

ABOVE THE BIG APPLE

PICK A TREE AND
RISE ABOVE THE
CITY AT THE NEW
YORK BOTANICAL
GARDEN

BY KARI BODNARCHUK

Brooklyn seems an unlikely

place to connect with nature. After all, it's best known for its man-made objects—the Brooklyn Bridge, the Cyclone roller coaster and Nathan's hot dogs—not to mention all

the people (if it broke away from the Big Apple, this sprawling borough would be the fourth largest city in the country).

But it's here, in a wooded area of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, that Chris Roddick teaches city-dwellers how to climb 80-foot oak, maple and beech trees for fun. Roddick, an arborist at the 52-acre botanic garden, wants New Yorkers to see the treetops and urban environment from a different perspective. "You can still hear the car horns—maybe even more

more feet in the air. Even though it sounds risky, most injuries are limited to scrapes, known as "bark bites," and blisters. The trees themselves are protected from abrasions by leather or nylon-rope sleeves.

Roddick likes to slip in a few botanical facts when he teaches climbing to help people better understand the environment—and help them forget they're dangling high above ground by a half-inch rope. "I want them to understand that they're not climbing a structure, but something that's living and breathing," he says.

Currently, Roddick runs recreational tree-climbing classes at the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx. Over the past nine years, he has taught about a hundred people. Some students got so hooked they formed a local tree-climbing club. This informal group—with a dozen core members, including Roddick—runs weekend trips to upstate New York, taking along anyone who's interested.

If you go, you'll hike anywhere from half an hour to two hours into the woods, in search of hemlocks and other hardwoods to climb. Those who want an extra dose of adventure can camp out in the trees, sleeping in four-cornered canvas hammocks or porta-ledges, both designed for treetop camping. From the branches, you can watch the moon rise and feel even the slightest breeze. Best of all, you'll see stars instead of city lights and listen to rustling leaves instead of car horns. **HOOKEE**



“...everything looks and feels different above ground.”

so, since sound rises,” says Roddick, “but everything looks and feels different above ground.”

Climbers use a harness, a self-belay system and ropes to scale trees—a technique that doesn't require extraordinary strength—and then thread their way through the branches up into the canopy. Once people learn the basics, Roddick shows them how to move from tree to tree by using a line and pulley to sidestep across (called the “Tyrolean traverse”) or by swinging across like Tarzan and Jane (a “flying traverse”), all while 40 or

IF YOU GO

The New York Botanical Garden runs recreational tree-climbing workshops (6 hours) and classes (27 hours) through its continuing education program (718-817-8747, 800-322-6924; www.nybg.org/edu/conted). To join the recreational tree-climbing club for an upstate weekend outing, call Chris Roddick (718-623-7200, ext. 6421). There's no charge for instruction, and Roddick provides equipment, but you must cover food and car-pooling costs.