

Gleaning Guide

How to Start a Gleaning Program in Your Community



Growing community, feeding neighbors

**ALAMEDA
BACKYARD
GROWERS**

STOPWASTE
at home • at work • at school

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction to the Gleaning Guide | 1 |
| What is Gleaning? | 1 |
| Why Start a Gleaning Organization? | 2 |
| Great! You've Decided to Start a Gleaning Organization - Now What? | 6 |
| Gather Your Group | 6 |
| Assess Needs | 6 |
| Determine where the food should be delivered | 6 |
| Define the Mission | 7 |
| Make a plan | 7 |
| Building Your Organization's 'Brand' | 8 |
| Name Your Organization | 8 |
| Branding..... | 8 |
| Get the Word Out | 9 |
| Create a Website | 9 |
| List Your Website on Other Sites | 9 |
| Collect Email Addresses and Send eNewsletters..... | 10 |
| Social Media Platforms | 10 |
| Printed Collateral | 11 |
| Newspaper Ads..... | 11 |
| Send Speakers to Community Organizations | 11 |
| Have a Booth at Community Events | 12 |
| Managing Your Gleaning Organization | 13 |
| Staffing Your Gleaning Organization..... | 13 |
| Keep a List of Trees Needing to Be Picked | 13 |
| Set Dates and Times for Picks | 13 |
| Keep Track of Donations | 14 |
| Keep Track of Volunteers | 14 |
| Find Volunteers | 15 |
| Reach Out..... | 15 |
| Volunteer Agreement and Liability Waiver | 15 |
| Online Sign Up Forms | 15 |
| Youth Volunteers | 16 |
| Cultivate Leadership | 16 |
| Volunteer Appreciation | 16 |
| Training and Safety for Volunteers..... | 17 |
| Train Volunteers..... | 17 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| What's Covered in In-Person Training | 17 |
| How to pick various types of fruit..... | 18 |
| Find Trees | 19 |
| Canvas the Neighborhood..... | 19 |
| Use the Same Publicity Tools..... | 19 |
| Options for Organizing Gleaning Events and Collecting Produce | 20 |
| Group Picks | 20 |
| Team or Micro Picks | 20 |
| Personal Safety for Women Volunteers | 21 |
| COVID Precautions | 21 |
| Cleaning the Fruit? | 21 |
| Donors Drop Off Fruit | 22 |
| Selecting the Right Equipment for Your Gleaning Program | 23 |
| Tools | 23 |
| Vehicle | 24 |
| California Good Samaritan Food Donation Act..... | 24 |
| Forming a Nonprofit Organization - Pros and Cons..... | 25 |
| Pros..... | 25 |
| Cons..... | 25 |
| Other Alternative to Forming Your Own Nonprofit | 25 |
| Introduction To Forming and Maintaining a California Nonprofit Corporation..... | 26 |
| Forming the nonprofit corporation | 26 |
| Maintaining the Nonprofit Corporation..... | 31 |
| Resources for More Information..... | 34 |
| Basic Insurance Requirements for Nonprofit Corporations | 34 |
| Final Thoughts | 35 |
| Remember Why You Started..... | 35 |
| Look For Opportunities for Partnership | 35 |
| Be Creative and Have Fun | 36 |
| Acknowledgements | 36 |
| Appendices..... | 37 |
| Appendix I - Sample Liability Waiver for Volunteers | 37 |
| Appendix II - Sample Spreadsheet for Keeping Track of Donor and Volunteer Information .. | 37 |
| Appendix III - Community Partners | 38 |
| Appendix IV - Additional Sites for Donating Produce | 41 |
| Appendix V - Case Study: Starting Free Seed Libraries in Alameda | 42 |

Introduction to the Gleaning Guide

After over a decade of gathering backyard fruit in Alameda and donating it to the Alameda Food Bank (over 23 tons to date!), Alameda Backyard Growers decided it was time to begin nurturing and collaborating with other gleaning groups in the East Bay and beyond. The Bay Area is blessed with an abundance of backyard fruit, and, working in collaboration with StopWaste, we hope every community has the knowledge and opportunity to collect this fresh produce and help feed the hungry in their area. This Gleaning Guide is one step to achieving that goal.

What is Gleaning?

The actual Merriam-Webster definition of 'to glean' means 'to gather grain or other produce left by reapers' or 'to gather bit by bit'. Going back over 2,000 years, the ancient Hebrews instructed farmers to leave a portion of their fields unharvested so the poor could gather the leftover grain. This also applied to vineyards where the poor, strangers, widows and orphans could gather grapes left over from the first harvesting. This basic food recovery system survived through the Middle Ages in Europe, all the way up to around World War II when food harvesting became more mechanized and property rights more legally enforced.



In the U.S. the value of gleaning for donating food to the hungry was finally recognized and protected under President Clinton, in 1996. Congress passed the 'Good Samaritan Act' to protect food recovery organizations from liability for food donated 'in good faith to a nonprofit organization for ultimate distribution to needy individuals'. Today there are hundreds of gleaning organizations across the country, mainly nonprofit or faith-based,

that gather food from grocery stores, restaurants, farms, markets and backyards, that would otherwise go to waste.

Here in Alameda County we are fortunate that our (current) climate allows for growing food all year round. Historically, many of our towns were initially farms that grew fresh produce for San Francisco and Oakland. Alameda and other cities, grew everything from berries to apples, as well as a wide range of vegetables



(<https://alamedabackyardgrowers.org/alameda-an-agricultural-history/>). Remnants of orchards, in particular, have survived in people's backyards throughout the East Bay, and people continue to plant many fruit trees to beautify their gardens and provide fresh fruit.

Why Start a Gleaning Organization?

Builds Community

Bringing people together who want to do something practical to help others in their community can be a powerful motivator. A gleaning group, where neighbors get to know neighbors and give their time and energy to a good cause, can help create a resilient community where people know and care about one another. In this case, learning about growing food and sustainable food sourcing is the anchor that brings everyone together. Local sourcing and sharing of food *without money being exchanged*, combined with community building can also create resiliency for times of emergency.

Feeds Hungry Neighbors

Setting up a gleaning organization is much more efficient than many individuals taking food to food banks. Indeed, the pandemic forced many food banks to stop accepting individual donations for the safety of their volunteers and recipients. However, the

needs of hungry families never went away and instead has increased in the last few years and there is a consistent growing need for fresh food at food distribution centers. In mid-2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Alameda Food Bank was serving 8,000 families in need per month, a *ten-fold* increase from 2019! They appreciate receiving nourishing food in bulk from local partners which they can then distribute in a compassionate and respectful manner with the support of their dedicated volunteers. Coordinating the recovery of neighborhood produce and delivering it to local food distribution organizations is a very efficient way to get fresh food to hungry families. Volunteers also appreciate the opportunity to work together to help their community in a 'hands-on' way.



Helps Stop Food Waste

According to StopWaste, food scraps and food-soiled paper are the largest single item in our waste stream — making up approximately 35% of what we throw away in Alameda County. When food rots in a landfill, it produces huge amounts of methane — a greenhouse gas at least 28 times as potent as carbon dioxide. Even though most of the produce is edible, unpicked fruit ends up thrown away in green bins or worse, the garbage. Learning more about where food comes from - in this case backyards - can help people want to grow and share it.

