

# **Indigenous Community Garden Needs Assessment**

**Includes:  
Research Report**

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Department: Indigenous Studies  
Course Code: INDG 3860  
Date of Project Completion: April 2012

Project ID: *4241*

**Call Number:**

**Needs Assessment Survey of the Nogojiwanong Friendship Centre Community  
A TCCBE Project by Bennett Bedoukian  
September 2011 to March 2012**

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**A. Survey Questions**

1. Is having access to affordable and healthy produce important to you?
2. Do you think a community garden would benefit your community?
3. Would you be willing to participate in a community garden project?
4. If yes, how often?
5. How much gardening experience do you have?

**B. Survey Responses**

1. All 50 respondents said ‘yes’.
2. 49 people said ‘yes’, with one ‘no’.
3. 41 people said they would be willing to participate in a community garden.
4. 23 people said they would work once a week,  
8 said they would work every other week,  
10 said they would be willing to work monthly.
5. 13 people said they have no garden experience,  
27 people said they have a little,  
10 said they have a lot of gardening experience.

respondents	question 1	question 2	question 3	question 4	question 5
1	yes	yes	yes	weekly	none
2	yes	yes	no	no	a little
3	yes	yes	yes	bi-weekly	a lot
4	yes	yes	yes	monthly	a little
5	yes	yes	yes	monthly	a little
6	yes	yes	yes	weekly	none
7	yes	yes	yes	monthly	a little
8	yes	yes	yes	weekly	a little
9	yes	yes	yes	weekly	a lot
10	yes	yes	no	no	a lot
11	yes	yes	yes	monthly	none
12	yes	yes	yes	weekly	a little
13	yes	yes	yes	weekly	a little
14	yes	yes	yes	bi-weekly	a lot
15	yes	yes	yes	bi-weekly	a little
16	yes	yes	yes	monthly	a little
17	yes	yes	yes	weekly	a little
18	yes	yes	yes	weekly	a lot
19	yes	yes	yes	bi-weekly	a little
20	yes	yes	yes	monthly	a little
21	yes	yes	yes	no	none
22	yes	yes	yes	weekly	a little
23	yes	yes	yes	bi-weekly	a little
24	yes	yes	no	no	none
25	yes	yes	no	no	a little
26	yes	yes	unsure	weekly	none
27	yes	yes	yes	weekly	a little
28	yes	yes	yes	weekly	none
29	yes	no	yes	weekly	a little
30	yes	yes	yes	bi-weekly	a little
31	yes	yes	yes	weekly	a little
32	yes	yes	yes	weekly	a little
33	yes	yes	yes	weekly	none
34	yes	yes	yes	weekly	a little
35	yes	yes	yes	weekly	a lot
36	yes	yes	yes	weekly	none
37	yes	yes	yes	weekly	a little
38	yes	yes	no	no	a little
39	yes	yes	yes	monthly	a little
40	yes	yes	no	no	a little
41	yes	yes	yes	monthly	a little
42	yes	yes	no	no	none
43	yes	yes	yes	monthly	none
44	yes	yes	yes	bi-weekly	a little
45	yes	yes	yes	weekly	a lot
46	yes	yes	yes	weekly	a lot
47	yes	yes	yes	weekly	a lot
48	yes	yes	yes	monthly	a lot
49	yes	yes	yes	bi-weekly	none
50	yes	yes	no	no	none

## **C. An Overview of Selected Community Garden Models**

### **Wahta Community Garden**

At Wahta, a Mohawk reserve south of Parry Sound, they have a two or three acre (Ryan couldn't remember exactly) garden. This garden is used by the whole community, but I was told that mostly it is elders and children who use the garden. On top of using the garden to revitalize traditional knowledge around gardening practices, it provides a basis for ceremony and language revitalization. Ryan has told me that instead of labeling each plant with its English name, they have labeled them with their Mohawk names to encourage learning the language. As well the garden's produce is shared amongst the people helping the garden, but more importantly, to the people who are unable to help or are in need of food. This has created a stronger sense of community by seeing the value of garden work and its ability to help those in need. Of course, there are a few community feasts that are put on with the produce from the gardens and meat brought in from community hunters.

