



NOT FAR FROM THE TREE

Fruit Picker Handbook

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Table of Contents

Welcome Information

1.

Fruit Picking In 4 Easy Steps

2.

1. Head To The Pick

3.

2. Pick Prep

3.

3. Get Picking!

4.

4. Wrap Up

5.

Appendicies

Appendix A: Ladder Safety Information

7.

Appendix B: Fruit Picker Code of Conduct

8.

Welcome to the Team!

Welcome to Not Far From The Tree's Fruit Picking Team! Thank you for volunteering your time and energy to support this organization. Our fruit picking and sharing program would not exist without incredible people like you, so consider yourself an integral part of the team!

About Not Far From The Tree

Not Far From The Tree is Toronto's fruit picking and sharing program. We bring Torontonians together to harvest and steward our city's urban orchard to reduce food waste, increase access to fresh fruit, and live sustainably. When a fruit tree owner can't keep up with their tree's bounty, we rally volunteers to pick the fruit and share 1/3 of the harvest with our 35 social service agency partners, including food banks, shelters and community kitchens.

Together, we're working towards a vision of a Toronto where urban fruit harvesting is a viable food access strategy, and where our urban orchard unites communities in the shared pursuit of social, environmental, and food justice.

Toronto's Harvest Season

We pick and share a broad variety of fruit from Toronto's urban orchard. For a breakdown of what fruits we pick and when we pick them, check out the [Fruit Guide](#) on our website. Keep in mind that some fruit years are more bountiful than others, and that fruit may ripen earlier or later than expected depending on environmental factors.

A woman with freckles, wearing a teal tank top, a grey baseball cap, and sunglasses, is shown from the side, reaching up to pick small red berries from a leafy green bush. The berries are clustered on thin branches. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

Fruit Picking In 4 Easy Steps

Photo: Celeste, Ryerson Urban Farm

1. Head To The Pick

Tree location

- Once you sign up for a pick on the portal, you will be able to see the specific address of the tree you are picking. The Tree Owner will also give you any specific information on the location of the tree (i.e. is it in the front or back yard, is there a gate they need to open), so make sure to take note of that before you head to the pick.

Arrive On Time

- Make sure to plan your route ahead of time and take traffic and weather into consideration. The Pick Leader may wait until a few minutes after the designated start time but they won't wait forever!

Early Birds

- If you arrive before the Pick Leader does, just hang out and wait for them to get there. They will have more information about the tree and Tree Owner, and are the ones responsible for making sure the pick runs smoothly, so we want to make sure they're onsite before things get started. Once they arrive, you can help them clean up the yard and get ready for the pick!

2. Pick Prep

Welcome

- The Pick Leader will give all Fruit Pickers a quick welcome and orientation to the tree and the pick. This is a great time to get to know the other Fruit Pickers and to ask any questions you have about the picking process.

Yard Cleanup

- The first thing to do is make sure the yard is reasonably clean before you start picking. The Pick Leader will put you and the team to work picking up any debris (fruit that has fallen before the pick).

Windfall

- It's important to understand the difference between debris and windfall (fruit that falls during the pick), so we've made this handy chart! Not Far From The Tree does not donate fruit that has touched the ground, nor do we leave it for homeowners. Here is a handy chart to explain what we do with fallen fruit and why:

	Fallen Fruit <i>Before</i> the Pick	Fallen Fruit <i>During</i> the Pick
What We Call It	Debris	Windfall
Concerns	May be infected by E. coli bacteria. We don't know how long it's been there	May be infected by E. coli bacteria
What We Do With It	Compost only	Given to volunteers or composted. Windfall is often still of good quality. Just be sure volunteers know to wash and process the fruit.
Where It Goes	In a yard waste bag or green bin. Should be done before pick begins	In the windfall container
Weighed or not?	Not weighed or included in the total 'pounds picked' calculation	Weighed and included in the total 'pounds picked' calculation

3. Get Picking!

Every Pick Is Different

- Remember that every tree is different and every pick is different. Sometimes there's a ton of fruit, and sometimes there's not. Whatever the case, relax and enjoy the unique experience of picking fruit with the NFFTT in our beautiful city!

Picking Tips

- If you're not sure how to pick the fruit in question, ask your Pick Leader for tips. Remember to always treat the tree you're picking with respect, which means that you should try and avoid excessive yanking or pulling of branches, or shaking the trunk of the tree too hard. You can also check out the [Fruit Guide](#) on our website for more info about picking (and eating) local fruits!

