Growing Food in the City; Knowledge Swap

Parkdale - November 29, 2014

Presented by:

Toronto Urban Growers

This project was funded (in part) by grants from Live Green Toronto, a program of the City of Toronto, Carrot Cache and the George Cedric Metcalf Foundation’s Prosperity in Balance program.
About Greenest City and Toronto Urban Growers

Greenest City (greenestcity.ca) builds healthy inclusive neighbourhoods through education and empowerment to preserve, protect and improve the environment. We aim to increase the public’s understanding on environmental issues, provide programs that protect and preserve the environment and conduct and disseminate research related to the environment.

Since inception in 1996, Greenest City (GC) has worked with Toronto's communities to take action to improve air quality, better the health of residents, regenerate urban life and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Our programs create opportunities for social and environmental change by equipping and inspiring residents of all ages and backgrounds to achieve local solutions to improve the state of the environment.

Awards
Environmental Award of Excellence Green Toronto – 2008 and 2009; Toronto Community Foundation Vital People Award – 2010; Toronto Community Foundation Vital Ideas Award – 2011; Toronto Community Foundation Vital Youth Award – 2009 & 2011; and Wellesley Institute 10in10 Urban Health Award – 2010

Toronto Urban Growers (TUG) (torontourbangrowers.org) is a member-based network of urban farmers, local businesses, organizations, institutions and networks that aims to increase availability of healthy, organic and sustainable food produced and sold in Toronto. In order to scale up urban agriculture in the city, we cultivate relationships and innovations, generate and share information, link growers to land, space and resources, support emerging leaders, work for enabling policies and promote the benefits of urban-grown food.

Knowledge Swaps

Greenest City and Toronto Urban Growers received funding to organize opportunities for urban growers to share knowledge about sustainable food production and organizing in three communities in Toronto – Parkdale, Rexdale and Taylor-Massey. Aside from helping growers to hear about new ideas and techniques, the events aimed to highlight the expertise of local growers and document some of their experience to share with others – locally and across the city. To achieve this, the knowledge swaps used “open space technology” to:

- Help participants identify discussion issues that were most important to them
- Identify:
  - barriers to scaling up urban agriculture locally and in Toronto
  - opportunities, innovative ideas and existing resources
  - next steps/action items

In the open space process, people brainstormed topics they wanted to discuss. The topics were clarified or modified as needed (making combinations when appropriate) and then everyone
voted for their top priorities. From that, discussion groups were formed and people joined whichever group they wanted.

Participants were also encouraged to write ideas down on sticky notes, either in response to the discussion or to poster questions put up around the room. This gave another option for people who were not comfortable expressing themselves verbally.

A full description of the process with debrief observations will be posted on torontourbangrowers.org after all three events are completed in March 2015.

**Group Discussions**

**Brainstorm Topics**

Fermentation • Herbs • Winter sowing • Community growing/food security • Medicinal wine
Connection between projects • Permaculture design • Harm reduction/mental health
Contamination/safety • Rooftop growing • Disease • How CG’s can benefit the community
Different cg models • Increase yield • Indoor gardening • Short season • Encouraging participation • Community supported agriculture • Biodynamics • Seed sovereignty/self sufficiency • Container gardening • Process for accessing vacant land • Land access policy
Balcony gardening – what can you grow? • Sustainable supplies • Companion plants
Transition indoors • Getting along with natural neighbours/pest control • Hydroponics
Soil • Mushrooms

**Group Discussion Notes**

**Indoor Growing**

**Issues/Challenges**

- Greenhouse access
  - Can community centres create hubs?
  - How could access be given to the community?
  - Beneficial for overwintering crops – especially fruit plants/trees
- Vermicompost
  - Ideal for small spaces without outdoor access; low maintenance
  - How to promote in the community?

**Ideas/Tips**

- Window ledges for growing

The success of the Parkdale event is largely due to the organizing work of Greenest City staff and students Monique Kelemen, Sahar Fanian and Jackie Selick.

Thanks to volunteers Bonnie Briggs, Debbie Nolan, Julianne Silver, Lynn Skye, Eugene Hennie, Bob Rose, James Partanen and Kathleen Fenton.
- Winter- put hanging sheets between planters
  - Basil, marjoram, sage do well
- Container growing
  - Can do sub irrigation system
  - Gets more pests because of warmth
  - Can use alcohol or other substance (i.e. white vinegar) for pest control
- Insects such as praying mantas can be used to control pests and disease indoors
- Hydroponics
  - Growing mediums: rock wool, coir (coconut husks)
  - Sack gardening
  - What are the lighting solutions
  - CFLs mimic the suns light, are appropriate for growing
  - Issues of obtaining local nutrients- minimize fossil fuel usage
  - Aquaponics (incorporating fish)
- Seed sprouting
  - Brassica sprout, sunflower sprouts, alfalfa, black lentils, onion seeds, peas (any seed (lentil, bean, etc) can be sprouted) can be done in mason jar or gravel
  - Soak overnight, put in a strainer, and rinse daily
  - Raw humus with sprout chickpeas
- Rooftop farming
  - Johanne Daoust-small space, near self-provisioning- Gives tours
  - Flickr.com/photos/johanne_daoust/
  - Sub-irrigation info www.richters.com/events/20140302.pdf
  - Kyla Dixon Muir- workshops on cold-frame growing- riverdalemeadow.ca
  - Eastdale- FoodShare (Katie German) foodshare.net/schoolgrown
  - YMCA Yonge and Wellesley
  - greeningtheymca.wordpress.com/
  - Carrot City –examples of rooftops around the world carrotcity.ca
  - Greenest City is working on a rooftop project

