



Real Life Fruit Orchard and Vegetable Garden Volunteer Opportunities

**If you harbor a passion for serving outdoors,
our Real Life Fruit Orchard and Vegetable Garden will WOW you.**

Our orchard started in 2011 and is housed on 3 acres at Dogwood Church in Tyrone. Planted in the orchard are 140 apple trees, 55 peach trees, 300 blueberry bushes, 135 blackberry vines, 35 grape vines, and more. In 2015, we started a half acre vegetable garden producing fresh tomatoes, watermelons, bell peppers, squash, zucchini, corn and jalapeno peppers in the summer and collards, turnips, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, radishes and kale in the winter. All produce is distributed seasonally to the families of the Real Life Center. Since fresh fruits and vegetables are hard to come by on a limited budget, the orchard and garden have been a huge blessing.

Below is a brief description of what it looks like to serve on a team in our Orchard or Garden. The typical volunteer will give approximately 15 hours serving on a team. You do not need to have any experience to make an impact. Your team leaders and local experts will teach you what to do. We do not expect every volunteer to attend every team session. We know that work, vacations and life in general may stand in the way. What we do ask is that you make it a priority to attend most of your team events.

Peach Team

The season begins around the end of February with pruning. This typically takes three work days to complete. After bloom, we schedule two to three work days thinning the fruit and fertilizing the trees. Most work days prior to harvest season are scheduled for Saturday mornings and run for a couple of hours. For those interested in learning, we instruct on pruning, fruit thinning, fertilizing and harvest. Harvest typically begins the 3rd or 4th week in June and runs to the end of August. Harvest is done on Saturday mornings and Tuesday evening. Each of these sessions lasts about an hour. Volunteering does not mean you have to be at every event, just when you can. The more we have, the less the work! Yes, we love to have kids involved. We prune the trees to allow low hanging fruit, so kids can help in harvest. This is an opportunity to teach your children to serve joyfully!

Apple Team

The season begins in February with pruning. Last year we spent 1 session pruning and it lasted 2-3 hours. The most important project this team accomplishes is thinning the small apples off the trees right after they set fruit in the spring. Each volunteer will use scissors and cut off 90% of the apples on a tree. This thinning session will take approximately 2-3 hours if we have a good turnout. After thinning, this team meets every 3 weeks for one hour on Saturday mornings from April 1 until the harvest begins in September. September through November, they harvest on Saturday mornings. A typical harvest session takes about one hour.

Grounds Crew Team

Each volunteer is on a 7 to 9 week rotation for mowing the grass in the orchard. It typically takes 2-3 hours of mowing. This team also pitches in time to bush hog the church property with our tractor. Volunteers may also use our weed eater and spray tank to eliminate weeds.

Grape Team

We have 36 very healthy vines which for the past two years have yielded more than 4,000 pounds of fruit for the Real Life Center. In fact, since our first harvest in 2013 we have harvested more than 9,000 pounds of muscadines. Success like this one can only be achieved through the efforts of our volunteers. Below are the required tasks of our volunteers in helping to assure a successful harvest.

- Pruning: Each February all our vines are pruned of the past year's old growth. We generally can accomplish the pruning in about 90 working hours. Thirty volunteers can complete the pruning with just 3 hours spent in the vineyard.
- Fertilizing: Every May we fertilize the vines. It takes 10 to 15 minutes to fertilize and water each vine, so we have a 9 hours commitment in May.
- Electrified Fence: We install a temporary electrified fence around our vines in June. Three volunteers can get the job done in less than 2 hours.
- Weeding: Weeding is accomplished in July if necessary.
- Harvesting: That is when we really need your active participation. We begin harvest around the middle of August and that continues until the first Saturday in October. We harvest every Saturday, weather permitting, starting at 8:30 AM and wrap it up at 10 AM. We do not pick on Labor Day Saturday, but we do pick on the Tuesday after Labor Day. In fact, Tuesday is our day for picking if Saturday was a rain delay. Harvest means to gather and that is what we do. Gather your family, friends, and neighbor and come out and enjoy this time of fellowship.

Blackberry Team

This team spends approximately one hour per week training the canes on the trellis. Most of your time serving on this team will take place from mid-July through mid-October. This team does not harvest blackberries as it is part of the U-Pick berries we open to the public.

Blueberry Team

This team meets approximately every 3 weeks to fertilize or weed the berry patch for less than one hour. They also spend time pruning twice a year, typically 2-3 hours in the spring and 2-3 hours in the fall.

Orchard Host Team

This team facilitates the U-Pick berry harvest in June and July. The U-Pick patch is open on Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday from 9-11 am. We are looking for volunteers to commit to serve on a particular day of the week. This team is important because you are the face of the orchard, the church and the Real Life Center with the guests. This team gives out buckets and instructs the guests where to pick, and coordinates packaging the fruit in berry containers.

Fig/Pomegranate Team

We hope to have a nice crop of figs this year. This team will pick figs once per week and package them in berry containers. Harvest begins in late summer and extends for 4-6 weeks.

Real Life Garden Team

This team will oversee the ¼ acre vegetable garden for The Real Life Center. Our garden uses the plasticulture method, which is a system of raised rows covered in plastic with a drip irrigation tape underneath. With water supplied from our well, the plants grow in ideal conditions, regardless of how much or little rain we get. This season, we plan to grow tomatoes, jalapenos, bell peppers, corn, squash, zucchini, cucumbers, watermelon and possibly other vegetables. Our goal would be that the average volunteer would spend approximately 15 hours per year, though there will be opportunities to spend more time if you so desire. In general, the harvest begins in July and runs through August, but preparations are made beginning in April. In August, a fall garden may be planted. We are looking for volunteers who are willing to do some work that is usually hot and dirty, but incredibly rewarding. You do not need to have gardening experience as we already have experienced people on the team

who can teach you, and we are connected with local experts who give us additional guidance throughout the season.

Mobile Garden Installation – Tractor Team

We have purchased all the equipment to use our tractor to install vegetable gardens for churches and individuals that are interested in giving part or all of their harvest to local food banks. This team will not take care of vegetable gardens. They will use our tractor and equipment to work the soil in preparation for planting. Our goal is to install 2-4 gardens this spring.

If you have questions or are interested in volunteering, contact Steve Thomas, Orchard Coordinator, at sthomas@RealLifeCenter.org. You may also send email to rlc@RealLifeCenter.org.

We appreciate you!

Your Orchard and Garden Team