

Vegetable Garden "Walk" with Camil Dumont - Thursday, July 5, 2018  
Recorded by Marilyn Goebel - notes reviewed by Camil

For the second summer in a row, Camil is on contract with VanDusen to work on the vegetable garden two days a week. He is a food systems expert and also runs a nonprofit organization called "Inner City Farms" (more about this below). He has a degree from UBC's Faculty of Land and Food Systems, specializing in food systems in the city of Vancouver. His grandparents were subsistence farmers in Eastern Quebec, and Camil picked up his interest (and some farming tips) from them.

Last year the garden theme was "vegetables from around the world", but the yield was low because many of those vegetables did not do well in our climate. This year the garden is focusing on recognizable varieties of vegetables that thrive here.

Camil only uses organic mushroom manure from Premium Soils. Regular compost, even from city parks, is too full of contaminants and should only be used for ornamental plants. Sunflowers can take heavy metals out of soil, but our sunflowers are grown to keep visitors out of the fire ant area. One guide asked about using horse manure from riding schools. Camil says that horse manure can give a quick shot of fertilizer upon application, but it could contain medications.

He gets his seeds from West Coast Seed in Ladner, a major seed retailer. The seed industry is tightly controlled by a few large companies, but this year he is doing a test bed of carrots grown from seed provided by local farmers associated with Farm Folk City Folk. The nasturtiums are from Camil's own seeds. He directly seeds scallions, beans, and carrots, but the rest of the vegetables get started in mid-May in our greenhouse, then planted out later.

Camil does not spray any of the vegetables, hence the little holes in the chard. So far this year he has not seen any cutworms or aphids. The diversity of vegetables he has planted helps with pests. He has also planted fennel, which attracts ladybugs that will eat aphids. He says the jury is still out on whether nasturtiums control aphids or encourage them, but he has not seen any bugs yet. Thinning out sprouts is a challenge given his 2-days-a-week work schedule.

Weeds are another challenge, especially chickweed. He digs it out, although he noted that it could retain moisture in the soil. But it is a real nuisance - it competes for nutrients and easily goes to seed. When he lays out the garden in the spring, he plans for paths which allow easy weeding from each side in order to avoid trampling the soil. Next year, he will rotate areas where the plants are grown, e.g. move the brassicas and nitrogen-fixers to other locations.

Some of the beds are infected with clubroot, a common disease of cabbages, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, radishes, turnips, and mustard. He is currently testing some areas of the garden to see how prevalent it is.

Our overhead watering is not always the best, especially with tomatoes, where it can cause blight. His Inner City Farm gardens all use drip. He has dreams of one day using grey water and rain catchment systems.

He does a little companion planting (e.g. tomatoes and basil). Last year the garden featured the three sisters companion planting scheme (corn, squash, and beans). He finds that companion plants sometimes compete, but this is not an area of expertise for him.

Asked about vegetable gardening in a north-facing condo, Camil said that is a challenge because most vegetables need 6-8 hours of sun a day. One possibility is pots of arugula that can be cut and will regrow quickly. Climbing beans might also work. He does not use raised beds because they are expensive, dry out quickly, and take up a lot of space, but they are a good solution for patios or disabled gardeners

Camil noted that vegetables grown in the city can only be "non-certified organic" Organic certification regulations are complex in urban settings. The certification context has traditionally been rural; thus many city realities do not fit (e.g. pollution).

Guides asked about signage. Currently there are some regular plant labels. [Later in the day, Cynthia sent out a lot of information which can be found at <https://www.ericanotebook.com/vegetable-garden.html>)]

The produce from our garden was shared with the Food Bank last year, but distributing fresh food was a challenge for them, so this year all the vegetables are going to the Shaughnessy restaurant. They weigh the incoming produce, determine the market value, and at the end of season will donate the total amount "purchased" to the food bank. Their chef uses the vegetables in various restaurant dishes, such as nasturtium leaf pesto. Camil calls this the "100-metre diet"! Someone suggested that he also provide Shaughnessy with the pulled-up chickweed, as the sprouts make a nice salad green.

Asked about winter gardening, Camil said that's a great idea, but his contract ends in the fall. He would like to show sequential plantings that could go on to December and how a garden can be used to store vegetables like cabbages even after they stop growing. Currently there is cover cropping in the winter, but perhaps a bed or two could be kept going with vegetables.

Camil's organization, Inner City Farms (<http://innercityfarms.com>), works with homeowners to use their yards for vegetable production (the chafer beetle has

been a boon to their program, as many homeowners want to get rid of their lawn). All told, the organization currently has an acre's worth of land in the city. In exchange for allowing Inner City Farms to use their yard, homeowners receive a free membership in Inner City Farms' Community Shared Agriculture program (CSA) that provides members with weekly produce boxes from that week's harvest. The program costs \$500 annually for each member family. This model has been around since the 1970s and is now being used in fisheries and meat production. It directly connects the eater and the producer. When converting a yard to a vegetable garden, he removes the sod, adds compost, then rototills it in. The first year of growing a new garden always has a steep learning curve, as each garden has its own unique characteristics.

Camil is running for Park Board as a Green Party candidate in order to further promote urban vegetable gardens (however, if he wins, he will have to resign from VanDusen). He says that while urban vegetable gardening will never feed the city, it is an important tool to connect city dwellers with what they eat. It can also help reduce air pollution, as a third of emissions are agriculture-based.

The guides were really impressed by Camil's knowledge and enthusiasm and look forward to seeing this important program grow in the future.

[Note: Camil is a candidate for the Vancouver Park Board and thus is no longer allowed to garden at VanDusen due to conflict of interest. Jen Berney, an associate farmer at Inner City Farms, has taken over his role.]