

TREES NOT TRASH

PUTTING THE BUSH BACK IN BUSHWICK



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Kate Gilliam, founder of Trees Not Trash, at the Bogart Garden.

Trees Not Trash is a neighborhood beautification project based in Bushwick, a once largely industrial part of Brooklyn that is becoming increasingly residential. Our mission is to transform this neighborhood into a community with green space where people can take pride in their streets. Trees clean the air, provide shade for people and animals, and create a sense of well-being.

Trees Not Trash was formed in March 2005 by Kate Gilliam in response to a lack of green space in the East Williamsburg Industrial Park and Bushwick. With the support of neighborhood residents and businesses, Trees Not Trash began turning empty lots into gardens, beautifying local store fronts, and improving public spaces. Trees Not Trash now has an email listserv of approximately 250 people and meets every Sunday throughout the year for gardening and neighborhood beautification activities. On average, 10 people come out to help each week.

Since its inception, Trees Not Trash has been working with the NYC Parks Department (and recently the Million Trees NYC Initiative) to get new street trees planted in Bushwick. So far, Trees Not Trash has had approximately 100 new trees planted in Bushwick, and we look forward to many more. In addition to tree planting, Trees Not Trash has transformed 3 neglected plots of land into community gardens and green spaces, and plans to create additional gardens and green spaces in 2009.

During the spring and summer months, the Trees Not Trash community garden on Bogart Street is open to the public. We encourage residents to participate in gardening and learn how to grow their own food in containers and small spaces. We also hold composting workshops in the garden, providing seeds, plants and tools for anyone interested in getting involved. A growing number of young gardeners come on a weekly basis to take part in growing their own tomatoes, watermelon, peppers, cucumbers, lettuce, and herbs. Trees Not Trash provides a safe, fun learning environment for gardeners young and old to discover the benefits of gardening in their neighborhood.

Trees Not Trash has participated in the Brooklyn Botanic Garden’s Greenest Block in Brooklyn Contest yearly since 2005, and was invited by the Open Space Alliance of North Brooklyn to operate an information table at the McCarren Pool and Park Summer Concert Series in 2008. We take part in the Daffodil Project every Fall, organized by New Yorkers for Parks, and have planted approximately 3,000 daffodil bulbs in public spaces in Bushwick. Trees Not Trash has also been involved in the annual Bushwick Open Studios, a local event that highlights the work of Bushwick artists and organizations.

MISSION AND GOALS

To transform Bushwick into a neighborhood with green space, provide the community with opportunities to get involved in growing their own food, and tree-line each of Bushwick's streets.

FARMERS MARKET

Trees Not Trash is partnering with GreenMarkets to establish a Bushwick Farmers Market for Spring/Summer 2009 in order to bring fresh, affordable organic produce to Bushwick. Our farmers market will participate in the WIC Program (Women, Infants and Children—a supplemental Nutrition Program that provides nutritious foods to supplement diets, information on healthy eating, and referrals to health care) and will accept food stamps used to purchase produce. We hope to involve the community in a weekly market that will encourage more nutritious food choices and provide a setting for social gatherings and information.

BIKE RACKS/TREE GUARDS

With the help of volunteers and local artists, Trees Not Trash is designing a model for metal tree guards that will also function as bicycle racks. This project will address the need for a sustainable and durable way of preventing damage to young street trees by cars and trucks, provide a much needed space for cyclists to secure their bikes (as well as discouraging them from locking their bikes to tree trunks) and create a sense of well-being.



Farmers Market to be in Spring 2009 in Maria Hernandez Park in Bushwick; Type of bike rack to be built on Bogart Street

JEFFERSON STREET

Trees Not Trash is committed to turning a stretch of Jefferson Street in Bushwick into a “green” block where residents can get involved in planting and caring for trees. Jefferson Street, between Irving Avenue and Wyckoff Avenue, has long been a through street for vehicle traffic and pedestrians coming off the L train at Jefferson Street Station. The block currently has no NYC litter baskets, and as a result garbage is thrown into the community garden that we have established. This garden is a great source of enjoyment in the spring and summer months for the neighborhood kids, and the constant refuse prevents the kids from planting and playing in the garden. We hope to work more closely with the Department of Sanitation to establish a solution to the litter problems with an increase in street sweeping, the reporting of illegal dumping, and the installation of NYC litter baskets on Jefferson Street. We also hope to have a public composting station and regular neighborhood events to establish a sense of community in a neglected area and forge more connections with local residents and businesses.

