

ST. GABRIEL'S GARDEN



GROWING NEWS

About Our Garden Ministry

As always, even in the “dormant” season, the Garden Ministry is busy: assessing, organizing, re-organizing, planning, and overall preparing for the upcoming burst of activity, requiring “all hands on task” in our ever-changing gardens. The demands and challenges of managing such extensive gardens mean that we are constantly examining our needs, and re-examining our administrative structure, to ensure that no one has a role that is too taxing on volunteers’ time and energy.

As people’s schedules shift, we recognize new needs, seek different skill sets, and strive to balance what’s needed for the growth of our gardens with our Garden Ministry’s leadership model, crucial to its functioning. We always have opportunities for leadership—often shared to make the job more manageable—and we ALWAYS welcome additional help in any capacity, whether through donation of time to help with ongoing garden tasks large or small, or with other resources.

In this coming season, we will be “recycling” the cherry trees that we lost last season to become a source of ongoing under-soil nourishment in *permakultur* gardens. There, organic materials form the interior of growing mounds, returning their nutrients to the soil in which they’re buried, while simultaneously helping to maintain garden bed moisture. We continue to tend to the existing beds with compost, natural fertilizers and organic fungicide.

Despite the disappointment of not qualifying for a City of Toronto Pollinator Grant, we have not abandoned hope for future success in obtaining one. These grants are provided to enhance pathways through urban landscapes to sustain bees and other pollinators. We wish to establish a new garden around the Meditation Circle, removing “problem plants” as well as the defunct irrigation system, and obtaining seeds to repropagate and revitalize this growing area.

Other initiatives include a Donation Program for garden tools and equipment, and a contest that has just launched (as of March 15th) to develop a distinctive Logo for the Garden Ministry. It will be used in our correspondence, promotional materials, and displays. Criteria details are available in the bulletin, and on the parish website. The contest closes at 4:30 PM on April 15th, so don’t delay: encourage the creative among you—especially young people—to design an entry! The winner will be announced in early May.

Once again, we have applied for a Canada Summer Student Grant to provide the Parish with a paid worker to handle the day-to-day needs of the garden during the busiest part of the growing season. We are hopeful for another successful application. In the past several years, these young people have been indispensable in handling the challenges of garden maintenance.

Our particular needs in caring for the Community Gardens have been difficult to meet. To both compensate and ease the “hands-on” requirements, we will be using the proven indigenous method of planting the “Three Sisters” crop—corn in the centre of a mound to support climbing beans, with squash seeds planted to spread down around the mound, keeping the soil moist.

We also plan to host more gardening workshops; the upcoming one will focus on Seed Propagation. Watch “The Garden Shed” in the bulletin, or listen for announcements regarding date and time.

Finally, we pray you will take to heart Fr. Paul’s invitation, found in the editorial at the end of this issue of “Growing News”. We are committed to our mission. With God’s help and yours, we will continue to care for our patch of His creation, where His marvels continue to unfold before our eyes (and sometimes, invisibly) season by season. May the joys of Spring’s rebirth feed your soul!

Spotlight on a Pollinator Garden

As mentioned, the St. Gabriel's Garden Ministry has been working to secure a "Pollinator Grant" from the City of Toronto, so far without success. However, that does not mean that St. Gabriel's Garden is not a Pollinator Garden: it most definitely is! Regardless of whether the flower that the bee or wasp or butterfly is visiting is what we call a "weed" (though it's really a plant in its own right), or a hybrid cultivar, the insects visit to feed or to collect food, and the plant gets pollinated!

Anyone who has walked through the St. Gabe's Garden during the growing season is aware of what a bountiful place it is: all sorts of insects visit the multitude of plants thriving there. Some are immediately recognizable as flowering plants. Some, we don't think of as "flowering". But just because they might not be "showy" in the flower-show-sense of the word, plants like grasses also have flowering parts and produce pollen. Some wildflowers and those erstwhile-called "weeds" have exquisitely tiny flowers, while some, like Echinacea and



If we bear in mind, when planning our floral displays and garden plots, that those small, seemingly inconsequential creatures upon whom so much depends also need to eat, then all of us can enrich the "food lots" of these pollinators. Plant a variety of colours and shapes, because each creature is drawn, by Nature's design, to slightly different flowers. We may plant for fragrance attractive to us, but sometimes, if we plant fragrance "defensively" (as with marigolds) we can "multi-task"—keeping pests from what we value, yet still providing irresistible scents for another creature. If we remember that each plant has its season, and amidst the profusion of long-blooming annuals, plant shorter-seasoned blossoms, we will enhance the biodiversity not only of the flora, but also of the pollinating fauna in our garden plots.



Daylilies, Lavender and Black-Eyed Susans, and even the ubiquitous thistles make it very apparent that they are beloved stopping-places for various pollinators.

From the time spring arrives with its flowering bulbs and fruit trees frothing in blossoms, through the productive weeks of early summer with vegetables blooming to enable maturation into the foods we eat, through the seasonal perennials and abundant annual displays, gardens burst forth everywhere. Whether filling large areas like ours, or a small sidewalk corner or an overflowing balcony container, each is a source of food for some small creature. We might not connect Our Lord's qualification that "whatever you do for the least of these, you do for me" with tiny pollinators, but we are all part of God's glorious creation—even when we don't recognize how connected we are.

We all have a role to play in appreciating and fostering the beauty and productivity of the garden spaces around us. We are certainly blessed to have such a large and beautiful one forming a sacred space here at St. Gabriel's. Let us be aware that its bounty extends beyond humanity.

