



Stories *from the* Soil

*Métis Citizens Growing Food,
Culture, and Community*



MÉTIS NATION
BRITISH COLUMBIA



Stories *from the* Soil

*Métis Citizens Growing Food,
Culture, and Community*



*Presented by the Ministry of Environment,
Climate Change, and Food Security*



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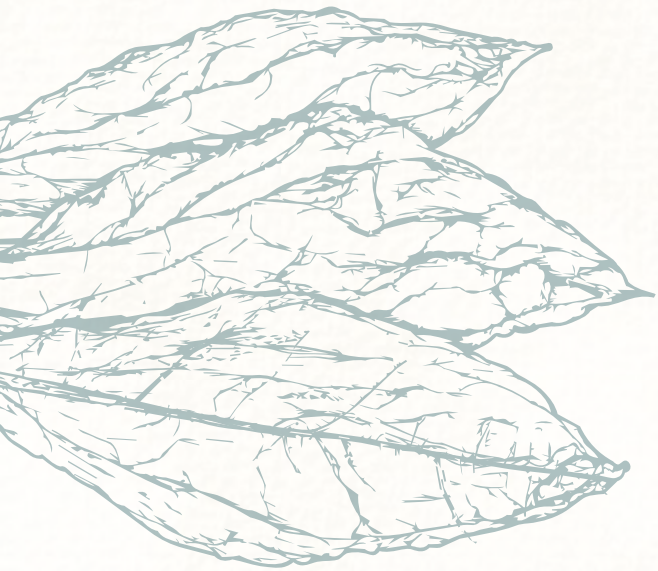
Produced by MNBC's Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, and Food Security

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MAARSII

Maarsii (thank you) to all the contributors for sharing their stories, memories, practices, and reflections. May these stories inspire readers to plant, cook, learn and to build relationships with food and the places that sustain us.

DISCLAIMER

This book shares personal stories, teachings, and experiences connected to land, food, and community. Some stories include references to harvesting, gathering, and foraging of wild foods. Wild food identification and harvesting require knowledge, care, and local understanding. Consuming incorrectly identified plants can result in illness or injury. Readers are encouraged not to harvest or consume any wild food unless they are completely certain. The stories in this book are shared for cultural and educational purposes and are not intended as harvesting, foraging, or food safety instructions.



Introduction



TO PLANT A GARDEN IS TO BELIEVE IN TOMORROW

The Stories from the Soil project is a knowledge-sharing initiative designed to document, preserve, and distribute gardening knowledge, lived experience, and traditional food practices with Métis people across British Columbia.

Across generations, people have harvested, cooked, preserved, and shared food in ways that reflect who they are and where they come from. Through growing and preparing food, knowledge is passed down, relationships are strengthened, and connections to land and community start to grow.

Stories from the Soil brings together Métis voices that explore these connections through personal stories of gardening, traditional foods, family recipes, harvesting experiences, sharing with community, and finding belonging through food. Whether grown in a backyard, on a balcony, in a community plot- growing food invites us to slow down, observe, connect with communities.

Throughout this collection, you will find moments of joy, resilience, patience, and discovery. Some stories describe traditions passed down over generations, while others share new practices that help people reconnect with food and create food security in ways that are meaningful to them.

THEMES CONTRIBUTORS REFLECTED ON

Connection to Land & Food

What does growing, harvesting, or preparing food mean to you and your connection to being Métis?

Your Growing Journey

Can you share how you started growing or working with food? Was there a person, place, teaching, or moment that influenced you?

Food, Culture & Community

How does growing or sharing food support your family, culture, or community?

Changes Over Time

Have you noticed changes in climate, seasons, land, or food availability? How have these changes affected how you grow or access food?

Food Security

As a Métis Citizen, what does being food secure mean to you, your family, or your community?

Looking Forward

What knowledge, teachings, or hopes about food and land would you like to share with future generations?





Meghan Hawkes



Taking on a bigger initiative



“HOPE IS HERE AGAIN.”

I was born in Alberta, and while there are some very cold days there, the land is also very fertile. Many of my earliest memories revolve around our family garden. I remember towering corn stalks, dirty hands, and bare feet walking through the corn patch. Collecting earthworms from the garden was a common game in our backyard. I still remember my dad starting his seedlings on the windowsills, the yard still covered in a thick blanket of white. Those seedling trays held the promise of our summer bounty. I would watch them closely, waiting and hoping for life to sprout. Each morning, I would run to check on them and shout a victory cry when, after days of anticipation, a tiny speck of green finally appeared. In those little seedlings, there was hope that winter was ending and spring was on its way.

Fast forward 35 years, and I am doing the same thing with my kids—but recently, I’ve

taken on a bigger initiative. My children’s school had a very sad-looking garden, neglected for many years after Covid.

One day, my children came home and told me how much they and their friends wanted to garden at school, but they had been told they weren’t allowed. I was shocked—indignant, even—and replied, “What do you mean you’re not allowed in the garden?” They explained that it was locked and that students weren’t permitted to enter. Sometimes, if they really wanted to get in, they would climb through a hole in the fence, careful not to get cut by the rusty metal. I thought this was an absolute travesty. What are we teaching children if they aren’t allowed to use a garden?

I took it upon myself to investigate and discovered that after Covid, the garden had been abandoned. It truly looked like a



forgotten cemetery. The garden beds were falling apart and overgrown with weeds. The wooden boards were rotten, the fence posts were leaning and nearly fallen over, and the little lean-to shed was in a sad state. According to the school administration, teachers didn't have time to tend the garden, and in the past, when it had been maintained, no one was available to care for it over school breaks—so the plants would be scorched by the sun and die.

I began talking to a few other parents and gathered a crew of moms, dads, and caregivers to help get the garden weeded. While we didn't grow much that first summer, we did start a weekly garden club that fall. We created a regular rotation of students who joined us during their lunch hour to weed, plant, and tend the garden. The school community was so excited about the work we were doing that they fundraised to have the garden completely redone. This past September, we were given a fresh start. In November, we planted garlic with the grade 3–5 classes and spring bulbs with the kindergarteners and grade 1/2s. Starting in January, we began planting tomatoes, lettuce, spinach, kale, asparagus, artichokes, peppers, broccoli, and pak choi inside our new heated shed.

Before spring break, each class—from kindergarten to grade 5—planted peas, carrots, lettuce, spinach, radishes, potatoes,

onions, and strawberries in their garden beds. The day we planted those seeds reminded me of my childhood in Alberta. It was very cold—the wind was whipping, and the rain slashed at us on a 45-degree angle. It was one of those cold West Coast days that leaves you chilled to the bone, with nothing able to warm you afterward. Everyone looked at me like I was crazy to plant so early—and on a day like that.

Fast forward to this morning: a sunny, warm spring day in April. I was giving someone a tour of our garden space, showing them all the little seedlings pushing their way up through the soil.

Hope is here again.





Cheryl Lee Fong

Making connections

“MODERN AND TRADITIONAL.”

I move forward by making connections to all people in my community. I combine both modern and traditional growing methods to the best of my ability when I grow and prepare food. Our family enjoys foraging berries together and boiling the bones of any meat we obtain to make nutritious broth. The crops I grow one season will prepare the soil for the next. I aim for sustainability and quality, rather than output. My goal is less waste and learning more ways to prepare and make use of what is locally available. If we move to a different area, it is like starting anew. I must relearn the land, the soil, the local fauna and wildlife. What will grow here? How long is the growing season? I inquire and make connections to those that have lived here longer than I and have greater wisdom of what is historically successful.



After I had kids, a lot of my priorities shifted. With three young ones to feed, I wanted to provide higher quality nutrition to our whole family. I can't remember the exact moment I decided to start growing - it started simply with more home cooked meals and noticing all the added ingredients in many grocery items. I joined a local Facebook group for gardening and started getting ideas that I slowly put into action. I had a shared backyard space that slowly started being taken over by pots and raised beds. I do distinctly recall seeing the MNBC \$200 home garden grant which helped to fund my initial cedar raised garden beds I used to grow my first tomato plants! They were a huge success. From there, we followed a few youtube channels and loved the idea of becoming more sustainable as a family. I didn't just want to grow and work with food - I wanted to rely less on the grocery stores and more on my own ability. I feel like many others, Covid reminded us how fragile our economy can be with one disaster.

As I stated previously, becoming a mother has inspired me to support my family in new ways. Growing food and gardening were a new skill I picked up after cooking more at home. We come from a variety of cultures between my husband and I, but ultimately, we are Canadian and have to adapt to the climate here. Sharing food with family has always been a large part of our culture, and probably one of my main love languages. I will often bake or share something from my garden to those I care about.

I think it has become apparent to many people lately how the climate has been shifting. I find the seasons come later, or not at all as they should. We had an





extremely warm winter (I don't think it even hit freezing more than a few consecutive days), which has now upset much of the ecosystem. With no freezing temperatures, bugs and pests have not died off as they should and have caused many issues. My cats got fleas in January, which was a huge shock this year. New invasive insects from overseas can now survive and ruin many local



gardens and crops. Depending on where you live, this has caused either drought in summer or flooding during the spring. It's so hard to predict what crops will grow well every season, especially when you're trying to feed your community. Even the Northern Lights seem more erratic than ever, being seen as far south as the USA year-round.

Not just as a Métis and First Nations family, but as Canadians, we want assurance that our crops and farms will do well enough to feed their local community. For those that homestead and garden individually, we rely on the knowledge and history of what crops and methods worked previously. The continuity of our four seasons and climates help us decide what to grow and when to start seeding. With the introduction of global trade and cheap labour, it's harder for



local farmers and those that sell at markets to compete for sales. The more we rely on foreign imports, the less security I feel we have in our own community if any of those trade lines are broken. It's important for Canadians and Indigenous people to pass down and retain knowledge of local farming practices so we don't lose our own ability to provide for ourselves.

