



Town of St. Paul - Creating Supportive Environments

The most significant change in our community over the last year has been the buzz around town on the topic of food. For a few years, the St. Paul Champions for Change Society has been leading the discussion around healthy, local food projects and has been partnering with various organizations and agencies to build a healthy, sustainable community. This year, the town of St. Paul has been able to see the fruits of this labour come to life. With the tag line, "Healthy food for all in St. Paul," we envisioned community members having more control over their food – gaining skills in growing healthy food, selecting healthy, local food for purchase, and preserving or cooking food in a healthy way. To provide skills in growing healthy food, we organized gardening workshops for beginners and for small spaces like patios or barrels. We also organized a Harvest of the Forest workshop whereby participants learned to harvest and use local wild edible plants such as spruce tips and cattails. To raise awareness around purchasing healthy, local food, we encouraged citizens to get to know the local food producers through a local Food Producers Guide, as well as through food-producers fair that is always part of our annual Harvest Ball event.

To improve cooking and preserving skills, we offered a food preservation workshop and started a Collective Kitchen in town. Every year we also celebrate healthy, locally-grown food at our Harvest Ball event, which features a dinner with the menu made from local ingredients. This year we had a live pasta-making demonstration at the event, teaching how to make noodles yourself, and then we included them in the soup later that evening!

However, the project that got the biggest buzz around town by far was the Incredible Edibles project, which saw the downtown businesses beautify their exteriors with barrels filled with edible plants such as corn, kale, or basil, for example, in the place of only flowers. And even when we included flowers, many also had edible portions such as pansies. These plants were enjoyed by sight and taste by passers-by and the downtown businesses that hosted the barrels. Many of the barrels had labels explaining how to grow and harvest the plants. We then showcased some of these foods that can be grown locally in healthy recipes at our Healthy Tasters at the Party in the Park events. For example, we harvested the kale, made sample kale salads, and then handed them out at the events with recipes attached. People who "didn't even like kale" said they enjoyed our salad! The plants in the barrels were also a lovely addition to beautify the town, with many community members commenting on how they didn't realize that regular vegetable plants could be so visually stunning. The project has gotten the whole community talking about their food again, and that's exactly what our aim was from the beginning.

