

*All photographs provided by Sara Rubinfeld and Tom Marcantonio*

Tom Marcantonio envisions an Ottawa in which everyone who wants to grow their own food can access a shared gardening space within a 10 minute walk. As the Food Production Coordinator for Woodpark Community Association, the Woodpark Common Ground Community Garden (CGCG) has been a dream of his since 2010. In 2015, when the NCC Board of Directors reinstated community gardening as an allowable activity on urban NCC land, he and other community members were ready to start digging. It took until June of this year for the garden to be approved.

CGCG is beautifully situated on a grassy flood plain between Sir John A. MacDonald Parkway, Richmond Road, Edgeworth Avenue, and Carling Avenue. The shared recreational parkway meanders close by, bringing in curious pedestrians and cyclists. Water and power are temporarily drawn from an adjacent community housing building. One side of the newly built shed lists the businesses that have provided equipment, supplies, and other kinds of support—for it's been a tremendous



community effort.

The project has not been without its struggles, though. The planned location had to be adjusted to accommodate the upcoming Light Rail Transit (LRT) construction, and the location may need to shift again once this construction is complete. CGCG is the only urban

garden in Ontario that is part of a pilot program with the NCC. It is imperative that it succeeds so that additional urban gardens will be permitted in the future.

If yield is a factor, it's clearly already a success. Even though the gardens were started late in the season, they're already producing beautiful tomatoes, greens, melons, and much more.

Tom has spent decades growing food, building gardens, teaching gardening workshops at local venues, conducting backyard assessments, and providing seedlings to various groups. But, putting these principles in action--by conducting hands-on demonstrations, and providing opportunities to practice these skills in a garden--is a much more effective means of conveying and absorbing knowledge. "At the core of everything, this is a school," he says of the garden.



Woodpark Common Ground Community Garden is not a typical urban garden. Only one of its beds is raised; the others, some of which are still under development, are flush with the ground, and laid out like a market garden. Each plot is three feet wide and ten feet long, and separated by two-foot wide footpaths. This layout enables the average person to reach halfway across each plot from the two adjacent footpaths; there's no need to step on the plot and compact its soil. Approximately 15 families rented plots in the garden this summer, with some families opting to rent multiple side-by-side plots or share plots amongst friends. Additional beds have already been prepared for next year, with a number of community members indicating their interest in renting a plot come next spring.

The garden at the front of the 11,000 square foot allotment produces vegetables for the local food bank. There's also a perennial garden, and there are plans for a children's garden. After all, the garden is not just about adults nor is it just about gardening.

Sara Rubenfeld, a resident of the Woodpark community and a member of the CGCG committee, recognizes that the garden's benefits extend far beyond a sustainable food supply. Woodpark has a small amount of greenspace relative to its population; the nearby park is barely large enough to throw a ball in. For her, this garden is a space where kids can play. It's where people can gather to learn--she plans to apply practices she's seen

implemented there in her own backyard garden. It's a centerpiece for community gatherings. Since June, they've already had a strong community turnout for several work days at the garden, and in September, they celebrated a successful first year with a harvest festival.

Though it is October now, and the growing season is drawing to a close for many, work still continues on the CGCG. Compost bins have been installed, and there are plans to ask participants for clean yard waste and kitchen scraps, which will be composted and then added to the soil, to enrich it for the following years. On the day that I toured the grounds, construction was continuing on the wooden shed, which, when completed, will be painted with bright, joyful images befitting a community garden—a mosaic, and flowers. Once the LRT station is complete, the area will see more passersby, some of which, I imagine, will want to sit at the picnic table and admire the garden, and maybe learn about growing sustainable food.

For more information on CGCG, please see <https://www.facebook.com/groups/commongroundgarden/>



