



URBAN FARM ROAD TRIP

Boston, Mass.

Beantown becomes Green Town, as the urban-farming and sustainability revolution gets representation on the East Coast.

BY CHERYL MORRISON

Boston acquired the nickname Beantown from the days when the pilgrims and Puritans put crocks of beans into public ovens on Saturdays to slowly bake overnight so they could have hot Sunday meals without violating the Sabbath. Today, with sustainability efforts taking root throughout the city and hardly a pilgrim in sight, Boston might be more accurately nicknamed Green Town.

Boston Tree Party

The Boston Tree Party, founded in 2011 as a public art project, has been organizing the planting of heirloom apple trees. Some of the trees are on lands with restricted access, such as schoolyards, but others are in public spaces where passersby will soon be able to pick and eat fruit from them at will.

"The idea is to create a decentralized, public orchard across the city," says founder Lisa Gross. "It's a way of connecting people to growing food that's also a playful and novel approach."

Gross says the benefits provided by the trees include cleaner air, more habitat for birds and other animals, and soil improvement, not to mention free fruit. By planting heirloom apples, the group also encourages biodiversity. (She notes that 40 percent of the apples sold commercially in the United States are Red Delicious.)

Apple trees and Boston go way back. The first apple orchard in the American colonies was planted on Boston's Beacon Hill in 1623, and the oldest apple variety in the United States, the Roxbury Russet, was developed a few years later in the city's Roxbury neighborhood. The Roxbury Russet is one of the apple varieties the group plants, along with Baldwins, Esopus Spitzenburgs, Golden Russetts and Grimes Golden.

In its inaugural season, Boston Tree Party planted 70 trees, which Gross says will produce 10,000 or 15,000 apples every year within about four years. The group's goal for this year is to plant 200 more trees.

The trees are planted in pairs, for cross-pollination. "That became the central metaphor for the project,"

STYLING: JESSICA SUTHERLAND; PHOTOGRAPHY: JESSICA SUTHERLAND



Boston Tree Party

possible," Gross says. "It's more about the quality of the experience for individuals than about the number of trees."

www.bostantreeparty.org

Fenway Park

This year marks the 100th birthday of Fenway Park, home of the city's beloved Red Sox Major League Baseball team. The park's home-run-stopping left-field wall, known as the Green Monster, is famous among baseball fans, but the team and its park managers are engaged in efforts today that rival the wall in greenness.

The Boston team installed solar panels at its stadium in 2008, making it the first team in MLB to do so. The panels, on the roof behind home plate, help to heat water for restrooms and other facilities throughout the stadium. More recent efforts include the installation of waterless urinals and dual-flush toilets to save more than 360,000 gallons of water every year. Tickets, pocket calendars and other team publications are now printed on recycled paper. Lighting in the stadium's concourse areas has been upgraded with high-efficiency fixtures.

The grounds crew has also joined the effort. The crew now maintains the grass with organic fertilizers and recycled grass clippings, and also apply environmentally friendly wetting agents to help the grass use water more efficiently and have added more energy-efficient equipment, including a battery-powered walk-behind mower and an electric dethatcher.

The park's restaurants and concession stands are pitching in, too. They now use Green Seal-certified cleaning products and offer locally sourced seafood and produce, as well as recycle fryer oil for conversion to biodiesel fuels. Even the souvenir vendors are getting into the game, with merchandise made from organic and natural fibers.

4 Yawkey Way; <http://boston.redsax.mlb.com/bos/ballpark>

Lights Out Boston

Contrary to its staid reputation, Boston does not roll up its sidewalks at 8 p.m., but owners and managers of skyscrapers and other commercial buildings throughout the city are turning down the lights in a joint program with the city and Massachusetts Audubon Society. The program, Lights Out Boston, calls for extinguishing decorative architectural lighting and turning interior lights off, or at least down, between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m.



Fenway Park

Gross says. "We, too, are interdependent. We need to cross-pollinate ideas."

Each pair, she says, is planted by a "tree-planting delegation" that takes ownership of the trees and commits to caring for them. The delegations include churches, synagogues, assisted-living centers, hospitals and schools. Some delegations are partnerships. For example, the Gerald J. and Dorothy R. Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy in Boston, which is part of Tufts University, had room for only one tree, so it partnered with an elementary school down the block, which planted the tree's mate. "It's an opportunity to continue building a relationship," Gross says.

A delegation typically contributes \$325; donations from individuals and a few foundations provide funding help for groups that can't raise that much but can contribute a minimum of \$75. Each delegation receives two young trees and a kit that includes tree guards, protective mesh and other supplies.

The group's goal for 2012 is to see 65 pairs of trees planted by 65 delegations. "We're interested in engaging as many communities and people as

Extinguishing the lights on skyscrapers protects birds, according to Mass Audubon, especially during migrations. Bright lighting on tall buildings confuses birds so that they fly into the sides of buildings and die.

