



ST. GABRIEL'S GARDEN GROWING NEWS



About Our Garden Ministry

It is with sad hearts that we share news that many may not have heard. Our beloved Garden Ministry Co-Coordinator, Patricia Bristol-Clarke, passed away suddenly in January. While we rejoice that she has been called home to the joy of God's presence, we cannot but mourn our inestimable loss. Patricia was known for her beautiful smile and gentle kindness. She possessed a lovely spirit in a quiet presence that inspired all with the strength of her faith. Yet she simultaneously displayed a resolute and boundless energy in moving the garden along. We are forever grateful for the gift of her knowledge, wisdom and dedication, and will remember her with love, especially when the legacy of the flowering bulbs she helped to plant burst into bloom this spring in the south garden. The Garden Ministry will be dedicating space in the garden to the west of the Elkhorn Driveway to Patricia's memory. We share the words of Sr. Malou in our prayers for Patricia: "May she continue to plant God's seeds of joy and peace in the Eternal Garden of Heaven."

Spotlight on the Garden

Besides the maintenance of the garden already established, one of the most difficult aspects of managing a garden as vast as ours is just that—to keep it manageable. This means we must persevere with multi-year projects, and resist the temptation to get carried away with the excitement of new hopes and dreams of garden glory. Nevertheless, it is important to keep those areas of the garden that are languishing from going their own merry way and re-establishing a new "Garden of Weeden"!

Consequently, we will be continuing to develop a pollinator garden around the meditation circle. Kevin Benoit, our Garden Ministry Coordinator, conducted extensive research on Sunflowers that will do well in our gardening zone, and GM members were consulted for their input on the varieties they would most like to see brightening the garden space surrounding the Tree of Life sculpture.

Parishioners who wish to donate appropriate pollinator plants to this initiative are asked to contact Kevin Benoit to arrange the timing of the transfer.

The area of the south garden beside the ramp to the underground parking will be used to repurpose the flowering plants purchased yearly by the parish for the Easter celebrations. In this way, we will be using our resources wisely, and ensuring that the floral tributes to the glory of Our Resurrected Lord will continue to bloom for many "paschal feasts" to come.

An area that has plagued the Garden Ministry since the garden began is the "desert space" under the South Window overhang. The area is particularly challenging because the roof necessarily shading the south-facing window also shelters the soil beneath it from rainfall. Thus, it is a hard place to establish and maintain the moisture that flowering plants need. Nevertheless, our goal is to begin to create a colourful, low-maintenance perennial flower garden in front of the huge window separating the interior and exterior Sacred Spaces. We hope to provide year-round visual appeal by carefully selecting the right plants and designing for seasonal variety.



Spotlight on the Sunflower

Perhaps one of the most recognizable summer blooms, the sunflower has become a favourite symbol of happy summer garden scenes. Sunflowers were first domesticated in the Americas by indigenous people. They are part of the daisy family—summer-blooming plants. The large-faced, tall sunflowers are annuals, meaning they need to be replanted each season. The largest, which can grow to over 6 feet tall, are best known for the tasty seeds produced in the circular centre of the flower, which is actually a “flower head”. The coloured outer rays resemble petals, while the central part is comprised of multiple tiny florets, arranged in intersecting spirals. It is these which pollinators visit, and enable seed production.

When passing a field where the sunflower is grown for seed, the flower heads seem to be sentient sun-worshippers. Actually, the plants are displaying *heliotropism*, following the sun's course from east to west, which only happens with they are young. Once mature and the stalks have stopped growing, the flowers maintain a single, usually easterly, direction. This ensures quicker morning warming, and thus increases pollinator visits. Later, the abundant seed heads, which droop with the weight of the mature seeds in their hard shells, not only produce a nutritious human snack, but are also processed for their oil. A favourite bird food, the small black seeds are highly prized, because of their high oil content. Commercially, the leftover meal (compressed into “cakes” after seed oil extraction), as well as the shells themselves, are also used as livestock feed, making full use of the harvest.

Home gardeners wishing to harvest their own seedheads after enjoying the huge blooms will find themselves in competition with all kinds of wildlife, from birds to squirrels to other rodents. Unless quick to gather the drooping flower head, humans seldom win that competition, finding many empty sockets which recently held tasty seeds.

Sunflowers grow quickly, on coarsely-haired stalks, but they don't like to share their garden space with other plants species. In fact, they produce a chemical shield of a phenolic compound in the soil around the stalk, approximately 6-12 inches in diameter. Within that perimeter, the plant will not be sharing water or nutrients. This might partially account for its quick growth and prolific output.

The sunflower is a popular symbol, used to highlight various positive meanings in various contexts. For instance, it is the national flower of the Ukraine, where the oil was used for cooking, particularly during Lent when the Orthodox Church forbade the use of butter or lard.



It is fascinating to discover that sunflowers have been used for *phytoremediation* to remove pollutants, such as heavy metals, from the soil. They have also been planted at nuclear disaster sites, such as Chernobyl and Fukushima, and at Pervomaysk, a former nuclear missile base to reclaim the land after radiation poisoning.

Though commercial farmers growing other commodity crops may consider the wild sunflower a weed, most people respond to its happy associations. We love the joyous beauty of the flower. We value its usefulness as a food source for humans, insects and animals, and its ability to grow in any environment that is not tropical, desert or tundra. Most remarkably, we marvel at its ability to rehabilitate severely polluted sites. In almost every sense of the word, the sunflower is truly a gift from God!

