

The PRAIRIE GARDEN

A non-profit publication dedicated to the
advancement of horticulture in the Prairies

Growing Food

80TH ANNUAL EDITION



WESTERN CANADA'S ONLY GARDENING ANNUAL

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FROM THE EDITOR



EXCEPT FOR THREE YEARS during World War II, this book has appeared annually since 1937, making this our 80th issue. It continues to serve as an inspiring resource for gardeners in the northern prairies and other cold-climate regions. Our focus this year, “Growing Food,” reflects more than just a trend (which it is!). It reflects a truth: ultimately, our food doesn’t come in plastic wrapping from the store, but from the earth. We chose our topic for its double meaning: sometimes *we* grow our food, as in gardens, and sometimes food just *grows*, as in the wild. So we also look at foraging, along with a broad range of techniques and plant varieties for gardeners who want to embrace more edibles, no matter what kind of spaces they have to work with. At the back, you will also find our index for the years 2014–2018.

—Linda Dietrick

FROM THE GUEST EDITOR

MANY YEARS AGO, a good friend sparked my love for *The Prairie Garden* when she randomly and quite fittingly gifted me with the 1992 issue on The Sustainable Landscape. After hearing how I was looking to step up my gardening game, she knowingly placed it in my hands, confidently stated, “This will be your bible,” and encouraged me to continue adding to my *Prairie Garden* collection.

As I read and learned, I often laughed and found myself savouring articles as though they were composed by good friends who had taken the time to share their wisdom and secrets so that I might understand and enjoy success, as they do. I can remember slowing my pace of reading that first book, so as to not run out of material before I could locate another edition. The information was precious and not something that I typically had the privilege to indulge in. By showcasing many interesting plants, explaining new techniques, and addressing relevant concerns for northern growers, the book clearly offered reliable content sourced from fellow growers.

Eighty proud years of helpful advice and community stories contributed by nearby experts and motivated green thumbs will, I hope, continue to inspire and educate future generations. As stewards of often challenging prairie landscapes, we gain confidence and become stronger as a whole when we

share and learn from each other’s experiences. Every grower is unique and each garden is different, but the common threads that bind us are curiosity and the determination to cultivate more growth in our lives.

It has been roughly fourteen gardening seasons since I first opened that 1992 edition, and today I find myself coveting these personally crafted writings more than ever. As my experience deepens, I feel proud and empowered as I harness each drop of wisdom to help build richer and more diverse gardens.

A recent opportunity to join this creative team and share my personal take on gardening has been a blessing that has come full circle. Just as Helena put this inspiring annual in my hands so many years ago, I wish to continue the tradition and set the stage for future growth. Needless to say, I am thrilled to offer inspiration and hope to pass on some of the passion that this publication has stirred in me. My goal as guest editor of this 2019 Growing Food issue is to return the generous favour by fostering and inspiring such growth in others.

“It is not from ourselves that we learn to be better than we are.”

—WENDELL BERRY



Truthfully, I am not sure who I might be or what I might know if I had not found this essential and precious connection to gardens. I encourage you to soak up the friendly advice that follows and then feel free to experiment. Remember, there are no real mistakes in the garden – only valuable lessons.

—Tiffany Grenkow

The first gatherings of the garden in May of salads, radishes and herbs made me feel like a mother about her baby – how could anything so beautiful be mine. And this emotion of wonder filled me for each vegetable as it was gathered every year. There is nothing that is comparable to it, as satisfactory or as thrilling, as gathering the vegetables one has grown.

—THE ALICE B. TOKLAS COOK BOOK



GRATITUDE GROWS IN THE GARDEN

BY TIFFANY GRENKOW

Tiffany Grenkow is an urban farmer and food activist who helps lead and tend the garden plots and orchards of Winnipeg's South Osborne Community Commons. Her gardens produce food for her family, sweet potato slips for local growers, and specialty crops for local chefs.

IT IS SAID THAT GRATITUDE is the secret to a happy life. Since we can learn to feel gratitude almost anywhere, I would like to share how I think gratitude can grow in the garden.