“Talk about ‘eat local’, you can’t get much more local than [food] from your neighbors’ yards! It is also a way for those with mobility issues to get their fruit trees harvested, and is another way the food bank gets exposure within the community. It is truly a win-win for all!”

Cindy Houts, Executive Director,
Alameda Food Bank

Backyard Fruit Trees Help Fight Climate Change

Most of the fruit trees that are common to East Bay backyards (citrus, apple, stone fruit, persimmon, figs, etc.) have been cultivated by humans for hundreds of years. Maintaining flourishing backyard trees in healthy soil (full of beneficial fungi and microorganisms) helps store or sequester carbon. This is actual ‘carbon farming’, reducing the amount of carbon in the atmosphere that is contributing to climate change. According to the Sierra Club, “every 12-foot tree in your yard can sequester half a ton of carbon each year. Larger trees sequester even more. If a tree happens to produce food as well, its carbon-reducing impact goes up while your food and grocery bill shrink.” In addition, “when you replace carbon-intensive lawns with trees and shrubs, you also get the added benefit of home-energy savings, since the plants provide shade in summer and buffer winter winds.”

Prevents Problems with Pests

Part of the process of caring for trees is picking the fruit, otherwise the unpicked rotting fruit attracts pests (like rodents or insects) or fungal or bacterial diseases that can also begin invading gardens, homes or even the neighbors’ backyard! Protecting, nourishing and picking the fruit from backyard trees helps them fight off these diseases enabling them to thrive and produce fruit the next season. If they are not tended to, over time, the tree’s immune system may become compromised, and trees may become very unhealthy or stunted with hardly any fruit.



Part of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is to deal with pests before they become established, and this includes making sure fruit trees are regularly pruned of dead wood, their fruit picked, and the area around the tree is cleared of rotting fruit. Gleaning trees is an essential part of a mutually beneficial relationship between home or garden owners and their tree.

Great! You've Decided to Start a Gleaning Organization - Now What?

Gather Your Group

You'll want the support of a group of likeminded people to contribute ideas, share the load, and inform the community. You can begin by reaching out to friends and neighbors who are interested in gardening or who volunteer at the local food bank or other food redistribution organizations for example. They can bring in people in their networks to help you build a cohesive group of motivated individuals. Alameda Backyard Growers created a flyer, got approval to use the space in a local neighborhood cafe and invited neighbors and friends to the first meeting. Surprisingly everyone invited turned up, and brought even more people. From that day a community organization was born.



Assess Needs

Look at what your community needs in the area you want to address and what resources already exist. Check if there are other organizations with a similar mission (food redistribution organizations, community gardens, faith-based organizations, etc.) that you could partner with in your area.

Determine where the food should be delivered

Preferably food should be delivered to an organization that already has a system in place to equitably deliver food, such as a food bank or food pantry. If these do not exist

in your area, perhaps a church or community center could be the place to take the food for distribution. There are also many community organizations helping the unhoused that could use the fresh produce. Also, if the fruit you've collected is overripe, blemished or otherwise 'imperfect' there are organizations that can make it into smoothies or meals for distribution. For example in Alameda, ABG's Project Pick has delivered produce to Food Shift (<https://foodshift.net/>) that creates and distributes meals from surplus or imperfect food to people in need. There is a list of sites and organizations that distribute food later in this guide.

Define the Mission

It's very important to clearly define the mission of the organization right from the start, even though it may expand as the organization gains members and experience. From the beginning, Alameda Backyard Growers chose to be an educational organization, providing free lectures on growing backyard food, as well as a gleaning organization. The specificity of the mission will help with choosing a name and a 'tagline' (such as Alameda Backyard Growers' *'Growing Community One Veggie at a Time'* or *'Grow Some, Keep Some, Give Some Away'*). It will also help with planning the actual steps it will take to fulfill the mission. The organization should have a clear geographical demarcation, for example a city (or cities) or county/counties, so you can respectfully turn down requests for picking from other areas (while encouraging them to start their own organizations). Most importantly, give consideration to the time and energy project leaders and volunteers have to prevent 'burnout'.

Make a plan

Now that your group has defined your mission, outline what services you initially want to provide and what resources (financial or people) you'll need to provide those services. Decide how often your group will meet as well as how (in person? online?) and where. Form a leadership team and assign tasks as needed. Following are some of the tasks that will get your organization up and running.

Building Your Organization's 'Brand'

Name Your Organization

You can't move forward with building your organization until you have agreed on a name. It doesn't have to be complicated. The basics can include what you do and where you do your work. You can use the words 'gleaning', 'harvest', 'community' for example combined with your city or location. You can find a list of gleaning organizations in California that might inspire you on this website:

<https://www.villageharvest.org/harvestingdirectory>.

Branding

Alameda Backyard Growers had an advantage in its early days. In our immediate group (which eventually became our Board) we had two secret weapons: an artist and a graphic/web site designer. Together they designed our logo which allowed us to move forward to promoting our group in the community with a strong brand which we were able to use on T-shirts, caps and tote bags as well as printed marketing information and a website. Use the skills of your group or reach out to the community for help in designing a logo for your organization if possible.



Get the Word Out

Create a Website

Having an actual website is a great way for people to find you (including donors, volunteers and neighbors). It can be as simple as a few pages, including contact information, or a content-rich resource for your organization as well as the community. Once you have determined your organization's name, the first step in the process is to register a domain name with your name and a .com, or preferably a .org, suffix. Currently there are no formal requirements that only nonprofits can use '.org', but it's generally understood to be for charitable work. We recommend keeping your domain registration separate from your web hosting service. ABG uses NameCheap.com but there are many domain registration sites available.

With your domain registered, you can now find a hosting service where your website 'lives'. The ABG site is hosted on SiteGround, but there are many reputable hosting services available. ABG uses a Wordpress-based site as we have a web developer on our Board. Other options are to look for someone in the community that could donate their time to work on the website, or if necessary, hire a web developer. We recommend having an actual website as opposed to a Facebook page as it's much more customizable. Having both is even better.

Once you have registered a domain name and have a hosting service you can set up an email address for your group (typically 'info@' or 'admin@').

List Your Website on Other Sites

Once your website is live, you can list your organization on other websites so people can find you. For example, many official city websites have a page where they list local volunteer opportunities. Check with the appropriate city officials to see if your site can be listed there. There are also regional food recovery organizations that list gleaning programs such as the Village Harvest Gleaning Organization Directory (<https://www.villageharvest.org/harvestingdirectory>).

Collect Email Addresses and Send eNewsletters

Mailchimp and ConstantContact are only two of many online services that enable you to send out regular emails to your donor or member database. You can collect the emails of people who are interested in your organization by having a signup form on your website, or by having sign-up sheets at community events. Sending out an eNewsletter on a regular basis (you can determine the schedule that works best for your organization) is a great way to keep people apprised of what your organization is doing, upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, information on growing and maintaining fruit trees, and just general information on growing food. It's a good practice to have a link from the article back to your website ('Read more...') to drive traffic there. This can encourage donations and engagement on the website.

