

Saskatchewan Municipal **Best Practice**

Urban Orchard

CONTACT

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THE PRACTICE

The Town of Eston repurposed the core of their municipal reserve parcel into an urban orchard. They held a community planting day where the entire school assembly (approximately 220 students) came out to plant. Through a community contest, local residents named the park "Eston's Memory Lane." It now holds a variety of fruit-bearing trees such as chokecherry, Saskatoon, pinch cherry, and apple. The trees will yield fruit for picking in future harvest seasons.

THE PROCESS

Eston town council had a vision for an urban orchard, dedicating land for that specific purpose. There was a community contest to name the park (funds provided by council), and community members could dedicate memorial trees to loved ones for \$10. Town staff applied for a \$5,000 grant from the Canon Evergreen program, recommended by Communities in Bloom. To prepare for phase one, the local town crew prepared the new park grounds for planting; they laid out tree maps, dug trenches, and created watering plans. Staff decided what to plant, had the trees and shrubs delivered, and coordinated media relations.

To kick off the day of planting, a brief assembly was held at the school and Mayor Al Heron spoke about the importance of planting trees, telling students and community volunteers that in 20 years "they will be able to visit the park and see what a difference their contributions have made in the community for generations to come." Following that, an orchard owner from Empress, Alberta, gave a presentation on the importance of trees and a quick lesson on how to plant the trees.

More than 250 trees and shrubs were planted. People dedicating memorial trees were welcome to take part and personally plant the tree that would be dedicated to their loved one; memorial markers will be placed at a later date. Once all of the planting and watering was completed, the Communities in Bloom committee supplied a barbeque lunch for volunteers. Future plans for the park include walking paths from all four corners of the park, intersecting in a centre site that will feature benches, flower gardens, and statuary.

THE RESULTS

The urban orchard project fostered community involvement and pride. This park has strong community attachment and roots as not only was it planted by the hands of local students and teachers, but it is named and dedicated in memory of many loved ones whose name is prominent on the park entrance sign. The community contest to name the park, "Eston's Memory Lane," further helped to raise awareness and community involvement in the project. The urban orchard project fostered community ownership from those who planted and thus reduces the chance for vandalism.

The urban orchard project provided valuable education, such as the presentation to the students on the proper way to plant and care for fruit trees. Most plants thrived, with only a few needing replanting. Students will see how long it takes to bear fruit and learn how fruit is preserved and made into other products.

As adults, students will be able to visit the urban orchard and/or take their children to visit and see the exact tree they planted. There is an opportunity for future education once the trees produce fruit in terms of how to pick and preserve fruit.

LESSONS LEARNED

- More education is needed for proper harvesting of the fruit so the trees/shrubs remain productive.