-Marlene Bourdon-King

Introduction to Fr. Paul's Editorial *Getting Back to the Garden*

In this issue, the Garden Ministry is delighted to welcome a reflection on St. Gabriel's Garden from the perspective of our new pastor, Fr. Paul Ruttle. Fr. Paul presents our garden as another way of "belonging and becoming" in this very special parish, and thus "believing" in the power of the garden as a "parable of place" (Fr. Steve Dunn's phrase), an outdoor extension of our Sacred Space.

-MBK (Editor)



Getting Back to the Garden

by Fr. Paul Ruttle, CP

*We are stardust, we are golden
We are billion-year-old carbon
And we've got to get ourselves
Back to the garden.*

Lyrics from "Woodstock" by Joni Mitchell

Here at St Gabriel's Passionist Parish, we have gotten ourselves back to the garden in a big way.

We bless cars and water and people and gardens, but in truth, gardens actually bless us. They bless us with their beauty, their life, their shade, their sustenance, their presence and their relationships.

Saint Francis considered the Sun to be his brother, and the Moon his sister. I think we should consider our gardens to be parishioners. Faithfully and without fail every Sunday, all the life, relationships and creation in our gardens join us in our worship, as together we give steadfast glory to God.

I consider the garden ministry to be our signature ministry. Our gardens are a part of our collective DNA. It is inconceivable to think of St Gabriel's without our three gardens: one to the North, one to the South and our indoor Living Wall.

Just for a moment, try to picture our church without a South wall of clear glass silently beckoning us to our relationship with our immediate patch of creation. Imagine there is no garden there, but a parking lot in its place. Imagine our pews arranged in a traditional manner facing the altar. That would relegate the South garden to be a mere backdrop, rather than an active partner in our worship. Imagine no Living Wall cleaning our air and moderating our humidity. Imagine no community garden to the North. What would be there? A wider sidewalk? Perhaps it would be a small lawn offering no shelter to so many small critters and no bees. Where would we be without the bees? We would not be St Gabriel's Passionist Parish.

I have a rich imagination, but I honestly cannot imagine St Gabriel's without our gardens. It just wouldn't be St Gabriel's. Our gardens are so much a part of our communal identity they even have their own Newsletter!

No doubt other parishes have gardens. Some may have bigger gardens and perhaps even more formally beautiful gardens, but our gardens are worshiping gardens. Our gardens are generative gardens, feeding both body and soul. Our gardens remind us that all living things have agency and rights and deserve our respect and gratitude.



When Betty Ford was first lady of the United States her passion was to have wildflowers planted all over the States. At first, people were enthusiastic. The program quickly stalled when people discovered that you don't just plant wildflowers and let them be wild. It turns out even wildflowers need our care and respect.

The same is true of our gardens. It takes a lot of volunteers to maintain what looks to be wild and random. Over the years, there has been a small army of Garden Angels who have seen to the upkeep of our gardens. We are constantly in need of volunteers.

Please consider becoming active in this vital ministry. No special knowledge or skill is needed. Just a willingness to play a small but vital part of maintaining the special relationship with this ever-present and faithful fellow parishioner. St Gabriel's cannot exist as St Gabriel's without our gardens and the gardens cannot exist without us and our ongoing care.



Right now, our South Garden especially is in every sense a Lenten Garden. (Perhaps going forth when we distribute Ashes on Ash Wednesday we should say: "Remember you are stardust and to stardust you shall return.")

Lent, as you know, is a liturgical season. It is also a season of nature, coming in late Winter. Lent is a season of secrets and above all, it is a season of the heart.

The heart has its secrets; so do our gardens.

Just as we take time to look inward during Lent so that we might be better, more loving human beings who respect and care for others and creation, our garden is silently growing its secrets underground, getting everything ready for the return of the birds, and of course, the bees and all the various insects, as well as the small wildlife that call our gardens home.

Everything looks still and quiet, but life is teeming in our garden this Lent. All those secret relationships that are so necessary for our survival and the survival of the planet are being formed unseen, in secret. Our happiness and joy are germinating even now and will soon gloriously break out as Winter turns to Spring.

The word Lent comes from an Old English word meaning "lengthen"—and our days are already lengthening, setting our Brother Sun to painting our walls in awe-inspiring colours as he moves through the sky, kissing the garden with his warmth and life-giving light.

We cannot exist without each other – these gardens and St Gabriel's. We cannot live without understanding our place in creation. Our gardens are our teachers. They teach us how the plants and the animals need each other and how we need them.

The physical manifestations of our gardens bring us pleasure. But our gardens are also living, breathing, spiritual beings.

Take a break and spend some time in our Garden – I promise, it will grow on you!



The Hope of Spring

God, thank you for Spring and the hope of warmer, longer, brighter days. Thank you for the coming of growth and life and birth.

Thank you that things are coming awake in the world.

This is what our calendar says, and we do see some signs that it is real.

But we also still struggle with the residual layover of winter.

Now we ask that you bring into reality all that belongs in this season.

Your word says that we will have provision,

and hope, and joy,

and health and loving relationships here and now in this life.

We ask that what belongs in this season would become actual in our practical lives.

We hope in you and in your promises.

We hope in your gift of Spring.



- Author Unknown

[from Xavier.edu]

"Growing News" is the newsletter of the St. Gabriel's Garden Ministry, published quarterly, at the turn of each season.

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