Photo credit: Pinterest



Taking Stock in the Season of Hope



Remembering that we are a people of hope, in this season of transformation and resurrection, is especially challenging in these troubled times. Everywhere, people are afraid: of tariffs, of climate change, of political uncertainty, of worldwide conflict. Fear is potent, and difficult to quell. Except that Jesus told us NOT to be afraid. As a people of faith, we know that we truly have nothing to fear, because with God, anything is possible, and despite indications that may seem to be the opposite, God IS in control.

Sometimes, though, we forget that. We like to think that we can control at least some things in our lives. We are not robots, because God did give us free will. We are free to choose the path we follow. And as a society, we find it very easy to operate as if by rote: automatically going through the motions of our lives, without truly considering the significance of our actions. It could be called complacency, and to a certain degree, that is true. But perhaps it is more fitting to examine our consciences for what might be dubbed “the sin of convenience”.

It is SO EASY for us to follow the beaten path, to walk in the footsteps of those around us. It is too easy for us to allay our consciences with little things we do that are “good”, sidestepping the more impactful things we could be doing, except that they are not convenient. We could walk places, but it is faster to drive. We could take public transit, but it is not as time-efficient as using our own vehicle. We could shop local, but it might be more expensive. We could do a better job with reducing, reusing and recycling, but it's so much easier to buy new, or to just throw something used away rather than clean it up for another use, or to not think about the packaging (or overpackaging) of a product we want to buy.

Recently, Fr. Paul reminded us of what the season of Lent is for. It is to be a time of transformation, which in the Northern Hemisphere, aligns almost perfectly with spring. Lent is a time to “slow down” and to examine what it means to transform—to become other than what we've been. If we have become a society in some ways “addicted” to convenience, how can our hearts and minds be turned in a new direction? How can we be transformed?



And what has dwelling on transformation and “convenience” got to do with St. Gabriel's Garden? Perhaps more than is immediately obvious.

Certainly, we know that spring is obviously a time of transformation: what has appeared dead or dormant “springs” to life with the arrival of longer days, and warmer sunlight. Spring bulbs push upward to delight us with the first blossoms of the season. But all the beauty and bounty to come doesn't happen by itself in our Garden. It requires human help to complete the transformation we expect. And that's where “convenience” becomes a temptation.



It might not be convenient to make time to volunteer with the Garden Ministry. It might be outside our “comfort zone” to get down and work in the dirt. We might prefer to spend our disposable time and cash in a coffee shop, rather than supporting one of the Garden Ministry fundraising activities. It might not occur to us that working in the garden can be a form of contemplative prayer: worshipping God—as we care for some aspect of the garden—and thanking the Creator for all this life and abundance. It might not seem relevant to recognize the connectedness of everything—from fungus mycelia in the soil, to flowering plants, to fruit-bearing trees, to lofty branches of shade-providing evergreens. We might not want to remember that all of us lifeforms: humans, as well as the creatures on land and in the sky and underground and in water—whether puddle or stream or river or lake or ocean—are gifts of a generous and loving God, our Father.

Pope Francis encouraged us to treat our planet as we are called to treat the poor, neglected, and downtrodden. Planet Earth needs our loving care and attention. Volunteering in our garden—making it part of a routine, not a “whenever”, can be a form of active prayer. We can offer up traditional prayers while we work... saying the Rosary while we weed or prune or water, for instance, praying to Our Sorrowful Virgin Mother, for the healing of our world. We can also offer our work as form of worship in our outdoor Sacred Space.



Our garden work in the community garden boxes has immediate and direct impact, because it helps to provide a fresh food supply for the homeless being fed by the Good Shepherd Ministry downtown. It reminds us that we can grow our own food in a responsible and sustainable way. Certainly, it is not as convenient as picking up something at the grocery store. But we can also support sustainable, local food production by purchasing fresh produce from Farmers' Markets. It might not be as convenient, but it may be contributing to a greater good: by supporting our local farming communities, we are ensuring that arable land remains available to grow food, rather than be swallowed up by yet more urban sprawl.

Modern life has been very successful in seeming to make our lives easier, and yes, more convenient. But in the “instant gratification” that technology provides, what have we lost? How have we been deceived into a transformation that is not life-giving? Can we reconnect with ourselves and each other as we take on some responsibility for caring for our own Sacred Space in the St. Gabriel's Garden?

Jubilee 2025 – Pilgrims of Hope

The Jubilee Prayer

Father in heaven,
may the faith you have given us
in your son, Jesus Christ, our brother,
and the flame of charity enkindled
in our hearts by the Holy Spirit
reawaken in us the blessed hope
for the coming of your Kingdom.



May your grace transform us
into tireless cultivators
of the seeds of the Gospel.
May those seeds transform from within
both humanity and the whole cosmos
in the sure expectation
of a new heaven and a new earth, when,
with the powers of Evil vanquished,
your glory will shine eternally.

May the grace of the Jubilee
reawaken in us, Pilgrims of Hope,
a yearning for the treasures of heaven.
May that same grace spread
the joy and peace of our Redeemer
throughout the earth.

To you our God, eternally blessed,
be glory and praise for ever. Amen.

- Franciscus



We mourn the loss of Pope Francis, the champion of the voiceless, and pray that the Holy Spirit will guide the Conclave to choose a new Holy Father who will build upon his legacy.



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

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