



**PHILADELPHIA
ORCHARD PROJECT**

Annual Report 2023



www.phillyorchards.org



Welcome

Message From the Board President

When I think back on 2023, the first word that comes to mind is Growth. With new infrastructure, staff members, funding, board members, initiatives, and community partners, it was a busy and exhilarating year to see our mission take shape in new ways.

One of our biggest highlights was the completion of two high tunnels at our Learning Orchard. After years of planning, fundraising, and permitting, the high tunnels became a reality. Volunteers from the neighborhood and POP community spent months building the structures alongside POP staff in what can best be described as an old-fashioned barn raising. Thanks to funding provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and the Junior League of Philadelphia, the high tunnels will allow POP to grow more nursery materials and experiment with growing a food forest and perennial crops that are typically raised in a warmer (Zone 8) climate.

Adding to our list of “firsts” in 2023, we received local, state, and federal funding for the first time -- from the City of Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and the People’s Garden Initiative of the United States Department of Agriculture. We are so grateful to receive this recognition, which has allowed POP to increase the hands-on support we offer to community partners, engage more with youth, increase Spanish language accessibility for our educational materials, and expand propagation of climate adapted plants at our nursery.

Responding to the growing needs of our organization, POP hired additional staff, bringing us to 10 (!) employees. And for the first time, we have a dedicated Communications Director to deepen our engagement in the communities we serve and amplify the impact of our collaborative efforts.



The year had some challenges, too. With the effects of climate change never more apparent, POP staff and volunteers struggled with tending the orchards in the midst of high heat and unprecedented smoke from wildfires thousands of miles away.

Our Strategic Plan continued to provide us with a path forward and we accomplished many of its goals. Key accomplishments included expanding our outreach efforts to grow and support orchard partners and continuing to increase and support our Lead Orchard Volunteer teams, especially at BIPOC-led sites. Internally, we evolved our talent and engagement guidelines to more closely reflect POP’s Core Values and DEIJ principles.

It was an exciting year to begin serving as Board President, and I look forward to continuing working with POP’s amazing Co-directors, Kim and Phil, and all the dedicated staff and volunteers to create beautiful green spaces, connect neighbors, provide hands-on learning experiences, and grow fresh fruit for generations to come.

With gratitude,

Marci Green

2023: Year in Review

Planting the Future, Growing Together

We planted our
1,610th tree!

NEW ORCHARDS PLANTED IN 2023



Get Fresh Daily
West Philly Peace Park

The **POP Learning Orchard at The Woodlands** completed its fourth season of production in 2023, with annual crops continuing to complement the increasingly productive orchard yields. An early Spring drought ended up resulting in bountiful fruit and berry harvests. Produce grown at the Learning Orchard was donated to **Food Not Bombs**, used by program partners **Get Fresh Daily**, and sampled at POP harvest festivals. We welcomed many volunteers and visitors, including youth from the **Norris Square Neighborhood Project**. This Fall, construction was completed on two high tunnels which will allow us to explore techniques for growing in the changing climate.

2023 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

34 community education workshops

785

volunteers engaged in orchard care

45 fruit & nut trees
122 berries & vines
1,054 perennials & groundcovers

231 plantings, trainings, work days



74 Learning Orchard work days
1,107 visitors & volunteers
1,419 lbs of food donated to mutual aid partners



Partners harvested over 11,700 pounds of fruit - almost twice as much as last year!

Orchards Connect Us to Nature, Food, Each Other, and Ourselves



POP Plants and Supports **Community** Orchards

We partner with community groups to plan, plant, and maintain orchards filled with useful and edible plants in formerly vacant lots, community gardens, schoolyards, and other spaces, primarily in low-wealth neighborhoods where people have limited access to fresh fruit. We provide design assistance, materials, and training. Partners own, maintain, and harvest the orchards, expanding community-based food production, environmental benefits, and opportunities for nature education.

