

FROM ORCHARD TO URBAN GARDEN: COMMUNICATING THE VALUE OF FRUIT TREES IN PUBLIC SPACE

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Abstract: *In recent years, urban landscapes have witnessed a renewed interest in integrating fruit trees into public spaces, redefining the boundaries between nature, culture, and community well being. This study explores how the symbolic and ecological values of fruit trees are communicated in urban environments, transitioning from their traditional role in agricultural orchards to new functions in city gardens and community parks. Through a multidisciplinary approach combining environmental communication, landscape design, and urban sociology, the paper examines how fruit trees foster a dialogue between humans and nature, serving as both aesthetic and educational instruments. Furthermore, the research highlights how public awareness campaigns, participatory design, and green communication strategies contribute to a deeper understanding of biodiversity, sustainability, and food heritage within cities. By analyzing case studies from European urban projects, the paper demonstrates that the presence of fruit trees in public spaces is not merely a matter of design, but a medium of communication one that connects environmental identity, collective memory, and the pursuit of a more resilient urban ecosystem*

Key words: *communication, environmental identity, collective memory*

INTRODUCTION

In most cities today, people walk past trees without giving much thought to the stories or functions behind them. Urban greenery tends to be appreciated for shade, beauty, or simply as a break from concrete [6]. Yet fruit trees occupy a different place in the public imagination. They remind us of orchards, childhood memories, family gardens, and rural landscapes that many urban residents no longer encounter in their daily routines. Bringing fruit trees into public spaces in the city raises questions not only about ecology and design but also about how communities interpret and relate to these living resources [13].

Although urban planners increasingly discuss sustainability, food resilience, and community engagement, fruit trees are still surprisingly rare in public spaces. The hesitation is often practical concerns about fallen fruit, pests, or maintenance but these reasons tell only part of the story. Much of the resistance comes from a lack of understanding of what fruit trees can offer beyond the fruit itself. They can serve as educational tools, as symbols of shared responsibility, and as reminders that food production does not need to be distant or hidden [1, 15]. When placed thoughtfully, they can change how people experience public space, turning ordinary streets or parks into places of learning, gathering, and ecological awareness.

However, the presence of fruit trees alone is not enough. Their value needs to be communicated in a way that resonates with those who use the space. People interact with landscapes through the meanings they attach to them, and these meanings are shaped by culture, memory, and conversation [17]. If residents view fruit trees as messy or burdensome, they will treat them accordingly. But if they understand them as resources for the community both practical and symbolic they may care for them, harvest from them, and even protect them. Communication, in this sense, becomes just as important as planting itself. Signs, stories, workshops, local traditions, and informal conversations all contribute to the public perception of these trees [10].

The shift “from orchard to urban garden” is therefore more than a change of location. It represents a transformation in how people relate to food systems and to the environments around them. In the countryside, orchards are familiar and accepted; in the city, they can feel unusual or unexpected. Exploring this transition helps reveal what makes fruit trees meaningful in different settings and why their presence in public space requires thoughtful explanation [8]. By examining community, forms of engagement, and the narratives that grow around such projects, this research aims to understand how communication strategies can help fruit trees become integral, valued parts of urban life.

This study highlights a simple but important idea: fruit trees can enrich public spaces, but their benefits become visible only when people recognize them. The challenge is not just to plant trees, but to cultivate understanding turning a familiar rural symbol into a shared urban resource that supports both environmental goals and social connections.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted using a qualitative, literature-based approach combined with a practical design component. The first stage of the research involved a systematic review of relevant academic literature on urban ecology, public space communication, community engagement, and the social perception of fruit trees. Scientific articles, books, and case studies were examined in order to understand how edible landscapes have been implemented in other cities and which communication strategies have proven effective in increasing public acceptance. The literature review provided the conceptual foundation for developing a communication framework tailored to fruit trees in urban environments.

In the second stage, the insights gathered from the literature were applied to the creation of a visual communication tool, a poster designed to represent the proposed campaign “City of Fruit-Growing Together in Public Space.” To develop this poster, a professional graphic design program was used, allowing for the integration of visual elements such as icons, color schemes, and typography that reflect the identity and goals of the campaign. The design process involved selecting imagery consistent with ecological themes, arranging visual components to ensure clarity of message, and incorporating the campaign’s central slogan in a way that supports public engagement.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The meaning of fruit trees in human settlements has shifted across centuries. Historical studies on rural orchards describe them as multifunctional systems that provided food, shaped cultural identity, and created a sense of seasonality within communities. In pre industrial Europe, orchards functioned not only as food sources but also as social nodes where seasonal labor, rituals, and communal knowledge were exchanged. As industrialization accelerated and cities expanded, such landscapes became progressively detached from daily life [2, 19]. Fruit trees, once ordinary elements of lived experience, gradually turned into nostalgic symbols associated with rural memory. Urban green spaces, by contrast, emerged primarily for aesthetic and recreational purposes. Nineteenth century parks emphasized scenery, health, and moral order, not food production [11]. Because of this heritage, the integration of edible species into public landscapes has long been perceived as unconventional or even inappropriate. Scholars argue that the lingering separation between “productive landscapes” and “urban landscapes” continues to influence public expectations today.