I look forward to teaching my children what I have learned so they can further their own journey of self sufficiency. We are the foundation of the future and must give as much opportunity to the next generation as we can. With a quickly changing economy and climate, many things remain uncertain. I want to prepare my own family as much as possible to be able to provide for themselves and be able to work and live off the land as

much as possible. I know I am not alone in this dream, as many other young families are returning to the land and traditional ways of living. Modern technology has provided many conveniences but has also made us complacent and ignorant in the ways of how we used to provide for ourselves.

We've had many foraging/gardening adventures through the years. The potato seeds were volunteer plants that sprouted from local potato skins I had tried to compost in my raised garden beds! The berries were locally foraged.

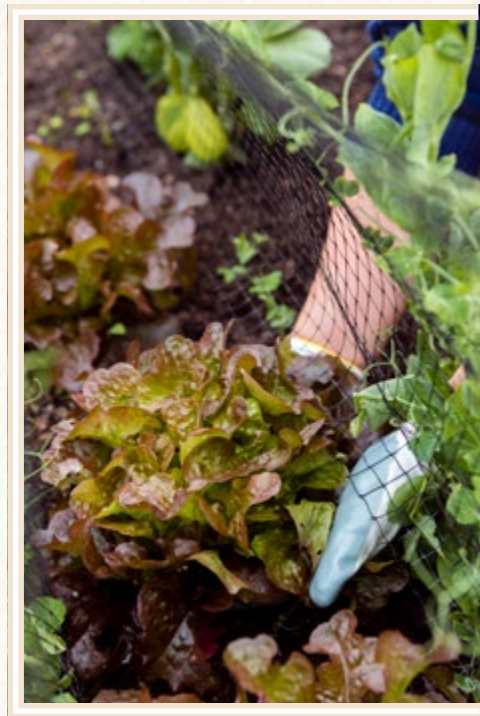




Cloyd Bjorklund



Appreciating food



“KEEP IT SIMPLE AND ORGANIZED.”

Growing food has helped me feel more connected to the land in a real, everyday way. It slows things down for me. It gets me outside and paying attention to weather, soil, and how things grow. It makes me appreciate food more and not take it for granted.

I didn't grow up gardening. I started because I wanted something simple and good for my mental health. The first time I tried growing, I didn't really plan things out. I put too much into a small space and didn't think about how big things would get. Some plants struggled and others took over. It taught me pretty quickly that spacing and planning matter more than you think.

Now I keep it simple and more organized. I use raised planters because they are

easier to manage. I can move them if needed and adjust to the weather. Living in Kamloops, that helps a lot. I also use a digital calendar to remind me to water and check on things. That keeps it low stress and easy to stick with.

I don't grow a lot of food, but even a small amount changes how I see it. I waste less and appreciate it more. I like sharing what I learn with others. Even just talking about what works or doesn't helps build connection. For me wasting less just came from paying more attention to how I harvest and use stuff. I used to pick way too much at once, then it would sit in the fridge and go bad. Now I just take what I need and leave the rest growing. also started using a dehydrator and a vacuum sealer, which helps a lot. If I have extra herbs or anything starting to turn, I dry



it or seal it instead of losing it. Even doing that changed how I look at what I grow.

I also keep it simple now and grow more of what I actually eat. Before, I grew stuff just because it was easy, but if I'm not using it, it's kind of pointless. Nothing fancy, just small changes, but it adds up and I appreciate it more now.

The weather feels less predictable now. Hot stretches, quick changes, and less consistency. That's why I like raised planters. I can move things around and adjust instead of being stuck with one setup.

To me, food security means knowing I can grow something for myself if I need to. It's not about growing everything. It's about having some control and understanding how food works.



I'd say keep it simple. Start small and build from there. You don't need a big garden or a lot of experience. Just start and stay consistent. It gets easier over time. One thing that helps me is treating gardening like a routine, not a big project. That way it stays enjoyable and something I can keep doing.

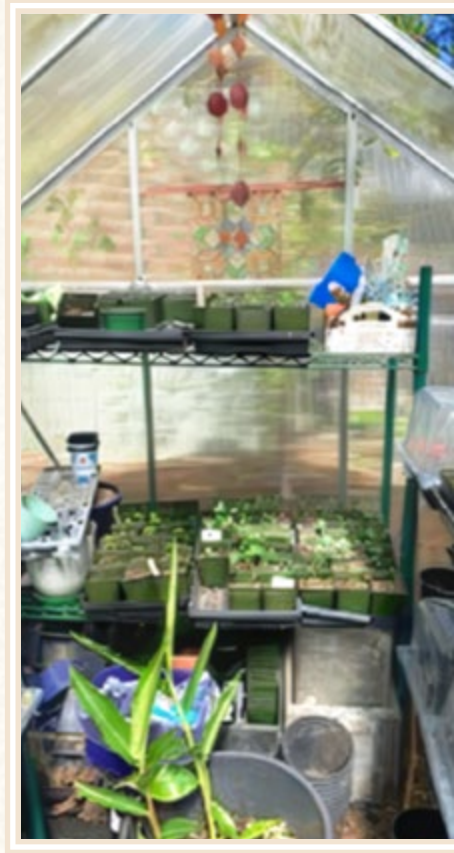




Michelle Martinson



Respect for Mother Earth



“GARDENING IS THERAPEUTIC.”

Gardening is my favourite activity! As a teen, I spent time working at a local greenhouse starting/transplanting seedlings and worked a season planting trees as a young adult. Gardening connects me to an earlier time when this was primarily how we got food. It is also very therapeutic.

Growing up, my dad hunted (deer, moose, ducks, rabbits, grouse, geese) and fished to provide us with meat. He also trapped for furs. We participated in fishing together in the summer and winter. I didn't like to hunt or trap but was taught about the rules, how to do it and about firearms. When I was around 9, I remember I went out with mom

and dad on a drive (we lived in a town of around 100 people, very rural and wild) and they stopped to harvest a rabbit. I am an animal lover and would not allow my dad to kill the rabbit. Needless to say, that was my last hunting outing with them.

My stepmom would have an extensive garden every year where she often started her own seedlings and I would help her plant them. Whatever they didn't grow or harvest, they would purchase from local farms and preserve. I remember spending two days shucking corn to be frozen and remember being upset because I wanted to go play. Other times remember sneaking



peas from mom's garden or watching dad skin and tan the animals he harvested for fur. It also was not unusual to see a deer or moose skinned and dressed hanging in the basement. We also harvested Saskatoon berries, strawberries, choke cherries, strawberries and blueberries in season. It was a very wholesome life.

As kids, we came along to help with harvesting tasks. As an adult with my own family, we discuss harvesting tasks and split them up between us. I often do the planting with the help of my grand girls and sometimes my son and my daughter do a lot of the picking of food and freeze dry it. I can some of the harvested food and freeze it. My son in law creates delicious meals from the harvested food and my husband does prep of the new garden sites and building of garden beds. I share my harvest with my friends and family. We are all involved in the various tasks involved in this. It brings us community and closeness

The weather is definitely changing so I am attempting to use drought resistant plants in my garden and landscaping. Utilizing several areas of the yard to grow in and also planting in container gardens.

Having the ability to grow or produce your own food creates a sense of safety knowing I can produce and store what we need to eat. I also know how it's been grown and what seeds are being planted.

I would really like to have people understand the importance and connectiveness of everything and everyone on this planet. That we must respect Mother Earth and be mindful of how we forage, hunt, fish, and harvest.





Nikki Wood



Getting busy planting

“GROWING MY OWN FROM SEEDS.”

My name is Nikki Wood, I live in a small community just outside of Kamloops (T̓k̓emlúps te Secwépemc). I have been gardening since I was a child, helping my mom plant and harvest was always something I enjoyed.

Once I moved into a place with garden beds of my own, I got busy planting. When I plant, harvest and cook with the produce I have worked hard to grow, it makes me feel connected to my Métis heritage, knowing that many years ago my ancestors were doing the same thing as me - planting, harvesting, and providing for their families. It makes me proud of my heritage and motivated to pass this knowledge down to my daughter for her to eventually pass down to her children.



I have a 4-year-old daughter and I run a daycare in my home with 6 other children around the same age as her. They are all very involved in our gardens and fruit trees. In the late summer months, they enjoy helping harvest our produce, especially picking apricots from our massive 50+ year old apricot tree. The tree produces



more than we could ever use, so the children help bag them up and we set them up on a stand in the front yard for neighbors to take for free. This has been a huge hit in the neighborhood. It connects me to the community, and I love hearing neighbors tell me about the apricot jams, and jelly's they have made and can enjoy through the winter.

Over the past few years, I have noticed the cost of food going up significantly, so being able to grow my own from seeds that have been provided by the MNBC Gardening grant, or from family/friends has helped me cut down a bit on our grocery bill for part of the year. I enjoy being able to share any extras with others to help them out as well.

Going forward I hope to continue to grow for my family, friends, and neighbors. I would love to learn more about preserving and saving seeds from the produce I have grown to use for the next season.



Apricot Jam Recipe:

8 cups pitted apricots

¼ cup lemon juice

6 cups sugar

Sterilize jars by boiling them for 10 minutes.

Combine all ingredients in large pot.

Boil on medium-high until sugar dissolves.

Continue to boil and stir occasionally for 30 minutes.

Remove from heat, fill jars ¾ full.

Wipe rims clean and put lids on.

Finish by boiling in water canner for 10 minutes.



Michelle Precourt



Being as resourceful as possible



“TODAY I HAVE A CHOICE.”