Social Media Platforms

Social media has its place in promoting your group and reaching out to the community. Posts on Facebook can advise people about upcoming picking or other events. ABG uses Instagram to promote growing backyard food. Social media is a mainstay of communication and ABG's engagement in social media ensures full and complete outreach to a broad and diverse community. It's a way to establish and continue to grow your local community's interest in volunteer opportunities including gleaning, programing, or educational events. It's possible to duplicate posts on your Facebook and Instagram accounts using interesting photos to increase interest and to feed the 'algorithm' of visibility. You may also post information on Patch or Nextdoor to reach out to your community.

Printed Collateral

Alameda Backyard Growers uses printed postcards to slip under door mats or leave on front porches of houses with visible fruit trees to encourage potential donors to contact us. Hand out these postcards each time you go to a pick, so food donors can share the information with neighbors and friends. You could also design brochures, pamphlets, flyers or door hangers for the same purpose. These can be distributed at farmer's markets, via civic or faith-based organizations to their members, or at community events. Business cards with contact information on the organization and a blank space for your name or notes can be also very useful to hand out at tabling events.



Be sure to develop sign up sheets that you can take to events to gather information on interested people, potential volunteers or potential fruit donors/tree owners. Project Pick also created lawn signs to advertise where we had picked and how to contact us.

Newspaper Ads

If you are fortunate enough to live in a city or area with its own independently owned newspaper, why not place ads about your organization and/or to have interested potential volunteers contact you, while supporting your local press?

Send Speakers to Community Organizations

Most towns have civic groups, such as the Kiwanis Club, churches, or other local community organizations. Contact them to see if they would like a speaker from your organization to tell them about your gleaning program. You could have signups for volunteers or fruit donations after your talk.

Have a Booth at Community Events

Alameda Backyard Growers has had a popular booth at the City of Alameda's Earth Day Festival for many years. (Often nonprofits can rent a booth or table free of charge or at a discount). We typically have an educational component (such as a worm bin demonstration), lots of literature on our organization, sign-up sheets, and we sell tomato starts which are very popular. What well-attended events do you have in your community that you could table at?

Managing Your Gleaning Organization

Staffing Your Gleaning Organization

Your organization needs at least one person to run a gleaning program, but more volunteers makes the workload lighter. Realistically, even with helpful online tools (spreadsheets, contact lists, sign up forms, etc) it takes many hours a week to organize picking events. It could be helpful to have one person organizing the picks, and another person going to the picks or delivering the fruit. For the continuity of the program, there needs to be at least a backup person for when the main coordinator is not available. It would also be very useful to have someone dedicated to checking out new donor sites to make sure the fruit is ripe and the area is safe before sending in volunteers.

Keep a List of Trees Needing to Be Picked

ABG uses Google Drive for our organization. For Project Pick, we have a spreadsheet that lists trees needing to be picked, type of fruit, tree height, whether the donor needs to be home, and other notes. As volunteers sign up, we add that information.

Set Dates and Times for Picks

Consult with donors about when their fruit will be ready. You can ask them to actually taste the fruit or send you a photo if needed. Generally, ABG picks on weekends, when most volunteers are available. Set a date and time when you'll pick that tree and reach out to volunteers to see who's available. For larger picks, ABG created a Google form on the website to collect responses from volunteers. You can also do group emails to reach out to volunteers, (but use BCC for everyone's privacy). ABG also uses a free website plugin (see the Online Sign-Up Forms section below) to list picking opportunities on the website and people can sign up online and will receive reminders. Finally, confirm with donors when you are coming.

Keep Track of Donations

Once the tree has been picked, weigh the fruit before delivering it. It's important to keep track of fruit donation information for several reasons:

- Donors like to know the total amount (pounds) they donated and what food distribution organization it was delivered to.
- A running total is useful when promoting your organization.
- Many donors come back year after year and it helps to keep notes about their tree and property.
- You can reach out to people who donated the same time last year to see if their tree is ready to be picked again.
- It helps keep track of how many times volunteers have participated.

Keep Track of Volunteers

Once you start gathering names, make sure to keep a spreadsheet with their first and last names, cell phone numbers, email addresses, and notes (if they have someone they like to pick with for example). Noting the number of times and or the last time they picked can help to space out requests for help from each individual volunteer and prevent 'burnout'. If you have equipment that you lend out to your picking team, this should be noted in the spreadsheet as well. You can label the equipment, such as extendable pickers, and mark when they were checked out and returned.

Find Volunteers

Reach Out

Many of the steps mentioned above to publicize your organization apply to finding volunteers. You can put ads in the local paper to start building your list of names, reach out via social media or neighborhood platforms, get help from family and friends, or enlist the help of other community organizations to put the word out that you're 'recruiting'.

Volunteer Agreement and Liability Waiver

We encourage our volunteers to sign a 'Volunteer Agreement and Waiver'. This waiver can be to:

- Clearly state the expectations that the volunteer must meet in the volunteer activity.
- Put in writing the volunteer's understanding that there are risks and dangers involved in the volunteer activity.
- Make clear that neither the nonprofit nor the landowner is accepting responsibility for any harm that could come to the volunteer while gleaning or engaging in other activities for the nonprofit.
- Limit the liability of the nonprofit and the landowner.
- Allow the nonprofit to use the volunteer's photo.

Online Sign Up Forms

There are free online sign up form applications that are very helpful in streamlining the process of setting up picking events and having volunteers register for them. Project Pick uses a free plugin on its Wordpress-based site called **Wired Impact Volunteer Management**. Another free option is **Sign Up Genius** (<https://www.signupgenius.com/>). In addition to creating events with online signup forms, they send reminder emails to

volunteers. The form should mention any waivers you need volunteers to sign, or online training videos you need them to watch before participating.

Youth Volunteers

ABG encourages youth volunteers who are in middle or high school to participate. Often they can fulfill some of their community service hours (sometimes required for graduation) by volunteering. We request that middle schoolers (ages 11-14) participate with a parent or guardian. High schoolers (ages 14 and up) can volunteer on their own. All youth (under 18) must complete a waiver signed by themselves and a parent or guardian.

Cultivate Leadership

Once volunteers have picked several times and have shown that they are responsible, work safely, care about the mission, and are a good team member, ask if they would like to become a 'pick leader'. Pick leaders can train new volunteers, be responsible for a gleaning event, etc.

Volunteer Appreciation

It's important to keep your volunteers feeling engaged and appreciated. When sending follow up thank you emails to fruit donors (including the number of pounds of fruit picked), copy in the volunteers and give them a shout out. This gives everyone a concrete sense of the value of their labor. In addition, if you can, give volunteers hats, t-shirts or other branded apparel. It helps people feel like part of a team and it gets the word out about your organization. It also confirms your organization's identity when volunteers show up at fruit donors' homes wearing your gear. Finally, you could have a special event just for volunteers, like a barbeque or party, for them to get to know each other and feel valued.