INTRODUCTION TO BUSHWICK

OVERVIEW

Bushwick is a neighborhood in the northeastern part of the New York City borough of Brooklyn. It is bounded by East Williamsburg to the northwest, Bed-Stuy to the southwest, the Cemetery of the Evergreens and other cemeteries to the southeast, and Ridgewood, Queens to the northeast.



HISTORY

In the 1840s and 1850s, a majority of the immigrants moving to Bushwick were German, which became the dominant population. Bushwick established a considerable brewery industry, including “Brewer’s Row”: 14 breweries operating in a 14 block area by 1890. Beginning in the mid 1950s and particularly in the 1960s, poor working class African American and Puerto Rican migrants began to move into Bushwick. This change in demographics coincided with changes in the local economy: at the same time, locally rising energy costs and advances in transportation encouraged beer companies to move out of New York City. As the breweries closed, the neighborhood deteriorated. According to the New York Times, “In a five-year period in the late 1960s and early ’70s, the Bushwick neighborhood of Brooklyn was transformed from a neatly maintained community of wood houses into what often approached a no man’s land of abandoned buildings, empty lots, drugs and arson.” One out of every 8 buildings was damaged or destroyed by fire every year from 1969 to 1977.

EXISTING CONDITIONS & PROBLEMS

After the blackout of 1977 and the subsequent looting and rioting, residents who could afford to leave abandoned the area. The neighborhood was a hotbed of poverty and crime through the 1980s. In the 1990s it remained a poor and relatively dangerous area. It has since enjoyed a revival with the emergence of new residents and businesses, as well as artists looking for cheaper studio spaces and young people starting lives and raising children. Still, Bushwick remains a neighborhood of families who survive on some of the lowest incomes in New York City; Bushwick’s median household income is about \$22,000. One-fifth of the neighborhood is on public assistance, and Bushwick has some of the poorest air quality in New York City.



Sign of Trees Not Trash on Bogart Street. Image of Bushwick roof and sky (top left).



Left to Right: Cory Mason working at Jefferson Street. Bushes and flowers at the Bogart Garden. Volunteers planting flowers around T.N.T. planted trees on Bogart Street.

IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE

ECOLOGICAL OBJECTIVES

Trees Not Trash aims to identify ways to:

1. Protect and Improve Neighborhood Living Standards
2. Improve Community Outreach and Involvement
3. Reduce Trash and Environmental Stress
4. Create Community Gardens and Public Green Spaces

APPROACH AND TYPE OF OPPORTUNITIES

Many organizations and individuals already participate in improving Bushwick. Organization, management, and environmental improvement require the cooperation of many volunteers to achieve successful outcomes. The community gardens and other environmental improvement projects start by removing invasive plants and garbage while involving the community. Successful projects require planning, design, and sustained management.

Public Green Spaces:

Vegetation planted along public streets provides shade, improves air quality, and promotes the revitalization of neglected areas.

Food Market:

Bringing fresh, affordable organic produce to Bushwick.

Gardens:

Scouting for abandoned places to create multiple community gardens in Bushwick.

Management:

Maintenance and management of gardens and newly planted trees. This includes protection from invasive plants, vandalism, traffic, erosion control, and promotion of biking standards (ie. not locking bikes to tree trunks).

Regulations:

Sanitation Department to increase street sweeping, the reporting of illegal dumping, and the installation of NYC litter baskets.

Trees Not Trash operates and maintains 3 community gardens in Bushwick. Each garden is unique, but all three spaces were neglected, unused plots of land that had been collecting trash for years. With the help of volunteers and donations from local nurseries, plant centers and the NYC Parks Department, the Trees Not Trash community gardens bloom each season with hundreds of tulips and daffodils, as well as plum trees, hibiscus, hostas, forsythia, honeysuckle, jasmine, cherry trees, nasturtium, irises, alliums, peppers, tomatoes, watermelon, cucumbers and fresh herbs. We also maintain a large compost in our biggest garden, compost all plant materials, and encourage volunteers to bring their fruit and vegetable scraps on a weekly basis for composting.

