic Garden gratefully acknowledges past and present support for these programs from the John N. and Gillett A. Gilbert Family Fund, Independence Community Foundation, The Joseph LeRoy and Ann C. Warner Fund, Inc., U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Environmental Education Grant, and Brooklyn Members of the New York State Assembly and Senate.

Printed on recycled paper

GOT QUESTIONS? GET HELP!

About composting, gardening,
and much more. Call the
BBG Gardener's Help Line at
718-623-7270, Tuesday-Thursday,
10:30AM– 12:30PM,
and 2–4PM.

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BROOKLYN, N.Y.
PERMIT NO. 832

Brooklyn Botanic Garden
1000 Washington Avenue
Brooklyn, New York 11225-1099