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3 Growing friends via sharing garden produce

Sharing garden produce can lead to increased individual pride and improved social relationships within the circle of sharing. The wonderful feeling of closeness develops amongst friends, colleagues or neighbours in the process of produce sharing. For example, one of the authors shared some home-grown chillies with a colleague who is very impressed that she can grow vegetables well in a small backyard. In return, he shares with her two new types of chillies that she had never seen before. This sharing experience has not only improved our knowledge, but also improved the mutual understanding of colleagues.

Sharing garden produce normally improves the overall well-being of those involved via fresh food and sharing spirit. However, this also raises some concerns. The growers may worry about what will happen if people get bad response after consuming the food, whether they will like the food, whether they would allow others to collect food from home etc. Consumers may concern whether the backyard farming is safe e.g. whether pesticide is used or whether the city area is too polluted etc.

There are also other challenges in sharing garden food. For example, how to find a good match between growers, certain food and consumers? one man's food can be another man's poison. Another challenge is where and how to share fresh garden produce. Excess produce could potentially be distributed via local markets, food banks or through community services. However, local market is too expensive for most individual growers as the amount of excess food is usually small. A food bank for providing free and fresh food to the in-need is a good idea. However, fresh produce can easily perish and needs to be distributed in time thus pose high requirement on food-bank management. Road-side stall is another way to share excess produce. However, how can the stall information e.g location and food type, quality and quantity be sent to the potential consumers?

In our experience, direct peer-to-peer sharing in a local community e.g. neighbours, friends, or colleagues, is one viable option for sharing backyard farming knowledge and garden produce. Sharing in workplace is still the most convenient approach for sharing garden produce and related knowledge for the busy workers. We experimented this for several years and it is a lovely experience. The problem is how can we expand this lovely experience to a larger community or area? How can garden produce lovers know who are willing to share, what can they offer and where are they?

4 Existing applications of information technology in garden food growing and sharing

There are a growing number of projects worldwide that seek to enable citizens to not only grow and share food locally but also improve community connectivity. Information technology has been used in these projects at different levels with most of them using websites for sharing information.

- Detroit's Garden Resource Program Collaborative¹⁶ aims to build connectivity between gardeners and strengthen their gardening community by providing to their members resources and education on gardening, policy, and food issues through workgroups, tours, field trips, and cluster workdays.
- The Monroe Sharing Gardens¹⁷ is a community garden initiative which aims to grow local food and also build sharing spirit in the community. It shares excess garden produce via foodbanks and advertise the sharing information on their website. It relies on volunteers and is often short of helpers.
- The Sharing Backyards project¹⁸ aims to address the lack of land issue and seeks to pair up growers with yard owners to not only grow food, but also grow relations. . It mainly relies on online-services to conduct the match-up between land owners e.g. senior citizens and growers who do not have land such as young high-rise building residents.
- The Brisbane Northey Street City Farm¹⁹ promotes permaculture education and help growers via website, workshops etc.
- The Permablitz team²⁰ addresses the issue of lack of growing knowledge and time and help yard owners to design and construct suburban vegetable gardens for free. They mainly use a website to send information.
- The Edible Yards project²¹ supports garden produce sharing via a website and information sessions to connect garden food growers and consumers.
- LocalDirt²² provides buying, selling and finding local food services online, some tasks can be automated with modern information technologies.

We can see that physical food banks, community services and volunteers can help distribute the food to the in-needs for excess garden produce. We can also see that internet is playing an important role in disseminating information for garden food growing and sharing. However, we can do better and more with modern information technologies. Therefore, we propose to use digital noticeboards, social network, and modern web services, recommendation systems and location-based services to improve the backyard farming and sharing experience. For example, a digital noticeboard with web and location-based services can be used to automate buying, selling, sharing notifications among multiple sites and multiple users.

5 Conclusion

Individual urban farming is more for recreation and well-being and it improves the quality and variety of food available. Through growing and sharing, we are not only

¹⁶ detroitagriculture.net/urban-garden-programs/garden-resource-program/

¹⁷ <http://thesharinggardens.blogspot.com.au/>

¹⁸ <http://www.sharingbackyards.com/>

¹⁹ <http://www.nscf.org.au/>

²⁰ <http://www.permablitz.net/>

²¹ <http://edibleyards.com.au>

²² <http://www.localdirt.com>

encouraging sustainable resource use and contributing to solving the food security issue, we are also encouraging care about our land and environment and improving the relationship between people, especially within a local community such as colleagues, neighbours, or friends. Researchers and decision makers need to design new technologies, systems and policies to encourage sustainable backyard farming, improve the sharing experience in order to build a stronger, happier, and healthier community.

