

*All photographs courtesy of the Jo-Jo's Community Garden Facebook page.*

In the heart of Stittsville, on a one-acre lot behind Jo-Jo's pizzeria, sits the region's newest community garden.

The idea of a Stittsville community garden arose several years ago, but it wasn't until 2017 that the first plants took root. Kim Bonin, the garden lead, grew up in rural Newfoundland, in a community in which fresh fish and root vegetables were always in abundance. When she moved to Stittsville, her gardening pursuits were relegated to container planting. Though her potted plants flourished, she yearned for more. The idea of a Stittsville community garden had been floating around for awhile, without much success. Ms. Bonin spoke with Councillor Qadri to let him know that she would like to take on this challenge.



Water frequently is the biggest challenge for community gardens on any land, as bringing in water can be prohibitively expensive. In this case, the Kassis family, who owns Jo-Jo's pizzeria, graciously offered up the use of their land behind their restaurant on Stittsville Main street. Ms. Bonin submitted a grant to Just Food and began meeting with the community to generate interest. Much of the planning had to be completed before engaging interested gardeners and community partners—then came the work to transform an unused space into a flourishing garden.

Ms. Bonin planned to create a Potager (kitchen) garden. This type of garden uses a very structured design to integrate herbs, flowers and vegetables. Phase 1 of the garden, which was completed last year,



consists of 30 garden plots that were built in four sizes, ranging from 5 x 5 to 10 x 20. Each bed is contained in its own wooden frame; the pathways between them are covered in woodchips that were generously donated by two local businesses.



Many organizations and individuals have donated their time, expertise, and supplies to this venture. It's only fitting that, like many community gardens, one of the plots within Jo-Jo's Community Garden is maintained by the community, for the community. Its plants were supplied by participants who grew too many seedlings, and by the neighbourhood grocery store, at the end of the season for the garden centre. Mr. Bonin envisions this community plot being used as, for example, a source of fresh herbs for the adjacent adult community.

The garden promises to be a beautiful centerpiece for the community. The Horticultural Society donated plants that were left over from its sale for use in the pollinator garden. These bloomed in abundance around the bee hotel, which contains several adorable bee houses that a local brownie troop made. Ms. Bonin plans to construct a barrier of woven grasses near the drop-off area, and to add raspberry bushes, strawberries, and other fruit

There were a few surprises along the way. The existing soil was very hard and clay-like. Jason's Landscaping provided new top soil at a discount, and distributed it amongst the beds. Even before the garden crew began to work in the huge donation of aged manure they received in the fall, the garden proved to be fruitful. It's lured more than just gardeners; they had to relocate a groundhog who decided that sunflower sprouts were a much-appreciated delicacy!



bushes to the gooseberries that were donated last year. These, and an Enchanted Forest through the treed edge of the property, are sure to attract young and old.

The focus of the garden for 2018 is to construct some accessible, above-ground gardens adjacent to the parking lot, and to finalize the shed, which was started in 2017. The charming old shed on the property is no longer structurally sound, but its wood will be used to reface new structures. There are plans to make a section of the garden available to a local school or children's club. The hope is to get local kids more involved in learning how to plant and care for gardens, so they're eager to eat healthy, organic foods.

For more information on Jo-Jo's Community Garden, please visit their Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/JoJosCommunityGarden/>

