



Local Harvest

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Features

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Local Farm Profile: Diversity Gardens

(2005 Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map Listing #16)

From the road it does not look like much. You may catch a glimpse of a garden patch in a gully under the Hydro wires and not realize that you just passed a regional hub of agricultural innovation and productivity. Hidden from view are two acres of unique varieties of vegetables and fruit – all grown organically. As you drive by you can't possibly see the vibrant weekly newsletter, the educational workshops, the certified kitchen, or the experimenting and hands-on research that this farm generates. The farm is Diversity Gardens and it is two acres of unending projects for Theresa Schumilas and the local chapter of Canadian Organic Growers (COG) who run the farm as a not-for-profit with charitable status.

The farming of these two acres began in 2000 when Theresa was ending her term as president of the local COG chapter and was looking for a way to stay involved in the local organic movement in a more hands-on way. While working full-time off the farm, Theresa negotiated with Hydro One to lease the two acres adjacent to her house for the COG demonstration farm and began clearing the land.

Although a relatively new operation, Diversity Gardens is now known for the variety and quality of its organic herbs. Not only do they produce this month's featured herbs: parsley, basil and dill, they also grow cilantro, thyme, tarragon, oregano, sage, mar-

joram, mints, borage, sorrel and bee balm. But herbs are not all. Diversity Gardens also produces a selection of hard-to-find vegetables and fruit including heritage tomatoes, blue potatoes, and edible flowers.

While always intended to showcase organic growing methods, Diversity Gardens has also applied some innovative marketing methods for their quality organic produce. Theresa and her husband Peter started out by taking orders from office colleagues and delivering boxes of assorted produce weekly. They then evolved into filling email orders and maintained a produce stand by the roadside. This year, Diversity Gardens will be operating a Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) program. In a CSA, consumers not only share in the harvest, but they also share the risks associated with farming. If it's a bad year for toma-



The roadside stand just south of St. Agatha

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Local Farm Profile continued

atoes, for example, members will receive fewer tomatoes – no money is refunded as the risk is understood from the beginning. Members purchase their “share” in early spring and then receive weekly boxes of produce during the growing season. This inaugural season will be serving 27 full members.

Although the CSA is full this year, (there’s a waiting list for next year) Diversity Gardens will also sell produce at the Waterloo Farmers’ Market and at the New Hamburg Farmers’ Market starting in July. There you will find fresh organic herbs and seasonal heirloom fruit and vegetables. The market stand will also double as an information booth raising awareness of organic growing methods and the true costs of producing local food.

One of Diversity Gardens’ mandates is to demonstrate the economic viability of small land holdings. Profitable farming does not always have to mean “large scale”. Part of the equation is a re-valuing of our food—purchasing farm products at prices “by which local growers can earn a reasonable living from the farm”. According to Theresa, most people do not realize the true cost of food because many vendors at local farmers markets run their business like a hobby (or depend on unpaid family labour) and don’t charge enough. Theresa believes that Canadians need to pay at least 10% more for their food. As she



Organic production encourages diversity



A fresh organic produce box ready for pick-up

puts it: “If you’re concerned about the quality of food, it comes down to price.”

Another factor in the viability of a small farm is the amount of time put into farming and marketing the produce. Currently, Theresa puts in two full days (sun-up to sun-down), an employee puts in one day a week and a volunteer puts in one day a week. Add to this the time needed to market the produce and you quickly realize how important it is to prioritize crops with a high return if a farmer wants to earn a reasonable living.

Looking for some ideas on cooking with fresh herbs? Diversity Garden’s weekly electronic newsletter provides tips on using herbs and produce as they become ready. Theresa recommends adding dill to fish or potatoes. She also reminds consumers that some herbs freeze well to use year-round such as cilantro, basil, parsley and dill. A favourite is to puree herbs with olive oil and then freeze them in an ice cube tray.

This herb and oil mixture is great added to pastas and sauces. To sample basil in some of its many forms—including a mouthwatering pesto—be sure and attend the Tomato Festival at Diversity Gardens on September 10th.

For more information on Diversity Gardens and their products you can check out their website at www.diversitygardens.com

Finding Local Herbs

If you’re looking for fresh herbs why not consult Foodlink’s Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map. The new 2005 edition features a number of farms close by that grow and sell them. You can also find some of these fine farms selling at our region’s fine farmers’ markets. It’s usually a good idea to call ahead.