Table 1.

Comparison between annual urban agriculture and perennial fruit trees

Feature	Annual urban gardens	Public fruit trees
Maintenance level	High (seasonal planting, watering, weeding)	Moderate to low
Visibility of food production	High	High once fruiting
Long term resilience	Low	High
Community involvement required	Continuous	Periodic
Main perceived risks	Crop loss, vandalism	Fallen fruit, pests
Educational value	Seasonal learning	Seasonal + multi year growth cycles

Source: [14, 18]

In the last two decades, research on urban agriculture has expanded significantly. Scholars highlight several motivations behind the resurgence of edible landscapes: Food security and resilience, Environmental sustainability, Community building, Education and ecological literacy. Fruit trees hold a distinct role within this movement. They provide long term, perennial yields with relatively low maintenance requirements compared to annual crops. They also resist extreme heat well, making them practical components of climate adaptive urban design [20]. However, while community gardens are widely studied, public fruit trees receive far less attention. Literature repeatedly identifies the following challenges: concerns about fallen fruit, insects, liability, vandalism, and unequal contributions to maintenance. These issues tend to appear not because fruit trees are inherently problematic, but because the public lacks clarity about expectations, responsibilities, and benefits highlighting the need for effective communication [7].

Environmental literature emphasizes the ecological contributions of fruit trees. They offer shade, reduce urban heat islands, support pollinators, and improve air quality. Unlike ornamental species, fruit bearing varieties provide habitat value and food sources for both humans and wildlife [3]. A growing body of research examines how biodiversity increases when fruit trees are integrated into parks and public corridors. Studies show higher pollinator presence, improved soil microbiology, and better carbon sequestration compared to purely ornamental plantings [18].

Public perception plays a decisive role in determining whether fruit trees can successfully integrate into urban public spaces. Although ecological arguments strongly support their inclusion, social acceptance often depends on factors that fall outside measurable environmental benefits. The literature repeatedly shows that people evaluate fruit trees through the lens of cultural expectations, personal memories, and assumptions about maintenance or safety [9]. This means that reactions to fruit trees tend to be emotional and socially constructed rather than purely rational.

One of the most significant barriers identified in Point 4 is the expectation of tidiness in urban environments. Contemporary cities have normalized a form of “clean aesthetics,” where fallen leaves, irregular growth patterns, or seasonal fruit drop are perceived as signs of neglect. Fruit trees challenge this aesthetic ideal, especially when their natural behaviour produces elements that some residents interpret as disorder. As a result, even species that offer substantial ecological value may be dismissed simply because they disrupt visual norms [4]. Equally important is the issue of responsibility. Public spaces are often governed by unclear rules regarding who may harvest fruit, who maintains the tree, and who cleans the surrounding area. When these responsibilities are

not communicated, residents may develop negative assumptions: that fruit left uncollected attracts pests, or that harvesting is inappropriate or even illegal. These uncertainties influence how willing individuals are to approach or value the trees. Studies suggest that when responsibility is shared or clearly defined, communities become more willing to care for the trees and participate in their seasonal cycles.

Cultural meaning also shapes acceptance. For many people, fruit trees evoke memories of rural life, childhood gardens, or traditions connected to seasonal rhythms. These nostalgic associations can generate strong positive reactions, making fruit trees feel familiar and emotionally significant. However, for individuals without such cultural references, fruit bearing trees may appear unfamiliar, unnecessary, or out of place in urban parks [14].

Trust in municipal management influences the degree of public support. Residents who believe their local authority manages public spaces effectively tend to welcome edible landscapes more readily. Conversely, where trust is limited, fruit trees may provoke anxiety about neglect, waste, or mismanagement. This shows that acceptance is not simply about the tree species themselves, but about broader relationships between the public, the landscape, and local governance.

Table 2.

