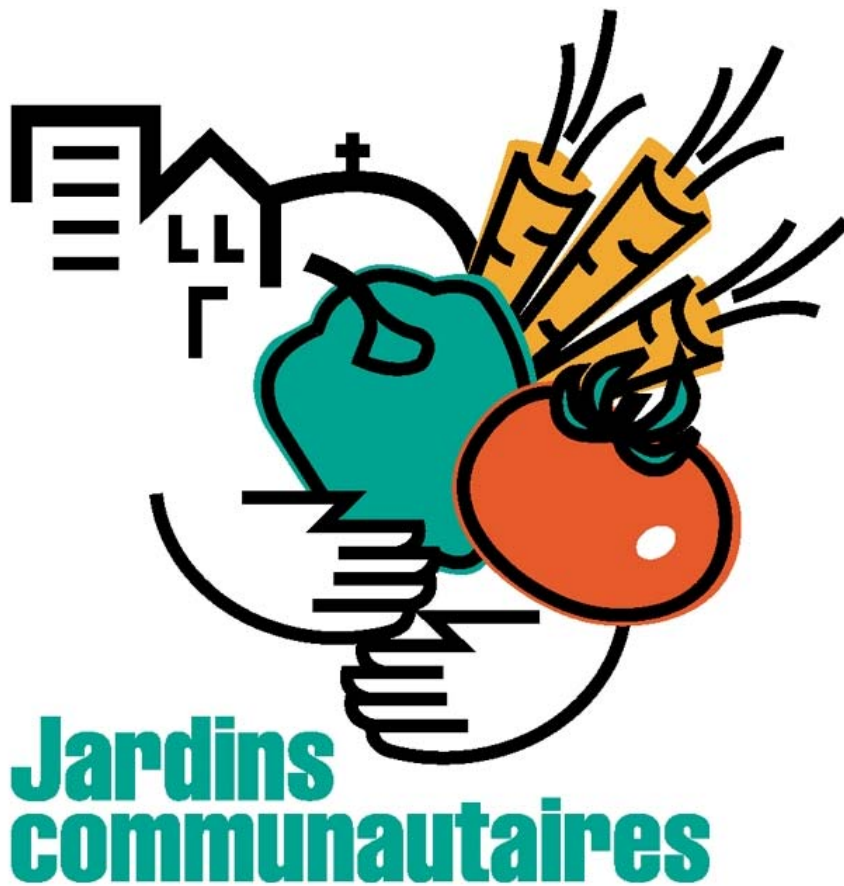


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MONTREAL'S COMMUNITY GARDENING PROGRAM



Ville de Montréal

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MONTREAL'S COMMUNITY GARDENING PROGRAM: A MODEL PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN A MUNICIPALITY AND ITS CITIZENS

Responding to its citizen's requests, the city of Montreal created 76 community gardens with 6,400 allotments since 1975. These serve some 10,000 people a year, which makes the program one of the most significant in North America. After 29 years of concerted effort on the part of both gardeners and the city administration, the program is now well-established, publicly-accessible, and increasingly ecologically-oriented. (Since the merge in 2002, the number of gardens within Montreal is now 97 community gardens and 8195 allotments.)

Introduction

Montrealers have historically been keen on preserving and developing their parks, green spaces and community gardens. Parks and green spaces now established by the different administrations over the years occupy a minimum of ten per cent of the territory. There are, of course, social and financial pressures for commercial development on public and private green spaces, on protected lands, as well as on prime vacant real estate. Often, in reaction to plans to build on precious green space, individuals and ad hoc pressure groups successfully lobby the city government at municipal meetings to safeguard the land against commercialization.



This 166-lot community garden is located on top of a huge water reservoir of the City of Montreal.

Because the city government's development plans include many initiatives to 'make green' existing open spaces, citizens have less cause for direct action than in many other North American cities. Regular large-scale flower-planting schemes, continual tree-planting initiatives, as well as an extensive annual beautification campaign over the past decade, is clear evidence of the municipal administration's policy on city greening.

