

In Vancouver, we build to work with nature, using its resilient self-renewal to our advantage. Putting nature back into urban spaces is helping create a sustainable, livable and delightful Vancouver.

Building a City with Nature in Mind

Green and growing spaces are both functional and artistic parts of Vancouver's urban design, contributing an enviable network of parks, greenways, community gardens and living rooftops. They contribute to the City's "Living First" strategy, creating environmentally, socially and economically sustainable neighbourhoods that are remarkably livable.

Innovative projects like Green Streets, community gardens and living rooftops have achieved wide-spread popularity in Vancouver, expanding the realm of nature in the city. These green and growing projects soften the concrete cityscape and make neighbourhoods come alive in a sustainable way.



GREEN STREETS GROW NEIGHBOURHOOD COMMUNITIES

Through the Green Streets program, neighbourhood residents become volunteer street gardeners, tending gardens planted in traffic circles and corner bulges. The program started in 1994 as part of a successful traffic calming plan and continues to grow along with Vancouver's network of greenways and bikeways.

These colourful gardens personalize each neighbourhood, and connect residents through shared pride and the simple experience of meeting and chatting with neighbours while gardening. Volunteers receive benefits including free compost, access to Green Streets Master Gardener Mentoring, and a coveted invitation to the annual Green Streets Garden Party.

URBAN GREEN THUMBS

Apartment dwellers interested in gardening beyond their balconies can join Vancouver's growing community of gardeners. Community gardens across the city bring residents together to nurture both floral and edible harvests.

On March 4, 2009, Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson announced that a community garden would be built on the lawn at City Hall, and its produce donated to food providers in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. This symbolized a commitment, now carried out successfully, to establish 2,010 new shared garden plots in neighbourhoods around the city, as a legacy of the 2010 Winter Games. Today, there are over 2,900 gardens across the city.

The popularity of community gardens has spread beyond community groups, inspiring some companies to convert unused property into garden spaces. A striking example is the site of a former gas station at the busy intersection of Davie and Burrard. Instead of merely throwing up a fence while waiting to redevelop the site, Prima Properties replaced the soil and started a volunteer-run flower garden, creating an attractive and productive community space.





Green roofs are sprouting across the city. Eventually these gardens in the sky will marry the top of the city with the surrounding ocean and mountains – creating a seamless vista of green and growing spaces.

GARDENS IN THE SKY: RECLAIMING ROOFTOPS

Living rooftops give buildings the appearance of having sprouted up naturally from the earth. Covered with soil and plants, they are transforming the urban roofscape – replacing lifeless surfaces with growing meadows and parks. The Coal Harbour Community Centre, for instance, is concealed beneath a waterfront park, yet is a bright sunny space with wonderful harbour views.

Vancouver is home to the largest living rooftop in Canada, covering all six acres of the Vancouver Convention Centre’s west building. Nurturing more than 400,000 indigenous plants and grasses, the rooftop is a natural habitat for birds, butterflies, insects and small mammals. It also supports four beehives housing 60,000 bees whose honey is used by the Centre’s kitchen.

Beyond the re-creation of natural habitat, there are many practical reasons to build living rooftops. The soil and vegetation absorb rainfall, filtering and retaining a portion of it to drain more gradually, helping to reduce sewer overflows and returning cleaner water to the surrounding watershed.

Green roofs are sprouting across the city, including a chef’s garden on the roof of the Fairmont Waterfront hotel, and a living green space atop the Vancouver Public Library. Eventually these gardens in the sky will marry the top of the city with the surrounding ocean and mountains – creating a seamless vista of green and growing spaces.

