

European training to the art of espalier

Executive Summary

Why this project?

The project is a follow up to 'Fruit trees in the City' – (Nantes 7-8/09/2023)¹ that confirmed that many municipalities, local authorities and NGOs in Europe are reintroducing fruit trees in the urban and peri-urban environments. They do so because fruit trees provide several important ecological services and contribute to improved social cooperation and trust and individual well-being.

Unfortunately, these projects are often put at risk by the lack of individuals and organizations capable of providing expert advice and training in fruit arboriculture adapted to the city. This is due to a general impoverishment in the knowledge and know-how of fruit arboriculture caused by the quasi disappearance of one of its essential components: the craft or art of espalier²

This art developed by gardeners over centuries³ enables the cultivation of fruit trees in small two- or three-dimensional patterns – known under the generic term of espaliers – which are very useful in urban and peri urban environments: small aerial and root volume, ability to be planted along walls and in little spaces, easy monitoring of predators and diseases, easily accessible and highest quality fruit which is very useful in the city⁴.

¹ Please follow these links for [Fruit Trees in the City](#) and for [Observatoire des Paysages Comestibles Fruitières dans la Cité](#). Fruit Trees in the City was organized in September 2023 by the City of Nantes, Plante & Cité and Les Amis du Potager du Roi. Subsequently to Fruit Trees in the City a guide '[Cultiver les paysages fruitiers en ville](#)' was published.

² Fortunately, the art of espalier remained [practised in a large number of countries](#) and in many countries, there still exist

- A small number of leading specialists in the art of espalier
- A number of teachers of fruit trees - in schools and associations - who are keen to learn how to pass on the art of espalier planting,
- Some excellent fruit trees illustrating the art of the espalier.

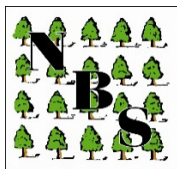
³ The art of espalier was included in [France's intangible cultural heritage](#) list in June 2023. This is the first result obtained by the [Collective for the inclusion of the art of espalier](#) in UNESCO's list of intangible heritage.

⁴ This lack of skills also affects historic sites, which very often find it difficult to conserve and develop their espalier heritage. Today, the art of espalier is potentially useful in commercial orchards also -



Overall goal

The overall goal of the project is to organize, run and evaluate⁵ a pilot experiment that is systematic, long and practice orientated enough for demonstrating how it is possible to train trainers and experts⁶ mastering a large array of the knowledge and know-how of fruit arboriculture capable of providing expert advice and training for all those organizations involved in reintroducing fruit trees in the city.



Outputs

The project aims at two major outputs:

1. Organization, delivery and evaluation of a pilot program for training future trainers and experts. The pilot will be a 3-year program⁷ followed by a 5-year further development process – An outcome of the program will be a library of learning material and processes available for a variety of courses in other institutions and countries⁸

2. Documentation and evaluation of pilot strategies for developing the capabilities of six sites (four horticultural schools and two fruit trees NGOs) in three different countries, Belgium, France and Switzerland, to deliver expert advice and training. This will involve teaching staff development as well as the creation of six pilot orchards aimed at training students by practice. These orchards will comprise fruit trees and shrubs of different species and varieties, of different ages (and conditions), trained according to different patterns, etc.

An open partnership of four schools and three associations

CFPne Lullier (Switzerland), Cfppa Olivier de Serres (France), Cfppa Tours-Fondettes Agrocampus (France) and Nantes Terre Atlantique (France)

The Association des Amis du Potager du Roi (France), the Fédération des Arboriculteurs du Haut Rhin (France) and the Nationale Boomgaartenstichting (Belgium).

⁵ The project also aims at preparing a wide diffusion of this pilot experiment.

⁶ Time is needed to develop experts and trainers... and hopefully new grand masters.

⁷ The program will put a strong emphasis on training through practice. It will consist of 7 3-day modules spread over the 3 years. 20 online sessions will also be organized.

⁸ The material will be available in French – the original language of the program, but also at least in Dutch and English.



The project is organized to leverage the specific capabilities of the different partners who all have strong competencies in fruit arboriculture – but not necessarily in fruit arboriculture adapted to urban and peri urban environments and in the art of espalier.

Four of the members of Amis du Potager du Roi are among the few great masters in espaliers and fruit arboriculture: Jacques Beccaletto, François Moulin, Thierry Régnier et Denis Retournard. Together with Marcel Vossen – the founder of the fruit museum garden of Gaasbeek (Belgium), they have started sharing their knowledge and know-how with their colleagues in the project. They are helping them develop their competencies - including the creation of transmission orchards. The Federation des Arboriculteurs du Haut Rhin brings its deep expertise in the teaching of fruit arboriculture to volunteers¹⁰. The 4 horticultural schools (Lullier, Nantes Terre Atlantique, Olivier de Serres and Tours-Fondettes bring expertise in program engineering, in plant sciences and the knowledge of the needs of future beneficiaries (municipalities, local authorities, landscape architects, horticultural and landscape businesses, gardeners, etc.). Finally, the Nationale Boomgaartenstichting brings its unique expertise in pomology. The 3-year pilot program and the 5-year further development process will be organized and delivered jointly by the five great masters and their colleagues in the partner organizations. A first faculty meeting has taken place at Valmer on October 17-18, 2024.

Board of directors

The project is managed by a board, three roles of which are to:

- implement evaluation processes and
- open-up the project to other interested partners
- make the outputs of the project largely available. German, Dutch and British experts are invited to a session of the board in January 2025

January 2025

¹⁰ The Federation is one of the few organizations that, for many years, has been offering systematic training in fruit arboriculture spread over 4 years.