

**12/12**  
May

# EAT LOCAL

2014

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**Twelve months. Twelve big ideas for a strong, resilient community.**





# Grow Your Groceries!

There are many delicious benefits to growing your own food. Feeding your family from your own backyard can be a very rewarding experience, in many more ways than you might think. A home-grown supply of fresh, healthy, and delicious food is certainly one of the best benefits, but there are many other reasons to grow your groceries. Gardening can inspire a healthier lifestyle, create a greater appreciation for nature, help you save money, and help reduce your ecological footprint. Also, many edible plants can attract important beneficial insects, and they can add beauty and interest to your landscape!

## Saving Money

Spend less money at the grocery store by growing your own groceries! Many people might think that the cost savings are insignificant, compared to the amount of work needed to grow your own food. I beg to differ! Although there are many days when the garden isn't producing much, the year's total harvest is well worth the effort! For example:

- A row of leeks and a half dozen potato plants equals six big pots of winter soup which will feed our family for 12 meals.
- A row of onions and two squash plants will make another 10 (or more) hearty pots of soup, and one large jar of dried beans can be used to inspire a dozen healthy, protein-rich meals.
- Six vigorous tomato plants, harvested at their peak and made into a huge batch of sauce can be canned or frozen into small portions. This home-made sauce could be the highlight of weekly pasta dinners through the entire fall and winter seasons, making up to 20 big family meals!

Not to mention, well planned food gardens offer summer-long grazing of salad greens, fruits, and veggies. One plastic box of mixed greens may cost about five dollars at the grocery store, and will make a few salads. But five dollars spent on mixed lettuce seed, planted in intervals, can provide all-you-can-eat salad until Christmas! When you start adding it up, growing your own groceries really does make cents!



Photo: Saanich Organics

## Reducing your ecological footprint

You can also help reduce your ecological footprint by growing your own groceries, because you will use fewer resources to get food to your table. Consider this simple example of "comparing apples to apples"! (The following comparison was inspired by "An Apple's Ecological Footprint" in David Suzuki's Green Guide.) Imagine two similar apples - the first apple is sitting neatly in a perfect row at the grocery store, and has a cute little sticker on it. This apple was grown on a commercial farm, somewhere in another country, where the soil has most likely been treated with decades of chemical use. The fields are probably irrigated by a nearby river, changing the river's natural water course. Large machines, powered by dirty fossil fuels, were most likely used to maintain and harvest the apple. After the apple was harvested, it was coated in wax, boxed up, and shipped to our country - creating more carbon emissions during transport. Then, this pretty apple was delivered, in a refrigerated truck, to your favorite grocery store. Finally you went to the store and brought the apple home. Now imagine the second apple, which has just been picked from your own backyard, and required only sunshine, rain, good soil, and a little bit of care, to grow crisp and sweet. The apple from your backyard required far fewer resources to grow, and probably tasted better, too! If you aren't able to grow your own, the next best thing would be to buy locally.

## Appreciating Nature

Gardening can also provide priceless learning opportunities for you and your family. Knowing and caring about where our food comes from can give your family a heart-warming sense of security, and children who spend time in the garden can benefit from the powerful life lessons of nature. The 'circle of life' constantly surrounds us when we are spending time with plants. We can grow a greater appreciation for nature, and a willingness to respect all living things. Not only can we feed ourselves from our gardens, but we can also create food and habitat for many insects, birds, and pollinators. Your backyard can magically turn into an all-ages, outdoor classroom with an ever-changing, seasonal display of natural systems.

## Improving the Esthetics of your Garden

Another, often overlooked, reason to grow edible plants is that they are often very attractive and unique in appearance. There is a wide array of food plants which thrive in our climate, and are both beautiful and delicious! Many edible plants have stunning flowers, decorative fruit, and contrasting foliage colors and textures. Perennial beauties, like rhubarb, asparagus, and artichokes have highly ornamental leaves, and can simply be added to your existing borders to come alive each spring. Many food plants have very showy flowers, like scarlett runner beans, strawberries, sunflowers, as well as many culinary herbs. Turn a hot, sunny area of your yard into a lush kitchen garden filled with hardy herbs like rosemary, thyme, sage, oregano, and chives. The beautiful flowers of these herbs will be buzzing with bumblebees. Blueberry shrubs are highly ornamental, and they can be added to your shrub beds, and raspberries make a great privacy hedge for the summer. There are many annual food plants food plants which can be direct seeded among your flower beds. Add unique colors and textures to your garden, and your dinner plate, by planting edible flowers, like nasturtiums, pansies, and callendula. Annuals, like root veggies and greens, don't need to be planted in rows - try planting in clusters or waves, and mixing your food plants with ornamentals.