This year I started seeds indoors, specifically tomatoes, cucumbers, tomatillos, bunching onions and kale. It requires patience and presence, a quiet commitment to watering morning and night, to watching, waiting, and trusting the process. I find that there is something deeply grounding about cultivating food from something so small, so fragile. In a way, I also feel it connects me to my ancestors. I am Red River Métis on my Mothers’s side from San Clara, MB and French settler on my father’s side. I think about the luxury we have today of a nearby grocery store or the convenience of modern infrastructure - this was not their experience. I am grateful for the convenience I have inherited, and more grateful still to remember where food really comes from.

I recall my grandfather growing vegetables that I had no appreciation for as a young child, like green onions and radishes. Today I love both! I’ve been gardening for a few years, mostly buying plants. This year I’ve tried to be as resourceful as possible: compostable coffee cups, sponges underneath for moisture, a heat mat, a grow light. My cucumber seedlings are especially thriving in that setup.

I think back to my ancestors who relied solely on the food they sourced through gardening or hunting. Today I have choice. I’ve chosen to grow vegetables, knowing that if my crop doesn’t withstand weather like high winds, I can simply go to the grocery store. Last year we had a bumper crop of plums. Not only did all of our friends and



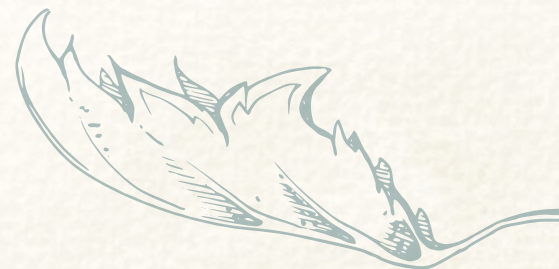
neighbours enjoy them but we also donated a large box full to our local shelter.

I am grateful to live on the unceded, ancestral territory of the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw, also known as Squamish, BC, which loosely translates to Mother of the Wind. These winds remind me of my time living in the Prairies - the sounds of leaves rustling in the wind brings me back to my childhood. It is an added bonus when I am gardening that I not only have my hands in the soil, but I can tune into the wind around me. It does mean I've had to be intentional about training my seedlings with a fan indoors, so they're prepared for our windy environment before they go outside. It's a small but concrete example of how the specific conditions of a place shape how you grow. This year, I've noticed that our Spring weather is slower to start. I am not sure if this is climate change, but it does mean that I need to be

patient and wait for the soil conditions to warm. I'm aiming to begin direct-sowing by mid-to end of April: bush beans, pole peas, potatoes, carrots, radishes. I also have a perennial bed with chives, oregano, thyme and lavender that will welcome the bunching onions as new companions.

I remember my grandmother told me a story of an unexpected guest who showed up just before dinner. She did not have enough food, so she forfeited eating and gave her portion of the meal to them. She told me this story to demonstrate how to be of service to others but looking back, I recognize this was a form of food insecurity. Growing even a portion of my own food feels like a form of resilience not knowing for certain if these plants will survive. I also recognize that my resilience is a quality that has been passed on from my ancestors which I am eternally grateful for.

Food brings us together and builds community. I also believe it runs deeper than that as food is relationship with the land, with our ancestors, with the seasons and with the other beings we share space with. From time to time, we have bears and raccoons roam around our backyard and garden and to be fair, they were here first!



Caren Nagao

Eating healthfully



“CONNECTION TO THE LAND.”

I grew up in two food eras; I started on a homestead with hunters and gatherers and lived mostly rurally until I was about 10. In northern BC, we had a huge garden which was in rotation with a pig field. I remember filling sausage casings, harvesting endless rows of potatoes, swiping peas off the vine until my belly hurt, and gathering high bush cranberries for “stinky feet jam”. After this time, my parents managed restaurants serving mostly traditional western fare. We had homemade burgers but no wild meat. Lots of veggies but none homegrown. We usually ate whatever the chef special was, homemade soups were a favourite.

Eating healthfully has always been important to my parents, and they passed that on, although not under the heading of Métis culture. We were one of the many invisible Métis in BC. My maternal grandfather was Métis but the family hid it due to discrimination in northern Alberta. His crepes were the best! Our cultural food connection related more to my maternal grandmother’s Austrian ancestry where homemade sauerkraut ruled and to our close

doukhobor friends who taught us an amazing borscht recipe. Eating healthy was just what we did as a family that had once farmed. It wasn’t until I was raising my own family that I connected our sustenance to our Métis ancestry. It has been a wonderful journey of learning.



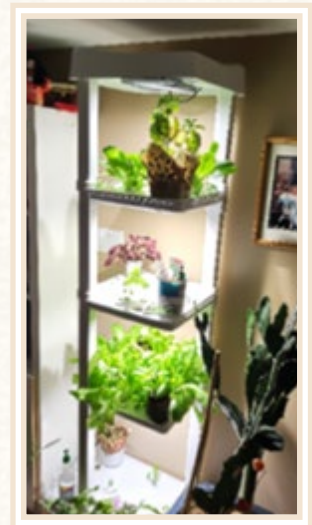
My grandparents always had a garden, and my uncles and their families always hunted and gathered from the land. Fishing was very important. Once I became a parent, I was blessed with the feeling of responsibility for reclaiming culture and connection to the land. I began by having an annual planting session with my grandmother on Easter weekends. After helping my aging mother-in-law with her garden, my mom helped me to set up and plant my backyard garden for food. My husband and family continued this for several years, expanding each year and encouraging our children to plant their own little plots. Then my grandmother died and I lost heart. I went two years with only minimal planting. Finally, one year a local elderly couple came and supported me in planting again. We planted new vegetables that I hadn't planted before, and they planted a newfound heart for gardening! I even planted tobacco, sweetgrass and sage and continue to do so. Several years later, myself and two of my children each received funding for food security through gardening from MNBC! We pooled our grant money and now have a winter hydroponic garden so we can eat fresh greens from home all year long! These opportunities taught me so much and allowed us to establish a sustainable seasonal round in our lives.

We have four generations of family in my little community. The food we grow now between my mother-in-law's yard, one of my children's yards, my own, and the shared hydroponic tower provide enough potatoes for the whole family all year. The priceless family time we spend tilling, planting, weeding and harvesting lightens the load as well as brings us closer together. Until I



retired from teaching grades K-2, I also brought my students to help out at my mother-in-law's garden. We chose, purchased and planted seeds together, one time even wheat, which we grew and made into pancakes

the following school year. We have also shared fresh produce and soups and such with neighbours, friends and our Métis community. Although it is not food related, but rather cultural, we use the harvested medicinal plants to gift for guests and





knowledge keepers within our community, and in protocol when harvesting. I have also been making and gifting salves from various harvested medicinal plants, including bum and nipple cream for my daughter and baby granddaughter.

With so much more traffic in the back country, I have noticed some areas where certain plants grew that they do not anymore, e.g. arnica. Although I am unsure as to why, I have also noticed areas where there are way more invasive species, although some of these are useful medicines like comfrey. With development such as new housing, high bush cranberry harvesting areas are decimated.

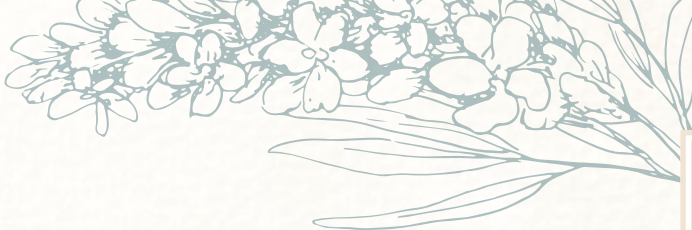
In order to be sustainable everyone needs to be provided with frequent opportunities to grow in their understanding of healthy eating, what, how and where to grow and how to harvest and process for eating later. To me food security also requires that



community members know each other and help each other.

Sharing food is love given in the form of life-giving sustenance. Try to eat to live, not live to eat. Only harvest what is sustainable for the plant relative; usually 10% but that can sometimes mean 10% of the branch or the plant, not just 10% of the whole colony. Remember that you are not separate from nature but truly a part of it and each of us must remember kaa-wiichihitoyaahk; we take care of each other. Only take what you need and use everything you take. Lay tobacco and carry water to offer the plants you harvest. Share because these gifts were offered to all of us. Each is worthy.





Val Robinson



Discovering my ancestors

“LEARNING TO GROW MY OWN FOOD.”

My connection to being Métis has been slowly expanding as I discover more about my ancestors and where I came from. Caring for nature and plants feels intuitive to me as an individual and I have always loved to grow things and watch bugs and nature up close. Growing food and putting my hands in the ground in preparation for planting a seed is such a satisfying part of the process of learning about myself and my connection to the land. I love harvest time! It is the time I get to really decide what to do with what I have grown and it is very rewarding. Whether it be freezing, canning, drying or making something fresh to eat, ultimately growing my own food allows me to put meals on the table for my family as well as provide supplies for my homemade teas, healing remedies and art making. This past year I have learned about making art ink from plants, typically called dye plants, and have worked out a plan to incorporate new varieties into my garden. You can make ink from almost any organic material and so far, I have made ink from onion skins, coreopsis flowers, rudbeckia flowers and rose hips.

There is not a defining moment for me that influenced me to grow food and plants. I wasn't necessarily taught directly I mostly learned from observing others. The first food I grew many years ago was herbs and lettuces in a small terracotta pot on my balcony. That little pot got me hooked and over the years since then I have experimented and expanded and that is how I learned to grow my own food. Not everything I grow is successful but sometimes we have to let something die in order to learn from it. I have always had a love and curiosity about the environment and things that grow. Growing up I observed my father and grandfather put their hands in the soil. This piqued my interest specifically in herbs, healing and native plants and I ended up studying Herbology under local herbalist Betty Norton and her Apprenticeship Program. Mental health and my connections to herbs and healing is very important to me and a play a very big role in my everyday life. The therapeutic benefit to me of getting





off the internet and heading into my garden where I can put my hands in the soil and listen to the birds helps bring me closer to nature and lowers anxiety in times of stress. It also helps elevate my spirits by bringing a tangible and natural element such as soil or plants into that moment. The healing that we can get from plants is not just ingested as food but absorbed by the spirit by being outdoors and in nature.

