

GOING GREEN

# SHARING IS CARING

Seed libraries, tool swap, and donating garden surplus

by Matthew Biddle

> **A PASSERBY STOPS** in front of a Tonawanda house, drawn in by the sweet sound of wind chimes scattered among the branches of a large tree. Several birdhouses—blue, red, yellow, and green—are secured to the same tree, along with a suncatcher and holiday ornament. Garden decorations, knickknacks, and a basket of baseballs sit around the base. A handwritten sign addresses all who walk by: “Dear friends: If you see a trinket that brings you joy, please help yourself and enjoy!”

This simple, colorful display is the sharing economy at work—the idea that we all have resources that others may need—and, that by giving or lending those resources, we not only help one another but also help the environment by producing—and wasting—less. While most of what we’ve talked about in this column previously has centered around non-perishable items, food sharing is also a huge part of the system.

## Share your bounty

How often have you harvested baskets of veggies from your garden—or brought home your weekly CSA share—only to realize you’re never going to eat it all before it goes bad. We’ve all been there, as evidenced by the more than eleven billion pounds of garden produce wasted each year.

That stat comes from AmpleHarvest.org, a nationwide nonprofit that works to connect home or community gardeners with nearby food pantries that accept surplus. More than eight thousand food pantries, including many in Western New York, have registered with the site. To find one near you, visit [ampleharvest.org](http://ampleharvest.org) and click “Donate food.”

Some gardeners plant a dedicated row for those in need, with intent to donate the resulting bounty to local nonprofits like FeedMore WNY ([feedmorewny.org](http://feedmorewny.org)). To schedule a drop-off at FeedMore’s distribution warehouse or one of its partner food pantries, call

716-822-2002.

Big Big Table Community Café ([bigbigtable.org](http://bigbigtable.org)), located near Days Park in Allentown, is a pay-what-you-can restaurant, where diners can pay a suggested price for their meal or give in other ways, by volunteering or donating goods such as fresh produce, including damaged items, that would otherwise go to waste. Heather McCarthy, community and operations manager, says the top nine veggies used in the café’s kitchen are lettuce, greens, tomatoes, carrots, cucumbers, zucchini, and summer, spaghetti, and butter-nut squash.

“When people make meaningful gifts of vegetables from their gardens or CSA shares, they’re sharing a piece of themselves and their hard work directly with their neighbors and personally contributing to the well-being of the community,” says McCarthy.

## Share seeds

Like most libraries, the Audubon Library in Amherst has a card catalog. But this one doesn’t contain information about where to find books. Instead, you’ll find seeds for peppers, pumpkins, carrots, beans, other produce, and flowers.

This is the WNY Seed Library ([facebook.com/wnyseedlibrary](https://www.facebook.com/wnyseedlibrary)), a volunteer-run community resource that Brenda Snyder started in 2018 so her neighbors could save and share heirloom seeds. “Seed saving and growing as much of your own food as possible is true independence,” says Snyder, who recently relocated to Tennessee.

Brenda Johnston now spearheads the effort alongside about three dozen volunteers who perform germination tests to ensure donated seeds are viable. Over the past four years, community members have donated more than two hundred different varieties of seeds to the library. “Once you start digging into seeds and heirlooms and non-GMO and hybrids, you fall down a rabbit hole,” Johnston says. “I can’t imagine not having a garden now or talking about seeds and plants.”

Like the rest of the library, from which patrons borrow and return