### **Wychwood Community Garden**

This garden was created through the Stop, a healthy food oriented food bank and soup kitchen located at Davenport and Symington in Toronto. The garden itself is in a reclaimed TTC lot near Bathurst and St. Clair. This garden functions as a 'standard' community garden where members can tend their own plots, but also as a community building and empowerment tool through the stop. There are programs in place where the clients of Na-Me-Res sprout and grow sacred tobacco and sage. This program is aimed at allowing the space for Urban Indigenous Peoples to reclaim their roles as growers of food and medicine, as well as providing them with programming that encourages healthy minds, bodies and spirits. Starting in the winter, participants learn how to sprout tobacco and sage seeds in the greenhouse on site, and then look after the medicine throughout the growing season, and then learning how to properly cure and dry them. From what I understood of my conversations with the people running the program, they try to bring in Elders to provide the participants with teachings relevant to the growing experience, as well as to growing themselves as Indigenous People. There seems to be many repeat participants year after year.

### **Trent Community Gardens**

Located on the Trent University campus, this community garden functions through a student levy. This allows for Peterborough residents to make use of the land at no cost to themselves, except for seeds. As I understand it there are tools available for gardeners to make use of, but they do tend to sprout legs and walk around a bit and so may not always be there. A grant pays for a permanent position and volunteers ensure that the plots remain watered and cared for if the need arises. There is lots of space to expand, but it is expected that people using the garden know a bit about

what they are doing. Staff and volunteers are available for questions, but they are not there to do the work or research for participants.

### **Miziwe Biik Community Garden**

The Miziwe Biik Community Garden is located Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment and Training, which is across from Allen Gardens in downtown Toronto. Each year one unemployed person gets hired to coordinate the garden. In this garden they grow food, native wildflowers and medicines. The produce grown in the garden is used for garden related feasts, and the rest is given to local aid agencies. This garden provides a space for Elders workshops and educational opportunities to learn about the importance of heritage foods and medicines and what constitutes healthy eating. This garden provides access to healthy foods, the opportunity to learn about traditional foods and medicines and how they are grown, community development, skills development and empowerment for local urban aboriginal community members.

### **Urban Aboriginal Urban Community Kitchen Garden Project**

This half-acre garden is located at the University of British Columbia's farm and has been running for more than seven years. This project is aimed at bringing Aboriginal people from the downtown eastside up to the garden to work and cook and eat together. The idea is that were they just to give people a bag of food, the impact would not be as great in the participants' lives as if the participants all ate together and shared the cooking, cleaning and gardening responsibilities. The aim is to connect urban Aboriginal people with their culture and their connection to growing food and medicine. This program does not discriminate between who the participants are, they range from the homeless, to addicts, sex trade workers, youth, and seniors. It provides a sense of control over where their food comes from and a sense of empowerment over their lives. The traditional relationship with food and medicine is explored and there are many teachings on the healthy and healing properties of traditional foods.

### **Tuscarora Gardens**

The gardens at Tuscarora in New York State are more like private gardens where one family farms their field. There are many individual growers in Tuscarora growing their variety of corn, and squash and beans and other foods they might like to eat. Where the community comes in is during the drying process, whole family groups bring their corn harvests together to one big barn and husk and braid the husks for drying the cobs of corn. This is quite a labour intensive process, which is why it helps to have the whole community together for the work. When it comes time to lye the corn, this is also done on a community scale so that there is not too much work for one person or family. The corn is shared and used specifically in feasts and ceremony. That these people have maintained and continue to maintain their unique variety of corn, helps to preserve parts of their knowledge and culture.

## **Six Nations Polytechnic Medicine Garden**

This garden is set up with a focus of educating participants in traditional gardening and medicine growing practices. The garden is 2,800 feet square and has a garden supervisor and a summer student who manage the garden and participants. The goal is not only to provide gardening knowledge and protocols, but also to provide the greater community of Six Nations First Nation with access to medicines and sacred plants. This project works in association with the Six Nations Polytechnic Ethno-botany program to provide hands on experience for students to learn traditional practices associated with gardening and medicine growing as well as to provide them with the educational tools to develop gardens of their own. Care is taken to ensure that the seeds and planting process follows protocols. There is a mixture between modern agriculture knowledge as well as traditional knowledge.