Along with dye plants, a new joy of mine is growing food to share with my friends, family and community, and I have created extra plants in the spring to share and give away to others to grow. I enjoy growing food to make preserves by way of canning, drying or freezing which holds on to that little bit of summer and brings joy in the winter months. I love the smile that comes back to me when I hand over a jar of homemade jam or pickles but also the satisfaction of being able to provide homegrown healthy meals, snacks and teas to my household and family. This summer I am growing an abundance of hot peppers so I can share my homemade hot sauce with others, and I am sure that the inks that I will create will be used to create birthday or greeting cards for my loved ones. Helping others to grow food is important and



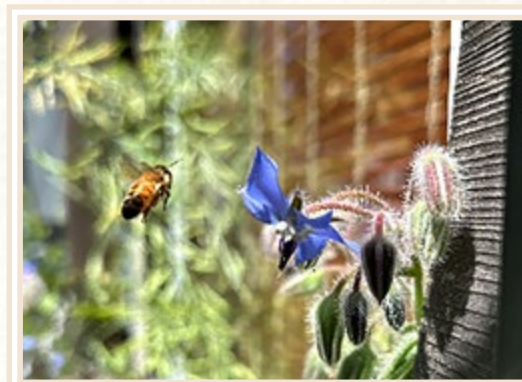
I have started saving seeds for seed swaps which encourages more growing amongst my family, friends and community.

Its not just a necessity but a blessing to be able to provide homegrown food for ourselves and to others and with food chain uncertainty it is important to me that I do my part to make sure that I can provide and give as many options as I can to help my community. Sharing my homegrown food and plants and showing people how to grow them is a valuable experience. I learn a lot from this and appreciate that it keeps us all connected. In my neighbourhood I put free plants in front of my house in the spring and summer. This year I have started a new cut flower bed so I will be adding cut flowers to my shared offerings. At our last Métis potluck, we did a plant and seed share where I shared my knowledge as well as seeds and plant offerings. With the unpredictability of food availability, I am motivated to expand my food garden this year and have added raised beds to my garden which will give me a wider variety of foods and herbs along with



dye plants for my art. I love that I can mix up my own homegrown herbal blends for tea and I am working on expanding the variety that I grow in my garden. If I can purchase even just one less package of commercial tea that becomes a huge success for me and my family and is very rewarding.

I would like to share that you can grow a plant no matter where you are. If you have never grown a plant before, start with a jar of sprouts on your window ledge or that pot of lettuce and herbs on your balcony. Parsley, chives, and mint are ones that I find are easy to start and take care of. Try planting a seed in the ground and watch it grow. See what happens to it and, if it dies, learn from it and shift what you do. Keep the knowledge alive and bring tangibility into your life by turning to books and people for knowledge about plants and gardening and share what you learn with people in your life. You don't



need a degree to teach others what you have learned about life which is a good reminder to myself to keep learning more about plants so I can continue to be a helper.

I am very grateful to my gardener friends that I have made over the years. Their knowledge and generosity of their time have helped me grow as a person and as a gardener.

Fresh Jalapeño Hot Sauce Recipe

WITH PRODUCE FROM MY GARDEN

***2-3 cups Jalapeños -
sliced and stems discarded***

***4 Cloves Garlic - peeled and
chopped***

***1 Onion - peeled and
chopped***

***1/2 Lemon - juiced and
zested***

2 cups water

1 cup apple cider vinegar

1 tbsp cane sugar

2 tsp sea salt

Zest and juice the lemon and then add to a medium pot (including the half lemon that you juiced)

Slice jalapeños into 1" chunks. (Keeping the seeds in is optional depending on your spice level preference).

Add the remaining ingredients to the pot then bring to low boil. Turn down to simmer for 20 minutes or so until everything is soft.

Remove the half lemon and add the rest of the mixture to a large blender. Blend well until smooth.

Using cheese cloth, strain out seeds. Pour into sterilized jars and refrigerate for up to one month.





Kathleen Wright

Growing garlic

“A STUDENT OF NATURE.”

When I was growing up my mom tended to a garden to raise organic produce and fruits not only because they were better for us in nutrition, but also to make ends meet in the household budget in a family of 5. Every year my dad would laugh at the request for Mother’s Day- a load of manure.



50 years ago, I learned pretty quick how to differentiate between a weed and a vegetable, making me a student of nature. To be honest, I didn’t love it back then, probably because it was a chore, I didn’t understand the true value of it all. Now as I am in my late 50’s, I’ve recently retired and spend most of my time in the garden, either planning, planting, harvesting, but most of all just reveling of the true power of having a garden. When you nourish your body with organic goodness, it can support overall well-being and help you feel your best in daily life. I find the soil in my hands is grounding for me, and I believe it is its own anti-depressant, as it is my safe space to think about my path in life, the way the world is turning, and how I wish to remain true to my Métis status by being a genuinely kind person who thinks of not only herself, but also others.

Many successes and failures have taken place in my garden, but I pride myself in



my growing of garlic the most. I also have started to keep a logbook from year to year to learn how to improve my skills for the growing season. For the last few years, I have also started to harvest, save and use my own Tomatoes, Celery, Peas, Kale and Squash seeds - making them a Heritage blend. Believe it or not I have the original peas my mom gave me from her garden so many years ago- true Heritage seeds. It has taken me years to learn that when you look at a garden growing, you are only looking at a small portion of it- the strength of the plants are in the roots as they grow first, and they nourish the plant to be strong and healthy. I'm learning about the Métis culture and can equate it with all the support this community provides- it is the root system for me to grow with the community and have a sense of belonging and I am very thankful for this. I hope to continue to farm/garden and provide the best produce I can grow for many years to come as I gift and sell my offerings regularly in my home Community group. My offerings come with a tour of my garden if people are interested

and mentoring people as they start their journey of providing organic goodness to their families. If I could name a secret to growing a bountiful garden it would be organic seeds, patience, and time spent with your hands in the dirt - gathering your thoughts and grounding your spirit.





Dean Wilson



Studying plant medicine

“I HAD NEVER GARDENED IN MY LIFE.”

Gardening has been key to my continued and deepening connection to aski (land). I am aware that all of my ancestors down to my grandparents and father, and now myself represent an unbroken line of growing and harvesting food. Hunting, farming, gardening, and gathering were all part of daily life in the past. While my life is substantially different than theirs, I have always enjoyed harvesting wild food and medicines. My garden provides a regular opportunity to work with the soil, nurture plants, harvest respectfully, and to feed my loved ones and friends.

I had never gardened in my life. My grandparents farmed and their parents and other ancestors before them did as well, primarily in Saskatchewan and

Manitoba. So, I had stories of farming and also stories of the use of traditional plant medicines that I was aware of. I have studied plant medicine and worked with Elders and regularly harvested them as well.

During Covid as a health care leader, I was working from home 14-16 hour days; and my “temporary” office in the dining room was slowly taking over more and more of the living space. I needed to create some separation from our living space/home and work. I knew the value of nature from my experiences harvesting plants in forest. I saw the gardening supports that MNBC



had through their home garden program. In addition, North Island Métis Association was providing food and other support packages to members, and they had a package that included a seedling warming mat and grow light, some hand tools and seeds. I was interested immediately.

I worked with my adult son, Ben, to build our first raised beds. We built two in the front of the house and two in the back yard – not all that aware of how much the sun difference would be. Each year since I have added one or two raised beds. In fact, I am slowly removing my front lawn and adding one or two raised beds each year. I presently have 4 in my back yard, 5 in my front yard, and a plastic covered greenhouse. I also use about 12 five gallon buckets each year to grow potatoes as well.

I have learned a lot, made mistakes, but am very happy. I was determined to grow food and address food security for my immediate and extended family. I learned about principles like companion planting, flowers for pollination, maintaining soil, composting, and more.

Just getting out in the garden, touching soil, and seeing the growth of plants has decreased stress, improved happiness and well-being for me. My life has improved mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually from this experience. I hope to continue to deepen my knowledge and continue for the rest of my life.





Growing food makes me feel connected to the past. While I may not be doing larger scale farming, I am aware that many of our families had smaller gardens to feed a variety of food to their families. My Elder relatives still do this. I feel that I am part of an unbroken chain now. My adult daughter has moved away and has her own property and is now beginning her garden as well. We are all connected to the land and to our heritage.

Obviously, there is great satisfaction in eating the foods we grow, knowing the value and taste of them is superior to what we find in grocery stores; however, the greatest joy is in sharing these foods with others. We gift our home-grown foods to friends, family, and neighbours. We regularly host large family gatherings and it so good to know that almost everything on the table



has been home grown. The sharing of food is integral to Indigenous cultures. We also grow yarrow, and stinging nettles for their use as traditional medicines, as well as harvest others in the wild. We share these as well.

While I am aware of the impacts of climate change, my journey in gardening has been short and I don't have much direct experience. I do see that many plants and berries are flowering and fruiting earlier than in the past.

