

# Grow • Cook Share & Relish



## Brampton heads to the backyard

Combine the passion of a seasoned vegetable gardener who is also a City Councillor, a supportive Mayor and Council colleagues, a deeply committed City Staff with the new reality of COVID-19 and the bets are high that some growing magic will happen.

But by all accounts, even when City of Brampton's Councillor Doug Whillans, in response to COVID-19, came up with the idea to create the first ever citywide initiative to help residents start veggie gardening in their own gardens, he never knew what response was ahead.

Six thousand residential sign-ups with another 8,000 on the waiting list in less than one month from when the idea was born and the City of Brampton is well on its way to adding Veggie to its well-earned title of *The Flower City*.

"Growing vegetables has always been part of what we have done as a family," said Whillans. "As a City Councillor, I've been very involved with Brampton's community gardens which not only gives our residents a great outlet for their gardening interests but, with the food that is grown there, contributes fresh produce for the needs of our local food banks."

"When COVID-19 hit our world and physical distancing measures came into effect, I thought that we needed to do something to keep things growing," he said.

So the Brampton Backyard Garden Program was created to encourage residents to grow produce and herbs from the comfort of their own homes while also encouraging donations of these homegrown crops to local food banks and community organizations.

Open to all Brampton residents, the program offered a free yard of triple mix and packages of veggie seeds along with growing advice to help everyone dig in. Additional arrangements with Scotts Canada provided several thousands of bags of *Nature's Care Raised Bed* soils and *Organic Choice* potting mix to support the demand generated by the initiative.

"It's a perfect time to turn something negative into a positive," said Whillans. "There are issues of food security, the need for everyone to remain active during these socially restricted times, families being isolated at home and looking for inspiring, low cost activities to do."

"Add to this the opportunity to continue to build positive community connections – amongst neighbours, our city services as well as community support organizations and the role of the backyard garden grows in importance."

"Our phenomenal staff has taken this on with greatness -- from our Parks Maintenance and Forestry division who are taking the lead with our residents to our fire department which has set up gardening plots around their stations for additional growing."

The City of Brampton, having received calls from municipalities across the country, has created a how-to manual that is available at no cost to help spread the concept forward. Quoting from Oscar Wilde – "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery", Whillans added "that's how we all can keep moving forward -- by learning from others, adjusting to find your own style and working hard to accomplish your goals."

In the months ahead, the program will be supported with added Social Media encouragement and through the joy and satisfaction that comes with including homegrown harvests in the meals for one's own family as well as neighbours-in-need.

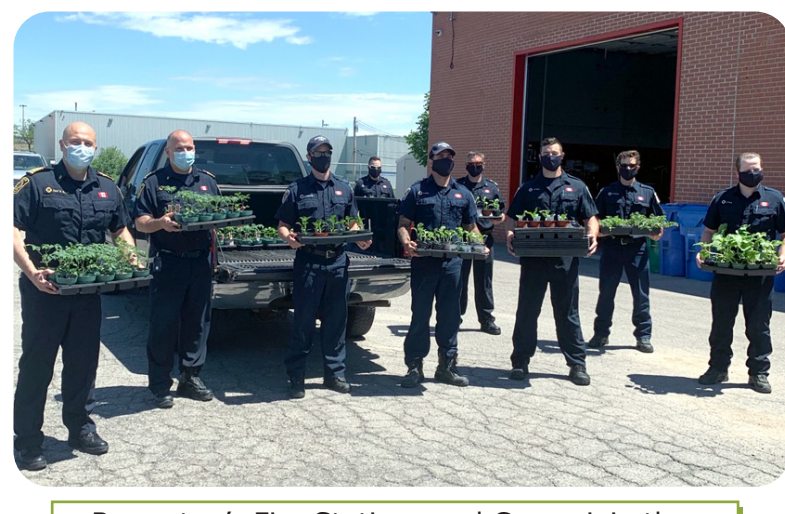
Susan Antler



Councillor Whillans walking-the-talk. His home-grown lettuce along with veggies-for-community-plantings are amongst his first of many harvest donations to local food-sharing organizations in Brampton.

