

Who Stole The Fruit At Ida Lee? Master Gardeners Find Trees Picked Clean

By Margaret Morton

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Volunteers at the Loudoun Master Gardener Demonstration Garden at Ida Lee Park in Leesburg remain dumbfounded-and upset-by the theft of more than 100 pounds of fruit from pear and apple trees last week.

Barbara Bailey, one of six volunteer Master Gardeners in charge of managing the garden, said when the group arrived at the garden Thursday, Aug. 12, trees which had hung low with the weight of the fruit, had "sprung back up again." Sometime between Tuesday and Thursday, thieves had come into the garden and lifted virtually all the pears from that tree and most of the low-hanging fruit on two apple trees.

The first culprit to come to mind was a four-footed one, but "it was not deer," Bailey said, noting there were no hoof marks under the trees, no marks on the limbs and no fruit lying on the ground as there would have been had the animals been pulling at the fruit and branches.

The trees, particularly the apple trees, were so heavy with the fruit. "We had to build two-by-fours to hold the limbs up," Bailey said, recalling the first sign to tip her off that something was wrong was that the trees were no longer hanging low to the ground.

"No, it was human," Bailey said this week. Although some fruit had been taken a couple of years ago, nothing on this scale had ever occurred before, she said.

The loss of the fruit to those who labor each week in the garden is bad enough. But the double whammy of the loss of food that should have gone to provide nutritious and fresh fruit for hungry people is even more hurtful and difficult to deal with, Bailey said.

"Why would someone do that," she said, hoping against hope the fruit was taken by someone who was hungry. That, however, would be easier to believe if only some fruit had been taken. "But, the whole tree?" she said. The Master Gardeners plan to install more signs and better lighting to make the garden more visible to passers by on North King Street.

The volunteer gardeners each year donate their produce to the Loudoun Interfaith Relief food pantry, a contribution LIR Executive Director Bonnie Inman called "a blessing." Last year alone the garden produced 1,900 pounds of food for those in need, and already is well above 1,000 pounds for this season. Despite the theft, Bailey said she hoped the volunteers would be able to come close to last year's total.

Inman, who just came back from vacation this week and had not heard about the theft, was equally dismayed by the news, which she said "could be a huge hit to us."

"We've been getting fresh produce, the bulk of it from the Master Gardeners, for years-close to 20 years," she said.

"What we get from them is invaluable," Inman said, noting how important it is to be able to offer clients fresh fruit. Not only do those in need get ripe, fresh fruit, but it helps LIR save its canned goods for the winter months.

"They come in practically every day with fresh produce, it's so vital," she said.

Reader Comments

The following are comments from the readers. In no way do they represent the view of Leesburg Today.

Total Comments: 5 comment(s)

swleesburg wrote on **Aug 19, 2010 3:36 PM:**

"it could have been anyone. why blame the homeless. and if it was then it went to those in need. Isn't it public land owned by the public and available to the public?

Just a bunch of Leesburg elitists using tax dollars to practice their hobby. "

xyz123 wrote on **Aug 18, 2010 3:36 PM:**

" either side of the WOD just south / east of Catocin Circle and before the trail zip zags under the 15 Bypass. It's all wooded floodplain. "

leesburgfirst wrote on **Aug 18, 2010 7:33 AM:**

" orly? where exactly is that? "

leesburg southeast wrote on **Aug 17, 2010 7:52 PM:**

" We have complained about the tents before. Leesburg said it was Loudoun's problem. Loudoun said it was Leesburg's problem (police). I won't go into more detail. "

af3454 wrote on **Aug 17, 2010 3:18 PM:**

" I would check all those tents off the bike trail. There must be 30-50 tents back in there. "

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