Knowing that we have access to home grown food that is nutritious and tasty supports our well being in all aspects of our lives. We take pride in sharing with our children,

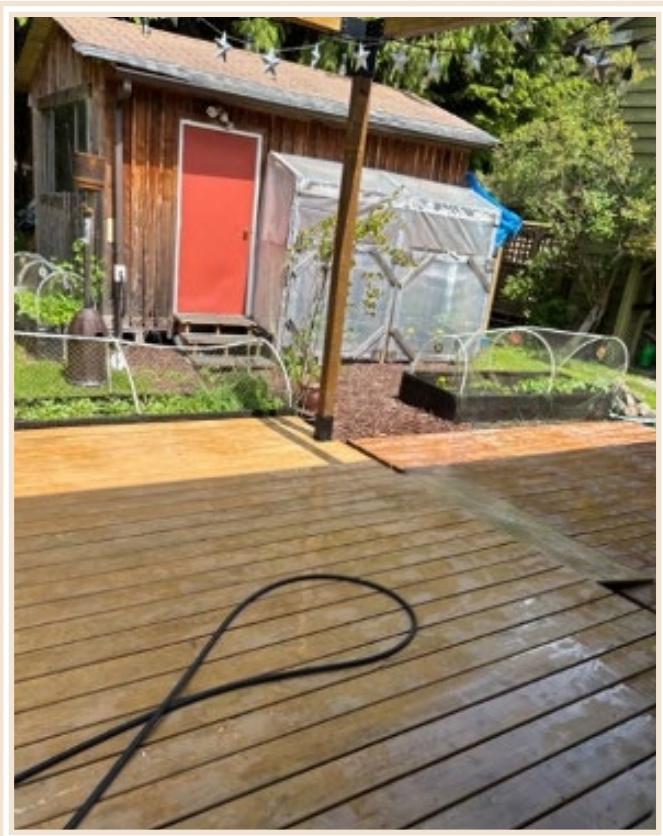


grandchildren, and other family and friends. We feast together knowing our table is almost all covered with food we grew and prepared with love. This allows us to do what our ancestors did and share what we have. This creates tighter bonds for us all.

The future is unknown for all of us, but we can all take steps to ensure food security and food sovereignty through growing our own food and medicines. This can be deep and healing work as we work to ensure our connections to the land, community, and culture as well. It will also improve not only our physical health, but our mental and emotional well-being.

Anyone can garden- start small, even if you live in an apartment, you can see what you can grow in a container on a balcony.

My garden presently has 4 raised beds in my back yard, 5 raised beds in my front yard, and a plastic covered greenhouse, and 2 berry patches- I have transplanted blueberry bushes and raspberry canes. I also use about 12 five gallon buckets each year to grow potatoes as well. I grow potatoes, onions, carrots, beets, peas, tomatoes, lettuce, squash, blueberries raspberries, and a variety of herbs, also medicinal plants like yarrow, stinging nettle.



Carol Fraser



Rich black gardening soil

“TEACHINGS FROM MY FATHER.”

Growing, harvesting and preparing food is a holistic, land-based practice that deeply connects me to my spiritual, physical, emotional and cognitive relationship with all my relatives. Food connects us to Creator and are not just activities related to environmental stewardship. They are not



just about survival, being responsible or having a reciprocal relationship with the land, water and animals. What they are is a testament to cultivation of spiritual and cultural practices that date back to our original Indigenous families. From growing, harvesting and preparing (preserving) food we learn about the cycles, seasons, hunting, trapping and fishing. We learn about the ‘cosmetology of knowing’, ways to respectfully harvest medicinal plants, traditional foods such as wild rice, onions and turnips for sustainability. We understand respect for the foods we harvest as being part of our kinship ties. The reciprocal nature of giving and taking plays a key role in how, where, when and what we gather or hunt.

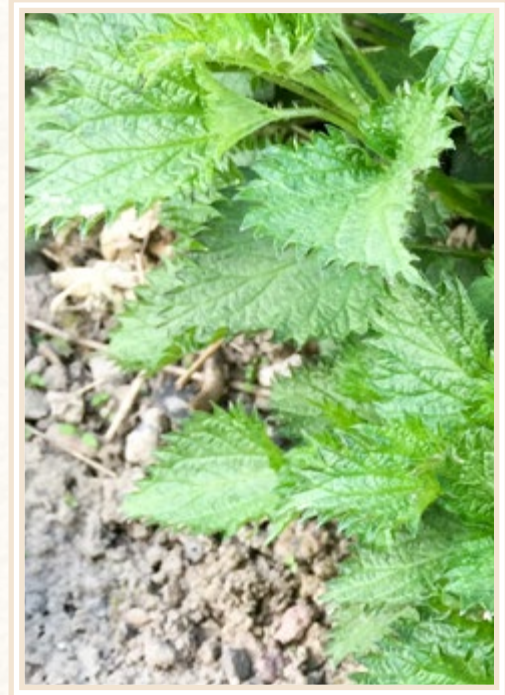
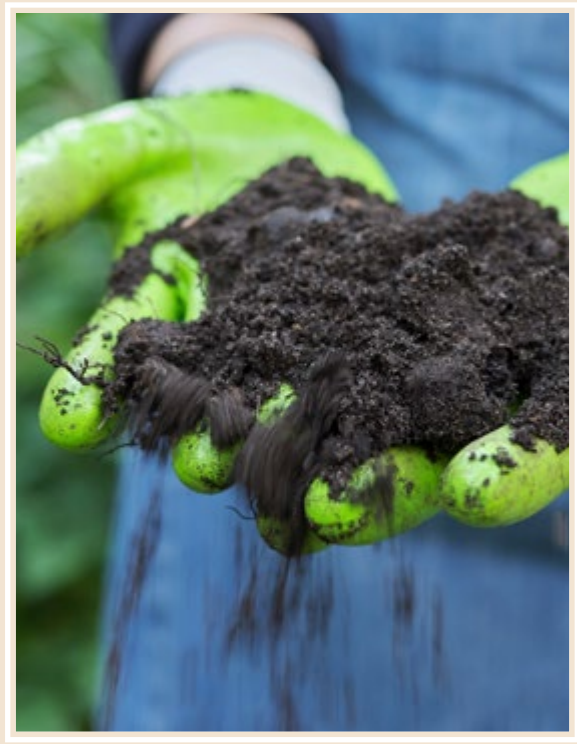
My personal gardening journey began on our family homestead in Alberta



where my father demonstrated how to prepare the soil, seed, weed and nurture domesticated plants throughout the entire growing season. In the fall he showed me how to harvest a crop of wheat, barley, mustard seed, and flax. He also showed me how and when to gather the harvest and preserve it, so we ate well all year round. In the wild, my father showed me where to pick berries, harvest, wild grasses, rice, roots, and medicinal plants and demonstrated how to make offerings to the spirits of the plants, cultivate a relationship, and to show respect. Gratitude was part of his teachings, to never take anything for granted. Hard work, listening, nurturing and protecting the yield and sharing was foremost in my gardening experiences. Father showed me how to dry and smoke meat. He built a root cellar in our basement to put preserves and bury root vegetables in sand. Dad taught me to preserve our culture by eating a balanced diet of commercial and wild foods, to allow my body to heal itself, and to foster community resilience by offering food to those who visited or were in need.

Today, I continue to depend on the teachings of my father. I try to grow, forage and, share much of my own food and medicinal salves. I continue to honour my cultural values by sharing with my community to ensure holistic health and well-being.

I started gardening, growing, harvesting and preparing food in the early 1950's. The climate, land quality, and availability of wild foods have gone through some drastic and disturbing changes. For instance, the soil on our family farm was good organic black dirt that anything could grow in. Today, government insistence on chemical spraying





has left our food almost tasteless, with poor nutritional value, or ability to last. The seeds we buy are no longer sustainable due to genetic modification. Climate disruption has affected seasonal changes and patterns. Trees begin to bud and plants are not sure if it's the right time to flourish. Too much sun and rain have destroyed crops. Insects become confused and the birds are unsure of their next meal. In retaliation, I find ways to adapt to all the changes. I try to locate or trade for sustainable seed sources and go further afield for medicinal plants. Wild meat sources have become so scarce it's rare to enjoy a good source of protein. As a result, the balanced diet my father taught me to grow and harvest, prepare and preserve has become almost impossible. Inflammation is rampant along with new flu variants. Sadly, the future does not in many ways mirror the past.

Many years ago, as a Métis Citizen, I felt secure in having healthy and abundant food sources, but this is no longer the case. When my father and I grew, harvested and preserved our own food we were assured of Food Security because it meant we could meet all our holistic health needs. We could share with our family and community to ensure they, too, never went without a good meal. Without this security our Nation cannot be sure they will experience the same sense of well-being I experienced 70 years ago.

My Father taught me the value and love of hard work, reciprocation (offerings), organics of natural foods (wild and domesticated), preparation and preservation. His hopes were that these teachings would last me and my children a lifetime of good health. My hopes were the same but unfortunately



“Spring Family Soup Pot” Recipe

Broth from bones

Wild onions, turnips, rice and garlic

Stinging Nettle shoots (2-3 weeks old)

Mushrooms (after spring rains)

Purslane for tangy taste, chickweed, clover

Wild asparagus, cattail shoots and roots, spinach

Boil bones to extract nutrition from marrow

Remove bones

Forage, clean, chop and combine all ingredients and cook on low heat all day.

the world of food security has become very challenging. More and more I depend on my wild relatives, plants of the forest to supplement my diet and to provide me with remedies for some of the ailments that come from having little choice but to eat foods that are forced to grow. It affects the health of my family who are plagued with things like diabetes, overweight and heart disease. My community suffer from the same debilitating circumstances. In a world where having a balanced lifestyle is nothing but a dream, I'm learning to accept the nightmare. I don't believe in hope since it just seems to set me up for disappointment. I cannot in all honesty ever see the world returning to the once clean rich black soil, normal seasonal changes and abundant crops. I try to guide my children and community to seek out sustainable seeds, educate them about the dangers of chemical sprays, discuss with them about wild produce and meat and the use of medicinal plants for salves, tinctures and

teas. Finally, I encourage them to seek ways to recover or locations that resemble my childhood experiences. Ideally, for family and community to find unadulterated land where they can learn and use the teachings given to me by my father.



Dena McDonald



Small spaces

“ACCESS TO FRESH PRODUCE.”

Our people had a strong respect and connection to the land. Growing and preparing food makes me feel a connection to those who came before me.

I grew up on a cattle farm. My grandad and mom taught me the importance of respecting our food and the animals who provide it.