Imagine a Philadelphia where everyone has access to fresh food, clean air, and peaceful green spaces.





**By investing in POP,
you support **68 orchards**
in **24 zip codes** across Philly.**



Read more about our work at
PhillyOrchards.org/programs



“It’s great to see the work you do come back in harvest. It is even greater to see neighbors smile with gratitude after receiving what’s harvested.”

Neury “Tito” Caba
Historic Fair Hill

Programs & Partners

From parkland to schools to community art centers, POP-supported orchards provided space for exploration and joy in 2023. Neighbors took part in workshops and other programs, tended to the plants in their gardens and orchards, enjoyed the bounty of the harvest, and at times struggled with climate impacts, pests, or squirrels. Here, we highlight a couple of partner stories: [read more on our blog!](#)



“Before the orchard, this space on the corner of 52nd and Pine was unused. Building the orchard expanded our garden space in front of the school where our main garden is located to span the entire block on 52nd Street from Pine to Osage creating an undeniable green space on this well traveled corner. We added a pergola for shade covering, picnic benches and ferns, and hosted many workshops in that space. The raspberries along the fence brought many smiles and joy to our community.”

Jiana Murdic
Get Fresh Daily

Union Baptist Church Garden of Eden



One highlight of the year was our collaboration with **Big Picture Alliance**, an organization that doubles as a video production studio and a youth program. Together we created a series of videos, including “Bloom Where You Are Planted,” which premiered last summer at **One Art Community Center**. The film uplifts the story of Philly’s community orchards through spotlights on three of our partners: **Sankofa Community Farm at Bartram’s Garden**, **Union Baptist Church Garden of Eden**, and **The Village of Arts and Humanities**.

[Watch the spotlight on UBC](#)

It’s what we’re all about: a collaboration that crosses zip codes, generations, and cultures to share stories that inspire others to grow together.



The Village of Arts
and Humanities

POP Shares Knowledge

through offering **hands-on workshops**,
developing **educational resources**, and
working together with our partners.

We are a learning organization. While we educate, we strive to continue learning and share that knowledge with the city. Read more at PhillyOrchards.org/orchard-education.

34 Workshops

500+ Participants

22 Articles

On topics such as... Successes and Pitfalls with Peaches, Herbal Salve-making, [How to drink black walnuts](#).



“I loved the opening greeting to the elderberry and the prayer/meditation. It shows we must honor and respect the land and yield its natural benefits. I also enjoyed hearing in general about herbal medicine.”

Participant of
**Harvesting the Healing Power:
An Afro-Herbalism Workshop on Elderberries**
led by community educator Yaya Vallis

Youth

We regularly work with partners who have ongoing gardening programs for youth, host summer camps, or welcome school field trips. Many partners are eager to learn how to best engage young people in learning about the environment and our food system, and we want to help them do just that!

“When the youth hear that we have apple trees and peach trees, they are surprised and excited. It's almost like it's hard to believe that those things would be growing here, but getting to share those spaces with them is a fun exercise in seeing what is possible.”

Ria Alfonso
Norris Square
Neighborhood Project



10 Events

168 Participants

Partners include Village of the Arts, Urban Creators, NSNP, Roots Tree Crew, Historic Fair Hill, SummerSearch, Get Fresh Daily

Over the past year, POP collaborated with partners to hold 10 youth-centered events, half of which were workshops or orchard work days held at partner sites, with the other half consisting of tours and activities at the Learning Orchard. Youth from **Urban Creators** and **The Village** requested repeat workshops on mushroom cultivation. A newly-developed scavenger hunt was a highlight for some groups, which involved identifying various kinds of fruit trees, tasting fresh herbs, and using a mini-aspirator to observe insects.

POP received support from the USDA's People's Garden initiative to support growing and propagation efforts at the POP Learning Orchard. Through this grant, POP partnered with **Get Fresh Daily** by providing fresh produce for monthly cooking demonstrations and pop-up markets which reached youth, families, and staff from the West Philadelphia school where they're based.