Climbing

- Anything that the Tree Owner has given Not Far From The Tree explicit consent to climb is fair game! Anything that they haven't given explicit consent for us to climb is not, hands down. If there's nothing to climb, remember that our picking poles extend up to almost 10 feet!

If There's A Ladder

- If a Tree Owner leaves a ladder for the picking team to use, you're welcome to use it. Just make sure to share it with the other pickers, and be safe (see [Appendix A](#) for ladder safety information).

If There's No Ladder

- We apologize! Because our Pick Leaders transport fruit and picking equipment by cargo bike, they are unable to bring ladders to picks. We do ask Tree Owners to supply ladders for their picks, but sometimes they are unable to do so. In some cases, if a ladder is really necessary for the pick to proceed, the Pick Leader may send a few Fruit Pickers out to knock on the doors of neighbouring houses to ask to borrow one.

Respect For The Picking Team

- Remember that everyone brings their own unique experiences and abilities to each fruit pick. It's vital that you treat everyone with compassion and respect, and to make sure that you make space for everyone to share the work of picking the tree.

Respect For The Tree Owner

- Also keep in mind that the Tree Owner is generously sharing their fruit and yard with us, so please treat their tree and property with respect as well! When in doubt, you can always refer to the Fruit Picker code of conduct in [Appendix B](#).

4. Wrap Up

Weigh The Fruit

- When the tree has been picked clean, or in the last half hour of the pick (whichever comes first), the Pick Leader will ask the Fruit Pickers to collect all the fruit they've picked so that it can be weighed.
- The Pick Leader will take the lead on this, but you can help by dividing the total weight in thirds to be distributed evenly among the Tree Owner, the Picking Team, and the Partner Agency that will be receiving the donation.

Divide The Fruit

- You can then help divide the third for the Picking Team into equal portions for each picker. Sometimes this is a great haul and sometimes it isn't, but either way you'll have some great memories to take home with you!

Pack & Clean Up

- Help the Pick Leader pack up all the picking equipment and clean up any further fallen fruit or debris. Do your best to leave the yard looking as clean if not cleaner than you found it – that helps guarantee that the Tree Owner will ask us back again next year!

Take Your Share Home

- Once the yard is clean and the fruit is all divvied up, you're done. You can head home with your share of the fruit with the satisfaction of knowing that you've helped diverted a ton of fruit away from the green bin and into your community!



Appendix A: Ladder Safety Information

Assess the ladder before anyone uses it and give instructions to ensure safety

- **Inspection**

- Look for cracks, abrasions, paint coverage, locking mechanism (braces), legs, feet, loose screws/nails/bits

- **Set-up**

- Get help when moving a ladder
- A straight ladder must rest against a stable surface (e.g., not against the trunk of a tree, or on a corner of a house). Use a rope to lash both sides of the ladder rung at point of contact with the surface if unsure about stability.
- Don't use a step ladder as a straight ladder
- Place the ladder only on the ground (e.g., not on a bench, cinder block, etc.)

- **Climbing**

- There must always be a spotter, who has two hands on ladder (climbing side)
- Ladder users must be wearing closed toe shoes and have clothing that is not too loose
- Climber must have three-point contact at all times (no stretching)
- Ladder's distance from the wall at the base should be 1/3 to 1/4 of the ladder's height
- Face forward only - both spotter and climber
- Pass equipment straight up and down (not to the side), not while climbing or descending
- Don't stand on top two rungs of ladder
- One person at a time on a ladder

Appendix B: Fruit Picker Code of Conduct

As a Not Far From The Tree Fruit Picker, I agree to:

- 1.** Fulfill my duties as a Fruit Picker to the best of my ability
- 2.** Familiarize myself with the Fruit Picker's Handbook
- 3.** Request no more than my allotted share of fruit per pick (an equal portion of the amount of fruit allotted for Not Far From The Tree Members)
- 4.** Honour the confidentiality of tree-owners, other members, our partner agencies, and our organization
- 5.** Refrain from imposing any personal beliefs or agendas on others during fruit picks
- 6.** Follow through on my picking commitments to the best of my ability and cancel my attendance on the web-app as soon as I realize I have a scheduling conflict
- 7.** Not consume cigarettes, drugs, or alcohol during fruit picks
- 8.** Respect the property of the Tree Owners whose trees I pick
- 9.** Treat all other Not Far From The Tree members with dignity and respect, regardless of personal quality, including but limited to race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital and family status, and ability.



Happy Picking!



Photo: Maria Miranda