### All About Lettuce

- When we think of salad greens, we naturally think of lettuce but who says lettuce always has to be green? This leafy salad staple actually comes in many colours including variations of red and burgundy as well as all shades of green.
- Its' leaves range from smooth and long to crinkled and textured.
- Days to maturity can be anywhere from 45 for leafy varieties to 60 or 70 for head lettuce types.
- Did you know that iceberg lettuce, a member of the crisp head group, got its name because, to keep it fresh on its trip from California to the east coast in the early 1900s, it was shipped on mounds of ice?
- Romaine lettuce, named by the Romans, grows upright with thick green or red leaves and takes 70 days to mature.
- Lettuce is one of the easiest edibles to grow from seed. Prepare the bed with lots of compost and then sprinkle the seeds wherever you want them.
- Stagger lettuce harvests by planting small patches every two weeks throughout the growing season.
- It is important to thin lettuce as it grows, nipping tiny leaves with scissors to promote air circulation and avoid damping off, a fungal condition that can cause seedlings to wilt and die.
- Ideally leaf lettuce should be grown 4 to 6 inches and head lettuce 8 to 12 inches apart.
- Planting rows of chives or garlic between lettuces can help to control aphids.
- Harvest head lettuce before the centre starts to elongate or leaves will become bitter.
- To harvest loose leaf varieties, just cut the leaves as needed – from the outside in – and the lettuce will rejuvenate from the stem.
- Lettuce likes cool temperatures and could become bitter in very hot weather.
- Lettuce is perfect for container growing. Just sprinkle seeds in a pot of soil mixed with compost, keep soil moist and snip off whatever you need for the freshest salads available.



Brampton's Fire Stations and Crews join the Veggie Gardening Force.

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## Joyce's Mandarin Orange Salad and Dressing

This was the signature salad served by my girlfriend, Joyce, whenever folks were invited for dinner. *Everyone* loved this salad but only one of us had asked for the recipe before Joyce passed away suddenly. Recipes are made for sharing ... and are of great help to bring back memories of times, people and places that might no longer be ... so write 'em down and pass them on. Some things just should never be kept a secret.

Susan

### Ingredients

- 1 head Romaine lettuce
- 3 green onions, chopped
- 1 stalk celery, chopped
- 1 can mandarin orange segments
- Slivered almonds, sautéed lightly until brown

### Dressing

- 1 cup oil
- ½ cup tarragon\* or red wine vinegar
- 3 tsp sugar
- 1 tsp tarragon leaves
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- Salt & pepper to taste

### Directions

Tear lettuce into bite-size pieces.

Add chopped green onions, celery, mandarin oranges and slivered almonds to the lettuce.

For the dressing, blend together oil, vinegar, sugar, Dijon mustard, salt & pepper, adding tarragon leaves. Pour on salad, toss and enjoy.

\* To make tarragon vinegar from scratch, pick 1 cup of tarragon leaves from your herb garden. Press the leaves gently with a rolling pin or even with the back of a spoon to help open up the flavour before putting them in a 250mL mason jar. Fill the jar with vinegar and cover. Strain leaves after 2 – 3 weeks (leaves can be composted). Use the vinegar within 6 months.

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PLANT • GROW • SHARE With Those in Need



## Summer Salad Dressing

A light salad dressing is a great accompaniment to the freshness of Garden Greens.

Lisa Kates, A Food Gypsy, shared this recipe with participants at a Grow, Cook & Relish evening at the Toronto Botanical Garden.

### Ingredients

- ½ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup vinegar (can be balsamic, cider or wine vinegar)
- 1 tbsp Dijon Mustard
- 1 clove garlic
- ½ tsp pepper
- 1 Shallot

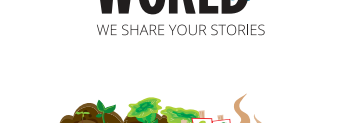
**Optional:** honey or maple syrup for sweetening

### Directions

Place all ingredients in a food processor and blend.

Taste and then consider adding some honey or maple syrup to slightly sweeten the dressing.

Special thanks to Lisa Kates, A Food Gypsy.  
Founding Partner of *Building Roots* [www.buildingroots.ca](http://www.buildingroots.ca)  
Follow Lisa on Facebook & Twitter  
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As part of your garden this year, plant and grow an extra row of your favourite veggies and donate the harvest to your local food bank. Help us help all those in need. [www.growarow.org](http://www.growarow.org)

Relish Yo' Mama shares tried-and-true family recipes, passing them forward to follow the footsteps of our mamas and those before us. Relish Yo' Mama also refers to Mama Earth who not only gives her goodness with the fruits and veggies of her bountiful but who we are striving to protect through actions of preservation and conservation. [www.relishyomama.org](http://www.relishyomama.org)

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