The beautification campaign is a good example of the way in which the city responds to

demands made by its citizens. It was born out of a request by several community organizations for flowers to transplant at the base of the trees that line their streets. Less than six years later, citizens were asking for a total of about half a million plants! As a result, the municipal government took on the organization of a large-scale flower production and distribution program on an annual basis.

The unique and rapid development of a municipal network of community gardens came about in the same way. Given its scale and success, over the past years other municipalities and community groups both in Canada and in the United States have asked for information about how Montreal's program works. This is a fine opportunity to describe the program's functioning and its distinctive elements.

Montreal's Community Garden Network

Montreal has the largest community gardening program in Canada. According to members of the American Community Gardening Association (ACGA), it is rated within the three best programs in North America. The program's significance as well as its distinctive characteristics account for the fact that Montreal was chosen to host the 1996 ACGA Conference.

Montreal's network of community gardens brings together 76 garden sites. About 6,400 allotments are available for vegetable gardening and 440 more small plots are set aside for young people between the ages of 9 and 14. An estimated 10,000 people, or about 1.5 per cent of the city's adult population, take advantage of this program, which makes it a significant recreational activity for Montrealers.

The 76 gardens are relatively well distributed throughout the city. Their sizes vary considerably, 13 of them containing less than 25 allotments and six counting more than 200. The greatest demand for community gardens comes from the central and southern areas of the city where rented properties predominate. Here, residential lots are only big enough for minor recreational activities and small parking spaces.



Left: Community gardens (small flowers) can be found throughout the City of Montreal.



Right: Montreal City Mayor, Gerald Tremblay, visiting the community gardens at the end of summer when the gardens are at their peak.

The city-run gardens are not the only community gardens within the municipality: a growing network of collective gardens, some senior citizens' homes, a few recreation centres, a hospital and a community farming venture have also made space available to their clientele for gardening purposes. These initiatives are not run by the city but are supported by the groups or the host institution in different ways. For example, one of the horticultural counsellors employed by the city for its own gardening program is occasionally solicited to give gardening advice, which creates an informal contact between the city and some of the private gardening programs.

Montreal's Municipal Community Gardening Program

Since its beginning 30 years ago, the municipal government has responded to citizens' requests not only by becoming involved in administering community gardens but also in offering technical support and a variety of services.

While at the same time allowing members the freedom to manage their own garden sites, Montreal's community gardens are administered by the Department of Culture, Sports, Leisure and Social Development, (DCSLDS) in cooperation with other municipal departments and voluntary gardening organizations.



A 36-lot community garden sitting on top of the Decarie Expressway. Insert: Raised garden bed.

André Pedneault, who chairs a consultation committee about Montreal's program, explains that "the community gardening program was established in Montreal to allow citizens greater contact with nature and to enable them to produce their own vegetables. Gardening is an enjoyable and instructive leisure activity and it also fosters a community spirit." Today, the program has attained a measure of maturity in that it is well run and solidly established in the community. It is characterized by a number of distinctive elements:

- . the involvement of the municipal government;
- . a well-established partnership between voluntary committees and the city;
- . impartial accessibility for all citizens;
- . the service of horticultural animators who visit the gardens on a rotational basis;
- . a focus on ecological gardening methods; and
- . the creation of 'youth gardens' adapted to the specific needs of a younger clientele.

The city provides the land, the equipment, and the materials necessary for the program to function efficiently. It also repairs the equipment, provides water, collects garden refuse, and offers the services of horticultural animators or counsellors as resource personnel. These animators visit the gardens on a rotating basis to give advice to the gardeners. The city also collaborates with volunteer gardener's associations in overseeing enrolment and garden maintenance.

Gardening committees, elected by the member gardeners, supervise daily activities in the garden sites and manage the distribution of plots while the horticultural animators assist them in these tasks.

Goals

The city's present management plan for the community gardens states the following priorities:

- . to allow citizens of all ages to garden in a community context where they may improve their quality of life as well as their natural environment;
- . to maintain a system of democratic access for all interested Montreal citizens;
- . to offer effective support to the voluntary gardening committees;
- . to improve the quality of services offered by the municipality;
- . to continue to offer practical gardening advice;
- . to strengthen the existing garden network by creating park zones on as many sites as possible;
- . to promote the fair establishment of new community gardens reflecting the needs of the community i.e. in disadvantaged areas, according to the number of requests, etc..

