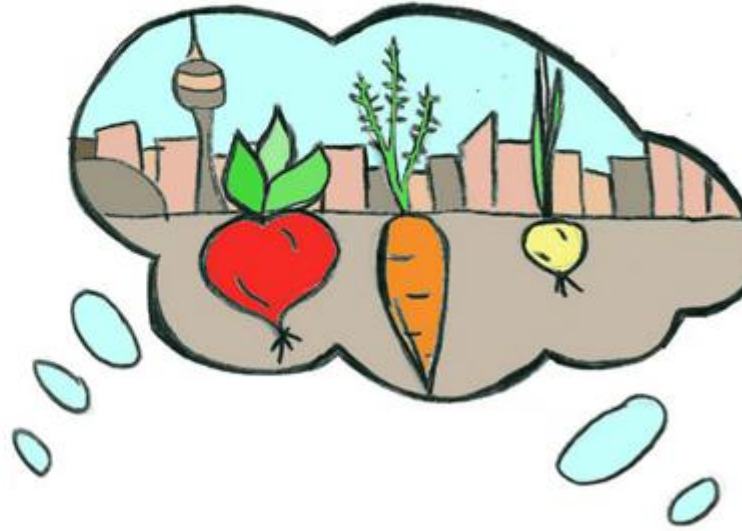


Growing Food in the City;
Knowledge Swap



Rexdale – December 5, 2014

**Toronto
Urban
Growers**

Presented by:

Rexdale Community Garden Network

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About Toronto Urban Growers

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

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.

The success of the Rexdale event was largely due to the organizing work of Rexdale Community Health Centre’s staff Tania Fernandes, Rexdale Community Garden Network members Eleanor Jimenez and Jim Graham and the MicroSkills Centre.

Thanks to volunteers Debbie Nolan, Paivi Evars, Tania Kroman, Christine Spence and Peggy Mooney.

Brainstorm Topics

- Growing with limited sun
- Fencing
- Coordination and networking urban agriculture in Rexdale
- Acquiring seeds
- How do we help people on waiting lists for cgs?
- Accessing land
- Education and training

Group Discussion Notes

Seeds

How to best save seeds?

- Need to clean seeds of vegetable pulp, dry them and then keep in a cold and dry area for storage

What do I do about black rot on saved kale seeds?

- Buy kale seeds from a seed house that has been inoculated against black rot

If you buy a marrow at a supermarket, can the seeds be saved? How do I pollinate squash?

- Store-bought vegetables may be sterile (seeds won't germinate) or hybrids (may not grow true to type).
- Squashes tend to cross-pollinate, if they aren't grown far enough from other squashes their seeds may not produce the same kind of squash.
- Hand pollinate using a Q-tip swab and pretend you're a bee – touch the male flowers to pick up the pollen, touch the Q-tip with pollen on the female flower
- Make squash jam by mashing it up with garlic

How do you test whether saved seeds are good?

- If seeds float, it's a good sign
- Put 10 seeds in a damp paper towel, then put it in a plastic bag. Wait a few days until seeds have germinated, count how many have sprouted. 70% germination rate is good

Can hybrid seeds be saved?

- Yes, but they may not grow true

Shade and growing plants

- Search the internet – lots of resources

Additional Resources

Toronto Seed Library
torontoseedlibrary.org
Seedy Saturdays
seeds.ca
tcgn.ca
Everdale/Bauta Seed Project
everdale.org/our-friends/bauta-family-initiative-on-canadian-seed-security

- Partial shade will take some plants longer to produce
- Lettuce, carrots, bok choy, mache, beets, celery like shade
- Plants like beans/tomatoes need sun
- A quick internet search revealed – fruit or root like sun – leaves, stems, buds more tolerant of shade
- There are two types of vegetables – cold weather and warm weather veggies
- Some plants won't germinate in the cold
- If you can put your butt on the soil comfortably, the soil is warm enough

Organizing Community

- 2066-7 Kipling garden: garden being on private land an issue
- Big challenge to get people to participate - people want to garden in spring but when summer rolls around they're not there. People interested in gardening at harvest time
- Residents were involved in garden planning
- Feeling that the garden wasn't big enough, people wanted larger spaces
- Large sized gardens at Panorama were a good idea
- The Toronto Seed Library was a revelation to the group. It brought up the important question of how do grassroots gardeners who might not be well-connected to networks find out about these initiatives.

Land Access

- Hydro Market Gardens – a TUG project to create urban farms on Hydro lands where people can grow and sell vegetables. City will do an EMF plan; research shows food grown in power corridors is not affected; if anything they may grow quicker
- Sense of equity is important
- Important for people to know the city is behind this project. People at 2006/7 wanted improvements to front garden, Mayor Miller involved Toronto Master Gardeners with good results
- Gardening on private land? Interest in exploring this idea is growing; examples of growing on private land include backyard gardening, apartments and companies;
- Rexdale: do we know where the community gardens are?
- Toronto Public Health's Food Friendly Neighbourhoods will identify some, TCGN has some gardens listed
- Soil testing: testing soil is expensive; soil sent to Guelph for testing but it's for fertility, not toxins. Public Health works with ECOH ecoh.ca. Toronto Archives is a great resource to find out previous uses of land

Additional Resources

Toronto Public Health's [Guide to Soil Testing](#)