## **Brant/Brantford Community Garden Project**

This garden is a project aimed at healing relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous members of the Brantford and Six Nations communities with a focus on poverty reduction. The focus on providing healthy food and good working experience between Indigenous and non-Indigenous program participants gives people that opportunity to build relationships and support one another in a healthy and sustainable way. The garden has about 200 members who have provided an average of 2000 pounds of food to local food providers for distribution amongst the under-privileged and provides members with about 1000 pounds of food to take home with them. Plots are available for the general public as well as for community groups and organizations who wish to participate. They also provide help for communities and organizations that wish to start their own community gardens. The woman responsible is Sarah Gill, she can be reached at 519-754-0777 ex. 235 or [sgill@grchc.ca](mailto:sgill@grchc.ca). The garden works through donations of tools, seeds and space from local community members and organizations.

## **Toronto Community Garden Network**

This garden network works to provide access to healthy food and lifestyles while increasing food production within the urban centre of Toronto. They have garden sites on a wide range of properties from parkland, to the tops of buildings (green roofs), seniors residences, schools and community centres. The aim is to increase interest in local food production as well as access to gardening knowledge. They wish to support diversity by working with communities of all nationalities and in various socio-economic ranges, and to support diversity ecologically by promoting heritage seed use to reduce the demand for monoculture crops.

## **Circle Organic Farm**

While not a community garden, I thought it would be beneficial to understand what a CSA (community supported agriculture) project is and how it works. Circle

Organic Farm is located near Bailieboro Ontario. How it works is that members purchase a share in the seasons production, ensuring a weekly or bi-weekly (whichever they choose) box of local organic produce including, strawberries, raspberries, lettuces, squash, potatoes carrots..... the list goes on. The farmer and the interns do the work, and through the grants they get they have to provide community support and part of their produce must be donated. Last year the farmer, Andrew provided me with various seeds, and gave me 50-pound bag of potatoes to bring to fall camp. They also provide space for an Indigenous bee keeper (I never got his name) to house his hives. This is a mutually beneficial relationship because the bees help to pollinate the fruits and vegetables on the farm.

#### **D. Researcher's Reflections**

Through this research it seems to me that there are many avenues to explore in creating a community garden. Whether it is as a tool for language revitalization, community empowerment, healing between Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members, or simply just to provide programing and good healthy food to community members. The trick is to figure out how many people in the community will really come and work in the gardens. Out of the 50 survey responses 41 said they would be willing to participate in some capacity. This is an encouraging number, if even half that number worked the garden that would allow a lot of work to be done and the potential to grow large amounts of food would increase. I think that to get a properly functioning garden someone would need to be hired to supervise the garden outside of programing hours. This requires resources and may be difficult. It would also be possible to ask for volunteers who would be willing to check in and help out at the garden outside of programing hours. This is because when harvest time comes, things are not all ready on one day, but some tomatoes, for instance, become ripe earlier and some later and there may be a span of two or three weeks to harvest tomatoes every day.

If the interest were just in getting access to good food that can be provided to the community, perhaps a better alternative would be to talk to some farmers about it. I know that a weekly box from some CSAs can go for upwards of 500 dollars for the season. This seems to me to be way out of most peoples price range. Perhaps there is a way to take programing out to the farm to help with harvesting in exchange for the food.

Realistically I think that there needs to be discussion as to what do you want to get out of a community garden project in order to determine how best to move forward. If it is purely an educational thing, or to provide just a small amount of food or medicines than perhaps a plot at the Trent Community Gardens would be the best idea because heading out there once a week would be fine, but if it is something larger scale then more resources would be needed to ensure that weeding and harvesting were all done in a timely fashion. There are lots of options available, it is just a matter of figuring out how much time and resources you have to invest and then building a plan from there.