According to the office of Mayor Thomas Menino, a driving force behind the city's sustainability effort, participating buildings will cut their energy consumption by up to 25 percent. The effort also reduces light pollution so that the stars and planets are more visible to astronomers and others.

www.massaudubon.org/lightsout

Taranta

One of Boston's environmentally friendly night spots is Taranta, in the city's North End. Taranta stands out among the neighborhood's many popular Italian restaurants not only for its distinctive menu, which fuses the cuisines of Italy and Peru, but also for its conservation efforts. Taranta has been certified by the Green Restaurant Association since 2007, and chef-owner Jose Duarte (pictured below) continues to look for ways to conserve resources and promote sustainability.

To earn GRA certification in 2007, Duarte changed the sprayers at the dishwashing stations to conserve water and began using solar chargers for the table lamps. He had motion sensors installed in the lavatories so that lights and exhaust fans don't run when the rooms are empty and switched to energy-saving light bulbs. He also recycles and composts nearly all of the restaurant's waste.

Duarte, who won the city's Green Business Award in 2008, says the restaurant uses new technologies to

curb its consumption of gas, water and chemicals. This helps the bottom line as well as the environment, he says, since food prices and other expenses continue to rise. Savings from his conservation efforts, enable Duarte to use only organic eggs, which cost more than conventional eggs.

About 15 percent of the ingredients used in Taranta's kitchen comes from local sources. "We work with a couple of local farms," Duarte says. "In summer, we use all heirloom tomatoes. We support local fishermen who really care about the environment, and we use a lot of root vegetables," which can be kept throughout the winter. Although he would like to use more locally sourced ingredients, Duarte cites the difficulty posed by New England's harsh climate and short growing season, as well as prices. The restaurant's meats and poultry are hormone- and antibiotic-free, although not necessarily organic or local because of cost concerns.

"That's the big problem with local sourcing: the cost," Duarte says. "Being sustainable means staying in business," Duarte says. Duarte hopes that the new federal farm bill will provide relief to small, local producers, perhaps in the form of subsidies. "There have to be incentives for local farmers to produce something that will be attractive for us to buy and support," he says.

210 Hanover St.; 617-720-0052; www.tarantarist.com

New England Aquarium

Among Boston's attractions for tourists of all ages is the New England Aquarium, which conducts numerous ongoing marine habitat conservation efforts. Subjects under study by the



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aquarium include effects of pollution (including noise pollution), global temperature changes and acidification on ocean life.

The focal point of the aquarium is a four-story, cylindrical, 200,000-gallon ocean tank, 40 feet in diameter, that houses brightly colored small fish, turtles, sharks, barracudas, rays and eels — more than 600 animals in all — in a reproduction of a Caribbean coral reef. The smaller tanks and exhibits that surround the cylinder, along with the aquarium's website, are a font of information about ocean life, threats to marine health and the importance of conserving it.

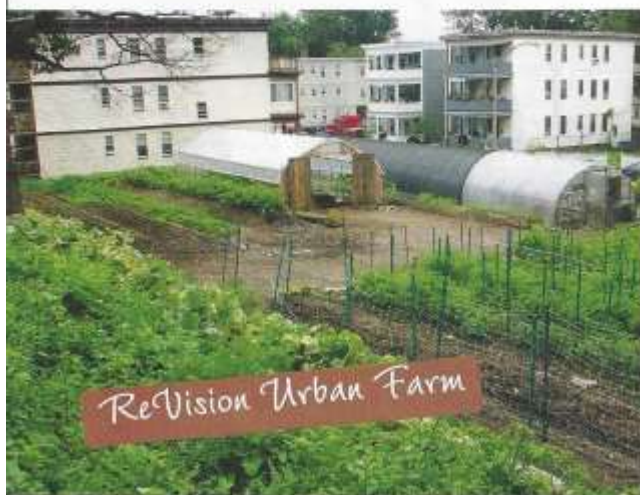
The aquarium is a center for research aimed at saving endangered species, such as the North American right whale, whose reproduction has been declining significantly for the past decade. Researchers have developed methods of identifying pregnant whales as well as whales that are experiencing high stress from human activities and natural phenomena.

With many food-fish populations reduced by overfishing and other threats, the aquarium sponsors programs to promote responsible fishery management and encourage sustainable practices in fish farming and wild-catch fishing. It also offers information about ocean-friendly seafood choices, along with recipes. In cooperation with local chefs, it even hosts sustainable-seafood dinners for registered guests in its Harbor View Café, complete with wine pairings.

1 Central Wharf; 617-973-5200; www.neaq.org

ReVision Urban Farm

Supplying fresh, reasonably priced, locally grown food to residents of a neighborhood who would otherwise have little access to it is



COURTESY: NEW ENGLAND AQUARIUM

just one part of ReVision Urban Farm's mission. It also provides job training for people who are young and/or homeless.