The city makes every possible effort to designate the territories occupied by community gardens as park zones so as to protect them from commercial speculation. To date, two-thirds of the gardens are thus protected. Some gardens are situated on city-owned land that is eventually destined for the construction of apartment buildings. Others occupy land owned by either the federal or provincial governments or by religious institutions.

Citizens who want to establish a community garden in their neighbourhood take their request to the SSLDS in their Borough or to their city counsellor. Those municipal services responsible for administering the garden program analyze the request and take a decision based on the number of

existing gardens close by and on the availability of funds. When a community garden that is not zoned as a park must close, the city tries to find a new territory to replace it. In the rare cases when a choice has to be made between establishing a new garden and re-situating a closing garden, the latter is given the priority.



*Community Gardens are a place for friendship.
All Montreal community gardens are fenced-in and are supplied with water. They are also provided with garden sheds and portable toilets.*

The Various Municipal Contributors

Montreal's territory is divided into Boroughs. Each Borough administers the community garden program for the garden sites in its region and designates a manager responsible for the community garden dossier. This manager supervises the horticultural counsellor who work directly with the voluntary committees and the gardeners. The Borough supports the action of the committee and responds to its needs and to those of the gardeners. It can also appeal to other municipal services required in the management of the garden and in providing needed equipment and materials.

The Department of Parks, Gardens and Green Spaces supplies materials such as soil, compost or manure, sand, containers for water or waste, and paint, as well as equipment such as picnic tables, hoses, and water barrels. It also takes care of mowing and trimming the grass outside the garden perimeters. The gardeners themselves are responsible for the maintenance of the garden sites.

The Public Works Department does repairs and looks after turning on and shutting off the water supplied by the city, and the Cleanliness and Recycling Services collects the garbage.

Several experiments with composting garden wastes and autumn leaves have proved successful, but the collection of organic refuse for this purpose remains irregular. The city distributes to each garden composted leaves in varying amounts, depending on availability: the municipality also uses its compost to fertilize annual and perennial flower beds and to incorporate into soil mixtures for its potted plants. Some gardens compost their own organic wastes on site in special composters or in areas designed for the purpose, but this activity only takes place when and where volunteers take charge of the initiative.

Horticultural Animators



The horticultural animator makes regularly scheduled evening visits to give advice on different gardening issues. Information leaflets are distributed during the visit. Additional information is posted on the bulletin board.

Daniel Reid, one of the city's six horticultural animators, explains that one of his tasks is to assist the community gardening committee with registration: he validates the committee's membership and waiting lists and helps in the allocation of lots. He also participates in the committee's general assembly. Each animator visits the different garden sites periodically to provide gardening advice and to ensure that rules and regulations are respected.

says animator Normand Watier. "They want to know if its better to water in the morning or in the afternoon, what organic products to use against cabbage worms, and whether or not to prune the suckers on tomato plants." Some new gardeners are more confident, he relates: "I've seen some newcomers misinterpret instructions on the seed packages and plant lettuce seed six inches deep and wonder why they don't sprout! It's also not uncommon to see whole boxes of seedlings transplanted just as they are! When we're asked, we give advice. That's one of our major jobs."

As a liaison between the administration and the committees, the animators are also responsible for coordinating and authorizing service requests. Part of their work involves helping in the organization of events held by the gardens and sitting on the panel of judges in a

'Best Garden Contest'.

The animators are employed from April to October. They begin visiting the garden sites in mid-May and are usually able to visit each garden every two weeks. Visiting days are posted on the garden's bulletin board. The amount of time spent at each site depends on the number of gardeners but lasts at least an hour, except in the case of very small sites. Because most gardeners work in their lots after work, animators usually do the rounds in the evenings.

The Garden Committees

More than half of the garden organizations are incorporated as non-profit associations in order to protect committee administrators and to permit the raising of funds. The city requires that each gardening committee be made up of at least three members elected at the annual gardeners' meeting, which is usually held before opening day. One member is chosen to act as a liaison with the municipal administration.