If you are planning to include a new tree in your landscape, choose one that will create beauty and summer shade, while providing food for your family! We are lucky to live in a climate where we are able to grow a wide selection of fruit and nut trees. Many fruit trees have beautiful flowers in the Spring, like apples, pears, and plums. Some fruit trees have excellent fall leaf colour, like peach trees. To add winter beauty and interest to your garden, plant a hazelnut tree which offers interesting catkins on its winter branches, as well as producing incredibly nutritious fall nuts.

## How?

Turn some of your high maintenance lawn into food by following the lasagna method. There's no need to dig out your lawn. Carefully plan the best size, shape, and sunny location, then mark out the area of lawn to be transformed. Lay down 3-4 sheets thick of overlapping newspaper (no flyers), or a layer of cardboard (remove all tape and staples) directly over your lawn. Then spay with water (so your paper doesn't blow away) and layer with straw, leaves, soil, seaweed, compost, grass clippings, or other organic matter. Try to alternate a layer of soil, with a layer of "green material" (compost or grass clippings) then a layer of "brown material" (straw or dried leaves). Keep building these layers until you have a "raised bed" that is 8-12" high. Always finish with a final layer of soil, and you are now ready to direct seed, or plant your seedlings, into your new garden.

Even if you have a small yard (or just a patio), you can grow almost anything in space-efficient containers. Potted herb gardens are a great choice for a sunny balcony. Hanging baskets filled with strawberries, or spilling out with cherry tomatoes, are also a great choice for sun. Big planters can be filled with root veggies, even potatoes will grow successfully in large pots. If you have you have a shady balcony, grow lettuce, spinach, and peas.

If you don't have outdoor space for gardening, consider renting a community garden plot. There are several in the region, including:

- Kinpark Community Gardens in Duncan  
email: [info@cowichangreencommunity.org](mailto:info@cowichangreencommunity.org)
- Centennial Park Community Gardens  
email Carol Sims: [carolsims@shaw.ca](mailto:carolsims@shaw.ca)
- St. Andrews Redemption Garden  
[standrewsduncan.org](http://standrewsduncan.org)
- Ladysmith community gardens  
[ladysmithcommunitygardensociety.weebly.com](http://ladysmithcommunitygardensociety.weebly.com)

Happy gardening!

*Priscilla Brewer*  
*Environment Commission Member*



# Eating Wild

Nature notes from a nature interpreter

We are blessed in the Cowichan Valley that eating locally is easy to do, right down to the salt on our tables! Besides patronizing our local farms and farm markets there is another place that you can find local food - in the wild!! Even your lawn, garden edges and the wilder parts of your garden offer much to eat. What a great way to reduce your carbon footprint, eating what has grown here for millennia! Don't have a garden or property? Ask a friend if you can look around in theirs.

Be sure when you wild harvest that you are respectful of where you do this. Please do not harvest in Parks, Protected Areas, and private property. Do not pick in areas where there is exposure to car fumes and/or pesticides. Be positive that you can correctly identify the plants that you are wishing to eat. Field guides like Pojar and McKinnon's Plants of Coastal BC (easily available in book stores) and a walk with a knowledgeable naturalist are helpful. Be cautious, not everything is edible. Remember not to harvest the whole group of plants and never rarer plants like wild ginger and camas. Some recently written plant guides suggest using rarer plants for eating and medicinal purposes; please do not do this. Be careful when collecting wild food with children to be sure that they are of an age to understand what they can eat. Start out with small amounts of new food, especially with children, to be sure that it is tolerated. Be sure and only pick fresh looking parts of the plants, old parts can be very bitter.

A good place to start wild harvesting is learning a few plants well. Some plants to start with in the Warm Land are big leaf maple, stinging nettle, and members of the wild raspberry family.

Big leaf maple, the largest leafed maple in the world, is easily recognizable with its leaves, which turn golden in the fall. The numerous flowers are edible and can be eaten raw straight up, in salads, and added into quiches. Of course the tree also provides maple syrup, but that requires a lot more work than picking flowers!

