

It's about 8:30 on a July morning, and there is a steady stream of people walking downtown to work along the sidewalk on Bank St. at Argyle. As they walk by, a few look up and spy me on a ladder, picking orange cherry tomatoes fresh off the vine in the Centretown United/Centre 507 Community garden.

For over 30 years, instead of a garden, there were four tall ash trees in large wooden planters beside Centretown United church. The folks at Centre 507, a downtown drop-in centre located upstairs in the church, used to enjoy sitting in the shade of these trees to cool off on a hot summer day. The members of the church and surrounding neighbours appreciated the green beauty that the trees provided to busy Bank Street. Sadly, the ash bore killed the trees and they had to be cut down.



After contemplating the empty planters for a while, a new idea blossomed, inspired by the United Church of Canada's policy on Food Sovereignty. The congregation decided to use the empty planters to grow vegetables for the lunches at Centre 507. With the help of a grant

from the Community Garden Development Fund, and volunteers from the congregation and neighbourhood, the garden began to take shape. First a very large stump had to be pried or chopped out of each planter, the sides repaired and raised and new healthy soil added.



In the past three years, we have added three large wooden planters and many trellises in order to maximize the space for cultivation. There are now 11 planters. The garden has been generously supported by many partners: students from Elgin Street Public School, who have grown seedlings over the winter to donate to the garden; La Petite Ferme in Gatineau, which donates three trays of seedlings every year; and our neighbour, the Arlington Five Café, which has treated garden volunteers to an end-of-season thank you gathering. The garden is very productive and healthy thanks primarily to volunteer Brian Ure, a retired horticulturalist who specializes in fruits and vegetables.

The veggies are harvested daily. These fresh, nutritious vegetables are added to the soups and lunches at Center 507. The garden creates an opportunity for participants in the Centre to volunteer with others from the congregation and neighbourhood to learn about growing food in the city and the pleasures of gardening.