Training and Safety for Volunteers

Train Volunteers

Alameda Backyard Growers filmed a short video (<https://alamedabackyardgrowers.org/volunteer-picker/>) with one of our Master Gardeners showing the correct way to pick different kinds of fruit, and the safest way to use a tripod orchard ladder (the best type of ladder if you need to use one). We embedded that on our website and asked new volunteers to watch the video before they come to their first pick. We also make sure that first time pickers work with more experienced volunteers for one or two picks before they work on their own.



What's Covered in In-Person Training

- 1) The proper use of extendable pickers - Hooking the tines around the fruit and pulling gently.
- 2) How to safely use an orchard ladder -
 - a) Positioning the third 'leg' to the inside of the tree.
 - b) Never stepping on or above the red step.
 - c) Making sure the ladder is stable before climbing up it.
 - d) Not reaching too far for fruit by hand to cause instability, using the extendable picker instead.
 - e) Using a shoulder bag or bucket to collect the fruit to reduce climbing up and down the ladder.
- 3) What safety equipment to wear - hat, safety glasses, gloves (can be provided)
- 4) What volunteers should bring to a pick - water, hat, gardening gloves if they have them. They should wear sturdy, low heel shoes and long-sleeved shirts to prevent scratching from branches.

- 5) Use two volunteers to carry containers of fruit to prevent back or other injuries.

How to pick various types of fruit

- 1) Citrus should be twisted off or cut with clippers so a little of the stem is left. Don't rip the skin. Citrus should be fully colored (no green on the fruit). Lemons can get a thick skin if left too long on the tree.
- 2) Persimmons should be fully colored before picking. Pick by hand with clippers or by twisting as much as possible. If they are high up, you can use a picker with a basket but be gentle.
- 3) Pom fruit (apples, pears) should be pulled up and twisted off at the small joint on the stem.
- 4) ALL FRUIT: Fruit that has soft spots, torn skin, blemishes, holes or bite marks, or has been on the ground should be discarded.



Find Trees

Canvas the Neighborhood

Walk, bike or drive the area within the scope of your organization's mission (your neighborhood, city, county or geographic area) and look for fruit trees. You could ring the doorbell or leave printed collateral (postcard, business card, brochure, door hanger) to invite potential donors to contact your organization to donate extra fruit.

Use the Same Publicity Tools

Reach out to potential fruit donors by using the same tools you did for finding volunteers or publicizing your organization: social media, personal contacts, newspaper ads, website, networking with other community organizations. Have a 'List Your Tree' form on your website that collects potential donor information in a Google spreadsheet for you to contact them. Leave printed information with fruit donors that they can share with neighbors and friends.



Got fruit to spare?

Let us know! Volunteers will help pick your fruit and donate it to the Alameda Food Bank.

Did you know that nearly 1 in 13 Alameda residents seeks help from the Alameda Food Bank, and that about 1/3 of those are children?

*Neighbors helping neighbors...
that's what Alameda is all about!*

Email
Info@alamedabackyardgrowers.org

or **Leave a Message**
510-239-PICK (7425)

PROJECT PICK
ALAMEDA BACKYARD GROWERS

Options for Organizing Gleaning Events and Collecting Produce

Group Picks

If and when large group events can be held safely, one way is to set up larger gleaning events where a group of volunteers goes to several locations in one day. Schedule a day and window of time (it's usually easier for volunteers to attend at the weekend) and confirm with several tree owners. Then list the event on your website and/or email your volunteers to see who can attend.

Volunteers must get themselves to each picking location. The pick leader(s) can bring extra equipment, boxes and a ladder.

Having a van to transport equipment (including ladders) and produce is very helpful.



Team or Micro Picks

Teams of 2-4 people meet at the donor location. If needed, they can borrow tools and containers that are kept at a central location to take to the pick. At least one of the volunteers must be experienced so they can show any new volunteers how to pick safely. Donors are asked if they would like to keep any fruit. Volunteers can also keep some of the fruit for themselves (they generally take the 'imperfect' fruit). Volunteers generally leave the donor's yard in as tidy a condition as they found it, using the donor's green bin for discarding unusable fruit, fallen twigs, etc. If they see additional fruit trees in neighbors' yards, they can ask the donor to contact your organization and leave printed materials about how to contact you. Volunteers take the fruit and return the

equipment to a central predetermined location where the fruit is weighed. Donations from 'micro picks' are consolidated into one delivery to the food bank or food distribution site within a few days.

Personal Safety for Women Volunteers

Volunteers, particularly women, should not be sent to a donor's home alone. Volunteers should always follow their instincts. If a place or situation does not look safe, don't go, and report the situation back to your volunteer organization. It's much more effective, and safe, to have at least two volunteers per event, to be able to lift heavy containers and to keep an eye out for each other. Plus, the companionship is more fun!

COVID Precautions

When COVID hit, for everyone's safety, ABG could no longer hold large picking events. We had to quickly change our gleaning model. As of this writing, volunteers form teams of 2-3 and only pick at one location. Here are our COVID-safe guidelines:

1. Those who were not family members (or living in the same household), must stay 3-6' apart.
2. No one who is feeling the slightest bit ill can participate.
3. Pickers can use their own extendable picker or sign out equipment and gardening gloves from Project Pick.
4. Homeowners (fruit donors) will be instructed to stay inside while volunteers pick.
5. Volunteers bring their own cardboard boxes or bags to haul fruit.
6. The boxes of fruit are dropped near the ABG van (where it's weighed and delivered to the Alameda Food Bank).

Cleaning the Fruit?

We do not pick up fruit that has fallen on the ground. Even so, sometimes fruit from backyard trees has a sooty film on it due to fungal disease, pests or dirty air. If you have the time and person-power, you can take a soapy cloth and wipe off the fruit before

dropping it off for distribution. Otherwise, just make clear to the food bank or distribution site that the food is edible, but recipients may want to wash it in soapy water before eating it.

Donors Drop Off Fruit

If fruit donors are able to pick their own tree safely (optimal), they can transport the fruit to a location that works best for your organization. Or you can collect fruit that donors have picked from their front porch. Often, especially during the pandemic, food banks do not want individuals dropping off food which can get in the way of their operations and be unsafe for their volunteers. Your organization can consolidate batches of fruit and deliver the produce at a time that works best for you and the receiving organization. Note that it's helpful to give donors who are picking their own trees some guidelines (here's a document with guidelines for donors picking their own trees):

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1LFXt3O5U34DRQNTI66vwHvCRib6bSdsmsQ36EfBGTfU/edit>

Selecting the Right Equipment for Your Gleaning Program

Tools

If your gleaning organization has the funds to do so, it's very helpful to purchase tools for the group instead of relying on volunteers to buy their own. Useful equipment for gleaning include:

- Extendable fruit pickers [ABG has purchased [Ohuhu Fruit Picker Tools](#)]
- Orchard ladder including the safety chain for the legs
- Pails to hang on the ladder
- Rope shoulder bags to collect fruit [such as this [Wells and Wade bag](#)]
- A scale for weighing fruit (to keep track of donations) [such as this '[Briefcase Receiving Scale](#)']
- Personal equipment for volunteers: gardening gloves, safety glasses
- For vehicle: first aid kit, hand sanitizer, water bottles, hand wipes
- Stackable bins for transporting fruit (Note: most fruit can be transported in stackable 'milk' crates, but soft fruit including plums and figs should be carried in shallow containers so the fruit is in a single layer). ABG's Project Pick rotates smaller milk crates with the Alameda Food Bank - dropping off full containers and picking up empties.
- Additional optional tools: extendable tree pruner, pruning shears, pruning saw, etc.