Stinging nettle, easily identifiable by its ragged edges is also tasty, much to people's surprise. If you look carefully you can see the little stinging hairs on the stalk and under the leaf, check for this to be sure that you are not picking something similar. If you do get stung by the nettle a dock plant is often nearby and when the leaf of this is rubbed on the rash the stinging will go away. Another option, believe it or not,

is to use the leaf of the stinging nettle to rub on the rash. Pick fresh looking nettles with gloves, when lightly steamed or macerated in the blender or food processor the stinging goes away. My favourite pesto is made from stinging nettles and local hazel nuts, your regular recipe with these substitutions will work out fine. When we have recipes needing spinach, i.e. lasagna, stinging nettles work well.

The wild raspberry family includes salmonberry, thimbleberry, wild trailing blackberry and many others. These can all be identified at berry time since the berry has the familiar raspberry shape; an aggregate fruit made up of many wee



*Edible bigleaf maple flowers*

gloves, each with a seed. The shoots and leaves of plants in this family can also be eaten or used in teas, but will be harder to identify without the berry.

Wild teas are another treat. Ones that you may find handy in your garden or nearby are blackberry leaves (only our little trailing blackberry is native, the Himalayan and cut leaf blackberries are introduced), wild rose leaves, stinging nettle leaves and wild strawberry leaves. The leaves can be dried or steeped fresh

Berries are a whole story on their own. Salmon berries are the first to be out, with colours ranging from pink to orange to blood red. Watery, they are best eaten fresh. Oregon grape berries are gorgeous with their blush of white on the purple berry, but very tart. They are best enjoyed in jellies and juices with added sugar. Other tasty berries are the tiny wild strawberry, crawling blackberry, salal, and thimbleberries, to name only a few.

While collecting, consider how you can give stewardship to the land so that our wild plants and their habitats are there for the future. Enjoy your wild harvesting!

*Genevieve Singleton*

*Nature Interpreter*

*Contact at [twinflower@telus.net](mailto:twinflower@telus.net) if you have questions*

# Going Local!

The Cowichan brand is becoming a desirable marquee for food producers in the valley. It delivers a trusted cachet for locally sourced food. Despite that rise to prominence, we still have a long way to go to become the main source of edible products for the community. Buying locally grown and processed food can still be a challenge for consumers here since local goods are not ubiquitous in all our stores. There are numerous reasons for this, not the least of which is the demand. Until the market creates a consistent demand for a product, there likely won't be enough suppliers to create the goods.

The other components of creating a stable supply of local produce are land, people, knowledge, water and diversity. If the demand is there, we can find a way to manage the rest.

Since 1991 the acreage farmed in the Cowichan Valley has decreased by 38% (Cowichan Valley Agricultural Plan) so the land is there to expand production. However, much of the land that is classed as Agricultural does not have the requisite water needed to make it prime land. That may seem counterintuitive when we are surrounded by so much water and are the beneficiaries of so much rainfall, but it isn't always at the right time and in the areas we need it.

The average age of farm operators in 2009 in Cowichan was 54.4 and rising. That is an unsustainable trend.

About 90% of the land base used for agricultural production is dedicated to forage and a large percentage of that is only suitable for forage. However if we are to create an environment conducive to a locavore populace it is clear that more land must be set aside for other uses.

The historical knowledge base dedicated to agricultural pursuits in the Cowichan region is understandably narrow at this point and must be broadened in the future to embrace a wider variety of crops and adapt to a changing climate.

The list of requirements for a thriving, profitable and healthy local food market may seem like a daunting one at this point, but there are two things that will bring about a rapid transformation. The first is a necessity to go local. Presently, the cost of transportation is minimal and access to cheap products from around the world is a given. That may not be the case in the foreseeable future. The availability of cheap fossil fuel transport is likely to evaporate, while climate change could very well destroy the capacity of mega-growing centres like California to be a main source of produce.

The second reason for a rapid transformation is the willingness of local consumers to create the demand for a basket of goods derived from their own backyard as it were. This is the most important factor. If we demand the product all the other variables will fall into place. Until we put our money where we say we want it, nothing much will happen. It is up to us to create the demand. The market will follow. We would be wise to generate that demand before we need to rely on it. So do your part and visit a local farm market soon.

*Pete Keber*

*Environment Commission Member*



Photo: Niki Strutynski



# Farm Profile: Mossy Banks Farm

We are fortunate in the Cowichan Valley to have rich agricultural soils and a mild climate. Aptly named the Warmland by the Coast Salish First Nations, we have the potential to meet the majority of our community food needs with local agriculture production, from fruit and vegetables, to livestock and grain. The Cowichan Area Agriculture Plan envisions a future where the local agriculture industry is producing 45% of the food consumed within the Cowichan Region (right now, we are producing about 5%). Lynn Wytenbroek has already surpassed this vision, producing 80% the food her family consumes at Mossy Banks Farm, and is doing this with joy and a great amount of zeal. Thankfully, she is happy to share her secrets with us.