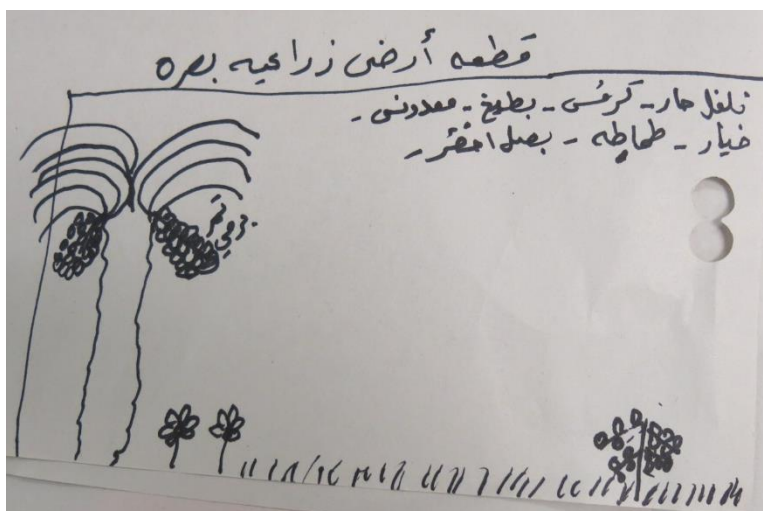
The Stop's YIMBY (Yes in My Back Yard) yard-sharing program
thestop.org/yes-in-my-back-yard

Pest control

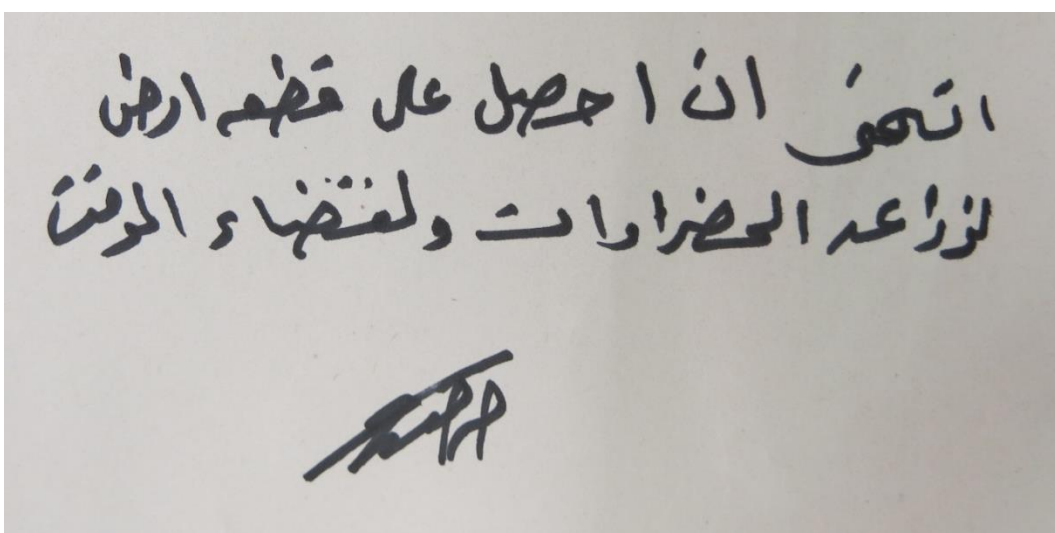
- Finding affordable fencing is difficult; deerfencecanada.com suggested as a supplier
- It's important to know how pests operate. Can cover plants with row covers to control pests and remove them again to encourage pollination, need to know timing
- Rabbits: need to know their habits; they like young plants, best to cover them up until they mature; rabbits are curious and will nibble, put fences into soil to stop burrowing.

Assyrian Table

A group of Aramaic-speaking Assyrians had a separate conversation with a translator. Here are their comments:



Agricultural land –
uncultivated – hot
pepper, watermelon,
parsley, cucumber,
tomato, green onions



I wish to
obtain a
piece of
land to
cultivate
vegetables
and to
pass the
time

لاحظت خلال وجودي في كندا منذ عدة شهور وخلال تجوالي
بمساحة نصف قطرها 50km ان تلك الاراضي هي عبارة عن
ساح خضراء بالكامل وتحتوي على العديد من الاشجار لكن
العزيب ان كل تلك الاشجار ليست مثمرة ولا اعرف
السبب وهل ان كنت استورد كل احتياجاتنا من
الفواكه والخضراوات تلك معاملة كيميائية

I noticed during my presence in Canada and travelling around the city (radius of 50k) green surface with many trees but what is strange is that all of these trees are not fruit trees and I don't know the reason. Is it because Canada imports all of its needs for fruit and vegetables or is it a chemical operation?

كيف ان تكون مساحة الارض اكبر
حتى يتمكن المزارع من زراعة أكثر
أنواع من الخضراوات والفواكه

اهم ان يكون لدي قطعة ارض
اربع منها بعض الخضراوات والفواكه
ان تكون مساحتها أكثر من مائة ونصف
وتكون مسيجة لكي تحافظ عليها
ويكون المار سنوي وشرا

My preference is for a larger land area to allow the farmer to cultivate a variety of fruits & vegetables.

I would like to have for me a piece of land that I can plant vegetables and fruits. It would be larger than 1.5 metres and fenced so that I can protect it. Water would be available.