We live in a townhouse, and our garden space is limited. Because of this we developed an herb garden and pots with berries. We have also allowed the wild blackberry bushes which line our fence to hang over so we have fresh berries! I have done this by pruning them appropriately. I would love to share that even with limited space, you can work with mother nature to grow and harvest your own produce!

Preparing healthy meals for my son has helped me adjust to him getting older. As



we wean out breastfeeding, it still makes me feel as though I can supply him with healthy food.

Our economy on Vancouver Island is hard. With real estate being so expensive, many do not have the available space to grow. This is now highlighted by grocery prices being so high. For many of us, space to grown food has become a luxury and not a right.

Not living paycheck to paycheck worried about budgeting for food. It has become so expensive that many of us are not able to confidently feed a family nutritious food.

Respect for food. It is important that we take only what we need and respect what we do take. Many don't understand when they eat a steak, the raising, butchering and other processes involved.

Food security is a large conversation. It begins with our people having access to land. As 'the forgotten people' we don't have the same benefits or access that others do. As the coordinator for Vancouver Native Friendship Centre's garden, I saw how having a space to learn and access fresh produce benefited many in our community. Although I have a garden, it is incredibly small. Access to the home garden grant has allowed me to obtain seeds which can be planted in pots, or small spaces. I also accessed the one-time grocery grant, and it was amazing. We used it to pay for a bulk order of meat to stock our deep freeze. Without the grant it would have remained empty.



Braeden Timms



Smart gardens & hydroponics



“NON-TRADITIONAL GARDENING.”

Growing my own food has become an important way for me to connect to my identity. While my experience may not look like a traditional garden, I see it as an extension of that relationship - finding ways to feed myself and my family, even in a small indoor space. Growing food reminds me that connection is not only about physical space, but also about intention, care, and respect for what sustains us. It has also



helped me become more mindful of where my food comes from and the effort it takes to grow.

I started this journey because I wanted to grow my own fresh food without having access to a yard or outdoor garden space. I began experimenting with hydroponics (growing plants in water without soil) and smart gardens.

Seeing seeds turn into plants has been really rewarding. With these systems, I've been able to grow lettuce, spinach, kale, swiss chard, cherry tomatoes and herbs like basil, mint, dill, parsley, and cilantro. The hydroponic tower uses only water, so nutrients need to be added and cycled through. The smart gardens use soil pods, so the plants get fertilizer that way. Even within a small indoor space, it's been interesting to see how much I can grow and use in everyday meals.



Being able to use something I've grown in a meal and sharing that with others brings a sense of pride for me. I see this as a way of contributing to community food knowledge in a modern context. It makes growing feel accessible and shows that even small efforts can have an impact. I think these methods can be especially helpful for people who live in smaller spaces, don't have access to land, or live in regions with shorter growing seasons (these systems can grow food year-round!). Even in places with longer growing seasons, there can be challenges with weather patterns, temperatures, and consistent climate. These systems provide a way to adapt by creating stable and controlled environments.

To me, food security means having reliable access to nutritious food. On a personal level, growing a portion of my own food helps create a sense of independence. Food security is also tied to knowledge-sharing and ensuring that people have the tools and skills to access and grow food in ways that work for their environment. My approach may be non-traditional, but it reflects the same goal of finding sustainable ways to support ourselves and our communities.

I hope future generations feel empowered to explore both traditional and innovative methods of growing, and to see that even small-scale efforts can make a difference. Whether it's through a backyard garden, harvesting from the land, or a hydroponic system, all these approaches carry values of resilience and connection.

I hope to continue learning and sharing what I can about alternative ways of growing. I think it's important to show that there isn't just one way to connect with land and food.



Blake Hunter



Working with the land

“NURTURING SEEDS.”

My family, like that of our Métis ancestors, have always had a relationship with the land in order to ensure our food security

and sovereignty. As a people, we have a long, proud history of hunting and trapping and fighting for our rights. Less mentioned is our rich history of foraging, gardening, and farming. Our ancestors gave a large portion of their focus towards securing food.

As a child growing up beside Kwakostowin Lake, Saskatchewan, 8km East of Batoche, I was influenced

greatly by my parents and grandparents' relationship with the land. My father and both grandfathers were skilled hunters,

trappers and farmers. My Mother, and both grandmas were all excellent gardeners, foragers, food preservers and kitchen miracle-workers. Seeing these family members working on the land to produce the warming, nurturing comfort foods at our feasts is set in my memory. I remember the digging of potatoes, the picking of raspberries, strawberries peas and beans with my Mom and Grandmas. I remember watching the Men harvest and process cattle, hogs, deer, elk and moose to fill freezers with meat.

For me, the growing and sharing of food began with a desire to make a living in connection with the land and to provide a lifestyle to my family that would include being on the land. Farming has not only supported my family by providing a financial income but also ensuring that our family has a full pantry of staple foods, and my kids know and feel what it takes to produce that food. Our family has learned skills and nurtured seeds that will carry forward to fill the bellies of future generations.





In my 20 + years of growing and harvesting food professionally, I have noticed changes in agriculture. The scale of industrial agriculture grows each year, with commodity producing farmers and corporations cultivating larger plots of land with greater dependency on petro fuels, petro chemicals and synthetic fertilizers. I have noticed more extremes in the weather, where we see longer dry periods, heavier rainfall events, unseasonal heat domes, unseasonal frost events and expanding ranges of invasive pests and disease. Additionally, the rising cost of food is noticeable and co-relates to more people wanting to learn to grow their own food. Our family is trying to be less dependent on the larger, vulnerable food systems by building resilience in our own gardens, communities and vocations.



As a Métis person, food secure means that we have access to land. Land where we can cultivate our own gardens, seeds, tubers, roots, rhizomes, herbs, fruits, meats and vegetables. And also uncultivated land where we can harvest and forage for meat, berries, mushrooms, hazelnuts and other “wild” foods. Access to land is the key to becoming food secure.

Looking forward, I hope for our people to remember the ways that our ancestors worked with the land, and with the plants and the animals, and with ceremony to keep ourselves fed and our spirit happy. I hope for the young ones to be inspired and proud of our Indigenous foods, with our Elders there reminding us of the stories and methods used to gather and prepare these foods. I look forward to the ways we will use new plants, new technologies and fresh partnerships with our neighbours to connect with the land and manage the land in a spirit of stewardship for our descendants.



Sarah Ellis Fox



Tiny spaces

“HOPE FOR THE FUTURE.”

I can't pinpoint exactly when my fascination with plants began. My dad worked as a landscaper for a huge city park when I was a toddler, and I have a hazy memory of going on walks and watching him point proudly at green expanses that seemed to stretch on forever. My mom would plant vegetables with my sister every spring, pressing dried peas in between wet pieces of paper towel and revealing the green sprouts a few days later like it was a magic trick.

I grew up in the city and moved frequently, so having a proper garden with plants that lasted longer than a season wasn't something that was ever possible. As I got older, I read as much I could about gardening, dreaming of acres of land from inside my tiny Vancouver apartment.

It wasn't until Covid, during the fluctuating supply chain issues that routinely emptied the fresh produce from my local grocery store that I started thinking seriously about



growing food inside. It took a few months of research, experimentation and second-hand purchases, but I was able to grow a shelf of herbs and greens within arms reach of my kitchen.

In the past year I moved from the city to the Sunshine Coast, into a home with a yard.



It's been so much fun using what I know to start my seeds indoors and then learning new techniques to successfully transplant them outside. Since I'm renting, I'm growing in containers (grow bags and plastic pots), and have been using the Square Foot Gardening method to get the most out of the space I have.

I really enjoy learning about self-sufficiency, especially when it comes to access to food. For me, a big part of this dream is to be able to share what I grow, and in a perfect world, inspire others to do the same. Where you live, what resources you have access to, and the skills you have are great guiding principles to finding what you can share with others.

For example: my garden doesn't get enough light to grow tomatoes, but the partial shade provides the perfect conditions for lettuce to flourish. A friend of mine has an abundance of sunlight in her yard, and

grows more cucumbers and tomatoes than she knows what to do with. Another friend of ours doesn't have space for a garden, but he often watches the cats of a neighbour who has a small business selling goat cheese, and gets paid partially in chèvre (which, honestly is a great currency). Separately, what we have is useful, but not particularly exciting. Together we can bring what we have to make a top-tier salad which, as whole, is truly greater than the sum of its parts.

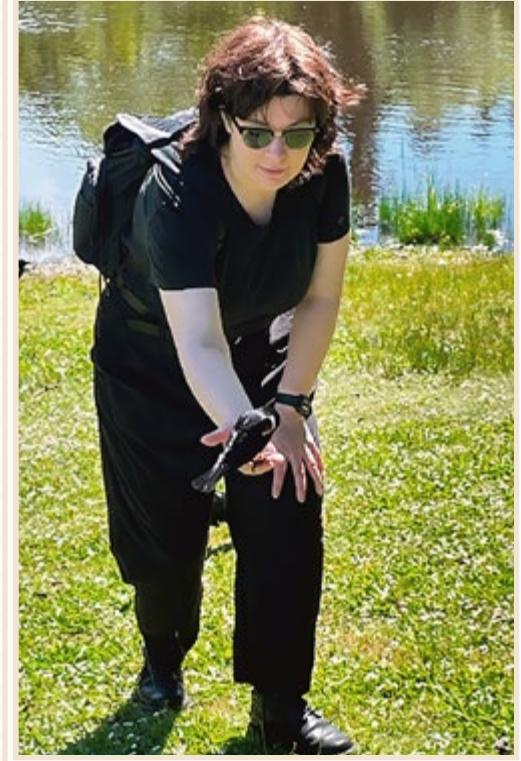
I'm a huge fan of the writing of Robin Wall Kimmerer, and in her book *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural*





World, she compares a hand-knit hat that an aunt gives you, compared to one you buy at the store. She says that when you are given a gift it instills a sense of responsibility and gratitude rather than just acting as a commodity, which is something that I also very much believe.

