Science Societies

Growing 'beyond food' in urban forest gardens

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Solomon's seal, a forest plant whose roots are used medicinally, can contribute to cultural and e

Solomon's seal, a forest plant whose roots are used medicinally, can contribute to cultural and ecological benefits in urban forest gardens. Photo by Tim Pilcher.

Urban "food forests" in the West have focused almost exclusively on the production of edible fruits and vegetables with ancillary benefits such as education, civic engagement, and environmental health. Less understood and applied are the myriad ways other types of plants and fungi—providing medicinal, craft, decorative, and other uses—can contribute to *biocultural conservation* in an urban setting where the complexities of urban spaces and communities are acknowledged.

A new article in *Urban Agriculture & Regional Food Systems* synthesizes literature that addresses these issues and asks: How does the urban-built environment affect the quality and usefulness of beyond-food forest species? What aspects of access, equity, and awareness might we consider for effective biocultural conservation efforts

in urban forest gardens? And what can we learn about beyond-food biodiversity benefits from tropical home gardens that may be relevant in a temperate context?

Ultimately, the opportunities and limitations of each unique forest garden's ecological and social context will define the specifics of biocultural conservation practices. We can enhance ecosystem services with the stewardship of this added biodiversity, especially in other incidental urban green spaces beyond the home or community garden. But full community participation is essential to start addressing the access, safety, equity, and livelihood values that can be gleaned from beyond-food forest species.

Dig Deeper

Hemmelgarn, H.L., & Munsell, J.F. (2021). Exploring 'beyond-food' opportunities for biocultural conservation in urban forest gardens. *Urban Agriculture & Regional Food Systems, 6,* e220009. **https://doi.org/10.1002/uar2.20009**

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