



BOSTON FOOD FOREST COALITION

A ‘food forest’ rises on an empty Mattapan lot, and draws a visit from the mayor

‘I can’t wait for people to enjoy it,’ says lead trustee

By [Sean Cotter](#) Globe Staff, Updated May 13, 2023, 1 hour ago



People explored the gardens of Edgewater Food Forest during the grand opening in Mattapan. ERIN CLARK/GLOBE STAFF

For years, Jessie Dambreville looked out on a vacant lot.

The plot at 640 River St. in Mattapan, once owned by her family and eventually ceded to the city in the 1990s, looked like many in her Boston neighborhood — an underused parcel of land.

Now, Dambreville is the lead trustee for the Edgewater Food Forest, looking out her window at a garden project three years in the making. Neighbors can come to pick berries, do yoga, or simply walk around and soak in a quiet, cool green space tucked away in a neighborhood that doesn't have many.

“I can't wait for people to enjoy it,” Dambreville said.



Sabrina Pilet-Jones, owner of Sabrina's Garden, assisted Joane Guzman in creating a flower crown

during the grand opening of the Edgewater Food Forest in Mattapan. ERIN CLARK/GLOBE STAFF

Saturday marked the grand opening for the city's 10th food forest, a term used by those in green circles to describe a perennial-heavy type of garden the mirrors nature, in a spot near [Mattapan Square](#) that will be open to the public from sunrise to sunset.

Vivien Morris of the Edgewater Neighborhood Association — and another steward of the forest — said she's happy to see something made of a lot where not much was going on.

"It's a new and important resource for the community," Morris said. "We just want people to walk in and enjoy it."

Multiple people involved in the food forest talked about how this space will only ripen with age. Many of the plants have to grow into themselves; Dambreville, ripen with age. Many of the plants have to grow into themselves; Dambreville, for instance, is particularly excited about two pawpaw plants. She's never encountered a pawpaw fruit, but the plants should yield them in a few years.



Mayor Michelle Wu participated in the ribbon-cutting during the grand opening of the Edgewater Food Forest in Mattapan. ERIN CLARK/GLOBE STAFF

Mayor Michelle Wu, who attended the opening on Saturday morning, said, “This is transformative for generations to come.”

Vanessa and Vanilo Leveque, who both grew up nearby, brought their three young children to the opening of the food forest. Twins Vamaya and Vanaya scampered about while 9-month-old Vamir sat happily on Vanessa’s lap, peering around at the smiling faces.

“It’s just nice to see when people come together what they can do,” Vanessa Leveque said.

The food forest smelled good. The wood chips on the ground, baking in the hot

sun, mingled with the smell of flowers and trees and the aroma of pastries provided by the La Baguette restaurant across the street.

On Saturday, musicians playing steel drums banged through renditions of Bob Marley and the Wailers' "Three Little Birds," ABBA's "Dancing Queen," and Simon & Garfunkel's "Sound of Silence" as the first members of the public to see the garden wandered through the small paths. People sat at a couple of chess boards, chatted with each other, and gathered around the small pavilion where the drummers played.

The stewards have visions of yoga and movie nights on the pavilion, and cooking demonstrations with ingredients from the garden.

"It's just peaceful," Liz Luc Clowes, a landscape architect, said. "When a neighborhood wants to build resources in their own backyard, they really can come together and figure it out."

This food forest has been a journey. Dambreville pointed to a small Italian fig tree she's particularly excited about — and said it's been dug up and potted in her basement so it could survive during the past two Boston winters. But it's grown too big to continue to be her tenant; the stewards say the recommended strategy now will be to keep it in the plot, bend it over, and cover it in burlap.

Orion Kriegman, executive director of the Boston Food Forest Coalition, described this as a "state of the art" garden. All the plants will be indexed on Google, and signage around the little path tells passersby about the space and the plans. Quick response, or QR codes, on the English-language

signs pull up translations in multiple tongues.

The Boston Food Forest Coalition, which incorporated in 2015, has nine similar spaces, though Kriegman said every one is tailored to the whims of the neighborhood stewards.

“This is 100 percent for the community, by the community,” Kriegman said.

The goal, he said, is to triple the number of food forests to 30 by the end of the decade, largely focused in underserved neighborhoods such as Mattapan, Grove Hall, and Dorchester.

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