Factors Influencing Public Perception

Category	Positive Influences	Negative Influences
Cultural	Familiarity with fruit species; rural memory	Urban norms of tidiness
Social	Community participation	Unclear harvesting rights
Environmental	Visible shade & pollinators	Fear of pests or allergies
Managerial	Clear signage & care routines	Perceived municipal neglect

Source: [2, 7, 20]

Table 2. synthesizes the range of influences that shape how people interpret and respond to fruit trees in public spaces. The contrast between positive and negative influences across cultural, social, environmental, and managerial categories illustrates the multidimensional nature of public perception. This table is not merely descriptive; it highlights why communication strategies must be tailored to address misconceptions and strengthen existing positive associations. From a cultural standpoint, Table 2 shows that familiarity can act as a powerful facilitator. Species that residents recognize apple, cherry, plum tend to be perceived more positively because they evoke shared cultural memories. On the other hand, unfamiliar species or those associated with rural labour may conflict with urban expectations of neatness and low maintenance. This contrast suggests that planting choices should be context sensitive and reflect community identity. The social category points to another important dimension: clarity of usage norms. The table demonstrates that communities respond positively when participation is encouraged, but negatively when harvesting rights are ambiguous. This duality emphasizes the need for explicit guidance, whether through signage, educational programs, or participatory events. People are more likely to engage with fruit trees when they understand that their involvement is welcomed. Environmental influences reveal a similar pattern. Tangible benefits such as shade and pollinator activity contribute to positive perceptions because they are visible and easy to understand. Meanwhile, potential risks such as concerns about pests or allergies contribute to scepticism. These concerns often result from incomplete information rather than direct experience. Table 2 therefore points to an opportunity:

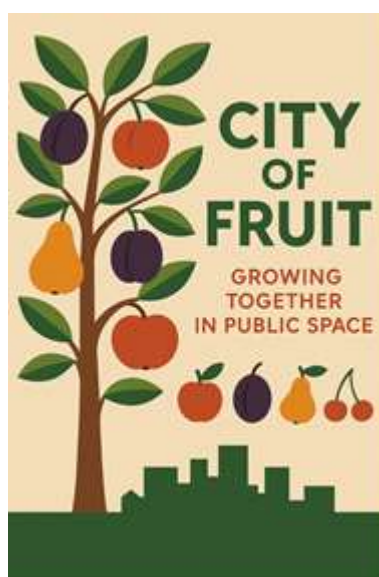
targeted communication can help transform perceived risks into manageable realities by explaining ecological functions and lifecycle dynamics.

The managerial category underscores the direct link between governance and perception. When residents observe regular pruning, fruit collection, or well maintained soil, they interpret fruit trees as cared for assets. Conversely, visible neglect fosters distrust and lowers acceptance. The negative influences in this category are particularly important for policymakers, as they demonstrate that a failure in maintenance can undermine otherwise well designed projects.

Public perception is multifaceted and contingent on both lived experience and communicated meaning [5, 9]. For fruit trees to become valued elements of public space, planners must not only consider ecological suitability but also address the social and cultural narratives that shape how communities interpret their presence. Far from being passive elements, fruit trees provoke a negotiation of values, expectations, and responsibilities one that requires clear, empathetic, and continuous communication.

The results of this study show that the successful integration of fruit trees into urban public spaces depends largely on how residents understand, interpret, and interact with them. While the ecological benefits are widely recognized in academic literature, public acceptance remains strongly influenced by cultural expectations, practical concerns, and the clarity of the information available in the urban environment. Many respondents expressed enthusiasm for fruit bearing species but were uncertain about harvesting rules, confused about species identification, or worried about issues such as fallen fruit and maintenance. These findings highlight a simple but essential insight: fruit trees cannot speak for themselves; they require communication.

To bridge the gap between ecological value and social perception, a dedicated communication campaign can offer the city a structured, engaging, and inclusive way to educate, involve, and inspire its residents. The proposal below outlines such a campaign designed to complement urban planning efforts, respond directly to the study's findings, and cultivate a long term culture of care around fruit trees in public spaces. So a possible campaign would be named "City of Fruit Growing Together in Public Space".



**Figure 1. Poster Concept for the Proposed Communication Campaign
"City of Fruit Growing Together in Public Space."**

Source: own creation

The insights generated through this research indicate that fruit trees can become meaningful and valued elements of urban space only when people understand their purpose and feel personally connected to them. To address the gaps observed in public perception ranging from low species recognition to uncertainty about harvesting rights this campaign proposes a comprehensive and culturally sensitive communication initiative titled “City of Fruit Growing Together in Public Space.” Its main objective is to cultivate a shared identity around fruit trees by transforming them from overlooked landscape elements into visible, appreciated, and socially meaningful community resources.