We have found the products mentioned above helpful. There are many products on the market and we have not tried most of them, so these mentions are not recommendations, only a description of what we have used. ABG is not recommending any particular products or brands.

Vehicle

After several years of running gleaning events which often resulted in picking hundreds of pounds of fruit at a time, Alameda Backyard Growers determined that they needed a van. It was just too difficult to continue to use volunteers' vehicles which typically were not big enough to transport the fruit, as well as store equipment. Using crowdfunding, we were able to purchase a van that could store our tools including the orchard ladder. You will have to budget for vehicle insurance, maintenance and gas.



California Good Samaritan Food Donation Act

On October 10, 2017, Governor Brown signed California's Good Samaritan Food Donation Act, AB1219, into law. Following on to, and strengthening, the protections provided by the Federal Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act, among AB 1219's provisions are:

- Explicitly stating that donated food which has exceeded the sell-by date is subject to liability protection.
- Providing liability protection for donations made directly to end-users.
- Providing liability protection to gleaners.

You can read more about the California law which protects gleaners here:

https://cpd.sccgov.org/sites/g/files/exjcpb706/files/CPD_Safe_Food_Donation.pdf

Forming a Nonprofit Organization - Pros and Cons

Pros

Alameda Backyard Growers needed to have insurance to hold free public meetings in a rented space and that was the primary reason they began to look into becoming a nonprofit organization.

The main advantage of your organization having federal nonprofit status is that it allows you to receive tax-deductible donations. It also makes it easier to open a bank account. If you want insurance coverage for your organization, forming a nonprofit provides liability protection for everyone involved, including members of your Board (see below).

Finally, it is easier to apply for grants as a nonprofit.

Cons

The difficulties of creating a nonprofit is that it can be expensive in terms of time and/or money to form and maintain. If you don't have huge costs, you can continue to have volunteers paying for things out of pocket. In addition, there are several state and federal filing requirements.

Other Alternative to Forming Your Own Nonprofit

Another way to be able to accept donations and obtain liability coverage is to operate under the **fiscal sponsorship** of another, perhaps larger or more well-established, nonprofit organization. Many nonprofits use this as a 'middle step' or alternative to obtaining their own nonprofit status. You can learn more about this on the National Council of Nonprofits' website (<https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/fiscal-sponsorship-nonprofits>).

If you decide to go ahead with forming a nonprofit organization, the following is some helpful information.

Introduction To Forming and Maintaining a California Nonprofit Corporation

Cautions and limitations: This Section is intended as an introduction and overview, and should only be used as a starting point to understand the steps involved in becoming a new tax-exempt California nonprofit corporation that provides gleaning services. The information in this section does not provide legal advice to any organization or individual. These resources are not a substitute for consultation with an attorney or a CPA familiar with nonprofits. This information may not apply to the organization's specific situation. Some organizations may need additional information not discussed in this resource.

This information applies as of September 2021. Frequently laws and regulations change and websites are changed by their owners. This information and the links included may become out of date. Alameda Backyard Growers and StopWaste have no obligation to provide updates, and take no responsibility for the correctness of the material on any cited website.

Forming the nonprofit corporation

The name of the organization

The name you choose for your organization needs to be unique – different from other corporations formed, doing business or registered in California. The Secretary of State, who oversees corporate filings, will check, but it's a good idea to do a preliminary check before filing, which you can do here: <https://bizfileonline.sos.ca.gov/search/business>. If you find a name that seems clear with the Secretary of State, you can reserve it with that office for 60 days. Learn about that here: <https://www.sos.ca.gov/business-programs/business-entities/name-reservations/#reserving>.

Caution: The person whose name is on the reservation form must sign the articles of incorporation.

The Secretary of State's acceptance of the name you have chosen does not mean that you will have a legal right to use that name. The name could already be used by a non-corporate entity, an entity outside California, be registered as a trademark in the California or federal registers, etc. etc. To look for such conflicts, the first step could be to search the Internet to see if anyone else is using the name you want. Particularly if the name is general and not geographically limited, you may want to take other steps to get additional assurance that you have the right to use the name, on your own by searching the state and federal trademark registers, fictitious business files, phone books and other directories, etc. or through a qualified lawyer. Much more information on trademarks here: <https://www.uspto.gov/trademarks>

File the articles of incorporation

- a. The Articles of Incorporation is the legal document that creates your corporation as a legal entity when it is filed with the California Secretary of State.
- b. As the Secretary of State site is currently set up and if you qualify as a California public benefit nonprofit - that is, you are organized for "public or charitable purposes," you can file the Articles online here:
bizfileonline.sos.ca.gov/forms/business
- c. On that page, find the Nonprofit Corporations Initial Filings section and click on Articles of Incorporation - CA Nonprofit Corporation- Public Benefit. This will take you directly to the filing interface. Be sure to carefully read the instructions.
- d. There is an online filing fee of \$30, payable by credit card. You can get an official certified copy of the articles for an additional \$5.00.
- e. Processing times are quite a lot faster if you file online, but there is a form you can complete, print out and mail in:
<https://bpd.cdn.sos.ca.gov/corp/pdf/articles/arts-pb.pdf> Be sure to complete both the cover sheet and the articles form and enclose a check or money order payable to the Secretary of State for the filing fee and, if applicable, the certification fee.

Appoint Your Initial Directors

The Board of Directors is responsible for the management and operation of the nonprofit. A California nonprofit must have at least one director, but many nonprofits have three or more. The directors are representatives of the nonprofit, and key to its relationships with others. Conflicts of interest between a possible director and the planned activities of the nonprofit should be carefully examined. At least 51% of the directors must be completely disinterested. Your Bylaws should contain provisions about managing conflicts of interest. Nonprofit directors typically serve without pay.

Keeping in mind the director's duties, consider appointing directors who are committed to your mission, who are respected in the community and who have the background and skills to perform the duties. Finding one or more directors familiar with the legal, accounting and tax issues of nonprofits should be considered.

To appoint directors, the incorporator (the person who signed the articles) makes a written statement that states that they are appointing the initial directors of the corporation, lists the names and address of the initial directors, signs and dates it, types their name in, and files it with the company's records. There is no need to file this with any government office. For clarity, title the statement something like: [Corporate Name]: Statement by Incorporator Appointing Initial Directors.

Draft your bylaws

A critical decision for the Bylaws is whether you want to have a membership or a non-membership organization. If a nonprofit has members as defined under California nonprofit law, the members elect the directors, have the right to vote on some major corporate actions and have standing to sue the corporation or in some circumstances to sue on behalf of it. Having members adds complexity, cost and additional procedural requirements. Most groups choose a non-membership structure. The organization can still have non-voting memberships that indicate, for example, particular levels of donations.