Lynn Wytenbroek calls Mossy Banks Farm home. This 37 acre farm, located on Richards Trail, is ecologically diverse and abundant, with marshland, forests, rocky bluffs, and 7 acres of productive, arable soil. The farm functions in a co-op style, with Lynn and Jake Vanderwerf working together as farm partners. Over the years Mossy Banks has been developed to include an orchard, a food forest, a market and household garden, and houses a large family of animals – pigs, sheep, rabbits, turkeys, ducks and chickens. Lynn uses permaculture based concepts, and integrates diverse plantings and animals in a way that promotes increased sustainable production and efficient land management.

Putting permaculture principals into action, Lynn's newest development at Mossy Banks is a food forest. Food forests are an agriculture system that uses perennial plants to create vertical layers of vegetation, emulating a forest ecosystem in design and plant species selection. In food forests, fruit and nut trees form an overhead canopy, berry bushes fill in a mid-layer, and smaller perennials cover the understory. Encompassing a polyculture of plants, Lynn states that food forests can produce up to three times more food in total than a conventional orchard of the same size, while also being more disease resistant. Food forests, and permaculture in general, create lower maintenance gardens because they are designed to work within nature's natural systems and cycles, in contrast to conventional agriculture that works against nature's systems. For example, in a food forest, the ground is covered with low growing plants which add nutrients to the soil and retain water. Conventional agriculture, in contrast, maintains a bare ground cover through persistent weeding or herbicide application.

Not only does the food forest necessitate less maintenance while being highly productive, Lynn developed it in a low cost, ecologically healthy method: she used sheep and pigs to prepare the soil, instead of a tractor! The sheep were used first to eat down the grass, and the pigs came in second to dig up the soil. Lynn was left with cleared, fertilized soil (thanks to the animal manure), ready to plant the new food forest. Even better, the sheep and pigs were happy outside, and there was no barn to clean out at the end of the day. Whether it is pigs clearing soil or ducks eating garden slugs, Lynn integrates animals into her farming system, using the natural habits of animals to increase farm productivity.

These are just a few examples of Lynn's farming techniques and stories. Check out Mossy Bank's webpage for more examples of how increasing food security is full of creativity, innovation, problem-solving and humor!

# New Food Forest 2014



Lynn walks the talk, and talks the walk, when it comes to her contribution to our local food system. She cultivates a growing awareness of local food security, not only through her work as a farmer, but also through her work as a university professor and her involvement in several community initiatives. Here is a list of Lynn's suggestions of how you can support a vibrant local food system:

- Buy from farm markets, farm stands and stores that sell local produce
- Lobby for more local food in stores
- Use the Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Cowichan Food Map, produced by the Cowichan Green Community, to help you source local food
- Get closer to a zero mile diet! Grow your own food, and work together as a community to share gardening knowledge and abilities.
- Attend community Seedy Saturday events to help support seed diversity, and local seed availability.

- Trust that by purchasing local food you are growing the local economy, and in turn you will live in a more prosperous community.
- Get involved in your community organizations that support local agriculture.

Curious to learn more about Mossy Bank's ways? Fortunately Mossy Banks also integrates education into their farm, hosting workshops, training apprentices, and participating in Cowichan Green Community's annual Edible Garden Tour. This spring, Mossy Banks is facilitating a Food Forest workshop. Over the weekend of June 13 - 15, expert permaculturist Brandon Bauer, will teach food forest principals, as well as hands-on food forest techniques, as the group plants 279 different food forest plants at Mossy Banks on a  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre food site! For more information check out Mossy banks website ([www.mossybanks.ca](http://www.mossybanks.ca)).

*Erin Ward and Tessa Stiven*  
Urban Food Forest Project Coordinators  
Cowichan Green Community



# Why Chickens?

Certainly with commercial eggs easily available, urban chicken keeping is not for everyone. However, with increasing food security risks, food recalls, and a growing desire for locally sourced food, many people have decided that keeping a small flock of hens is worth the work, expense and commitment.

Fresh eggs are usually the first motivation that inspires the backyard chicken keeper. Studies have shown that eggs layed by hens who have access to pasture (grass, sunlight and insects) are significantly higher in vitamin's A, E and D and lower in cholesterol and saturated fat than eggs layed by factory farmed hens.

