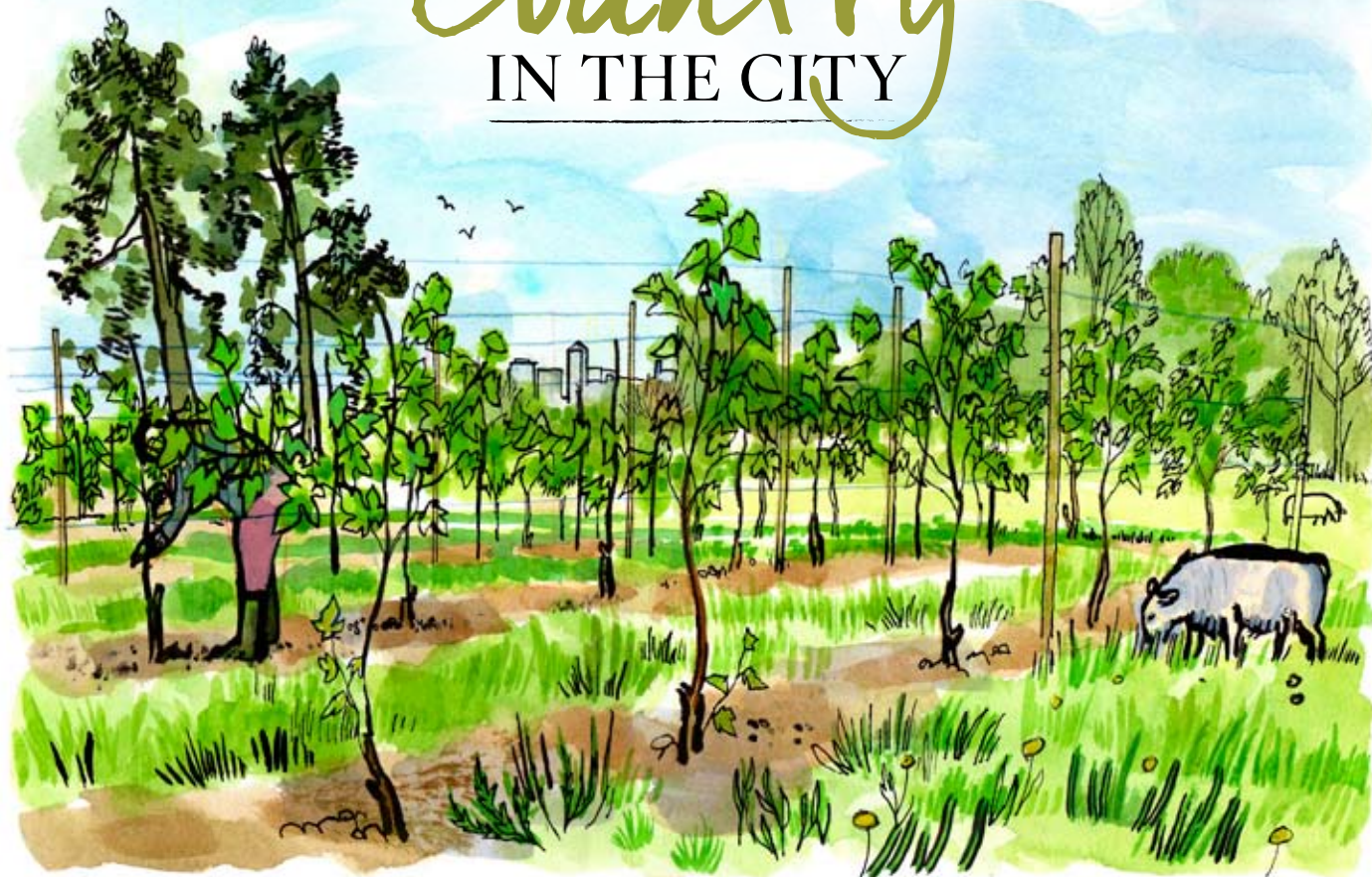


Country IN THE CITY



As well as growing a little of my own and making regular trips to the local farmers' market, food-share schemes have become one of my favourite – and most rewarding – ways of enjoying a taste of the countryside. In recent years, I've invested in half of a white saddleback-cross pig raised by a CL colleague, adopted a cherry tree in East Sussex and become a crop-sharer in a Herefordshire apple orchard.* Not only has this brought the freshest produce to the table but I've also been able to harvest fruit myself amid the most beautiful rural surroundings.

My latest venture is adopting a vine as part of an inspired project to create London's first commercial vineyard since medieval times. At Forty Hall Farm in the borough of Enfield, vines are currently being planted on two sloping south-facing fields with panoramic views of the city skyline, while sheep graze contentedly along the grassy pathways. "In summer, when the bees and insects are buzzing between the wildflowers, it almost feels like a little patch of Provence," says organiser Sarah Vaughan-Roberts, who first had the idea to restore commercial viticulture to London five years ago.

Assisted by more than 100 volunteers, she has planted two acres of vines but hopes this will increase to ten with a combination of funding and public support. "We've been helped enormously by nearby Capel Manor Horticultural College,

Can a city dweller enjoy a taste of the good life?
Louise Elliott reports from her urban neighbourhood

This month: the vineyard

which leases the land from Forty Hall, while Shoreditch Trust [which set up Water House and Acorn House sustainable restaurants in London] sponsored our second acre," Sarah explains. Locals – and those from further afield – are encouraged to get involved by adopting a vine and helping out with vineyard duties. On my latest trip in early

summer that meant trimming, leaf-thinning, mulching and weeding; in winter and spring there will be the chance to get hands-on with the pruning and planting. Autumn, of course, is harvest time although the first vintage won't be available until 2012. All the wine will be made off-site by organic wine-maker Will Davenport of Davenport Vineyards (CL November 2003). "We'll produce a range of still and sparkling whites that capture the characteristics of the best English wines – light, fresh and fruity," Sarah says. "The fields are on a gravel deposit and the soil is ideal for the vines to flourish, but I'm learning more about the site and how conditions affect the plants from year to year."

I may have rather a long wait before I can uncork my first bottle as part of the adopt-a-vine scheme but, in the meantime, I hope to visit the vineyard as often as possible – and play my own small part in the renaissance of urban viticulture. 🍷

For more about the project and to adopt a vine, visit www.fortyhallvineyard.org.uk *www.rentacherrytree.co.uk; www.onceuponatree.co.uk.