Bylaws are long and filled with legal language. But they are meaningful and the choices you make will be crucial to the functioning of your organization. Be sure to read them carefully, making sure you understand the different provisions included. Some of the provisions are important to your nonprofit status with the IRS.

With this link you can find a form of Bylaws intended for California public benefit corporations <https://publiccounsel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Annotated-Form-of-Bylaws-for-a-California-Nonprofit-Public-Benefit-Corporation-2018.pdf>. At the end of each section is an explanatory annotation. If you purchase the Nolo Press book cited below, it also provides sample Bylaws.

Hold the initial organizational Board meeting

To complete your initial corporate set up, you need to have an initial meeting of the directors that the sole incorporator has appointed. Actions that need to be taken at this meeting:

- Approve the Bylaws.
- Set the number of directors, if not specified in the Bylaws, for example, if the Bylaws state a range.
- Elect officers to manage the corporation's day-to-day operations. California requires that nonprofit corporations have a chair of the board and/or president, secretary, and treasurer/CFO. The president may not be either the Secretary or the Treasurer.
- Authorize officers to set up bank accounts. To open a bank account, the organization will need its own tax ID number, called an EIN. You can apply for one online using form SS-4: <https://irs.taxid-usa.com/products/EINNonProfit>.
- If the officers are to be paid, set compensation amounts (wages or salary).
- Set the physical address of the principal office.
- Authorize the officers to do the tax-exempt status applications.

Applying for tax-exempt status

- **Register for Pay.gov** - Starting in 2020, all applications for federal tax-exempt status under section 501(c)(3) must be filed online at Pay.gov. To register, just click on 'Create an Account' at the top, and fill in the registration form.
- **Form 1023 or 1023EZ** – Most nonprofits that have assets of less than \$250,000 and annual gross receipts of \$50,000 or less will be able to use 1023E-Z. It is a shorter form and has a lower filing fee (currently \$275 compared to \$600). To get started, after you have registered on Pay.gov, go back to its homepage and type 1023 into the search box. That should open a page with links to both forms.
- **Who qualifies for federal tax exemption under Section 501(c)(3)?** Groups that are organized and operated for any of several specified purposes. These include charitable purposes, which could include giving gleaned produce to people with food insecurity in a community. If gleaning organizations also provide educational workshops benefiting the public, they may also serve an educational purpose.
- **When should we file the Form?** If the nonprofit applies within 27 months of incorporation, and the status is granted, the nonprofit status is retroactive to the date of incorporation. This may be important to avoid incurring the minimum CA state franchise tax, which does not depend on profitability.
- **Information not confidential.** Keep in mind that information you provide in or attach to the Form 1023 is not confidential, unless you specifically apply to the IRS to keep it confidential and the IRS agrees. So to the extent you can, you may want to avoid including social security numbers, bank information, personal home addresses and the like.
- **More information.** Before you start the form, it's useful to read (or at least skim) through *IRS Publication 4220 - Applying for 501(c)(3) status*. IRS publications are much more readable than you might think. In addition, as you fill out your Form, it's good to read the instructions for the Form carefully – it can make your task a lot easier.

- **California State Tax Exemption.** California grants 501(c) groups that have obtained an IRS determination letter an exemption from state corporate franchise tax. You can download the form at <https://www.ftb.ca.gov/forms/misc/3500A-instructions.html>, then fill it in, attach your determination letter, and mail it in.

Maintaining the Nonprofit Corporation

Treat the nonprofit corporation as a separate entity

Don't ever mix the corporation's funds with any individual funds, keep them separate.

To get the tax and liability benefits of a corporation, take care not to confuse yourself (or any of the other directors) with the entity. When the entity makes a contract, the contract needs to be with the entity, not an individual, and should be signed:

Corporation Name

By _____

Signer's Name and Title

The Board should approve important actions

The Board of Directors as a group, not individually, is responsible for the vision, direction, management, and overall operation of the corporation. So, the Directors need to approve all major contracts and grants, any interested party transaction, any compensation to officers, and all other important actions taken by the nonprofit.

Hold Board meetings and Keep a Corporate Record Book.

Your Board is required to meet at least once a year, but to properly direct the nonprofit, the Board should meet more often, perhaps once a quarter or once a month. All directors must be notified of meetings or waive notice. If you have used one of the referenced Bylaws, the Bylaws will provide details on how to do that. Take minutes of each meeting and finalize them promptly after the meeting. Store your minutes in a corporate record book. It's useful to also include in the same place your Articles of

Incorporation, Bylaws, Action by Incorporator, your applications for tax-exempt status and your determination letter from the IRS and acknowledgement from the California FTB.

Government filings

Quite a bit of paperwork is needed to maintain your nonprofit organization in good standing. These are the most common filings:

- Filings to be made promptly after incorporating:
 - California Secretary of State - Form S-100 Information Statement. Must be filed within 90 days after incorporation and every two years thereafter. This can be printed - pdf at: https://bpd.cdn.sos.ca.gov/corp/pdf/so/corp_so100.pdf - and mailed or filed online <https://bizfileonline.sos.ca.gov/forms/new/7041> The fee is \$20 per required filing.
 - California Attorney General – [Form CT-1 Initial Registration](#) – must be filed within 30 days of receiving assets. The fee is \$25 and you will need to attach your articles and the IRS determination application.
- Annual filings:
 - Federal Tax – The IRS has three forms for nonprofits:
 - Form 990
 - Form 990 EZ (simpler form – can be used generally if receipts are less than \$200,000 and total assets at the end of the year are less than \$500,000) and
 - Form 990N (postcard form – can be used generally if an organization normally has gross receipts of \$50,000 or less) <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/annual-electronic-filing-requirement-for-small-exempt-organizations-form-990-n-e-postcard>
 - State Tax – Form 199 – Exempt Organization Annual Information Return (FTB Form 199). If your nonprofit has \$50,000 or less in gross receipts,

you should instead file the Form 199N electronic postcard. The 199N can be found here: <https://www.ftb.ca.gov/file/business/types/charities-nonprofits/199N.asp>

All these tax forms are required to be filed by the 15th day of the fifth month after the end of the organization's taxable year (so if your fiscal year ends by December 31, the form is due no later than May 15).