Land Access and Policy

Issues
- How do we view land? How should land be used?
- We are **borrowing** land from future generations
- Exploitation, gentrification of land here in Toronto
• Low income people don’t have access - **Stewardship**
• Land is often **vacant**, privately owned. Political system favours private ownership
• Often ownership is untouchable - should be used for social needs
• Land is commodity - no relationship to people - our policies aren’t about sharing
• Home owners vs. renters - they have more rights to parks
• Waitlist issues

Responses

*How to get access?*

- Role of government - to hold land in trust? **Lending**
- Aboriginal model – signed agreements, they never agreed to sell it. Wanted to **share** it. Not ownership
- Black Creek model - is shared and segmented making crop shared
- Permission should be granted to grow on vacant land
- Container gardens in fenced toxic areas - gas stations
- Policy about reclaiming contaminated land
- City is worried about liability, fear of being sued = paralysis
- Urban farming - gardens for homeless
  - Temporary - container gardens from landowners
  - Is this a liberal or radical response?
- Organic gardens are making it better
- Phytoremediation plants - take toxins out of the soil, for soup kitchens - **sharing**
- Gardening helps health, wellbeing, social concern - improves whole neighbourhood
- Know our constitutional rights, right to land, struggles right to housing
- Social media - publicize injustices, help mobilise people
- **Pilot mechanisms** for giving people access to land
- Shared community land trust in Parkdale - decided by the community - to grow food for marginalized individuals
- People donate land/home to community - e.g. **Velveteen Rabbit** story
- Tax incentives - for land trusts legacy
- **Occupy** land - mechanisms of change – squatters rights
- **YIMBY** back yard sharing eg. [thestop.org/yes-in-my-back-yard](http://thestop.org/yes-in-my-back-yard)
- Co-op credit system [parc.on.ca/programs/coop-cred-program/](http://parc.on.ca/programs/coop-cred-program/)
- Space
  - **Shared**, occupied
  - Push city to convert derelict land
  - Expropriation - political system
  - School yards - kids
  - Repurposing of land - asphalt to garden
- In Brazil if land is not used owners must pay more in taxes
- More exploration of values - how land is used - ecological

Additional Resources


- **Mechanisms**
  - Repurposing/requisition of land
  - Expropriation
  - Tax incentives
- Use political organization and the right to land

**Healthy Plants - Pest and Disease Control**

- Crushed eggshells + cayenne + chilli peppers - deters chewing, ants, squirrels, hornets
- Smell of humans in vacuum cleaner bag contents repels pests
- Blood meal
- Urine - Particularly human male (first thing in the morning works best)
- Companion plant - ones that squirrels, etc will go for instead of the plants in the garden that you don’t want eaten
- Natural sheep’s wool yarn deters deer
- Shiny plastic and foil effective for deterring birds
- Flea beetles - use barrier method - row cover
- Slugs - don’t like copper - copper mesh
- Improve quality of soil to increase health and natural defenses of plants
- Rust flies - planting in a windy area makes it difficult to propagate
- Put a 3’ barrier around garden to inhibit weed seeds from landing in garden (do this prior to weeds releasing their seeds)
- Leaf miner - incubates for three days, can be wiped off the leaf(leave) onto ground to get rid of it; needs the leaf to develop
- Leave habitat, such as stalks in garden for bees/wasps/etc to make homes in over winter to encourage their presence in garden to cut down on pests.
- Cut worms - use empty toilet paper and paper towel rolls, pack soil in them (puncture with a few holes for roots) to plant seeds in, leaving an inch or slightly less above soil surface
- Use specific plants to deter pests, such as comfrey
- Weed tea - use a barrel (rain barrel), place weeds in it, fill with water, keep in sun to ferment, let it sit for a week, then use on garden - *note, only use rainwater
- Iodine is deficient in southern Ontario, supplement soil - make a liquid supplement from seaweed - can also use liquid kelp
- Use charcoal to build up soil quality, can purchase from an aquarium store and collect from a fire place, wood stove, etc.
- Use dried leaves mulched up to layer on garden in the fall

