

## 'Participating with Community Gardens' with Gosse Van Oosten



Gardening is a rewarding activity and the practice of sharing gardens fosters community engagement and green living. Since not everybody owns their own private garden, community gardens offer the possibility to grow your own plants using shared plots on private or public lands.

### Why people should be interested in gardening:

- Gardens support food security and give you fresh food at a reasonable price.
- Gardens are good for our mental health, and well-being (they provide physical activity).
- Having a garden gives you pride, and satisfaction in growing food as fulfilling work.
- Gardening helps you reconnect with nature.
- Gardens help preserve diverse seed stocks.
- Gardens create beauty and give new life to otherwise unused plots of land.
- Gardening reduces hidden fossil fuel costs through energy conservation and recovery of materials from composting any yard waste.
- Shared garden spaces cultivate stronger relationships between neighbours, instill pride and ownership in communities, and inspire people to learn from others.

### Various gardening options:

- On your patio: with sufficient sun, you can do planting in containers or boxes.
- In a small backyard without a lot of sun you can do vertical gardens in small pots.
- Through community-supported agriculture (CSA) where urbanites can visit and help with food production and also get a share of the produce.
- Foraging for wild plants: some organizations actually help people recognize the different plants that they can gather from unused spaces.
- Raised bed gardens are a good way to start a sizable garden, especially if the soil has poor conditions and you have difficulty reaching down to the ground or want to reduce weeds.

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## **Urban Agriculture and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)**

Urban agriculture is the practice of growing, processing, sharing, and distributing food within the city. If you have little space, through a CSA, you as a subscriber can receive either a weekly or bi-weekly box of produce directly from participating farms. A driving force in London was the implementation of the Food System chapter of The London Plan to establish a dynamic London approach to urban agriculture now called London's Urban Agriculture strategy.

### **White Oaks United Church community garden:**

This garden is in a very diverse neighbourhood with citizens from around the world - for instance, Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. In developing their personal garden plot, participants have different gardening practices and cultures so they learn from each other. Amazing relationships have developed to share and cultivate diverse horticultural and culinary knowledge.

The White Oaks Church contributed to the set-up of this private community garden by sharing land that they had available. Approximately 2008, they made the vacant land into a community garden with the help of the City. Now, this garden is looked after by a group of individual gardeners.

To maintain this garden, the garden committee does the organizing. Everyone shares responsibility for the maintenance of the garden, composting, and cutting of grass. Plots are rented out at \$40 as the standard. The gardeners pay the church for the water, but they do not pay any rent for plots.

Those interested in the White Oaks United Church Community Garden, to access a plot are asked their name, phone number, and email, and once a plot becomes available they must confirm their interest. To participate with a public plot, information can be found on the City's website for the gardens they help look after. These are starting to become more self-directed as well.

### **What grows well in a garden:**

- In the perennial part of your garden, you can plant rhubarb and various herbs. In this case, you need to provide permanent locations in your garden.
- Adding wild daisies and other similar plants are important to feed the insects and pollinators.
- Vegetable plants that grow well and are relatively easy to grow are onions, garlic, lettuce, tomatoes, carrots, peas, eggplants, zucchini, and beans.
- To have good crops you can use a 2 in 1 mix: a garden soil plus compost and sheep manure.
- When planting your garden plot, always consider where each vegetable will go and when each vegetable needs to be planted. Some areas can be replanted with other crops later.

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