

Gardening & Composting



Why garden?

There are many benefits to gardening. It can be a relaxing and rewarding hobby that allows you to nurture a plant from the ground up. Planting your own vegetable garden is one of the most sustainable options for sourcing produce, helping you know how your food is grown, and ensuring that unwanted chemicals aren't being applied to the soil. Flowers and other plants add beauty to your home and outdoor space. Plus, the process of growing plants can provide many health benefits, including exercise and stress relief.

Types of gardening

Indoor gardening

Houseplants indoors helps to purify indoor air. They draw in air-borne pollutants, and expel fresh, good quality air.¹ Examples of small house plants you can enjoy inside year round include aloe vera, English ivy, weeping fig (Ficus), snake plants and lucky bamboo.

Indoor herb gardens are another option. They can grow on your kitchen windowsill all year long supply you with fresh seasonings for your cooking. Some ideas to get you going can be found online at the [Backyard Farmer](#) or at [Psbydilla](#).

Native plant gardening

Native plants thrive naturally in the region you are in. By using native plants, you will grow a garden that is easy to maintain, drought-tolerant, and attractive to native wildlife.²

Container gardening

This is a great option if you do not have a lot of outdoor space. Containers can be placed on apartment balconies, rooftops, and patios. They can be used to grow food, flowers, herbs, and foliage. Containers generally have fewer weeds and diseases.¹

Did you know?

There are over 30 community garden groups in Edmonton and over 60 different garden sites.

Community gardening

A community garden is a piece of land that is gardened by many individuals. Options usually include either renting a plot for yourself, or working with others to collectively garden the whole space. Community gardens give people the chance to grow their own produce and plants while building and beautifying their neighbourhood. There are over 80 garden sites in the capital region.³

Sustainable Food Edmonton is great resource for finding a community garden near you. It also provides resources for starting up a new community garden in your neighbourhood.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

This type of agriculture directly links consumers with local growers. Individuals buy shares in a local farm, garden or business, in exchange for a regular portion of the harvest over the whole growing season. Products are regularly delivered to designated drop-off sites where individuals can pick them up. CSA is an exciting and sustainable way to get your groceries, but it is not without its risks. If a farm has a low yield one week, less produce will be available for shareholders.

The **Community Supported Agriculture in Alberta** website provides a list of CSAs across the province.

Gardening on campus

Community Gardens

Green & Gold Community Garden (South Campus)

This garden is a joint project between the School of Public Health and the Faculty of Agriculture, Life and Environmental Sciences. It is run entirely by volunteers and grows local, organic produce which is distributed by donation. The proceeds are donated to the Tubahumurize Association in Rwanda which seeks to empower socially and economically marginalized women.

Edmonton Organic Grower's Guild Community Garden

This organization is a working group of the Alberta Public Interest Research Group and receives support from the Imanta Latvian Society of Edmonton and the Faculty of Agriculture, Life and Environmental Sciences. This garden is used to grow

Helpful hint

Turn your long-handed tools into measuring sticks by marking inch and foot marks onto the handle.

local organic produce that is often donated to non-profits in Edmonton that are working towards food security (eg. the Edmonton Food Bank, Mustard Seed, and Youth Emergency Centre).

Sustain SU's Campus Community Garden (North Campus)

The mandate of this garden is to promote local, organic food production. The garden is run by volunteers who get to take home a portion of the fresh, healthy produce. The rest of the produce is used to promote food security through a partnership with the Campus Food Bank. Volunteering at the garden provides an opportunity for nature-connected recreation and socializing.

Jardin Communautaire (Campus Saint-Jean)

This garden is a place for Residence Saint-Jean students, campus staff, and community members to work together and share knowledge. The garden uses organic techniques, composting and responsible water use. The harvest is given to volunteers and donated to community programs.

Augustana Campus Community Garden (Augustana Campus)

The garden was a student-led initiative started in the summer of 2011 funded by a YES grant from Alberta ecoTrust. The produce grown during the year is used to encourage food security of campus and the fall harvest was used to provide a free campus community supper.

Other gardens on campus

Faculty of Education's Indigenous Teaching Gardens

In 2011, UAlberta's Sustainability Enhancement Fund provided funding to refurbish the patios in Education Centre North, adding an Aboriginal Garden to support the Faculty of Education's Aboriginal Curriculum initiative. The gardens provide a space for the campus community to learn about indigenous plants.

Devonian Botanic Gardens

The gardens are located a 15 minute drive southwest of Edmonton, with cultivated beds and plant collections, indoor show houses, and an extensive natural trail system. The gardens are open to visitors from May 1st to Thanksgiving weekend.

Did you know?

UAlberta's [Devonian Botanical Gardens](#) were established in 1959 and cover 190 acres of land? Highlights of the garden include a butterfly show house and beautiful ornamental flower gardens. Tours and educational courses are available.



Gardening Programs at UAlberta

Adopt a Flower Bed

This program encourages involvement of staff and students in the grounds of the University of Alberta. It promotes stress reduction and increased physical activity. Individuals or work groups can adopt a designated planter from a list. They may choose their own plants or select from an approved list, and plant and care for them all summer-long. The program encourages both ornamental and edible plants.

Master Gardener

This is a part-time, non-credit certificate program at the Devonian Botanic Gardens. It comprises classroom lectures, tours, and a practicum in which students learn a variety of topics related to gardening. The program runs weekly from September to April.

