



growing YOUR OWN COLOURS Can Help Save Some Green

The Business Case

Growing your own produce can help you stay healthy and keep money in your pocket. You also get great taste and important nutrients a few steps from your back door. Vegetables and fruit picked from your garden (e.g., backyard or patio) are cheap, healthy, and handy.

When you buy produce at the grocery store, you pay for that item to be shipped from the farm to the store. Often that item travels hundreds, if not thousands, of kilometers. You also pay for special packaging and preservatives that keep the produce looking fresh.

Whether you're working or retired, live in the city or county, in a home, condo, or apartment, you can grow vegetables and fruit. Growing your own produce can be as simple as growing one plant on a patio. One of the easiest plants to start and care for are tomatoes. They are hardy and one plant can produce a lot of delicious fruit.

Growing vegetables and fruit makes financial sense. In March, Statistics Canada reported that 1 kg of carrots cost \$1.64 and a 796 mL can of tomatoes cost \$1.34. Carrot seeds cost less than a dollar and can easily produce up to two dozen large carrots. One tomato plant, which can cost as little as a dollar, can produce a lot of fruit. In fact, gardeners usually have too many to use at harvest time. Canning or preserving vegetables or fruit from your garden allows you to:

- Enjoy your garden delights all winter long.
- Get best value for money spent on seeds and plants.

Safety should always come first when canning or preserving your vegetables or fruit. Botulism, a rare but deadly illness has been linked to home canning. Learn how to prevent botulism by visiting www.foodsafetynetwork.ca. In the search box, type the words "clostridium botulinum" and click on the first article called "clostridium botulinum". Following these recommended instructions about home canning can reduce the risk for this serious illness.

Get Started

"A garden is a friend
you can visit any time." ~ Anon



Seeds are the cheapest way to start a garden. They are available at different types of stores (e.g., hardware, home improvement, or department) or from seed catalogues. Plants like cucumbers, zucchini, peas, squash, pumpkins, beans, beets, corn, radishes, greens, carrots, green onions, and most herbs grow easily from seed. Other plants like tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, broccoli, cabbage, raspberries, strawberries, blueberries, or rhubarb are commonly started with young plants from the nursery. Onions or garlic grow easily from "sets" or bulbs. Stores and nurseries offer these sets or bulbs for very little money.

Young plants cost just a few dollars and often give baskets of food. As an added bonus, some plants will grow from one season to the next without being replanted (e.g., strawberries, rhubarb, blueberries, and raspberries). Also, some vegetable seeds survive the Canadian winter and sprout on their own the following spring e.g., grape tomatoes.

You're Not Alone

If you need information on how to start a garden in your backyard, there are many websites that can offer help. One great site is the University of British Columbia's Botanical Garden website. Check out the section called "A Beginner's Guide to Vegetable Gardening" at <http://www.ubcbotanicalgarden.org/articles/5/>. Also libraries often display gardening books in the spring.

No Backyard... No Problem

You can grow vegetables and fruit in containers on your patio. Container gardening is ideal for people who are short on space, time, and energy. Even people in wheelchairs or those who have trouble bending down to the ground are able to grow a container garden.



Container gardening is different from backyard gardening. You need special soil mixtures, exposure to partial and full sunlight, and plenty of water. Plants like lettuce, spinach, peppers, radishes, green onions, carrots, beets, broccoli, beans, and tomatoes grow well in containers (Environment Canada, 2008). Some provinces have gardening or horticultural societies that offer gardening tips e.g., container gardening. You may find a club in your area by searching the web.

Gardening keeps us fit, well nourished, in touch with nature, and saves us money. Start your garden today and you'll enjoy the fruits of your labour within a few months.



Working Out in The Garden

Raking, digging, and planting use all the body's major muscles. For some people, working in the garden can burn the same number of calories as jogging for 30 minutes. (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008).



From Garden to Table

In the past, people had a garden because it put food on the table. Some people still grow their own food today. In fact, in a study done across Canada in 2001, 42% of households reported eating vegetables they grew themselves. (Teitelbaum & Beckley, 2006).



PYO Farms

If gardening is not for you, pick your own (PYO) farms offer a variety of vegetables and fruit. Your area likely has plenty of pick your own farms. For a list of PYO farms across Canada visit: <http://www.pickyourown.org/index.htm>. This site also has information on canning, preserving, drying, and freezing your fresh picked goodies.



Chemicals Are Out, Nature Is In

On April 22, 2009, Ontario banned the cosmetic use of pesticides by homeowners. To help keep your lawn and garden healthy and chemical free, check out:

- <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/life-vie/homemade-artisanaux-eng.php>
- <http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/en/land/pesticides/healthy.php>



Key References:
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Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion. Healthy Ontario. (2008). *Stretch that grocery list in lean times*. Retrieved March 2, 2009, from http://www.healthyonario.com/newsitemdetails.aspx?newsitem_id=1210

Teitelbaum, S. & Beckley, T. (2006). Harvested, hunted and home grown: The prevalence of self-provisioning in rural Canada. *Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 1, 114-130.