- State Attorney General Tax – [RRF-1, Annual Registration Renewal Fee Report and Instructions](#). This report must be filed no later than 4 months and 15 days after your fiscal year ends (same as the deadline for the tax forms). Nonprofits who meet the criteria for filing an IRS Form 990 or 990-EZ must file a copy of it with the RRF-1. Smaller nonprofits that instead file a 990N must file a form [CT-TR-1, Annual Treasurer's Report and Instructions](#) along with the RRF-1. If your nonprofit's annual revenue is less than \$25,000 there is no RRF-1 filing fee. Above \$25,000, the fee scales up with the nonprofit's size.
- Other possible filings: If you have employees, you will need to follow the same requirements as for-profit companies who have clients. Likewise, most nonprofits are subject to the same sales tax requirements. For some special purpose nonprofits, there will be additional filings required. An excellent checklist of requirements specific to nonprofits can be found here: [Nonprofit Compliance Checklist - CalNonprofits](#)

Resources for More Information

- NOLO Press book “How to Form a NonProfit Corporation in California”. This classic reference, includes many forms and can be purchased in paper or download at <https://store.nolo.com/products/nonprofits/nonprofit-books-31>
- Public Counsel law form. <https://publiccounsel.org/resources/>
- California Association of Nonprofits <https://calnonprofits.org/resources/starting-a-california-nonprofit> and other links at their site
- California Attorney General Guide to Charities <https://oag.ca.gov/charities#guide>

Basic Insurance Requirements for Nonprofit Corporations

First, all nonprofits need at least two types of insurance: General Liability and Directors and Officers (D&O) Liability. Second, you will need guidance from a good insurance broker who understands the particular risk exposures your organization will experience. This broker needs to be willing to help you access insurance markets appropriate for not-for-profit entities. And, while the major carriers – State Farm, Farmers, Progressive, Travelers, etc. – can provide these coverages, it is also worth exploring specialty organizations that offer customized insurance options only for not-for-profit organizations, such as: www.insurancefornonprofits.org; www.calnonprofits.org; and www.cimaworld.com.

Most general insurance brokers and/or specialty organizations will direct you toward General Liability, which provides coverage against allegations of personal injury arising from any aspect of your operations. A broadly written General Liability policy should cover bodily injury, property damage or personal injury caused by or to volunteers.

The other important coverage you will need before you begin to provide services and/or programs to the community is commonly known as D&O Insurance. This provides protection for the personal assets of (volunteer or paid) Board of Directors and Officers of the not-for-profit corporation. Should a lawsuit be brought against your organization, alleging fraud or financial mismanagement for example, the D&O Insurance should

cover the cost of defending the Directors and Officers in any litigation and pay any resulting money damages resulting from a mistake or malfeasance.

Depending on your circumstances and the quality of the Agent or Broker you work with, \$1 to \$2 Million in General Liability coverage should cost between \$400 and \$700 per year. Most D&O coverage, depending on the organization's risk profile, has a minimum premium of \$800 for a \$1 million limit of liability.

So, you can expect to have an annual insurance expenditure of at least \$1,200. But if you own or rent office or programming space; and/or if you have one or more vehicles; and/or if you provide a particular product to consumers or clients, you may need to explore other types of insurance coverages that apply to those particular risks.

Final Thoughts

Remember Why You Started

Recalling why you started your organization is the best way to ensure that you don't veer too far from your mission, and that you continue to be enthusiastic about the good your group is doing for your community. The needs of a community may change, and unexpected events may occur (such as a pandemic), but hopefully your organization will adapt and stay strong and continue to help meet the needs of hungry neighbors in your community.

Look For Opportunities for Partnership

There is so much work to be done. Even though there may be other organizations out there who are doing similar things, look for ways to collaborate and connect. Encourage and support other community groups with growing and sharing food.

Be Creative and Have Fun

“Are we still having fun?” Building community, encouraging partnerships, and fighting food scarcity can be difficult and can take lots of time and effort.. The rewards are profound. Meeting fellow citizens that are committed to doing good in the world while using your own hands to help hungry neighbors is exhilarating and moving. Keep up the good work!

Acknowledgements

- <https://foodforward.org/fruit-tree-care/glean-not-glean-shouldnt-let-bad-fruit-hang-around/>
- <https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/2016-4-july-august/green-life/how-put-your-yard-work-for-climate>
- Dena Andersen, Alameda Backyard Growers Board member
- Linda Carloni, Alameda Backyard Growers Board member
- Birgitt Evans, Alameda Backyard Growers Board member
- Holly Johnson, Alameda Backyard Growers Board member
- Marla Koss, Alameda Backyard Growers Board member
- Ronald Limoges, Alameda Backyard Growers Board member
- Alison Limoges, Alameda Backyard Growers Board member
- Kristen Smeal, Alameda Backyard Growers Board member
- Sarah Miller, Alameda Backyard Growers Board member, Assistant Farm Manager at Farm2Market, Operations Manager at Acta Non Verba
- Amanda Bruemmer, co-founder of Alameda Backyard Growers
- Sonja Simmons, founder and director of Oakland Gleaners
- Josh Engl, Berkeley Mutual Aid volunteer

Appendices

- I. Sample Liability Waiver
- II. Sample spreadsheet to keep track of information
- III. Community Partners
- IV. Additional/alternate sites for donating produce
- V. Case Study - Starting Free Seed Libraries in Alameda

Appendix I - Sample Liability Waiver for Volunteers

- [Click here for a link to the ABG Project Pick Volunteer Agreement and Release of Liability Waiver.](#)

Appendix II - Sample Spreadsheet for Keeping Track of Donor and Volunteer Information

Here's a blank sample spreadsheet for tracking donations, volunteer activity, equipment checkout, donations dropped off at receiving organization, etc.

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1lqdYhs9obxQEoNcR_6vYuy8GtIW3bSy6ivVjiuuJJvU/edit?usp=sharing

Appendix III - Community Partners

Alameda Backyard Growers works with the following community partners:

1. **Ploughshares Nursery** (<https://apcollaborative.org/ploughshares-nursery/>) - Ploughshares Nursery is one of 2 nurseries in Alameda. It is a full scale retail plant nursery that specializes in California native, drought tolerant, and edible plants. One hundred percent of the proceeds from its business support Alameda Point Collaborative's supportive housing community for formerly homeless families. ABG has held workshops and plant swap events at Ploughshares, and its former Director, Jeff Bridge, has given numerous presentations at ABG free monthly meetings. In addition, ABG collaborated with Ploughshares (and with [Encinal Nursery](#)) on ABG's Project Tree to help homeowners and organizations plant fruit trees in Alameda.
2. **Farm2Market** (<https://apcollaborative.org/farm2market/>) - F2M is a social enterprise of the Alameda Point Collaborative (APC). This 2 acre working farm employs APC residents, provides job training and offers educational volunteer experiences, and runs on a Community Supported Agriculture subscription model. One of ABG's Board members, Sarah Miller, is the Assistant Farm Manager at F2M. ABG volunteers (including board members) have held workshops as well as work days at both Farm2Market and Ploughshares. Several ABG board members spend Saturday mornings at Farm2Market, primarily pruning the trees in the orchard. For every volunteer hour ABG works at either Farm2Market or Ploughshares, APC is allowed to collect federal funds.
3. **CASA** (Climate Action for a Sustainable Alameda) (<http://casa-alameda.org/>) - Some ABG Board members attend CASA meetings when possible. CASA sponsored three ABG Board members participation in a 6-month Resilience Training program put on by NorCal Resilience Network. CASA and ABG collaborate to support the City of Alameda's Climate Action and Resiliency Plan.
4. **ARPD (Alameda Recreation & Parks Dept.)** (<https://www.alamedaca.gov/Departments/Recreation-Parks/Jean-Sweeney-Open-Space-Park>) - Since 2014, ABG has been advocating for a community

garden at Jean Sweeney Open Space Park (JSOSP). Plans pushed by ABG now include an urban orchard, a forager's lane and demonstration gardens for the community as well as space to hold gardening workshops. ABG has had at least four Board members and several volunteers on the JSOSP committee of ARPD since the City voted to approve its development in 2016. ABG advised the committee on what drought tolerant plants as well as fruit trees to plant in that location, and provided volunteers for a work party to help with the initial clearing of space at the park. In addition, ABG always has a table at the ARPD hosted annual **Earth Day Festival** (from 2012-2019) where we do a gardening demonstration and sell tomato starts while talking about growing food to attendees.