During the summer months, volunteers share the responsibility of watering and weeding the gardens, as well as removing garbage, which is a constant challenge. In 2009 we will be developing and implementing “water catch” systems to use rainwater for watering the gardens. We accept donations throughout the year, and offer a place for people to plant their live christmas trees every January.

Trees Not Trash holds garden parties in the summer months to promote volunteer participation, and regularly harvests the produce we grow. All the food that is produced is given to volunteers and the neighborhood kids to give to their families. We hope to expand our food growing initiative and provide information and materials to people interested in growing vegetables in their own homes, backyards and rooftops.



Map of T.N.T. Gardens in Bushwick

COMMUNITY GARDEN ON BOGART

Located next to the Morgan L train stop, the Trees Not Trash Community Garden is the largest of the gardens and has been operating for 3 ½ years. Adjacent to the Ramirez Park and Playground, the garden is a rectangular plot of land that was overgrown with weeds and full of refuse. Trees Not Trash removed approximately

40 contractor garbage bags of weeds and an additional 40 bags of broken glass, hypodermic needles, discarded batteries, bottles, cans, dead animals, car parts, metal and various litter. We then removed a substantial amount of soil, tilled the earth, and filled the space with new soil and mulch.



Transforming an abandoned lot into a community garden, Bushwick 2005. Opposite page: clockwise pulling out weeds; spring bulbs blooming; harvesting tomatoes; young peppers; enjoying spring in the garden.



The garden has enjoyed a remarkable transformation, and now contains raised flower and vegetable beds built from found, recycled railroad ties, as well as a garden path made from discarded wood. We have a compost, a garden shed, wheelbarrows, garden hoses, and a regular supply of donated materials to ensure our garden stays beautiful throughout the year. The Trees Not Trash garden

has become an integral part of the Bushwick landscape, and provides a serene place in an industrial area for local residents and children to meet, learn about composting, dig in the dirt, discover how food grows or just relax with a cold drink and a book in the sunshine.



THE LITTLE BOSJWICK GARDEN

The Little Bosjwick Garden on Bogart Street in Bushwick was the first unused piece of land that Trees Not Trash transformed from into a public green space. We removed the garbage, broken glass, syringes and old tires and planted a maple tree, cherry tree, evergreen bushes,

hostas, clematis, lemon balm, verbena and spring bulbs. The little garden now blooms each spring with tulips and daffodils and is a little oasis in the middle of an industrial area.



Clockwise from top left: Cleaning out trash and weeds; empty lot ready to be planted; watering new plants; finished garden with maple and cherry trees (right).

BOGART STREET

Trees Not Trash builds, plants and maintains wooden planters, tree pits and window boxes outside local businesses on Bogart Street. These planters were built as part of Trees Not Trash's participation in the Greenest Block in Brooklyn Contest, and they hold numerous bulbs, evergreens, vines and flowering shrubs for the public to enjoy. The businesses do their part to maintain their planters, and more bike racks are scheduled for installation to prevent damage to trees. All the trees on Bogart Street and on surrounding streets are direct results of the efforts of Trees Not Trash to increase the number of street trees in Bushwick.



Planting window boxes; volunteers after a day's work gardening; planting trees

JEFFERSON STREET COMMUNITY KIDS GARDEN

The newest of our gardens is the Trees Not Trash Community Kids Garden on Jefferson Street, which will undergo a major transformation and planting in Spring 2009. The Kids Garden is maintained largely by the neighborhood children, who have each “adopted” one of the trees that we planted in 2008. The kids check on their trees daily, and make sure they have enough water, that there is no garbage around their tree, and report any damage to the

trees or the garden to the Trees Not Trash volunteers. The kids decide the majority of what is planted in the garden, choosing the color and variety of plants. They also completed a garden mural and have all made enormous progress in their understanding and involvement in gardening, food growing, taking care of their neighborhood and environmental awareness.



Clockwise from top: Jefferson Street before clean up; building sidewalk garden fence



On average 10 neighborhood kids show up each week for gardening activities and street clean up; trees not trash kids' mural; grape vines growing in street garden



Trees Not Trash is thankful to be the recipient of neighborhood beautification grants from Citizens Committee for New York City. We are also grateful to have donations from The Sprout Home in Williamsburg, as well as continued donations of mulch and plants from the New York Parks Department. Trees Not Trash regularly sells silk screened t-shirts at music and arts events in Brooklyn and at the Archive Cafe in Bushwick. We also hold annual Benefit Shows to raise money for the organization.