Kitchen gardens, especially, can offer gracious rewards in the most delicious and delightfully tactful ways. When I cultivate the things we eat, my family and friends enjoy the most obvious of edible rewards, but my garden also offers poignant lessons from a world we often take for granted. It gives me a deeper connection with the magic of nature. Learning to create healthy ecosystems while connecting with life on such a fundamental level is immensely valuable. When I take care of my corner of the earth, it takes care of me. That connection is both gratifying and easy to understand.

Admittedly, I'm the first to swoon over traditionally landscaped properties, so I have struggled with a reluctance to use my property to grow food. Not too long ago, my first (and current) yard was beautifully landscaped with cottage flowers and perennials, which periodically put on a nice show. But I gradually realized that it required a fair in-



My son monitoring the rain gauge in my first allotment garden

vestment of care, and it seemed to lack mystery – as well as interesting things to nibble.

Amusingly accurate is the joke amongst flower gardeners about how the best time to visit the garden was two weeks ago or two weeks from now. This isn't exactly fulfilling and makes you wonder about the value of a display garden whose sole purpose is to please the eye. Unfortunately, anything short of perfection is often perceived as failure, which in turn might make the space feel more like a burden than



My daughter enjoying a 'San Marzano' tomato on the spot

the privilege it really is. Strangely enough, this only crossed my mind after years of tedious maintenance. I finally began to question the value of spending precious energy tending grass when it could be food.

After years of coddling giant delphiniums and striving for short-lived bursts of aesthetic perfection, my attention shifted to a more sustainable strategy to employ the land and feed my family. Unless those gorgeous swaying delphiniums were bound for a vase, their effect on my life would be fleeting. Food plants play more committed roles in my garden, and I love them for this. Even long-forgotten rhubarb plants possess powers strong enough to call forth pies, and so they became worthwhile investments. I very much cherish cooking and eating the best quality food, so growing it became far more appealing than

staking and deadheading just for the sake of aesthetics. Flowers are essential for pollinators, and I wouldn't dream of a garden devoid of blooms, but vegetables are admirably keen to multitask and earn their keep, while at the same time offering plenty of visual interest.

It wasn't until I grew out of my shady yard and ventured into my growing community that I would recognize how far the benefits might reach. Fortunately, a city-owned allotment garden put me out in full sun, and new possibilities began to sprout. For the first time, there was ample space for experimentation, which bolstered my confidence and experience. New spaces gave me excuses to step out of my comfort zone and before long, I was motivated to put as much as I could on our table.

The children munched miniature white cucumbers ripped straight from the vine, and together we steamed dragon's tongue beans until their stripes faded into butter and dill. Peruvian potatoes impressed us with their purple chips and spurred us on to make home-

Lost a little lawn and gained buttercrunch lettuce



made ketchup. Summer squash spent hard time on the grill, and torpedo onion rings raised the bar in the snack department. All produce was prized, and vegetables were easily incorporated into each meal. Celebration ended up revolving around whatever was happening in the garden, and this endearing way of life quickly became both comfortable and inspiring.

At first it was thrilling just to see small portions of my produce play a part in our diet, and then gratitude started to snowball. Soon I began to recognize a cascade of life's gifts and simple pleasures that I had previously failed to notice. Sun-soaked raspberries, pickled beets, and tart juice squeezed from apples stowed in the freezer became symbols of gratitude that were hard to deny.

Edible gardens are inspiring places that encourage taste buds to explore and expand. Even small pots of herbs or solo tomato plants can provide inspiration and help you enjoy more of what the seasons have to offer. Not only does produce taste better when it is picked at the peak of ripeness, but nutrient values are increased and healthy eating just comes easier. Since we consume whatever we grow, and since we can't exactly grow cookies, we graze on peas or baby carrots instead. I shudder to think how not growing my own arugula might have meant a lifetime of pushing it away.

It's easy to be grateful when rain plumps your perfect bell peppers, sunshine sweetens melons, or bees and butterflies conspire to help make you dinner. Yet even in



My mother and me pulling carrots in my grandmother's garden, late 1970's

winter, after the plants die back and the heavenly aroma of heirloom pumpkin pies fades away, a greater appreciation of life and its delicate natural balance remains. Aside from providing fresh flavours and nutrition, the food in my garden lets me see that bigger picture.

Gratitude that grows in the food garden can become infectious and possibly even unstoppable, so you may want to warn your neighbours – or help them make a larger garden.