The **majority** of our partners have **Youth Programs** that engage with their **orchards**.

Of **45** partners who responded to our annual survey:

29 (64%) had youth programs that engaged the orchards.

9 (20%) had youth programs in the past, or are interested in having them.

Only **7** (15.5%) were not interested in having youth programs.

Lead Orchard Volunteers

“I love introducing visitors to the food forest, and working with volunteers to steward that small patch of earth.”

LOV at
Awbury Food Forest



The Lead Orchard Volunteer (LOV) program has continued to grow in 2023. Deja Morgan joining the team as POP’s first Community Outreach Coordinator has expanded our ability to build deeper and more intentional relationships with our volunteers as well as our partners.

POP aims to use our reach and network to build capacity across the city by connecting our partner sites with enthusiastic volunteers from their own neighborhood and offering need-based stipends. This supports our partners while offering training and experience to community members.

LOV Learning & Gathering Opportunities



4th Year of the LOV Program

29 LOVs

18 Sites

86% from same or adjacent zip

62% Receiving stipend

In 2023, the POP team selected a subset of sites, mainly BIPOC-led with limited or no paid staff to help maintain their orchards. We were successful in working with partners to identify new LOVs and hold monthly work days with hands-on training, with new volunteers getting involved at **FNC Poplar, Hamilton School, Strawberry Mansion, and Urban Creators.**



Learning Orchard at the Woodlands

2023 was a big year at the Learning Orchard which finally saw us complete the construction of two high tunnels adjacent to our nursery space. Thanks to POP's long-term partnership with The Woodlands, since 2020, we have been able to plant a 1-acre demonstration orchard containing 90 fruit & nut trees; operate an edible plant nursery; host bee hives that help to pollinate our orchard and nearby plants; and build a solar system to power the nursery irrigation and high tunnel fans.

With milder winter temperatures and the absence of late freezes in 2023, the orchard experienced an **unprecedented bounty**. Beloved stone fruits, such as peaches and cherries, made their debut at the orchard with their inaugural harvests.

Pome fruit trees, such as apples and Asian Pears, continued their maturation, yielding enough fruit for POP staff to experiment with orchard techniques, such as fruit bagging, as an integrated pest and disease management tactic.

New additions were added to the perennial fruit yields, offering up the first harvests of Catawba grapes, Che fruit, maypops, and cucamelons.



The high tunnels were constructed in part by POP staff and volunteers, and completed by contractors when we realized that more help was needed. Volunteers from Citizens Bank helped with site preparation while a group from Spark Therapeutics assisted with getting the high tunnels ready for planting by flattening out the rough clay-ridden soil, then adding a thick layer of compost and wood chips.



Land Justice

POP is fortunate to have a long-term lease agreement and a degree of land security that many of our orchard partners and others across the city lack. In March 2023, POP joined 30 Philadelphia community gardens and nonprofits in calling on the Land Bank to end its 30-year mortgage requirement for community gardens and open spaces by **submitting a letter to the Land Bank Board of Directors**. The statement details the unnecessary barriers created by these mortgages, which contain ambiguous terms, put nonprofit organizations at significant risk, and fail to permanently protect community gardens and open spaces. Some of the main contributors to the letter were people from the Public Interest Law Center, Neighborhood Gardens Trust, Iglesias Gardens, Neighborhood Land Power Project (formerly Urban Tree Connection), and Urban Creators, who continue to lead ongoing organizing efforts.

POP raises this issue and participates in advocacy for reforms **in solidarity with our partners** and other stewards of these spaces, many of which were long neglected by the City or absentee property owners. We wish for them to have the security to keep greening and growing as POP is afforded at The Woodlands. It's an issue of racial justice, environmental justice, health justice, and food justice. **We as community members should get a say in what happens to land in our neighborhoods.**

Here's what the
D A T A
says about

Urban Ag Land (in)Security

All data referenced is from the
**Philadelphia Urban Agriculture Strategic Plan:
Growing from the Root**, co-authored by
Soil Generation & Interface Studios.