**Additional Resources**

- National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service (US)
  - [attra.ncat.org/](http://attra.ncat.org/)
- Top Ten Garden Insect Pests
- Pest Control Library
  - [http://www.garden.org/pestlibrary/](http://www.garden.org/pestlibrary/)
- McGill University’s Ecological Agriculture Projects
  - [http://eap.mcgill.ca/General/browse.htm](http://eap.mcgill.ca/General/browse.htm)
- [https://extension.umass.edu/vegetable/soil-crop-pest-management/insects](https://extension.umass.edu/vegetable/soil-crop-pest-management/insects)
Community Gardening
Keys to Success
- Steering committee
- Positive impact and role
- Mindful design/community engagement

Examples of Community Gardens

HOPE Garden
- Posted notices, booked room at community centre for facilitated meeting, 60-70 people came
- Committee structure
- Design-Planning- Grant funding
- Water/plots/paths/no fee
- Plot sharing 4’x8’
- Agency supported
- People planning
- 5-6 people in steering committee
- Ownership/leadership among growers, also agency supported
- Workshops/skill exchange provided

Double Rock
- 40-50 gardeners
- Municipally/grant funded
- Planted by volunteer group with 1 paid staff
- Community took over

High Park Kids Garden
- Municipally funded
- School fed
- Community engagement
- City staff- design
- Agency driven

Mississauga
- Corporate funding
- 5-7 years, driven by Ecosource
- Transition back to community

Dunn Parkette
- Agency supported: Greenest City, PARC
- Ambassador program
• 2-10 participants
• Bike ride fundraising - $37k
• Market garden
• Learners garden that engages community
• Co-op credit for food at WEFC
• Bond created in sweat equity
• Food to food bank - giving back
• Innovation to have access to healthy foods
• Impact through involvement
• Communal garden - shared plots
• Dunn Garden for Youth - seeking funding
• Erin Mills - food to market

**Milky Way**

• Issues
  - Public health/public land for individual gain
  - Land/cost/funding
  - Drop-off in community involvement
  - Interest in staying involved/leaders
• What’s most encouraging - community, food security
• Common threads
  - Access/community group support
• What keeps it alive
  - Coordinator is key to bringing people together
  - Meetings/pot lucks
  - Rotation of leadership
• What’s New
  - Land trust - to donate land/funds
• Contract, responsibilities outlined
• Care of outlining areas (end rows)

**Poster questions**

**Innovations**

Are you growing food that no-one else is growing? Are you growing it differently from how other people grow?

• Community shared orchard - WEFC
• Greenhouses and community kitchens at all community centre (cheaper than some weight rooms)
• What about flowers? Dahlia, zinnia, nasturtium
• I’m growing bacteria! (fermenting at home)
• Orchards, berries, nuts
• Medicinal herbs and foods

**Ideas**

• Teach in high schools/universities in the city organic agriculture
• Set up horticulture as therapy for marginalized population, dementia and Alzheimer population
• Local community shared access gardens to provide medicinal plants
• Set up a Facebook page to continue these and other discussions- the urban beekeeper’s one is great
• I dream that we will become largely self-sufficient for fresh produce
• Vertical gardening and rooftop gardening (hotels, high rises, office towers) – on top of local businesses
• A herbal/veggie garden on every rooftop
• Shared backyard gardening space
• Community garden at Westlodge Park
• What can we grow on our balcony?
• Potential for two plots on Roncesvalles for display food garden. Note- high traffic, public snacking/picking, high turnover, funding available- Heidi.eisenkayer@gmail.com

**How did you learn about growing food? Who taught you?**

• Johanna Daoust- rooftop gardener, she’s brilliant!
• Mother Nature and Dagmar Baur
• Herbal apprenticeships with traditional herbalist (Walter Kacera)
• Experimenting in backyard year to year
• Grew up on a farm

![How do you learn best?](image)

- Watching someone else
- Online research
- Reading
- Doing and trying it out

[Photo of Dagmar Baur]

Parkdale Knowledge Swap
Selected Evaluation Feedback

Total attendance = 35
Total evaluations completed=20
100% said they made new contacts

“People have creative awesome ways to deal with the challenges of urban farming/gardening”

Did the event give you new ideas about growing food in the city that you would like to try?
Yes (11) No (8)
Production methods (10) Land access (3)

What other topics would you like to learn more about?
- Measure soil toxicity levels without using expensive labs
- Composting (2)
- Herbs and companion plants
- Hydroponics (3)
- How to make wine
- Increasing food production and decreasing food insecurity (2)
- Community supported and organic farming
- Local community groups
- More integration learning and integration between gardens and programs
- Social organizations to put urban ag on the political agenda
• How to access land for use with people who are homeless, low income and experience mental health issues

What other food events would you like to see?
• Having tomato fertilizer exchanges
• Balcony bounty for food and attraction
• Permaculture design conversations
• Hear from actual farmers
• How to start an urban farm
• Diverse topics about food sustainability
• Community involvement
• Growing and preserving
• Availability of non GMO seed
• Changing policy in regard to land use
• More knowledge swaps and hands-on workshops (3)