Mrs. Marcelle Arcand, who is head of the St-Andre gardening committee, explains that "the garden committee makes sure municipal by-laws are respected. Each garden also has its own particular rules and regulations, so we also make sure that the gardeners are aware of these and respect them." Mrs. Arcand notes that the beginning of the season is the busiest time for the committee: "we have to allocate the garden plot, which is based on registration lists the Borough office gives us, and then we have to keep our membership lists up to date." One of the duties of the committees is to make sure that the garden sites are well maintained. "If we don't want to do all the work ourselves," adds Mrs. Arcand, "we have to enlist the cooperation of all our members." Garden committees also represent their members with the municipal administration regarding requests for services and suggestions for improvement. The city requires that committees produce an annual financial report.

Each garden organization charges a membership fee to cover the cost of replacing tools and to fund activities such as the ever-popular corn roasts or community suppers. These kinds of activities are well-attended and are organized every year by most of the garden committees. Some committees solicit neighbourhood merchants to donate prizes to be raffled off at the annual gardeners' meeting.

The Adult Clientele

The program is intended for adults while children have access to the youth gardens. About 38 per cent of adult gardeners are 55 years old or over. Very few 18 to 25 year-old take any interest in this hobby, although their numbers are increasing in some centre-town gardens.

Garden allotments are available exclusively to residents of Montreal and proof of residency is required at the time of registration. Only one garden plot can be allocated to each civic address. Citizens may apply for a plot in any of the city's garden sites, but most choose to garden in their own neighbourhoods.

Registration takes place in March. The municipal administration sends a renewal form to each gardener and between 75 and 80% of the previous year's gardeners renew their memberships. According to a poll taken recently, almost 25% of respondents had been members for at least five years. For the past several years, the level of occupancy in all 76 gardens has approached 100 per cent.

Five garden sites contain elevated gardening areas specifically created to enable people with physical restrictions (those in wheelchairs or with special health problems) to enjoy gardening. The De Normanville garden was constructed to accommodate this



The Montreal Community Garden Program offers a total of 100 lots for gardeners with reduced mobility.

type of clientele. New elevated containers are regularly added to those community gardens that request them.

Cultural Communities

An informal survey conducted in 1991 revealed that a variety of cultural communities are represented in Montreal's community gardens. Indeed, eight garden sites qualify as multicultural, given that 50 per cent of their members come from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Members of one or more ethnic communities belong to each garden site and the participation of many nationalities enriches both gardening activities and the life of the community.

Members of ethnic communities often cultivate a number of exotic vegetables and some of their gardening methods differ from those normally practiced here. Interaction among various cultures and the exchange of viewpoints help to animate the life of the city gardens.

Because some garden members speak neither French nor English, a number of gardens translated their rules and regulations into other languages. Frequently children can be seen acting as interpreters. Children of Chinese members of the Habitations Jeanne-Mance garden, for example, regularly attend committee meetings in order to explain changes in gardening regulations to their parents who speak only Chinese.

Some regulations had to be adapted to accommodate different gardening methods. Asian, Portuguese, Italian, and Spanish gardeners cultivate climbing and trailing plants that require longer trellises than usually allowed. Those gardens on the perimeter of the sites are now permitted to use the fences as support for climbing plants.



Community gardens hold "Fête des récoltes" events at the end of the gardening season.

formed of two committee members and an animator judges the entries. The city invites the winners to an evening organized in honour of the event. "At last fall's ceremonies, municipal counsellors awarded the winners as well as committee directors with certificates and gave them gifts of house plants," recalls Mr. André Pedneault. "Pictures of the presentation were also mailed to the participants later on. As well, much to everyone's pleasure, attendance prizes, such as books or composters, were also drawn during the evening," he adds.

Competition for Merit in Gardening (The Best Gardener Contest)

Each year, a convivial contest takes place in each community garden that seeks to reward and recognize the best gardeners of the season. Each community garden chooses a winner from each block of 25 plots, with a maximum of seven winners per garden.