We continued throughout the year to engage with the “Gardens Group” on how to be better advocates for urban agriculture. This happened through a forum with **then-candidate Cherelle Parker** to highlight struggles with accessing land, and a series of workshops with land stewards and public space organizations to delve into how we can build power together. We look forward to working together with these groups, alongside local elected officials and City agencies, to create changes in land use policies that recognize urban agriculture as a desired long-term community use for land. We also hope to impress on local funders the importance of not only supporting urban agriculture organizations in their land stewardship, but for the type of community organizing that allows us to develop deep and meaningful relationships.

140+ known gardens and farms have been lost in Philadelphia since 2008 and the number continues to grow.

1/3 active gardens or farms are in areas with highest intensity of new construction.

2/3 active gardens and farms are in Racially Concentrated Areas of Poverty, where over 50% of residents are BIPOC and over 20% live below the poverty line.

In roughly half of city's Census Block Groups, fewer than 1 out of 10 food stores sell fresh fruits and vegetables.

Financials

7/1/22 - 6/30/23

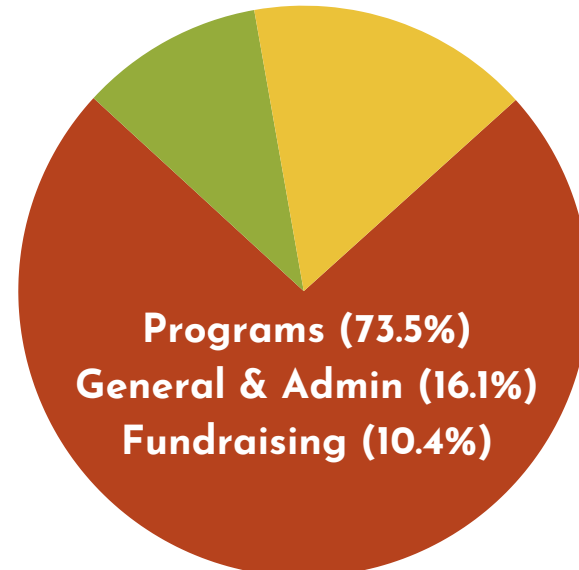
Income

Individual Contributions	67,702
Foundation Contributions	184,695
Corporate Contributions	65,936
Government Contributions	49,500
Sales of Product/Earned (Net)	3,921
Program Fees	12,104
Special Event (Net)	8,576
Interest Income	168
In Kind Contributions	5,792
Total Income	392,602



Consolidated Expenses

Programs	338,373
General & Administrative	74,158
Fundraising	47,630
Total Expenses	460,161



Change in Net Assets

Total Net Assets, Beginning of FY	662,058
Total Net Assets, End of FY	603,048
Change in Net Assets	(59,010)

Some of our Foundation and Corporate Supporters

Alvéole Inc
Anonymous
Armstrong Foundation
Blackbaud
Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church
Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Foundation
Dolfinger-McMahon Foundation
Good Buy Supply
Hardy Plant Society, Mid-Atlantic
MOM's Organic Market

Patagonia
Philadelphia Committee of the Garden Club of America
Philadelphia Reinvestment Fund
Leo & Peggy Pierce Family Foundation
Primex Garden Centers
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Spark Therapeutics
Gwynne Weinberg

Matching Gifts

Apple
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Oracle
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Netflix
PwC

A list of POP's current institutional supporters can be viewed at phillyorchards.org/donate.



POP deeply appreciates the support of our hundreds of individual supporters and additional foundation, corporate, and government partners.

Full financials are available on [POP's website](https://phillyorchards.org) or via [Guidestar](https://www.guidestar.org).