I feel like sharing food, time and skills also have the benefit of creating a story: the late frost that nearly wiped out the butterleaf lettuce, the monster tomato plant that ended up growing eighteen feet, the rogue cat that escaped out into the goat pen. This sense of community, storytelling and creative adaptation aligns with my idea of Métis culture, and I believe that making space to honour these values really adds a lot of magic to my life.



To me, planting a garden really is a profound act of hope for the future and it has fundamentally changed how I perceive the passage of time. Sometimes when I'm learning something new and worry I'm not making progress fast enough I try to extend the same trust in myself as I do in the seeds I plant. Even though I can't see the growth at first I know that one day when I wake up in the morning I'll see the little sprouts coming up, rising up from the earth.





Melissa Wood



Flowers, food and family



“PASSING KNOWLEDGE.”

I’m a mom to two children, Hudson, age 11, and Charlee, age 6. We live just outside of Campbell River, where we tend to a small but thriving garden at our home. Each year, I continue learning, growing, and expanding what I cultivate in our space. Involving my children in that journey is one of the most important parts for me.

Our garden is a mix of both edibles and flowers, carefully grown to support not just our family, but the ecosystem around us. We grow a variety of tea flowers like anise, chamomile, mint, and bergamot, along with tomatoes, greens, peas, squash, and a wide range of herbs. It’s amazing to see how much can come from even a small space!

From the beginning, I’ve wanted Hudson and Charlee to understand the importance of food

sovereignty and to feel a deep connection to the land that sustains us. Gardening is just one part of that. As a family, we also hunt, forage for mushrooms and gather berries. Last season, we picked and froze over 35 pounds of blackberries—a moment that felt both abundant and deeply rewarding.



Preserving what we harvest has been a learning experience for me. I'm developing skills in canning, drying, and freezing so that we can make the most of what we grow and gather. Some of our family favourites include blackberry jam, frozen roasted tomatoes, and pickled beans and asparagus. There is something incredibly satisfying about filling our pantry and freezer with food we've grown, gathered or hunted and prepared ourselves. I am also so grateful for the workshops and resources offered by our local Chartered Community, North Island Métis, and also for the gardening grant from MNBC. These little nudges have had a huge ripple effect in our home.

A big part of our garden philosophy is respect for the small but essential life within it. Pollinators and insects play a critical role, and we do our best to support them. We've introduced mason bees into our yard and built "lasagna-style" garden beds to encourage healthy soil and attract worms. These efforts have made a noticeable difference, and they've also created countless learning opportunities for the kids.

We try to approach everything in the garden, and in nature, with curiosity. Whether it's observing insects, learning about soil, or watching plants grow from seed to harvest, my kids are always eager to learn more. One of my favourite moments each year is watching sleepy bees nestled inside giant sunflowers. It's a simple but powerful reminder of how interconnected everything is.

This journey is ongoing, and there is always more to learn. But being able to share it with my children, to grow together in knowledge and appreciation for the land, is what makes it truly meaningful.





Sheila Duchesne



Making an attempt

“IT CAN START SMALL.”

When I was a child my family would always have a small vegetable garden in the backyard. We would grow things like potatoes, carrots, lettuce and whatever could grow in the Canadian prairies during the very short summer. When I moved out on my own, I had no land or space of my own to grow anything in my small apartment. As a poor student, I was sick of paying too much money for fresh herbs so I decided one year that I was going to try and grow my own herbs to save some money. The first year went pretty well although I actually ended up paying more in gardening supplies than I did saving money on herbs. It didn't matter though because I was hooked and every year since then I've grown a small garden in my balcony. I used to grow more vegetables

like peas and tomatoes but I find that I like to only stick to herbs or flowers as they're easier to maintain and I do not have a lot of space to have productive summers. Now I am able to have fresh herbs in the summer and I dry them to use in the winter. I also like to grow my own sage to dry and smudge with. Being able to smudge with my own home grown sage makes me feel very connected to my Métis culture and I love being able to gift it to my friends as well.

For me I like to think of the history of the Métis people when I am doing things like gardening, foraging or making traditional recipes. We survived on the land, and gardening or cultivating the land is one way I like continue on that cultural practice. Being able to support yourself,





grow your own food, and survive on your own with the help of your community is wonderful. Most importantly, it rebuilds our connection with the land that has historically been severed. Planting our own medicines and food can also revive knowledge of the land we have lost and help us connect with members of our community when we are able to share that knowledge with others.

I think as a young(ish) person I would like to emphasize that food and land knowledge or practice can start small. Sometimes we don't always have the resources or space to just start growing our own food. For me, I only do balcony gardening, however, it has given me so much joy and pleasure over the years and has been the gateway for me to connect with the land further. I

would encourage others to start, even if it's just attempting to keep a cactus alive. Any interactions with nature can be healing and a gateway to more wonderful things.



Steve Arnett



Picking berries

“BEING GRATEFUL TO THE LAND.”

Gardening is direct connection to the Earth and has reestablished a relationship with the natural world where in taking care of the Land in a traditional Harvesting way, it provides for and sustains our family in a healthy way as it did for our Métis Ancestors before us.

There are three specific memories of experiences that influenced my individual interest in the entire process of working with the soil growing and harvesting the ‘fruits of our labor’.

My grandparents always had a modest mixed vegetable and fruit garden. When visiting as a little boy I used to pick and eat berries right off the raspberry bushes from their garden and that amazing taste experience at my age of seventy-five now is as fresh in my memory as it was when I was 5 years old.



Similarly visiting my (mother's older sister) Aunt in Northern Ontario, one time she instructed my teenage cousin to take my brother and I out to pick wild blueberries- with a caution to watch for bears - which she then turned into a delicious fresh pie for dinner.

Even more vividly I still 'feel' my amazement in remembering the first time in 1958 my late mother served us Spaghetti Squash with butter and parmesan cheese out of what at 7 years old, seemed to be an enormous pale, yellow seed right out of our garden in Portage La Prairie.

Those memories which were deep Teachings and Learnings about appreciating and being grateful to the Land and plant life have remained with me all my life.

Our garden is a combination Vegetable and Berry patch. Each year we prepare the beds, plant the seeds, and harvest the 'fruits of our labor' ongoing with our two young Métis grandchildren. Our sons and daughters in law help with the heavy work.

It gives us joy to do it together and has and continues to create lasting loving fun memories for all of us as an added treasured benefit as Seniors/old ones to eating healthy from garden bed or bush to plate. Cultivating the care and growth of the Mason Bees pollinators also add so much to the learning and fun for everyone.

The Tarriff war and US boycott have driven up price, selection and affordable access to fresh vegetables and fruit for many families and seniors. Stage One 'Water Restrictions' begin May 1 due to low snowpack and predictions of another hot dry summer mean being very thoughtful and dedicated in watering the plants we are growing to maximize their

growth under Climate Change conditions and Municipal regulations. Stage two restrictions will come into effect by July.

The MNBC Gardening Project has been a wonderful support in maintaining a garden contributing to our 'food security' and 'Health' as seniors in this time of costly food prices especially fresh produce and fruit. We are just now using up the last of the fresh tomatoes, Raspberries and Blackberries in our freezer from last years harvest.

As I type this today the Global Morning News reported on the Canadian Food Index and pricing inflation making fresh food (all food) increasingly harder to afford for even more people in our country and communities.



The joy of sharing and watching our smiling grandchildren having fun planting seeds, watering the beds, or picking and eating peas or berries right off the bush and popping them into their mouths enjoying their amazing taste on a sunny day connects the next generation to our Métis ways and Traditions.

The Teaching and meaning for our family is practicing our Métis Way of Being 'rispay lii zoot' (Respect each other) in our relationship with the Creator, the Land and our plant relatives and the Pollinators, 'Kaa-wiichihiitoyaaahk' (We take care of each other).



Fresh Pasta with Fresh Tomatoes and Basil or Cilantro for Two

ADJUST THE RECIPE ACCORDINGLY FOR MORE PEOPLE

Pasta of your choice or spaghetti squash

Four tomatoes or two cups of cherry tomatoes

Your choice of herbs

***optional side:
Fried zucchini with oregano and garlic***

Boil 250 grams of Pasta

Make fresh or use dried from the package.

In early fall can substitute with Spaghetti Squash.

Dice four large (plum or any variety), fresh tomatoes or alternatively two cups of Cherry tomatoes picked directly from your garden or balcony planters.

Roughly chop up your choice of herbs also picked directly from your garden or balcony planter.

Boil and drain your pasta.

Plate pasta and top with a mixture of the tomatoes and herbs.

Top with some fresh ground pepper and parmesan cheese.

Enjoy with a glass of cool lemon or lime infused water and a Raspberry.

(Can add fried Zucchini with chopped Oregano and Garlic all picked fresh from the garden as a side dish as well).



Corinna Stevenson



Care for the land

“NURTURING BODY AND SPIRIT.”

Growing, harvesting, and preparing food feels deeply connected to relationship — with the land, with ancestors, with community, and with the future generations. As a Métis person, food is not just sustenance; it carries memory, resilience, and kinship. Working with food, whether growing a garden, harvesting from the garden and from the wild, or preparing meals, is participating in reciprocity and care for the land.

My journey with growing food has been shaped over time mostly through personal curiosity and a desire for a way of life that is physically, emotionally, and spiritually healthy as well as by a growing desire to reconnect with practices that feel grounded and life-giving. Gardening has become a spiritual and cultural practice for me as much as a practical one.

Sharing food creates belonging. It brings people together, strengthens relationships, and carries culture in ordinary but profound ways. Growing and sharing food can be an act of care, hospitality, and cultural continuity. For me, it supports family and community by nurturing both body and spirit.