A gardener wishing to participate has to cultivate at least eight different vegetables. Flowers and herbs are considered to be companion plants. A jury

Youth Gardens

A special horticulture and natural science program is offered to young Montrealers between the age of 9 and 14. The youth garden program introduces the children to vegetable gardening. Each child sows, transplants, tends, and harvests vegetables in one of 440 small garden plots for at least 8 weeks.

Mrs. Violene Simard, the program director, is proud of the two new activity programs that have

been offered since 1991. "In the Jardi-Recolte Program (or Harvest-Gardening), children simply cultivate a small garden plot," she explains. "The other program, called Jardi-Nature (Nature-Gardening), is a day camp that offers natural science activities as well as gardening. The kids get to enrol in workshops and they can take part in all sorts of games, activities and outings. Mrs. Simard adds that these activities are specially prepared to introduce the children to the rudiments of horticulture, entomology, ecology, and geology.

Two people are in charge of the youth program. Group animators or counsellors are hired to help the two program leaders during the gardening season. Each animator is in charge of a group of 20 day-camp gardeners and of a group of 30 to 40 young gardeners in the Jardi-Recolte program. In addition, a volunteer counsellor's assistant is chosen from among the 15 to 18 year-old veterans of the program to help each group animator in the running of daily activities.

Youth Garden Activities

Activities in the youth gardens begin in April. The young gardeners, divided into groups of 20 to 40 youngsters, sow tomatoes, peppers, or herbs in one of the Botanical Garden's greenhouses. Then, during several weekends in May and June, they plant, thin, transplant, and weed their own small garden plots.

Once the summer holidays begin, the groups take turns coming to the gardens two mornings a week to work in their plots. Every Friday afternoon is devoted to working together on communally held garden areas.

According to Mrs. Simard, young people enrol in gardening activities for something to do in the summer, to learn about nature, to become more resourceful or to learn how to cultivate plants. A small, informal poll of the young gardeners indicated to Mrs. Simard that since their involvement in the project, most of them eat more vegetables than they used to! Most of the participants are very proud of being able to give advice to their parents and neighbours. "After two or three summers in the program, the kids are well-enough informed to be able to cultivate a garden all by themselves" assures Mrs. Simard. "It's so popular, that at least 40 per cent of the kids return to their plots the following year," she adds.

Indeed, the experience gained in the youth gardens has led many participants to careers or hobbies in gardening or horticulture. One graduate of the program, who is now a hairdresser, claims that it was his unforgettable gardening experience as a youngster that gave him his great love for plants. Several years ago, a get-together was organized for the program's 'alumni' at which it became evident that many had gone on to become agronomists or horticulturists. Some are now employed at the Botanic Garden and others have become amateur 'emeritus' gardeners with an avid interest in cultivating new kinds of plants!

The Community Garden Program's Role in the Larger Community

City residents living in close proximity to community gardens down-town, such as the Centre-Sud or St-Andre gardens, claim that the gardens help to beautify the neighbourhood and even to impart a fragrant scent to the surrounding air. "The gardens look so beautiful from above," exclaims an occupant of a neighbouring building.

The gardens give cohesiveness to the community life of the neighbourhood. Gardening activities enable gardeners to fraternize, to fulfill their need for contact with nature, and, in the case of those who take part in the voluntary garden committees, to take an official role in society. Some garden sites organize events to which the whole neighbourhood is invited.

The community gardening program actively participates in the city's flower-planting campaign by transplanting thousands of flowers and shrubs and by supplying the city with volunteer workers to help when these are distributed to the city Boroughs.

The gardening program is also an excellent vehicle for the diffusion of gardening techniques that are more ecologically-oriented as well as for ideas about composting methods. These notions then spread into the surrounding neighbourhood and further.

Several gardens emphasize the activity of redistributing excess produce, or vegetables that have not been harvested, among the garden's members or to 'meals-on-wheels' programs and soup kitchens. All these activities are examples of how the community gardening programs are becoming firmly anchored in the life of the community.



Harvesting is well appreciated by gardeners.