Aberle Farms
2639 Northfield Dr. E., Elmira
Tel. 669-2097



Corn & More
2050 Bleams Rd., Shingletown
Tel. 634-8903



Rare Organics
1679 Blair Rd.
Blair
Tel. 650-9336



James and Rosann Albrecht
Special producers for Fairshare Harvest CSA
Fairshare Harvest Tel: 595-4841



Diversity Gardens
1528 Notre Dame Dr., St. Agatha
Tel. 885-8775



Stevanus Family Farm
1082 Snyder’s Flats Rd.,
Bloomingdale
Tel. 585-7784



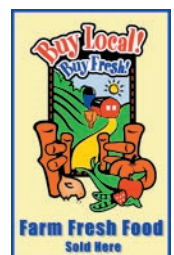
Joel Bauman
1764 King St. N., St. Jacobs
Tel. 664-3093



GROW Herbal Gardens
50 Kraft Dr., Bloomingdale
Tel. 749-9177 Ext.238



Unfactory Farm
5415 Streicher Line, Crosshill
Tel. 656-2691





“Garden Dill-lights”

From very early times, herbs have been used for healing. Primitive people learned by trial and error how plants could be used to help them. By the fifth century, people in England had 500 herbs they used as medicines. Around the 1600s, people started thinking about herbs in a different way, and began classifying them according to the Doctrine of Signatures. By observing physical properties of an herb, such as its color and shape, they identified its healing properties. For example, an herb with leaves that looked like snake skin would be used to try to help someone who had been bitten by a snake; a plant growing near a wet place would be used to treat colds; or, a plant with heart-shaped leaves would be used to treat heart problems. Today, we recognize the preventative and curative properties of herbs, but we no longer assign those properties based on shape, colour, or soil preference of the individual plants.

In the Middle Ages people used many plants and herbs in their daily life. Herbs were used to disguise the rank flavour of spoiled meat, as well as to add flavour to other dishes. As there was not always easy access to water for personal hygiene, people used herbs as perfumes and deodorants. They even put herbs on floors to act as an air freshener when walked upon. Herbs were also employed to produce dyes for yarn and fabrics.

Dill

Native to southern Russia, western Africa and the Mediterranean region, dill has been used for its culinary and medicinal properties for millennia. It was popular in the ancient Greek and Roman cultures, where it was considered a sign of wealth and was revered for its many healing properties. Dill was used by Hippocrates, the father of medicine, in a recipe for cleaning the mouth, and ancient soldiers would apply burnt dill seeds to their wounds to promote healing.

Dill is an unusual herb in that it has two different seasons: in early spring it is used for

its leaves and then later in fall for its seeds. The name is derived from the Norse word *dilla* (to lull). It is for this calmative property that dill is best known medicinally. The dill seeds contain a volatile oil that has a relaxant effect on muscles, especially those of the digestive tract, and has been used for centuries to cure such problems. Teas made with dill seed relieve indigestion and nausea, and produce a lulling effect. Gripe water is made with dill seed specifically as a remedy for colic in infants.

In addition, dill is also very rich in vitamin C and calcium. In fact, 1 tablespoon of dill seeds contains 100 milligrams of calcium — more than in 1/3 cup of milk.

How to Select and Store

The leaves of fresh dill should look feathery and green in color. Dill leaves that are a little wilted are still acceptable since they usually droop very quickly after being picked.

Fresh dill should always be stored in the refrigerator either wrapped in a damp paper towel or with its stems placed in a container of water. Since it is very fragile, even if stored properly, dill will only keep fresh for about two days. Dill can be frozen, either whole or chopped, in airtight containers. Alternatively, you can freeze the dill leaves in ice cube trays covered with water or stock that can later be added during meal preparation.

Parsley

Parsley is the world’s most popular herb. Its name derives from the Greek word meaning “rock celery” (parsley is a member of the celery family). It is a biennial plant that will return to the garden year after year once it



is established. The crisp, tight foliage of the curly parsley is the most attractive variety to use fresh as a garnish, but the flat-leaved Italian parsley has a superior flavor when cooked.

Parsley contains volatile oils that inhibit tumor formation, act as an antioxidant, and neutralize some types of carcinogens. Parsley is also rich in flavonoids that increase the antioxidant capacity of the blood. In addition, parsley is an excellent source of three vital nutrients that are important for the prevention of many diseases: vitamin C, beta-carotene, and folic acid. As an added bonus, you’ll enjoy parsley’s legendary ability to cleanse your palate and your breath at the end of your meal.

Parsley is native to the Mediterranean region of Southern Europe. While it has been cultivated for more than 2,000 years, parsley was not originally used as a food. In fact, the practice of employing it as a garnish goes far back into history. The ancient Greeks held parsley to be sacred, using it to not only adorn victors of athletic contests, but also for decorating the tombs of the deceased.