Sustainable Gardening Practices

Five Quick Tips

1. Reuse and recycle materials in your garden.
2. Look into sustainable and organic lawn care.
3. When designing your outdoor space, look at ways to provide habitat for wildlife and pollinators.
4. Learn by reading books and online materials, and joining local organizations and clubs.
5. Encourage children and youth to learn how to garden at a young age.

Curb your water use

Sustainability in garden and lawn care can be improved by simply using a rain barrel instead of tap water from the garden hose. Using rain water significantly reduces the amount of fresh water needed to keep a healthy garden and saves money on your water bill.

Did you know?

Both the City of Edmonton and University of Alberta use a variety of integrated pest management practices to maintain their grounds. For example, North Campus garden beds are covered with recycled wood chips that act as a physical barrier that reduces weeds.

Plant Sustainable Seeds

Sustainable seeds can be organic (harvested from non-GMO plants that are grown without synthetic fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides) or heirloom variety (a plant varietal that has been grown and passed down over generations or centuries).

Where to find sustainable seeds:

- **Apache Seeds** 10136 149 St
- **Earth's General Store** 9605 82 Ave
- **Planet Organic Market** 7917 104 St
- **Strathcona Farmers' Market** 10310 83 Ave – Saturdays only
- **104 Street Farmers' Market** 104 St, 101 - 103 Ave – Saturdays only
- **Hole's at the Enjoy Centre** 101 Riel Drive, St. Albert

Composting

Composting is the process of turning food waste back into soil. It is a managed biological process involving living organisms found in soil like bacteria, fungi and earthworms. They break down the organic matter and convert it into a soil conditioner called compost. Examples of organic matter that can be easily composted include coffee filters, dry brown leaves, woody materials, tea and coffee, uncooked vegetable and fruit scraps, and more.⁴

Benefits of composting:

- **Diverts kitchen scraps and other materials from the landfill**
- **Improves water and nutrient holding capacity of the soil**
- **Helps to break down tough soils, making digging easier**

There are a few different types of composting:

Backyard

Backyard composting requires three key elements: organic materials, moisture, and soil organisms. It is also helpful to have a structure in which to place your scraps. Two great step-by-step sources on how to backyard compost are:

- **City of Edmonton's "A down to heart guide to composting"**
- **Government of Alberta's "Backyard composting to reduce organic waste" guide**

Did you know?

Synthetic fertilizer is a fossil fuel and once in the soil many of its chemical components, like phosphorous, can leak into water system and affect other plants.

Vermicompost

To compost year-round in the comfort of your home or office, set up a vermicomposter. Your earthworms will break down most food waste you feed them, producing a rich fertilizer to use on your houseplants. Two excellent resources on setting up your own safe and easy vermicomposter are:

- **City of Edmonton’s “Welcome to the world of vermicomposting”**
- **Government of Alberta’s “Vermicomposting to reduce kitchen waste” guide**

Learn More

Programs and groups

City of Edmonton’s gardening programs

The City of Edmonton offers various gardening programs, including Container Gardening, and Living Frames (learning how to create a living wall in your home).

Edmonton Horticultural Society

A volunteer-run, non-profit society that is committed to fostering an interest, understanding and enjoyment of gardening. Their activities range from hosting a speakers series and plant sales and exchanges to garden tours and competitions.

Alberta Horticultural Association

An organization of horticultural societies and individuals in Alberta who are involved with horticulture on a professional or amateur basis.

Edmonton Naturalization Group

An informal group of people who like to grow native plants and promote their use in gardening and landscaping to a wider public. They raise plants at the Oldman Creek nursery, maintain a demonstration bed at the John Janzen Nature Centre and volunteers help care for parts of Edmonton’s parks.

Alberta Invasive Plants Council (AIPC)

Invasive plants are spreading throughout our ecosystems at an alarming rate. The AIPC works to raise awareness about the dangers of these species of plants and works to restore the prevalence of native species.

Looking for more information on composting?

The [John Janzen Composting Education Centre](#) has experts on site to answer any and all questions about composting. They will even provide a tour of their facility.

Master Gardeners Association of Alberta

A non-profit society dedicated to providing master gardeners with the opportunity to network, volunteer and further their education. They host many tours and workshops.

Online resources

I Can Garden

A website formed by Master Gardener Donna Dawson to provide information to gardeners. Includes information on over 500 garden clubs, 300 public gardens, and gives access to over 8000 articles on gardening.

Urban Farmer

This site provides information to empower individuals and communities to develop local food systems that are resilient, healthy, and sustainable within their city.

Balcony Gardener

A website with great ideas and inspiration for individuals to start their very own balcony gardens.

Canadian Gardening

A companion website to Canadian Gardening magazine. It is a great place for gardeners to connect, chat, compare notes and learn new information.



Helpful hint

Got too many edibles?

Donate them to the [Campus](#)

[Food Bank](#) or [Operation](#)

[Fruit Rescue Edmonton](#)

Sources:

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2. "Gardening with Native Plants". Habitat Acquisition Trust. n.d. Web. Retrieved 27 June, 2013. <http://www.crd.bc.ca/watersheds/protection/howtohelp/documents/HAT_Garden_Brochure_web.pdf>
3. "Find a Community Garden". Sustainable Food Edmonton. n.d. Web. Retrieved 27 June, 2013. <<http://sustainablefoodedmonton.org/find-a-community-garden>>
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