

Tools and Ideas

Community Gardens

CityPlan

Riley Park/South Cambie **RPSC**

Community gardens are public lands where neighbours come together to grow fruit, flowers and vegetables. Typically, community gardens have many small plots tended by individuals or families. These plots are often supported by common facilities for the use of everybody: compost, water, sometimes storage sheds for garden tools, and even gathering places, greenhouses and shared garden areas such as a fruit orchard or a berry patch. They are often fenced to keep out dogs, but the public is welcome to enter and visit the community garden.

In some neighbourhoods, residents have created gardens on public land that do not have individual plots. Instead everybody works and enjoys one common garden. These Neighbourhood Greenways serve as informal meeting places, connect neighbourhoods and make the community more beautiful.

Neighbourhood Greenways are created with the assistance of the City's Greenways Program. For more information, call the Greenways Team at 604-873-7526, or check the City's website: www.city.vancouver.bc.ca

History

Community gardens have existed in some form since people began to live in cities. Early cities were densely packed with buildings leaving no green space; people therefore had garden plots outside the city to grow their own food. About 150 years ago in Europe, the modern version of the community garden began to appear, founded on the same principle: to give apartment dwellers a chance to grow plants and to enjoy fresh air, sunlight, greenery and each others company. Community gardens are still important today; in Germany, for example, there

were more than one million community gardeners in 1996.

Community gardens in Canada came and went in waves, peaking in the Victory Gardens that were intended to alleviate food shortages during the World Wars. In 1943, there were more than 50,000 Victory Garden plots in Greater Vancouver, but they quickly disappeared after the war. Since the 1980's, community gardens have made a comeback in Vancouver. Today, there are a dozen community gardens with close to 700 members.

Most Vancouver residents still have backyards or front yards for their gardening, but the number of people who do not have access to private green space is growing, and will continue to grow as the city becomes more densely populated. The demand for community gardens is therefore likely to expand.

Benefits

Community gardens are increasing in popularity because they:

- Create places where people from a neighbourhood come together, get to know each other, enjoy working side by side, and make the neighbourhood a friendlier place.
- Turn unused public land into lush green gardens.
- Teach people about gardening, nature, and plants.
- Grow fresh, healthy, tasty and organic food.

Not everyone appreciates community gardens, though, because they can look quite messy compared to the neatness of mowed grass in most City parks. Neighbourhoods don't always

support proposals for new community gardens, and residents occasionally complain about existing ones.

Information Sources

The best way to learn about community gardens is to visit one, walk around and maybe chat with a gardener. Community gardens are public places, and people are welcome to visit. The largest one in Vancouver is the Strathcona Community Garden on Hawks Avenue between Prior Street and Malkin Avenue. Other community gardens can be found at:

- Strathcona Park (Cottonwood Garden)
- Jonathan Rogers Park (Elizabeth Rogers Community Garden)
- McSpadden Park
- 7th and Fraser Park
- Robson Park
- Cambridge Park
- Tea Swamp Park
- Stanley Park along Lagoon Drive
- Maple Community Garden (Maple St and 6th Ave)
- Cypress Community Garden (Cypress St and 6th Avenue)
- East Boulevard from 49th to 57th

Not a community garden, but always worth a visit is the City's Demonstration Food Garden at 2150 Maple Street, focusing on urban agriculture, composting and water conservation. The garden is operated by a non-profit society, City Farmer, Canada's Office of Urban Agriculture. Their website is home to many interesting articles about gardening, food production, and links to many other websites that specialise on community gardens: www.cityfarmer.org

Green Streets Program

The City of Vancouver's Green Streets Program encourages citizens to

beautify their neighbourhoods by planting and maintaining street gardens in traffic circles and corner bulges. This program began in 1994 in Mount Pleasant and has been blooming ever since. The success of this program has inspired other communities to get involved and liven up their streets.

Street gardening offers Vancouver residents the opportunity to discover a greater sense of neighbourhood pride and ownership. By sponsoring a street garden, you can share experiences and learn new skills.

Street Gardens and the Green Streets program

Street gardens are landscaped traffic circles and corner bulges in neighbourhoods.

Traffic circles and corner bulges are built by the City as part of an on-going program to slow traffic and increase safety in residential areas.

Traffic circles are located in the middle of intersections and are landscaped by the City with evergreen shrubs.

Corner bulges are located on the corner of intersections and are usually planted with grass and sometimes with evergreen shrubs.

Green Your Street

Anybody or any group can sponsor a street garden.

Volunteer street gardeners simply agree to work with the City and with their communities to help the gardens grow during the coming year. You may just want to water and weed the plants provided by the City. Or, you can choose to add your favourite plants to provide colour through the changing seasons and be part of the Green Streets program.

Once a year, you will be contacted by city staff to see if you want to keep gardening in the coming year.

If the street gardens close to your home are already sponsored, you can

still sponsor one anywhere in the city.

Recognition, Prizes and Giveaways

The annual Green Streets Garden Party is held in the fall to recognize volunteer street gardener's contributions to improving the quality of life in their communities.

The Garden Party gives street gardeners the opportunity to meet other street gardeners, see photos of all the Green Street gardens and win fabulous plants and prizes donated by the City's Sunset Nursery and our generous corporate sponsors.

Green Streets gardeners receive a newsletter twice a year, the opportunity to get free compost, and notification of giveaways, such as bulbs and plants. By officially registering your street garden, we will also be able to notify you of any street construction that might affect your garden.

For more information on Green Streets check the City's website: www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/greenstreets

Although some community gardens have been developed on park land, the Park Board only gives permission if no other land is available, and if its policies are met.

The Park Board's Community Gardens Policy

The Park Board supports the development of community gardens by giving assistance in searching for land, formalising user agreements, developing environmental educational programs, and gathering basic information on garden development and operation.

If it is determined that park land is the most suitable land for a community garden, then a permit is given if the following conditions are met:

- no cost to the public,
- support by the neighbourhood,
- approval of the garden site plan, and
- formation of a non-profit society

developing and operating the community garden.

These non-profit societies sign user agreements with the Park Board for five-year terms, including the following rules:

- Membership in the society must be open to every Vancouver resident
- Plots must be allotted on a first-come first-served basis.
- No pesticides can be used.
- The public must have access.
- The garden must adhere to maintenance standards
- Any fees charged to the members must be approved by the Park Board.

Once the new community garden has been approved, the Park Board will prepare the site for planting by removing grass, ploughing the soil and adding compost.

The Community Gardens Policy can be found on the Park Board's website: www.parks.vancouver.bc.ca