A man plays a cello under the veranda, neighbors move around a potluck food table, and a ping pong ball flies overhead. Then, over the sound of neighborly commotion, a loud, friendly, Dutch-accented reminder: “Alright everybody, we’ll start weeding the path soon!”

Brooks Park and Community Garden is booming. Peter Vaernet, the garden coordinator, wants this garden to be a “village meeting place.” The ping pong table, tai chi classes, beehive demonstrations, and educational tours for local schools at the garden are all part of the gardeners’ efforts to include and attract not only gardeners, but also the greater community. Vaernet believes that the garden should be a focal point for the neighborhood; a place for people to gather and connect. He knows that sooner or later, one gardener will ask another about seeds for fall planting or an unknown plant. He appreciates the way someone from China and someone from Ecuador, who have no common language, can share seeds and knowledge.

What to plant now from the SF Seed Library

January
- Fava beans, Carrots, Lettuce, Mustard, Onions, and Shallots.
- Foggier neighborhoods can try: Collards, Kohlrabi, Leeks, Swiss Chard, and Turnips

February
- All January plants plus: Beets, Broccoli, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Kale, Peas, Potatoes and Spinach
- Sunnier neighborhoods can try: Celery and Rhubarb root
- Foggier neighborhoods: Parsnip and Shallots

March
- All January and February plants plus: Artichoke root, Runner beans, Cucumber, Summer squash, and Turnips

Visit sfseedlibrary.org/planting-calendar for the full calendar list.
To keep communal areas tended, Vaernet makes work days more about the fun of gathering than about the work. “If you ask for help weeding on a big workday, no one will be interested. But as soon as you mention a potluck! Oh then people are excited.”

The games, sitting areas, and even the bee hives help create a fun meeting place, building a community that will ultimately benefit the garden. Vaernet suggests inviting local musicians or meditation groups to meet in gardens to draw people in. Someone who takes tai chi classes in a garden’s communal space might become interested in maintaining that space. Offerings in Brooks Park also engage local students to keep the garden healthy. Most middle and high schools require students to participate in community service projects, and Brooks Park draws in regular student volunteers from schools like Balboa High, Conerstone Academy, Lick-Wilmerding High, and SF State.

Vaernet thinks that gardeners and coordinators should “think of [themselves]…as preventative health teachers.” As a gathering place and green space, a community garden can both strengthen the surrounding community and provide health benefits for members. “A garden,” according to Vaernet, “should be much more than a place to grow vegetables.”

Urban Orchards in SF!

On January 26, 2012, we’re hosting the first ever city-wide fruit tree planting with San Francisco’s Urban Orchards program funded by the Local Carbon Fund and Friends of the Urban Forest. We’ll be planting 200 apple, plum, and Asian pears in 20 different locations.

This kind of project needs lots of hands! Volunteer and find out where we’re planting trees in your neighborhood by contacting kimberly.swinford@sfgov.org or dougleybeck@fuf.net. Learn more about the Urban Orchards program at SFEnvironment.org/orchards.

Resources

Free Compost and Mulch:

- **Bayview Greenwaste**
  Hours: M-F, 7am-3:30pm, Saturday 7am-12 noon
  1300 Caroll Avenue
  bvgrecycle@aol.com

Worms:

- **The Worms Resource Page**
  SFEnvironment.org/worms

Seeds:

- **SF Seed Lending Library**
  at Potrero Hill Library and Hayes Valley Farm
  sfseedlibrary.org

Tools:

- **The Green City Store**
  1029 Geneva Ave
  tinyurl.com/tool-lending

**It’s Bare Root Tree Season!**

Fruit trees need a certain number of hours with temperatures below 45°, or chill hours, to break dormancy and begin fruiting. With 600 or less chill hours per year, only certain varieties will produce in our climate. According to the Chronicle’s “Many Kinds of Apple Trees do well in San Francisco” by Pam Peirce (author of “Golden Gate Gardening”), these are a few low-chill varieties that do very well in the city:

- ‘Suntan’
- ‘Winter Pearmain’
- ‘Gala’