

## Community Gardens

Community gardens are happening in many communities in the Western region and the province. A community garden is a shared space where people gather together to grow their own vegetables, fruit, and flowers collectively. Many rural and remote communities in our region do not have a population large enough to support a full local grocery store so many residents depend on transportation over long distances to buy healthy food. In Newfoundland, we have a strong tradition of individuals growing, hunting, fishing, preparing and preserving local food sometimes because of access to grocery stores. Community gardens can increase availability to fresh, locally grown produce and contribute to residents eating healthier.

Community gardens provide health, economic, educational, social, and environmental benefits to participants and the community at large. This type of garden can play an important role in food security for participants by increasing physical and affordable access to adequate amounts of healthy food. Community gardens provide fresh, healthy, low-cost food that can substitute for otherwise expensive food purchases. Participants can learn basic gardening skills, from sowing seeds, weeding, and watering to harvesting, and better understand where their food comes from.

Community gardens also provide a welcoming space for participants to build self-confidence, wellness, and personal skills, and encourage people to act as local stewards. Each gardener in a community garden has a plot of their own land to grow on, but tools and facilities such as watering and storage are often shared. When the cost of gardening supplies is taken care of, the supply of fresh vegetables and fruit grown in community gardens can be of very little cost to the participants.

In Newfoundland, our daily intake of vegetables and fruits is low. The Canadian Community Health Survey from Statistics Canada states that 62 % of people over 12 years in the Western region consume less than 5 vegetables and fruit daily. Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide recommends different amounts of vegetables and fruits for different ages and gender and as a population, we need to be eating more in our diet. We know that a diet rich in vegetables and fruit and vegetables can play an important role in providing important nutrients for overall health. Being a part of a community garden and growing different types of vegetables provides an opportunity to try new foods and enhance healthy eating in homes and communities. There are many vegetables that can be grown in our climate like squash, brussel sprouts and kale, that are not traditional Newfoundland foods.

There are many benefits to participating in a community garden that go beyond nutrition. It also provides physical activity for all age groups, creates a social gathering for the community members and enables participants to learn basic gardening skills.

There are many resources available to assist groups in starting a community garden. These resources will tell you that every community garden is unique, and they all have different qualities that work for them. There are, however, some qualities that mostly all successful gardens share:

- Find out if there is enough support, need, and interest in your area by having a public meeting;
- Establish good lines of communication between all gardeners;
- Develop partnerships in the community;
- Choose a suitable garden coordinator;
- Start small;
- Maintain the garden site year round;
- Provide learning opportunities for the gardeners.

If you are not able to participate in a community garden, you can grow your own foods in containers in your own yard. Foods like tomatoes, potatoes, and lettuce can be successfully grown in containers on your windowsill, your patio or in your own back yard.

A community garden doesn't just provide food... it brings people together. Look for a community garden in your area or start one today! The Food Security Network of Newfoundland and Labrador has many resources to assist communities in starting a community garden or individuals with container gardening.

For further information go to: [www.foodsecuritynews.com](http://www.foodsecuritynews.com)  
or contact Stephanie Buckle, Regional Nutritionist, Western Health.

Contact person : Katie Temple, [kati temple\\_nc@yahoo.ca](mailto:kati temple_nc@yahoo.ca) she is involved in the CB Community Garden.