How to Select and Store

Choose fresh parsley that is deep green in color and looks fresh and crisp. Avoid bunches that have leaves that are wilted or yellow as this indicates that they are either



overmature or damaged. Fresh parsley should be kept in the refrigerator in a perforated plastic bag. Wash it just before using as it is delicate like spinach.

If you have excess flat-leaved parsley, you can easily dry it by laying it out in a single layer on a clean kitchen cloth. Once dried, it should be kept in a tightly sealed container in a cool, dark and dry place. Curly leaved parsley is best preserved by freezing in airtight bags. Although it will retain most of its flavor, it has a tendency to lose its crispness, so it is best used in recipes without first thawing.

If you are making a light colored sauce, use the stems from this variety as opposed to the leaves, so the sauce will take on the flavor of parsley but will not be imparted with its green color.



Basil

Basil has long been revered. It has even been the stuff of legends. In ancient Rome, the name for the herb, *basileuscus*, referred to *Basilisk*, the fire-breathing dragon. Taking the herb was thought to be the charm against the beast. With this in mind, it is interesting to note that today basil is used as an antidote to venom.

The Greeks also had great respect for basil, and their word, *basilikohn*, meant royal or kingly. It was believed that only the king himself should harvest this herb, and only with the use of a golden sickle. In Romania, basil took a more romantic turn. There, when a lad accepted a sprig of basil from a maiden, he was officially engaged. In India, basil was cherished as an icon of hospitality, while in Italy it was a symbol of love.

Basil now grows in many regions throughout the world, but it was first native to India, Asia and Africa. A member of the peppermint family, basil can be found in over a dozen varieties cultivated for culinary use. Sweet basil and its close relative Genoa basil are the most familiar varieties. Both produce fragrant, broad, deep green leaves in abundance. Their spiciness is the perfect compliment to ripe red tomatoes and soft cheeses such as fresh mozzarella and brie. Even their tiny flowers, which appear in swirls on slender spikes that extend high above the plants, are edible. Sprinkled over salad or pasta, these flowers give a concentrated flavor and a spark of color.

Research studies on basil have shown unique health-protecting effects in two basic areas: basil's flavonoids and volatile oils. Water-

soluble flavonoids have been of particular interest in basil, and in studies on human white blood cells as they protect cell structures as well as chromosomes from radiation and oxygen-based damage.

In addition, basil is a very good source of vitamin A, magnesium, iron, and calcium.

How to Select and Store

The leaves of fresh basil should look vibrant and be deep green in color. They should be free from dark spots or yellowing.

Fresh basil should be stored in the refrigerator wrapped in a slightly damp paper towel. It may also be frozen, either whole or chopped, in airtight containers. Since basil is an abundant producer, you can freeze it in ice cube trays covered with either water or stock that can later be popped into soups or stews. Dried basil should be kept in a tightly sealed glass container in a cool, dark and dry place where it will keep fresh for about six months.

Since the oils in basil are highly volatile, it is best to add the herb near the end of the cooking process, so it will retain its maximum essence and flavor.

Herb Veggie Dip

"This recipe is quick to make and is a great substitute for the onion soup mix and sour cream standby," says contributor Marie Moyer. (Yields 1 cup/250ml)

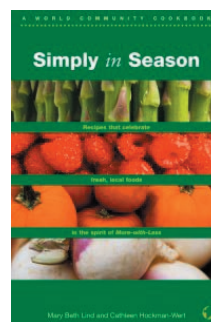
Ingredients:

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|------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1/2 c. mayonnaise | 1 tsp. lemon juice |
| 1/2 c. plain yogurt | 1 tsp. celery seed |
| 1/2 tsp. salt | 1/2 tsp. garlic powder |
| 1 tbsp. each fresh dill, parsley, chives | 1/2 tsp. paprika |

Preparation:

Mix the first 3 ingredients in a small bowl. Add a combination or all of the the remaining ingredients. Chill for an hour and serve with fresh vegetables. In winter use dried herbs (1t. each) in place of fresh ones.

Recipe (pg. 165) by Marie Moyer, Lethbridge, Alberta



Simply in Season, by Cathleen Hockman-Wert and Mary Beth Lind, is a brand new cookbook that features eating and using local, seasonal foods like our grandparents did—in wholesome, delicious dishes. For more information about *Simply in Season* visit the website at www.worldcommunitycookbook.org or call Mennonite Central Committee Ontario at (519) 745-8458.