5. **Food Shift** (<https://foodshift.net/>) - Food Shift creates delicious meals via its catering and food donation programs, while teaching culinary skills and job-training to kitchen apprentices. They distribute to food insecure communities, and to support individuals with limited resources to achieve economic security through job training and employment. ABG has donated some donated backyard fruit that the Alameda Food Bank couldn't accept to the Food Shift Kitchen, which was made into meals.
6. **West End Arts District** (<https://www.westendartsdistrict.org/index.html>) - The West End Arts District, in collaboration with the West Alameda Business Association, created the Healing Garden on Webster Street in Alameda. These organizations helped ABG set up a Free Seed Library and have publicized and hosted ABG events there including a Seed Saving Workshop in November, 2021.
7. **Alameda Boys & Girls Club** - ABG has been working with Gretchen Doering, Seed-to-Table Director at Alameda Boys & Girls Club, for the past several years. The relationship began in the fall of 2016 when ABG planted fruit trees in "Italo's Garden" on club grounds. Project Tree (a partnership between ABG and The Alameda Sun) donated fig, apricot, plum, lime, orange and apple trees. The Boys & Girls Club later added pomegranate, lime and Meyer lemon trees. ABG volunteers prune the trees in February and in July, working with Gretchen and

youth volunteers. In 2020, ABG held its Annual Garden Tour at the Boys & Girls Club garden.

8. **Rhythmix Cultural Works (RCW)** - When we could have in-person events, RCW hosted our monthly meetings.
9. **Alameda County Master Gardeners** - Several of our Board members are Alameda County Master Gardeners, and ACMG allows ABG workshops and monthly meetings to be counted towards master gardeners' continuing education requirements.
10. **Alameda Sun** - Our local independently-owned newspaper, the Alameda Sun, donated funds towards ABG's [Project Tree](#) which taught people how to plant and care for fruit trees. ABG contributes monthly gardening articles to the Sun, and encourages the community to subscribe to the newspaper to keep it going.
11. **StopWaste** - ABG has featured many speakers from StopWaste at our free monthly meetings who discussed topics including sheet mulching, home composting, reducing food waste and more. ABG has received several grants from StopWaste, one in support of our Branching Out program which provided a limited amount of low-cost fruit tree pruning services, and another grant to host workshops to teach people how to stop wasting food. In addition, StopWaste is developing **compost hubs** for free mulch and compost around the East Bay which will be very helpful for fruit tree owners to keep their trees healthy.

Appendix IV - Additional Sites for Donating Produce

ABG's Project Pick drops off almost all of its gleaned backyard fruit at the Alameda Food Bank. However, occasionally we have picked soft or easily bruised fruit that the AFB will not accept, like figs or fuyu persimmons, and have donated them to Food Shift Kitchen (see above under Appendix II - Community Partners). Christ Episcopal Church in Alameda (www.christchurchalameda.org) also has a food pantry program. The Although ABG hasn't donated to them to date, it's possible these organizations might also accept donations of fresh local produce:

- Alameda County Community Food Bank
- Alameda Point Collaborative
- Essential Food Medicine (EFAM) (Oakland)
- McKay Avenue Senior Housing & Medical Respite Center
- Alameda Meals on Wheels
- Alameda Unified School District
- Midway Shelter for Women & Children
- Other churches

Appendix V - Case Study: Starting Free Seed Libraries in Alameda

Alameda Backyard Growers was formed with a mission to build community, share information about growing food, and give back to the community. Addressing food insecurity was one of ABG's founding principles and we have expanded upon that mission in the decade since, harvesting and delivering over 23 tons of Alameda-grown fruit to the Alameda Food Bank, and offering free education meetings to teach people how to grow their own food.

In the spring of 2020 the COVID pandemic created a disruption in the nation's food supply and delivery system and, as a result, the stress of food insecurity grew to an all-time high.

In response, many people decided to grow some of their own food, except that — again — the seedlings, seeds and supplies were not always available or affordable. Alameda Backyard Growers (ABG) decided to go ahead with our annual tomato sale, adding vegetable seedlings to the mix, to get plants into the hands of the community quickly and affordably.. About that time, ABG also created a monthly online newsletter to educate beginning and advanced gardeners about growing food in their own backyards, including activities for parents to do with their children.

To confront the high cost and low supply of seeds, ABG met the moment with the idea to install a [Free Seed Library](#). The concept was loosely based on the Alameda Free Library's Free Seed Exchange, which was forced to close during the pandemic. The design was inspired by the Little Free Libraries, which are an Alameda neighborhood staple for free books.

The first Free Seed Library was installed in July 2020, on San Jose Avenue, Alameda. It proved so popular that 2500 packs of seeds were dispensed within a few short months of opening. A community collaboration between ABG, Girl Scout Troop #33373, and local contractor Ken Carvalho, opened three more boxes in February 2021. Then, in November 2021, Eagle Scout Jake Meyers, along with the help of ABG and West End

Arts District, installed an additional two boxes, bringing the total number of boxes to six. The strategic plan to diversify the location of the boxes ensured equal access to them for all community members.

The Free Seed Libraries are ‘curated’ to offer seasonal seeds. Community members can select six packets of vegetables and flowers per month, and are encouraged to only take what they will grow. ABG held a popular seed saving workshop, and is planning community seed swaps in the future. The alamedabackyardgrowers.org website offers many articles and videos on growing plants from seeds as an additional resource.

Though the Free Seed Libraries have been successful in the 18 months since inception, the program has not been without its obstacles. Seed prices have risen, and market demand has left limited choices to consumers. In addition, measuring and packaging 17,000 packs of seeds for distribution to the community was an incredible time commitment from some members of the ABG Board.

ABG hopes that the Free Seed Libraries will help close a gap and assist neighbors in their attempts to grow food. Here are the addresses of the Free Seed Libraries:

- 305 Santa Clara Ave. (West End)
- 1435 Webster St. (West End - Healing Garden)
- 1125 Morton St. (Central Alameda)
- 1827 St. Charles St. (Central Alameda)
- 2829 San Jose Ave. (East End)
- 16 Cove Rd. (Bay Farm)

Everyone can grow some of their own food, even if it is only a couple of pots of greens, peas and herbs on a sunny balcony. The act of cultivating food can help relieve anxiety and stress. Studies show that contact with the garden soil bacteria, *Mycobacterium vac*