

# WHAT IS A FOOD FOREST?



**Figure 10.** A food forest consists mostly of forested space but can also contain community gardens and orchards. Community gardens are found in the middle of Browns Mill Food Forest. These community gardens provide space for vegetables to grow. Photo courtesy of The Conservation Fund.

Residents of the Browns Mill neighborhood in Atlanta, Georgia, along with the USDA Forest Service and other partners, are creating a “food forest.” It will be Atlanta’s first food forest and one of the Nation’s largest.

A food forest looks like a regular forest, but its plants also provide fresh fruits, nuts, mushrooms, herbs, and vegetables (figure 10). The Browns Mill Food Forest is a 7.1-acre piece of land that used to be a small family farm. The land was abandoned and neglected for many years. Now, through the hard work of many partners, the food forest contains an **orchard**, community gardens, a walking trail, a picnic area, and more (figures 11 and 12).

The Browns Mill Food Forest is important because it is located in a “food desert.” A food desert is a community that has limited access to affordable and healthy food. Thirty-six percent of Atlanta is considered a food desert, including the Browns Mill neighborhood. The Browns Mill Food Forest helps address the lack of access to healthy and affordable foods.



**Figure 11.** These kids are learning how they can help with the community gardens. Photo courtesy of The Conservation Fund.



**Figure 12.** These volunteers are planting trees for the orchard. Photo courtesy of The Conservation Fund.

The food forest provides numerous environmental, economic, and social benefits. For example, the space provides habitat for many plants and animals. In particular, it provides pollinator habitat (figure 13). Pollinators are responsible for helping over 80 percent of the world's flowering plants reproduce. Some pollinators include bees, bats, hummingbirds, moths, and butterflies.



**Figure 13.** The Browns Mill Food Forest has bee pods that provide a home for pollinators. Local students get to learn about the bees and the role bees play in the food forest.

Photo courtesy of the United States Geological Survey.

The Browns Mill Food Forest also provides economic benefits, like increasing the property values of nearby homes and businesses. One of the important social impacts includes opportunities for local people to learn about gardening and healthy eating (figure 14).

Food forests are a great way to bring communities together and closer to their environment. To learn more about the Browns Mill Food Forest, visit <https://www.aglanta.org/urban-food-forest-at-browns-mill-1> or <https://www.conservationfund.org/projects/food-forest-at-browns-mill>.



**Figure 14.** The food forest provides space for outdoor recreation, like birdwatching. Photo courtesy of The Conservation Fund.