

## Clifford Park Food Forest (Town of Hartford) Vermont Fruit & Nut Tree Grant Application

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*Garden name*

Clifford Park Food Forest and Abenaki Garden

*Garden address*

100 Recreation Dr, White River Junction, VT 05001

*County*

Windsor

*Garden website*

<https://www.hartford-vt.org/2505/Community-Resilience-Organization-Resili>

*Garden type*

Community

*How can community members be involved in your garden? (select all that apply)*

Volunteer AND attend events

*Description of garden*

Ground was first broken at the Clifford Park Food Forest in 2021, when community volunteers assembled under the leadership of Resilient Hartford, a Selectboard appointed Town committee established in 2015, to begin growing fruit and nut trees to combat food insecurity, particularly for the residents of West Hartford. The project is in collaboration with the Hartford Planning and Development Department and the Hartford Parks and Recreation Department (PARD). The project also promises co-benefits including reducing the amount of turf Hartford PARD has to manage, restoring the depleted ecosystem of the park, and creating opportunities for community members to gather together, connect with the land, and re-localize food production. The first project of its kind in Hartford, the Clifford Park Food Forest is a pilot project that, if successful, hopefully will be replicated at other parks in the Town and other communities.

In 2023, a portion of land at the site was dedicated to an Abenaki Garden, under the leadership of Abenaki tribal elder and Resilient Hartford member Earl Hatley. The garden is intended primarily to grow seed stock of Indigenous varieties and grow food for local Abenaki community members, in conjunction with a sister Abenaki garden in Quechee. Our initial focus in the garden area is building soil health through cover crops and hugel mounds.

Currently, the Food Forest is home to a variety of species including plum, chestnuts, butternuts, burr oaks, linden, pear, peach, hawthorn, hazelnut, chestnut trees. As the project is relatively new (at least,

relative to the lifespan of a tree!), most saplings are still in development and have yet to bear fruit. The Food Forest is stewarded by Resilient Hartford and Food Forest volunteers, with monthly or bimonthly workdays (depending on the season and amount of work), with intermittent checks by volunteer coordinators as needed, especially to water during drier spells. Tree plantings draw 20-30 volunteers while workdays typically draw 7-10 volunteers. We are currently conducting outreach, especially targeting Hartford/West Hartford, to increase our volunteer base.

One particularity of our site is that it is in a one-hundred-year floodplain next to the White River. Given last year's July 10th flood, which did cover our fields, we are shifting our strategy to prioritize flood-resistant varieties and are also seeking to strengthen our riparian buffer. Additionally, while the soil is poor quality, we are unable to bring in significant amounts of traditional amendments like compost and mulch because of local and state flood regulations. Our primary strategy to build soil health has been to plant cover crops with a diverse seed mix (including brassicas, nitrogen fixers like legumes, oats, and pollinator-friendly flowering species). Restoring the Clifford Park ecosystem is by nature slow going, but already we've seen signs of success including increased insects and other wildlife like birds and small mammals, and a quick recovery of our cover crop islands after flooding.

We have worked with the West Hartford Library and West Hartford Farmers' Market, located just across the river from Clifford Park, and intend to continue collaboration to strengthen community bonds and increase opportunities for gathering around growing and learning about food for all ages. Clifford Park is located in Windsor County, where an estimated 10.4% of residents are food insecure, according to Feeding America. By providing healthy, organic fruit and nuts free for picking, we hope to offset grocery expenses for these disproportionately expensive items. Currently, community members already visit Clifford Park to recreate, especially making use of its river access, and we anticipate this pre-existing foot traffic will naturally facilitate interaction with the trees, including harvesting when fruit is ripe. Once trees are producing, we will spread the word in the surrounding community (via Facebook, listserv, flyers, and word of mouth) to ensure that folks are aware of the presence of the trees. Our location at Clifford Park is particularly salient, as the closest food store, the Hartford Irving gas station/convenience store, is 6 miles away, and its options are limited to relatively unhealthy convenience food. We are therefore providing perhaps the only proximate source of fresh food for nearby households aside from the summer weekly Farmers' Market.

*How many people would you estimate your garden serves (through direct involvement and benefiting from the harvest and/or space)?*

An estimated 40 unique volunteers have attended workdays throughout the 2.5 seasons we've been working on the Clifford Park Food Forest. Once our trees begin producing fruit, we anticipate that number increasing to include folks who come to recreate at Clifford Park, Farmers' Market attendees, and residents of the nearby neighborhoods.

*After completing the site assessment, have you made any changes about where to plant your trees or do you have any questions we can help you with?*

The biggest consideration for our location is flood tolerance, or the ability of our varieties to withstand “wet feet.” We are also prioritizing species that grow well in riparian buffers.