The farm is connected with the ReVision House, a shelter for homeless women and their children. Both the shelter and the farm operate under the aegis of Victory Programs. Jolie Olivetti, who manages the farm, describes Victory Programs as "a social-work organization that runs programs all over Boston and Cambridge, opening doors to health and housing.

"The aim of the farm is to be a resource to the people staying in the shelter, a place where they can learn about gardening, show their kids. It's an amazing thing to be able to show a kid a tomato plant. One of the main ways we are involved is education: being accessible, being relevant. We also produce donations to shelters."

The farm gives some of its produce to ReVision House residents to feed their families, and it sells some from the farm stand it opened last year and from its stall at neighborhood farmers market. In partnership with two suburban farms, it also operates a community-supported-agriculture program that sells shares of its produce to about 75 households throughout greater Boston.

The farm began with a garden adjacent to the shelter on Fabian Street. A few years later, with the purchase of three vacant lots across the street, the garden grew into ReVision Farm. The farm's expansion is continuing.

"The city of Boston has just undertaken a project to get agricultural zoning on the books," Olivetti says. "There have been farms in Boston for at least

COURTESY: REVISION URBAN FARM

20 years, and community gardens for generations, but no agricultural zoning." In a pilot project, she says, ReVision Farm has obtained a five-year lease on an additional 18,000-square-foot lot with an option to renew the lease for another five years.

38 Fabjan St., Dorchester; 617-822-FARM (3276); www.vpi.org/Farm

New Balance Hubway

Members of the city's year-old bike-sharing program, New Balance Hubway, are given keys that will unlock any of 600 bicycles that are kept at 60 stations throughout Boston. The bikes are accessible around the clock in spring, summer and fall; the program shuts down for the winter.

An annual membership costs \$85, but three-day and 24-hour memberships are available for \$12, and \$5, respectively. Visitors can sign up for short-term memberships at any Hubway station. For low-income Bostonians, the city health commission provides subsidies that lower the annual membership cost to \$5 and includes a free helmet.

Members can use the bikes as often as they want for up to 30 minutes at a time without additional cost, and bikes can be returned to any station. Longer rides carry usage fees, which start at \$1.50 for an additional 30 minutes and increase with the length of the trip.

855-4HUBWAY (448-2929); www.thehubway.com

Boston Green Tourism

Placing a call to Boston Green Tourism or visiting its website is a great way to start planning a visit to the city. From the scores of hotels



PHOTO: VALERIE/ISTOCKPHOTO

and hundreds of restaurants in the greater Boston area, Boston Green Tourism can help you to select accommodations and eateries that are committed to environmental responsibility.

Boston Green Tourism's mission is to promote the city as an eco-friendly place for business meetings. Dan Ruben, the organization's executive director, says conference planners are increasingly seeking green meeting places, and that more and more tourists care about environmental practices. The city has three green-certified convention centers, as well as dozens of hotels and restaurants with similar credentials. Boston Green Tourism helps those establishments to market themselves and encourages other establishments to follow their lead.

175 Auburn St., Newton; 617-527-7950; www.bostongreentourism.org

From its historic baseball park to its skyscrapers, along its harbor and riverfront, in hotels and restaurants, and on busy city streets, Boston is greening up. The city's extensive mass-transit system lets you leave your car behind while you explore its picturesque neighborhoods. Individuals and organizations throughout this walkable, bikable city are committed to providing affordable locally grown food, encouraging biodiversity and conserving resources. Whether you're visiting Paul Revere's house, attending services in one of America's most historic churches or making a bee-line for the Cheers bar, you can see evidence of the city's movement toward sustainability. **W**

Freelance writer Cheryl Morrison took the train down from her home in New York City to research this article.

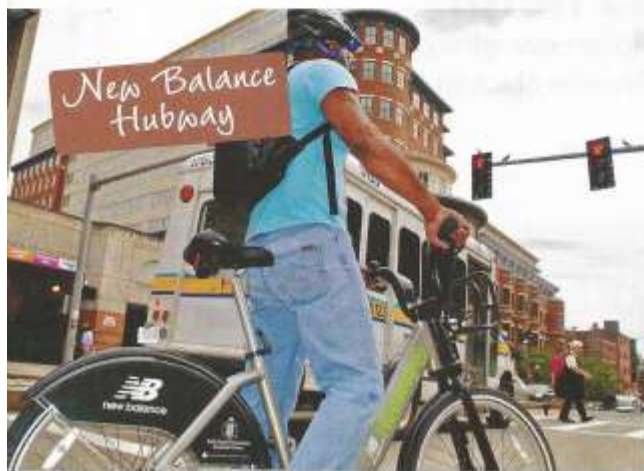


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