I have noticed changes in seasons, weather patterns, and the unpredictability of growing conditions. These shifts affect timing, abundance, and sometimes what feels possible to grow. They also deepen awareness that caring for land and food systems is inseparable from responding to climate change and protecting future generations.





Food security means more than access to enough food — it means access to nourishing, culturally meaningful food, and the ability for communities to sustain themselves with dignity. For Métis people, I think food security is also tied to land access, harvesting rights, traditional knowledge, and community resilience.

I would like future generations to inherit not only knowledge of how to grow and gather food, but also the teachings that food carries — reciprocity, gratitude, stewardship, and community. My hope is that younger generations feel empowered to reconnect with land-based practices in ways that are both rooted and evolving.





Solange Legal



Encourage growth



“COLLABORATE AND COMMUNITY.”

My earliest memories of growing food are from when I was young and would watch my dad. I remember him burning small fires in the garden and then mixing the ash into the soil before planting, the way he would trim plants to encourage growth, and all the times we would weed together. Once harvested, food was brought to the kitchen where my mom would prepare it. I learnt how to cook and work with food by watching my mom and older sisters. Kitchen skills and favourite family recipes I memorized because of how many times I saw them being done. When I was asked to do a task I felt confident I could complete it because of how many times I'd

seen it being done. When I reflect on the different skills I learned from my parents, I see how growing and cooking food is a collaborative, community effort. Just as certain plants help each other, so too, different people help each other to support the family and community.

I am married and have five kids. As a family of seven, being able to grow our food helps provide food security. Growing and using the food we grow is a way that our family connects. Just like I used to learn by watching my parents, my children are doing the same, and I love when they get their hands in the dirt or help prepare





meals in the kitchen. We talk and share stories while gardening and cooking and in this way I feel we are connecting to each other, our culture and heritage.

Our family likes to make pickles out of various veggies, freeze portions of grated squash for baked goods and soup, and can fruit sauce and tomatoes for year-round use. Every part of the plant gets used whenever possible: chive and herb flowers go into salads or get added to vinegar to make flavoured herb vinegar, peels and trimmings go in the freezer to make homemade broth, and anything we can't use gets composted to feed next year's plants.

The land provides for our needs. We are building relationships with both the land and each other. The land sustains us and helps us grow. There is the obvious support

of home-grown produce but the emotional and spiritual sides of me are also cared for through the time spent gardening. In this way, the land supports me so I can then support those around me, both at home and in my community.

My dad used to say, "The seed has the same goal as you, it wants to grow."





Paulette Flamond



Spiritual abundance

“CREATING A FOOD FOREST.”

For me, being a road allowance child, we lived off the land. We didn't have water and the only way to survive was through harvesting—whether animals or growing food. We were extremely poor. When I was eight years old, we moved further into the city and became more food deprived and things changed for us. As a child, I knew very well what it was like not to have food.

Food to me is spiritual abundance, connection to land and community, sharing with family. Métis people are self-sufficient and I was always taught that if you want something, you have to create it for yourself. We did not have the opportunity of a

government supporting us so we had to rely on each other and our community.

To me, being Métis is to be a servant leader. Teaching our next generations is vital. We need to work with our youth so that they know how to grow their own food as many youth today have lost that connection to the land.

What really got me going was when I did more research on Monsanto— an American



agrochemical famous for producing genetically modified seeds (GMO). When I learned about GMO foods, and the poison that exists in them, I was motivated to learn about permaculture and the whole concept of it. I decided to create a self-sustaining food forest called Boreal Gardens that integrates with the natural environment. Boreal Gardens features 20 Hügeltkultur mounds (a method of gardening that has been used for centuries in Eastern Europe and Germany, often as part of a broader permaculture system), raised garden beds including over 30 types of gardens and structures, and native and traditional plants thriving within the boreal ecosystem. I wanted to create a food forest on my property, and to be able to access it out my front door. It's a lot of work, but it's my creative outlet and I get a lot of satisfaction in designing gardens and creating a food forest I always dreamed of.

Growing my own food supports my family by having readily available nutritious food that's grown with love, outside my doorstep.



For me, being on the land greatly supports my mental well being- I am at my best when my hands are in the dirt. Every time I plant a seed, I bless the seed- I am in ceremony. I am so gifted by Creator. When I'm growing things, I always say it is me and Creator growing things together.

Boreal Gardens will become a living lab. Our next goal is to offer summer camps for youth where they can come spend a week with Elders and learn many things from gardening to food processing. By applying Indigenous ecological knowledge and regenerative permaculture techniques, we are building a year-round food system that aligns with nature. Find out more of Paulette's incredible Boreal Forest at: www.borealgardens.ca





Chantel Folster



Just a bit of dirt



“THE ULTIMATE ACT OF CARE.”

Growing food is a way of reclaiming self-sufficiency and honoring the land. To me, it's about the cycle of starting a seed indoors in the late winter and seeing it through to a harvest that feeds my family. It feels like a quiet, steady way to practice Métis values of stewardship—taking only what you need and nurturing the soil, so it keeps giving back.

My journey started in 2020 when I planted my first bed of garlic... and from there ... I now have a 20x20 vegetable garden. There is a specific kind of “teaching” that comes from the trial and error of the seasons—

learning how pumpkins and peas can thrive together or how to manage a greenhouse. It started as a way to provide fresh food, but it turned into a deep passion for understanding the specific needs of each plant.

Sharing food is the ultimate act of care. Whether it's sharing the harvest from my garden with neighbors or preparing a meal for my daughters, food is how I show up for my community. It's about more than just nutrition; it's about the time spent together and the security of knowing we can provide for one another.





Living in Campbell River, I've had to become very in tune with the seasons. I've noticed that timing is everything now—watching for that last frost in May and adjusting my seed-starting schedule accordingly. You notice how a shift in the weather can change the success of a blueberry patch or the timing of a lilac bloom. You must be more adaptive and observant than ever before.

To me, food security means sovereignty. It means having the space, the tools, and the knowledge to grow my own vegetables and raise my own poultry. It's the peace of mind that comes from knowing my pantry and freezer are stocked with food that I've had a hand in producing from start to finish.



I hope future generations understand that you don't need a massive farm to make a difference; you just need a bit of dirt and the patience to learn. I want to pass down the knowledge of how to distill what the land gives us—whether it's food or something as simple as rose water—and the understanding that being connected to the land is a form of strength.





Cheryl Godin

Clean fresh food

“LUCKIEST PEOPLE EVER!”

Honestly it is more about the connection to the land and being able to grow your own foods. Even if it is a tiny spot it will grow an edible plant of some sort. We live in the lands of the Ktunaxa people and have tried to learn about the plants that have fed people for eons.

Growing up in Williams Lake we always had a garden. We moved to Cranbrook when I was 14 and again had a garden. For 13 years I moved around and never was able to have a garden. When we bought this house I felt we were the luckiest people ever! Not only did we purchase a home, but it came with a huge garden and as it was early September we got a wonderful harvest. This garden had established strawberries, raspberries,

black currents, and rhubarb. It was amazing! 40 years later the garden is smaller but as bountiful as ever.

This garden has always supported our family and when my three daughters got their own places, they also planted gardens. We all have always enjoyed being able to pick our own clean fresh food. Of course any abundance has always gone to family and friends.

There have always been changes with the seasons yearly. Sometimes I have to wait until later in June to plant things -sometimes we get lucky and can start in May. We always just try and keep track of the weather forecast and be patient. It is a constant job to keep track of your garden.



Not only as a Métis Citizen but as a human on this earth, I have tried to teach my children as well as my grandchildren, three which live with me now, to respect the earth. As long as we have a plot of dirt we can grow our food, save our seeds, we have that knowledge and opportunity. We are living in one of the best places on this earth.

I just hope that more people would involve themselves in teaching children about gardening and where their food comes from. It is heart-warming to see the amount of elementary schools in Cranbrook that have gardens in the school fields and are teaching the kids.

We love making rhubarb crisp (recipe below) or even stewed rhubarb as it is the very first harvest of the season.



Rhubarb Crisp

***2 pounds rhubarb, sliced crosswise
¾ inch thick***

¾ cup granulated sugar

¾ cup all-purpose flour, divided

***½ cup cold unsalted butter, cut
into pieces***

½ cup packed light-brown sugar

½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

Preheat oven to 400°F. In a 9-by-13-inch baking dish, combine rhubarb, sugar, and 1/4 cup flour; set aside.

Combine remaining 1/2 cup flour and the butter.

Use a pastry blender, 2 knives or your fingers to get the butter pieces pea-size. Add brown sugar, oats, and cinnamon. Sprinkle topping over rhubarb.

Bake until rhubarb is tender and topping is golden, 35 to 45 minutes. Serve warm with ice cream or whipped cream.



Michif



Here are some Michif words for the garden

Potatoes

Li patak

(Michif French)

Carrots

Lii karot

(Southern Michif)

Strawberries

Li frayz

(Michif French)

Saskatoon berries

Misâskwatômina

(Northern Michif)

Cabbages

Lii shoo

(Southern Michif)

Apples

Lii pomm

(Southern Michif)

Cranberries

Wîsaîîmina

(Northern Michif)

Flowers

Lî flârr

(Northern Michif)

Jam

La konfitchur

(Michif French)

Our roots are growing

Nutr raasin aahkikinwaa

(Southern Michif)

It's almost spring

Wiiput li praentaan

(Southern Michif)

Translation Credit

Southern/Heritage Michif as written by Elder Norman Fleury of St. Lazare, MB

Northern Michif as written by Elder Vince Ahenakew of Île-à-la-Crosse, SK

Michif French as written by Dr. June Bruce and Dr. Lorraine Coutu of St. Laurent, MB





MÉTIS NATION
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Stories From The Soil



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