*What are your goals for including fruit and nut trees in your garden?*

1. Provide a fresh, healthy, local source of fruits and nuts for the surrounding community—fruits and nuts are among the more expensive groceries, and we aim to provide members of the community with a free alternative. An estimated 10.4% of Windsor County residents are food insecure, according to Feeding America; for 1 in 10 of our neighbors who are already struggling to make ends meet, fruits and nuts may be an out of reach luxury. We aim to address that!
2. Increase diversity in Clifford Park, providing habitat for animals, building soil structure, and building resilience, especially in the riparian zone, considering the risk of future flooding.

*Please provide a list of desired trees and how many of each. Please note: As part of our grantee support, we provide varietal selection resources to help you choose the best trees for your site.*

In our project at the Clifford Park Food Forest, we are working with several members of the local Abenaki community. They are hoping to take a walk around the site once the snow recedes with another Abenaki member who works in forest conservation to assess which species might be compatible with our conditions at Clifford Park. We anticipate that this selection will include riparian species like black walnut and American hazelnut. However, as discussed with Vermont Garden Network staff, we will not specify tree varieties at this time to accommodate the inclusion of our partners’ valuable Indigenous knowledge in this planning process.

*How will the fruits or nuts from the trees be harvested, used, shared, and stored?*

Community members and visitors to Clifford Park will be free to pick and eat what they’d like, and if trees are particularly full, large harvests will be collected on volunteer work days. Surplus fruit and nuts will be distributed for free at the nearby West Hartford Library and Farmers’ Market, and/or donated to food banks and food recovery efforts. Additionally, we will save nuts to grow saplings in our planned nursery, which forms part of the next stage of our project.

*Who will care for your new trees?*

Our volunteers meet monthly or bimonthly for workdays at Clifford Park, depending on need. During drier months, project coordinators visit the park more frequently to water our trees. We currently have a core committed group of ~15 volunteers and are actively working to expand that base for this upcoming season!

*Have you received a VGN Fruit and Nut Tree grant in the past?*

No

*If you answered yes to the above question, how does this proposed project build upon or enhance a previously funded project?*

N/A

*If this is your first time applying to this grant, how will this funding allow you to meet your goals for your garden?*

Some of our saplings have died during winter 2022-2023 and the 2023 summer flood, so part of this funding will go toward replacing those trees. Additionally, after last year's flood, we now know the importance of bolstering our riparian buffer, and species we've requested like black walnut, American hazelnut, elderberry, and serviceberry all contribute to healthy riparian buffers while still providing a source of food. Finally, drawing on lessons we've learned over the past 2.5 growing seasons, we hope to increase the success rate of our trees, which continued cover cropping, fencing, and consistent access to tools will allow us to do. (Currently, we rely on tools volunteers bring to workdays from their homes, but this means that the tools available on any given workday are quite variable. As we expand our volunteer pool and offer more workday opportunities, we want to ensure that folks can rely on a consistent supply of tools.)

*Grantees may receive up to \$1,200 to fund the purchase of trees and related care supplies (Please Note: Funds **do not** cover payment for planting or caring for fruit and nut trees). **Please provide your total project ask.** This amount must be equal to the category breakdown below. Please only provide monetary values here and in the category breakdown. (Please note: you do not need to fill in each category if you are not requesting money for the items in that category)*

*Trees, including delivery - fruit & nut bearing trees only (berry bushes like raspberries, blueberries, and grapes are NOT included).*

\$700

*Tree planting & care supplies (water gators, protective fencing, tools, etc.)*

\$271.85

*Mulch, wood chips, compost, organic fertilizer, or soil amendments*

\$166.51

Total Grant Request \$1,138.36

*Please provide a short budget narrative to elaborate on the categories above. This may include information such as how you calculated budget costs and how certain supplies will support your project.*

Trees

As detailed above, we are not yet ready to commit to certain tree species because we are awaiting consultation from our Abenaki project partners. We intend to buy most/all of our saplings from Perfect Circle Farm.

Tree planting and supplies

4ft x 100ft [fencing](#) - \$109

2 weeding [hand tools](#) - \$45  
1 [garden fork](#) - \$64.89  
1 [garden shovel](#) - \$14.98  
[Garden stakes](#) - \$37.98  
**Subtotal: \$271.85**

Fencing and stakes will allow us to protect our trees while they're young. As detailed above, we currently rely on volunteers to bring tools from their home, and as we're bringing in new people, especially some who might be getting their start with gardening. We also want to make sure to have some basic tools reliably on hand for our workdays!

#### Amendments

35-lb bag high-diversity mix - \$41.67  
30-lb bag cool season soil builder - \$27  
5-lb bag perennial pollinator - \$38  
Shipping - \$59.84  
**Subtotal: \$166.51**

Because of our location is in a 100-year-flood-plain, we are unable to introduce large amounts of amendments like compost and mulch to Clifford Park. Our main strategy for building soil has been growing cover crops (and chopping them down as mulch), allowing the roots to do much of the necessary soil-building work we need to ensure that our trees have hospitable earth to grow in!