The campaign begins with the recognition that communication must operate simultaneously on several levels: informational, emotional, and participatory. On the informational level, the city needs to provide clear and accessible knowledge about the trees themselves. This includes their species, seasonal cycles, ecological benefits, and guidelines for proper harvesting. Many residents reported being unsure whether they were allowed to pick fruit or who was responsible for tree maintenance. To address these uncertainties, the campaign introduces educational signage installed directly at the trees. These signs present the most important information in friendly, concise language and include QR codes that link to further details online. Their presence in the landscape helps residents identify each species, understand its role in the ecosystem, and learn exactly when and how the fruit can be collected. In this way, the signs turn each fruit tree into a small, locally anchored learning space.

Alongside physical signage, the campaign extends into the digital environment with an interactive citywide “Fruit Map.” This map allows residents to explore the location of fruit trees across neighborhoods, discover what species grow near their homes, and follow ripening calendars throughout the season. For younger audiences, especially students who rely heavily on online information, the map becomes an engaging tool that encourages exploration and fosters curiosity about urban nature. By making fruit trees visible in both physical and virtual space, the campaign strengthens their identity as an integral part of the city’s green infrastructure.

Emotional engagement is equally important. The campaign seeks to build a sense of connection by organizing seasonal gatherings around the trees, particularly during blossom and harvest periods. These community harvest days invite residents to participate in fruit picking, learn basic maintenance skills such as pruning, and share personal memories or cultural associations related to orchards and rural life. Such events shift the perception of fruit trees from passive scenery to active social spaces. They encourage intergenerational exchange, allowing older residents to share knowledge while younger participants contribute enthusiasm and creativity. Over time, these shared moments foster a collective sense of stewardship, reinforcing the idea that fruit trees belong to everyone.

The campaign also includes an educational component directed at schools and youth groups. Children engage with the trees through guided lessons on pollination, seasonality, and environmental responsibility. They may be encouraged to “adopt” a tree and follow its development over the year, which not only deepens their ecological awareness but also helps cultivate a new generation of urban residents who feel comfortable interacting with public nature. Research shows that childhood experiences with green spaces strongly influence environmental behavior in adulthood; therefore, school involvement is essential for long term success.

In the cultural domain, the campaign uses storytelling to highlight the symbolic meaning of fruit trees in urban life. Social media platforms feature short stories, photographs, and videos that present the trees not just as biological organisms but as elements of the city’s evolving identity. Residents are encouraged to share their own

associations whether memories of family orchards, traditional recipes, or personal reflections on nature in the city. These narratives help integrate fruit trees into the emotional and cultural landscape of urban living, making them more familiar and valued.

“City of Fruit” aims to build a bridge between ecological function and human experience. By combining clear information with opportunities for participation and emotional resonance, the campaign reframes fruit trees as accessible, beneficial, and meaningful. It encourages residents to view them not as sources of inconvenience or uncertainty but as contributors to community wellbeing and urban resilience. Through this approach, the campaign supports the long term integration of fruit trees into public space and promotes a model of urban life in which ecological awareness and community identity grow together.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this research demonstrate that the integration of fruit trees into urban public spaces is not simply a matter of planting more edible species, but rather a process that requires thoughtful communication, cultural sensitivity, and community engagement. While fruit trees offer clear ecological advantages providing shade, supporting pollinators, and contributing to biodiversity these benefits alone are not sufficient to guarantee public acceptance. Residents respond to fruit trees through a complex lens shaped by cultural memory, expectations of cleanliness, uncertainties around responsibility, and the degree of trust they place in municipal management.

The study shows that communication plays a decisive role in shaping these perceptions. When information about fruit trees is unclear or absent, misconceptions tend to dominate. However, when residents receive clear explanations through signage, digital tools, and participatory events, their attitudes shift significantly. They become more willing to harvest fruit, more curious about species, and more inclined to view fruit trees as valuable communal assets. In this sense, communication does not merely support urban ecological design it enables it.

The communication campaign “City of Fruit Growing Together in Public Space” illustrates how cities can transform fruit trees from overlooked elements into symbols of shared identity and ecological belonging. By inviting residents to learn, participate, and care, the campaign demonstrates that public stewardship arises naturally when people feel included and informed. The campaign’s blend of education, storytelling, and community engagement offers a replicable model for municipalities seeking to promote edible landscapes in a socially meaningful way.

Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of bridging ecological intention with social understanding. Fruit trees succeed in cities when people see themselves reflected in the landscape when a blossom, a shade given bench, or a ripe piece of fruit becomes part of their everyday experience. By cultivating communication alongside cultivation of the trees themselves, cities can create public spaces that are not only greener but also more connected, participatory, and deeply rooted in community life.

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