All proceeds go towards our greening and beautification efforts. For 2009 we hope to secure sufficient grant money to continue with our ever-expanding operation. We are excited to be working with youth education organizations for the first time (such as the Bushwick branch of the Brooklyn Public Library) and will require additional funds to supply our new volunteers with the appropriate safety wear, as well as to cover the costs of materials for creating and maintaining our new gardens.

In addition, Trees Not Trash has filed for 501(c)3 status, and will be focusing on fundraising to get our newly formed nonprofit off the ground!



Clockwise from top left: Receiving grant checks from Citizens Committee for NYC, selling silk-screened merchandise at Open Space Alliance event at McCarren Park in Williamsburg, Brooklyn; silk screening tote bags;

Trees not trash relies on the generosity of donors and charitable organizations to continue with our projects and mission. All the proceeds from fundraising and all grant money goes toward making Bushwick greener.

SAMPLE BUDGET: BOERUM STREET LEARNING GARDEN PROJECT

\$60: 4 pack of contractor garbage bags from ACE Hardware

\$40: 75 foot garden hose from Home Depot

\$240: 4 (four) 55 gallon reclaimed plastic drums for composting and rain water collection from BayTec Containers

\$200: reclaimed lumber from Build It Green (317 26th Ave Astoria, NY 11102 tel. 718 777-0132)

\$60: transportation of materials (gas)

\$200: seeds and plants (these will come from local nurseries and plant centers such as The Sprout Home, Home Depot, Garden World in Queens)

\$100: soil from Home Depot

\$100: materials (nails, hammers, gloves, etc) from ACE Hardware

TOTAL: \$ 1000



AWARDS AND PUBLICITY

AWARDS

Trees Not Trash has been the recipient of the following awards:

Mollie Parnis Dress Up Your Neighborhood:
2006, 2007, 2008

New Yorkers for Better Neighborhoods Award:
2008

Participant in Greenest Block in Brooklyn Contest:
2006, 2007, 2008



PUBLICITY

Trees Not Trash has appeared in various publications:

Publication: *Brooklyn Botanical Garden*
Article: Guerrillas of Green
Year: 2008

Publication: *The Village Voice*
Article: Best Reason to take up gardening
Year: 2007

Publication: *Gothamist*
Article: Kate Gilliam, Trees Not Trash
Year: 2007

Blog: *Bushwickbk.com*
Article: Putting the Bush back in Bushwick
Year: 2008

Blog: *Citynoise.org*
Article: Buswicks Brown and Green
Year: 2008

Publication: *Dwell Magazine*
Article: Trees Not Trash
Year: 2008

Publication: *Ouside.In*
Article: Putting the Bush Back in Bushwick
Year: 2007

Publication: *The Brooklyn Paper*
Article: Let every pothole bloom
Year: 2006

Publication: *Bushwick Courier*
Article: Trees Not Trash
Year: 2007

Publication: *AM New York*
Article: Branching out in Brooklyn
Year: 2007

Publication: *Bon Appetit*
Article: Vintage Spritis
Year: 2008



REFERENCES AND DONORS

Many charitable organizations and nurseries have made it possible for Trees Not Trash to operate. We are grateful to the following organizations for their continued generosity:

Name: New York City Department of Parks and Recreation
Contact: Bram Gunther
Title: Deputy Chief of Forestry and Horticulture
Address: The Arsenal
Central Park
830 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10065
Phone: (212) NEW-YORK
Website: www.nycgovparks.org

Name: Citizens Committee for New York City
Contact: Scott Codey
Title: Director of Advocacy
Address: 305 7th Ave # 15
New York, NY 10001
Phone: (212) 989-0909
Website: www.citizensnyc.org

Name: New York Restoration Project
Contact: Nik Charov
Title: Deputy Development Officer
Address: 254 West 31st Street 10th Floor
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Phone: (212) 333-2552
Website: www.nyrp.org

Name: Open Space Alliance for North Brooklyn
Contact: Stephanie Thayer
Title: Executive Director
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Brooklyn, 11211
Phone: (212) 333-2552
Website: www.nyrp.org

Name: The Sprout Home
Contact: Tassy Zimmerman
Title: Manager
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Brooklyn NY 11211
Phone: (718) 388-4440
Website: sprouthomebrooklyn.blogspot.com