

10 Years at the Market Garden

A Place Where Plants and Community Thrive

By Adam Kramer, Rachael Chong & Vanessa Ong

The road to the Working Centre Market Garden is not through country fields of corn or soy, barley or hay, rather it runs through city streets and neighbourhoods. You can arrive on the Number 6 bus, or by bike or foot, if not by car. And when you arrive, you are met with sun shining through the fruit trees, or raindrops on puddled paths, and the call of a robin or a wren as the osprey circle overhead. You are met by gardeners, eager to tell you stories if you'd like to listen. Eager to have your help with some weeding, or eager to get in a harvest and share it with you.

The multitudes of volunteer gardeners that have worked the land are, after 10 years, far beyond count. Eight cohorts of community-based market gardening interns have spent a season at the garden – gaining the practical skills, knowledge, and the confidence to grow food for themselves and their communities. The garden has also been a place of employment – not only for year-round staff, but also for seasonal workers and casual labourers from our community. Together, we have grown the Working Centre's "CommunitySupportedAgriculture" share program from 40 members to over 160! Together, we have worked with nature to transform the garden's initially poor soil it into a thriving ecosystem, teeming with beneficial flora and fauna, feasting



on each year's accumulation of organic matter. Together, we have found common purpose, created an open and welcoming community, and nourished the land as it has nourished us.

After 10 seasons, the garden at 1254 Union Street in Kitchener is in its maturity. While it will always be a place for learning and continuing the work of seasons past, the garden's steadiness in the face of challenges, whether expected or unforeseen, belies a resiliency in the land and in the community that stewards it. Many of them are here with their hands in the dirt, but multitudes more are in the office or gardening their own plots or sitting down to a meal featuring the fruits of the work that they got from a share or the community fridge. This garden turns community spirit into food!



A Productive Urban Garden

By Joe Mancini

The Working Centre's Market Garden is now in its 10th year. It is an excellent example of converting 1.5 acres of privately owned vacant land in the heart of the city into a community-based market garden.

A key factor for success was the vision of Ron Doyle, the owner of the property, to integrate a garden into his development plans that recreated a run-down 100-year-old factory into a stunning version of something you might find if you walked the Camino de Santiago.

A second factor was that The Working Centre had determined it was important to establish a larger scale teaching garden in a location in the city as opposed to a rural property.

The third factor was the commitment from Ron and The Working Centre to invest in the necessary tools for the market garden to flourish. These amenities included



a fully functioning water system, washrooms, interlocking brick pathways, a cooler, tool storage, an office space, and a washing station. We also committed to learning about organic soil amendments like good quality compost, greensand, and cover crops. We invested in a heavy duty tiller, row covers and other seeding tools.

A fourth factor is that every year there have been efforts to add to the garden, such as expanding into new garden plots, developing tiered raised beds on the slopes, adding fruit crops, berry plants, and native perennial flowers, and building a greenhouse.

While our future on this property may not be clear, the success and hard work to create and maintain this market garden oasis can only be celebrated.



Kim Knowles starts to lay out our first garden plots in spring of 2012. Over the winter of 2011-12 we had studied the SPIN (Small Plot Intensive) model of market gardening. It gave us a perfect start to understand the scale of the project.



Ron Doyle installed an old water tank along with statues created by Sandra Dunns of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. The containers that Ron installed are used for washrooms, garden storage, washing station and a cooler.



In May 2012, Fr. Toby Collins CR helped us install 6000 sq. ft. of interlocking brick pathways. These pathways define the garden sections and add visual appeal.



One of the interlocking brick pathways gleaming after installation with first crops starting to grow.



The aerial photo on the left is the Hacienda land in September 2011 before Ron Doyle started bringing in top soil and a landscaping pattern was designed. The photo on the right is the Hacienda Sarria and the Market Garden lands in 2020.

Aerial images courtesy of the City of Kitchener



Since it started, the market garden has offered 42 internship opportunities



Overhead views of the garden
Images courtesy of Larry Bond

Ecological food production is centered on striving to **protect, restore, and support** the natural processes that enable us to grow nourishing food.



Seasonal change at the The Working Centre Market Garden

The Working Centre aimed to demonstrate how to take vacant urban land and turn it into a sustainable and successful market garden.

The Working Centre Market Garden is a **volunteer-driven community enterprise** engaged in ecological food production, hands-on cooperative work, and knowledge sharing. The garden is a space for cultivating relationships among gardeners through the work of growing food and building a more sustainable community-based food system.

Different than community gardens where gardeners have their own plots, at The Working Centre Market Garden everyone works collaboratively to produce food for a **160+ member CSA share program, local retailers, and to share with the community.** Through hands-on, satisfying work done in community, the garden welcomes many to belong, enjoy the outdoors, and learn about growing food.



Visit garden.theworkingcentre.org to see more photos of the Market Garden, and for information about CSA Shares, internships, and volunteer opportunities