Appendix

General Information

Area of Montreal year 2001 (in acres)	43,875
Population	1,017,837
Under 20 years old	19,7%
Over 65 years old	14,1%
Tenants	75%
Property owners	25%

Parks and Green Spaces

Parks and developed green spaces	882
Developed area (in acres)	4,535
Mont-Royal Park (in acres)	500
Recreational grounds	522
Sport grounds	535
Annual plantings	
Flowers	1,017,000
Trees	5,000
Shrubs	15,000
Flowers distributed to citizens	500,000

Montreal's Community Garden Program

Number of community gardens	76
Number of protected sites (zoned as parks)	21
Number of unprotected (réserves foncières)	35
Sites in location (5 years terms)	20
Percentage of incorporated gardens	47%
Total area	31.25 acres
Area of garden plots	18 square meter
Number of garden plots	6400



Surplus harvest is offered to other gardeners.

Number of garden plots for persons with reduced mobility	100
Number of garden plots per garden	11-248
Number of citizens participating	10,000
Number of volunteers in garden committees	380
Number of horticultural animators	6
Average rate of gardener registration renewal	75%
Percentage of low-income citizens participating	50-60%
Age groups of participants	
18 years or younger	0.5%
18-24 years	1.0%
25-34 years	11.5%
35-44 years	23.4%
45-54 years	25.3%
55 years and over	38.3%
Reasons for participating	
Mainly for recreation	40%
Mainly for food production	40%
Other (concern for environment, friendship, etc.)	20%

Opening date of gardens
Closing date

May 1st
October 1st

Schedule of Operations

Here is a brief list of the main activities planned every year:

- February: municipal meetings to plan the gardening season;
- March: registration renewal for gardeners from previous year;
- April and May: allotment of available plots to citizens registered on waiting lists;
- May 1st: opening of the gardens and first visit from the gardening facilitator;
- By June 1st: completion of sowing and planting work;
- Allotment of any remaining plots;
- August or September: final selection of the winners of the gardening awards;
- October: Soirées du mérite horticole (gardening awards events) in various boroughs;
- October: submission of boroughs' annual balance sheet;
- At the latest, November 1st: closing of community gardens;
- November: drafting of consolidated municipal balance sheet, transfer of computer programme data in order to manage registrations for the following year, and meeting of interdepartmental committee.

Fee Schedule

In order to pay for maintenance and development of the Community Gardens Programme, the City of Montréal requires that each gardener contribute \$10 per year per small garden and \$5 per half-garden. Certain groups of citizens do not have to pay.

Also, each garden committee sets the amount of dues to be paid for purchase of equipment (gardening tools, keys, etc.) and for organized activities. These dues vary from \$2 to \$20 depending on the location.



Gardeners of this community garden decorated the shed which holds a variety of gardening tools.

Budget

The budget below indicates the average expenditures for the years 2000 and 2001 by the various departments involved.

Income

Fees – City		\$40,000
	TOTAL	\$40,000

Expenditures

Sports, Recreation and Social Development Department		
Coordination		\$12,600
Communications		\$ 7,000
Cahier de gestion, Carnet des jardiniers, La Feuille de Chou, membership cards Civics and gardening regulations, etc.		
Horticultural facilitation		\$90,000
Soirées du mérite horticole (gardening awards event)		\$ 5,800

Parks, Gardens and Green Spaces Department	
New layout of existing gardens	\$60,000
Ongoing maintenance	\$140,000
Soil, compost, gravel, garbage bin, dry toilets, water barrels, repairs, etc.	

Public Works and Environment Department	
Waste collection	N/A
TOTAL	\$315,400

N.B.: The cost of implementing community gardens is approximately \$2,000 per garden plot, not including the cost of soil decontamination.



Left: Kindergarten kids visiting the community garden

Photo: M. Pfeiff

Right: Gardening Young woman with her baby.

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Comment créer, animer et gérer un jardin communautaire, Pedneault, A, Grenier, R., 1997, 114p.

Le cahier de gestion des jardins communautaires, 2000, 55 p.



A gardener trying a different watering technique.

Insert: The garden is a fun place for the young at heart!