Most hens will lay between five to seven eggs a week starting, on average, from the age of four months until about the age of two years. After that she will continue to lay but her production will slow down and be less consistent for several more years. They can live for ten to fourteen years and may stop laying altogether by that time. It's important to understand the egg production cycle of hens, if eggs are your goal. Most birds stop laying during the Winter months unless you provide them artificial daylight during that time. Excessive cold and heat may lead to some dehydration that will slow laying. Being aware of these details will help you decide how many birds would be best for your lifestyle.

Chickens require some advance planning and a predator proof residence but are very easy to care for. They will enthusiastically help turn over your compost pile, consume most kitchen scraps and produce manure that, after curing, is an excellent source of nitrogen for the garden.

In addition to these benefits, our chickens have been a source of interest and joy to our family. Seeing them grow and watching their hilarious antics have been a different sort of reward. They are a source of conversation and shared laughter with many neighbours and our daily lives are the better for it.

*Amber Finn*





# Urban Food Forests

Take a walk in the woods and it is easy to see the vitality and sheer capacity of nature to thrive and produce in diverse conditions. A forest, with its many layers, from tall trees in the canopy to low lying herbaceous plants near the ground, provides many vital functions of this planet. From generating rich soil and thriving microorganisms, to habitats for a plethora of species, water and carbon sinks, and food sources for the plenty, it is a remarkable system.

Steadfast in their ability to also inspire creativity and wisdom amongst their visitors, forests are drawing the attention of farmers and horticulturists eager to understand how such a system can be so resilient, and ironically, so productive with

so few human inputs. From an awareness also of our vital need to produce sustainable and ecologically sound food systems, the forest stands as a teacher and guide. The result is a new horticultural design principle called Food Forestry.





A Food Forest, at its core, is intended to mimic many of the principles and functionality of a natural forest ecosystem. Focusing largely on perennial foods, however, it draws much of its insight from the external edges of a forest where light can percolate deep into the many layers of vegetation. In keeping with forest ecosystems, it seeks to produce high yields of foods with less inputs and maintenance relative to conventional agriculture.

Still quite new to the West Coast of North America, Food Forests are taking a variety of shapes and sizes. At the Cowichan Green Community, we are exploring Food Forestry principles in an urban setting. Here we are transforming a commercial space – the land around the former Phoenix Hotel, now known as The Station – from unused urban terrain with poor soils and a plethora of invasive species into a vibrant gathering of food perennials and native forest species.

When you wander through this forest in its full form, you will come across edible berries like raspberries, blueberries, Saskatoon and salmon berries. The forest floor will be peppered with herbals such as lavender, calendula and rosemary, and natives such as kinnikinnick, lupine and fern- each with their own unique uses. Climbing up the walls and meeting you at eye level will be kiwis, grapes and trees such as pears, mulberry and apple. It will be a gathering place for the many – birds, bees, children, harvesters, and educators.

We invite you to join us as a volunteer on this forest inspired creation every Wednesday from 3:30-5:30pm at The Station or keep in the weave by following us on instagram – [www.instagram.com/foodforest](http://www.instagram.com/foodforest). It is an exciting time when we get to fathom and create such an inspiring back to nature piece in downtown Duncan.

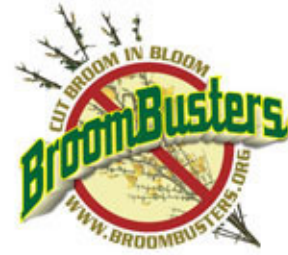
Alicia Taylor  
Cowichan Green Community

Join us as a volunteer on this forest inspired creation every Wednesday from 3:30-5:30pm at The Station.



## Did you know May is the best time to cut scotch broom?

For more information, check out [broombusters.org](http://broombusters.org)



## Stay Informed

### Upcoming meetings

All residents in the region are invited to attend the following meetings:

#### CVRD Environment Commission meetings:

Thursday, May 22, 6:00 pm

Board Room at 175 Ingram Street, Duncan

#### Duncan Environment Committee meetings:

Thursday, May 22, 10:00 am - 12:00 pm

Committee Room, City Hall, 200 Craig Street, Duncan

#### North Cowichan Climate Action Committee:

Thursday, May 22, 2:30 pm

Large Committee Room at the Municipality of North Cowichan, 7030 Trans Canada Highway

## Stay Tuned

In the next issue of 12/12:





Sign up for the “12 Months of 12 Big Ideas” e-newsletter  
and find more information at:

**[www.12things.ca](http://www.12things.ca)**



Share your feedback, email [12things@12things.ca](mailto:12things@12things.ca)

## Volume 1, Issue 7

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