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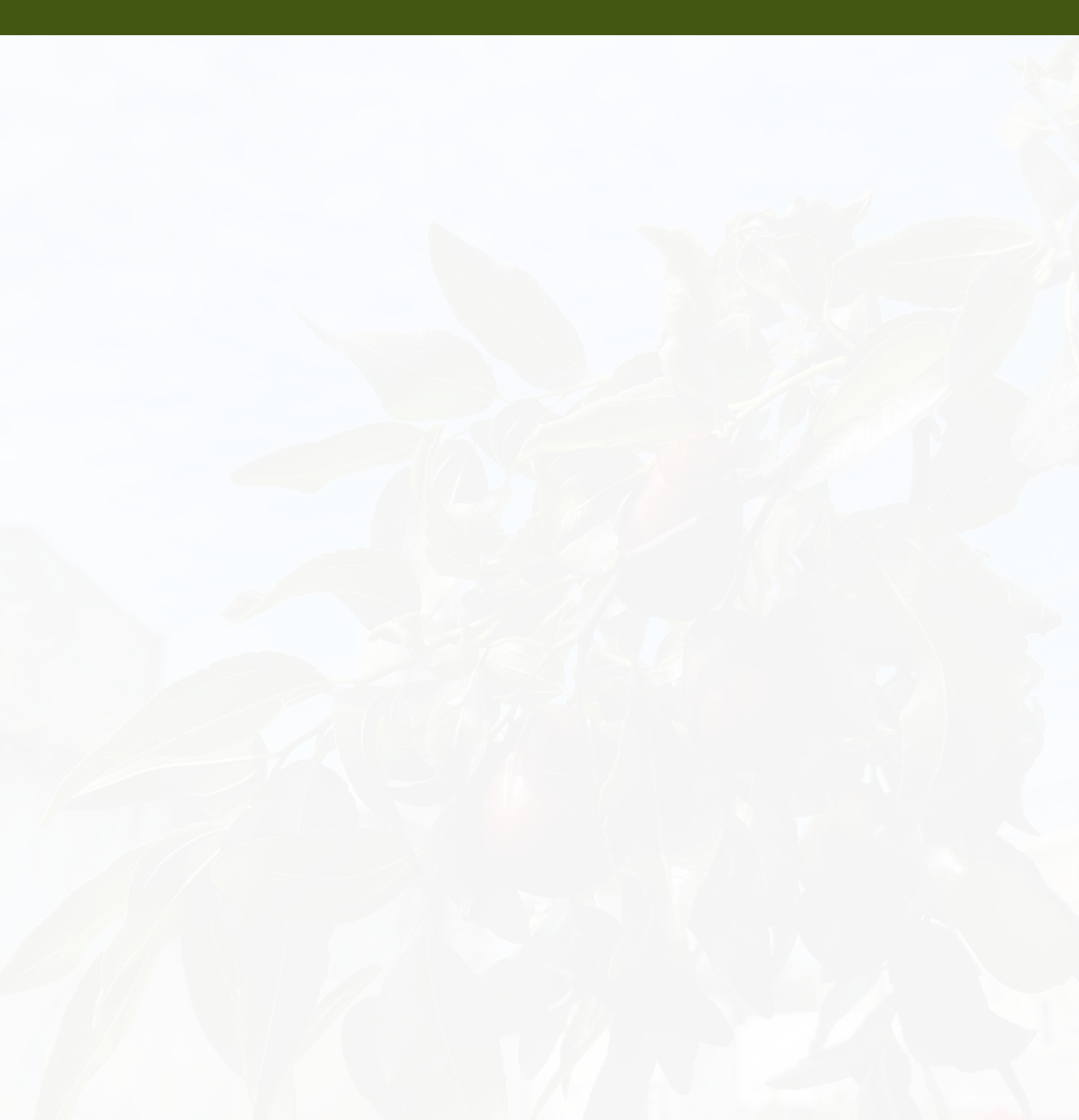
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Corrie Spellman-Lopez – Education Director
Carolina Torres – Orchard Coordinator



People

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