

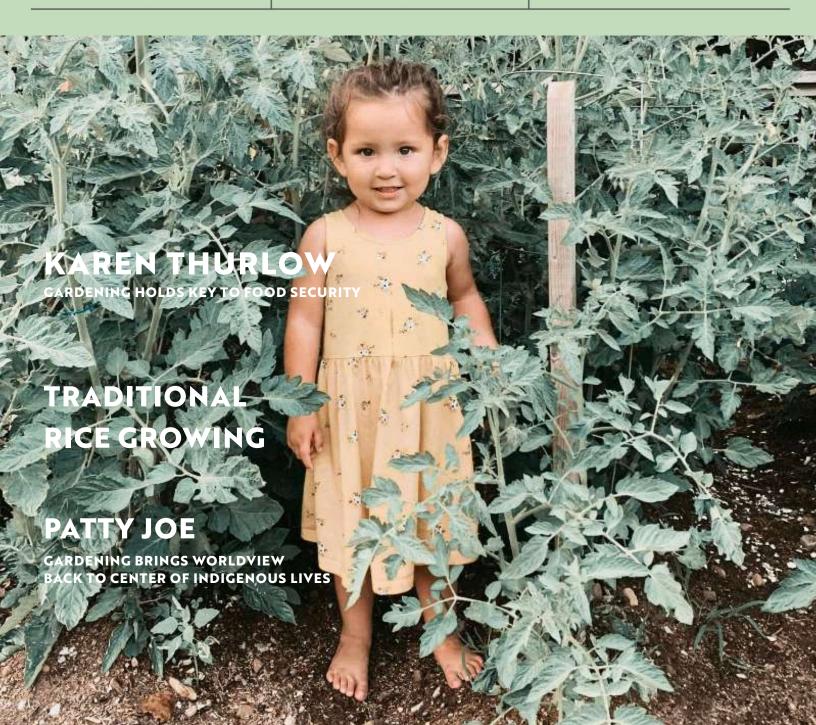
NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA MAGAZINE



FROM SEEDS WE GROW



MARCH 2022 MAGAZINE ISSUE 10





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WELCOME TO THE TENTH EDITION OF KCI-NIWESQ, THE MAGAZINE OF THE NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA (NWAC).

IN THIS ISSUE WE EXPLORE OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAND.

While farming was not universal among the Indigenous cultures of North America prior to contact with the Europeans, many First Nations actively cultivated plants like squash, beans, and corn.

In this issue, you will read about Karen Thurlow who grows all of the vegetables that go onto her dinner table – year round - in the small garden and greenhouse behind her house on a First Nation in northern a New Brunswick. Now she has purchased 100 acres of land off the reserve so she can grow far more produce, so she can set up hives of bees, and so that other members of her community can plant and harvest their own patches.

You will read about Patty Joe who just loves to garden and is providing advice for other aspiring agriculturalists who just need a little help to get started. Joe says the best thing about gardening is watching the faces of children when they realize you can pick and eat food straight from the ground.

We will take you to Northern Ontario where Rhonda Lyons is guiding people who want to enjoy the healing beauty of a fall day on a lake, on two-day visits to the places where her ancestors have been harvesting manoomin (wild rice) for generations.

We will chat with Cherlene Seward, the food sovereignty steward at the Kwantlen Polytechnic University in British Columbia, about the unique Indigenous programs that are being run at the Centre for Sustainable Food Systems.

You will learn about the beautiful greenhouse and green roof that will sit atop NWAC's new Social and Cultural Innovation Centre in downtown Gatineau, Que., and will provide vegetables and herbs for the Centre's Indigenous-themed café.

And we will hear from Elder Alma Brooks about the healing energy of plants and an experience she had connecting with her non-human relations while taking part in a sacred ceremony.

As First Nations, Inuit and Métis women who are overcoming centuries of colonization, we are reconnecting with the land – a fact that is much in evidence at the NWAC's Resiliency Lodges where our healing programs are centred in land-based learning. In this issue we want to share a small taste of that experience with you.

So, thank you once again for opening the pages that follow. Thank you for reading the tenth edition of Kci-Niwesq. Please drop us a line and let us know what you think at reception@nwac.ca.

MIIGWETCH.



TRADITIONAL RICE GROWING:

When Spirituality and Business Development Combine





01

nishinaabe elders tell of a prophecy that pre-dates the arrival of European settlers on their ancestors' shores.

At that time, so the story goes, the Anishinaabe people were living on the East Coast of North America. They were told to go west until they found the place where the food grew abundantly on the water. It was the gift of the Creator and would sustain them through difficult times. So they traveled west, stopping many times on their journey. Eventually, they came to Minnesota and Michigan and Northern Ontario. There they found manoomin (wild rice), a semi-aquatic grass seed with a delicious nutty flavour that could be stored and eaten throughout the winter. It became their staple food.

Rhonda Lyons is keeping the tradition of her ancestors alive. A school principal in northwestern Ontario, Lyons has learned the old ways of rice harvesting and roasting. And she is sharing them with others who want to experience the peace of the gathering process as summer turns to fall, through her company Anishinaabe Wild Rice, one of the offerings of Indigenous Experience Ontario.

"IT'S THAT CONNECTION WITH THE LAND," SAYS LYONS. "FOR ME, JUST BEING IN THE RICE FIELD, IT'S PEACEFUL, ITS HEALING. I SING TO THE PLANTS, I JUST FEEL LIKE I'M PART OF THEM.

And I know I'm doing this for good reasons, with good heart to share, because there's so many traditional teachings involved in this whole process."

For Lyons, the gathering of wild rice could have ended with her grandparents. Her mother is a residential school survivor and, because those schools stripped students of their culture, she could not pass along the wild rice teachings to her daughter.

"But I knew my grandparents did this. We grew up with wild rice. I love it. I remember telling my grandparents 'I really want to



learn this. How come this wasn't taught to us?" she says. "My grandparents said: 'It takes a lot of work.' I said 'Okay, I'll do the work."

So, when she was in her 30s, her aunties took her out to where the wild rice can be found on Whitefish Lake. It grows on tall stalks in shallow bodies of water, and begins to germinate in the spring. The harvest takes place over about four weeks in September.

Canoes are pushed through the rice stalks with cedar sticks, and the person in the bow grabs a stalk with one hand and gently shakes the rice into the floor of the boat. "Whatever doesn't fall into the canoe falls into the water and it stays there, until next year when it's ready to germinate again," says Lyons.

When her family first took her out on the lake, they would point to various spots and say, this is where they used to camp, or this is where they stomped the rice.

"It just really spoke to me. I wanted to learn this. I needed to pick up these pieces, to rebuild this so I can teach my family, teach my grandkids," says Lyons. "And I just fell in love with it. Just being with the water, being with the plants."

Then, in 2016, Lyons decided to share the wild rice experience with others.

Every September, she takes groups of up to 20 people at a time for a two-day rice harvesting experience. Part of those days is spent in canoes, shaking the rice off the stalks. And part of it is spent back at camp, roasting the rice to end the germination process so it can be safely stored for the winter.

Those who join her are treated to teachings from Elders, great food around the campfire, and a hot tub to warm up after a day of harvesting.

Lyons has also brought students out to the lake – which is a four-hour drive from her home community – and Indigenous elders who have never had the chance to take part in the wild rice experience.

"I TAKE THOSE PEOPLE WHO REALLY WANT TO LEARN, TO COME OUT TO HELP OUT, BECAUSE IT IS A BEAUTIFUL HEALING TO BE OUT ON THE WATER COLLECTING RICE."

It's also about enjoying the spectacular fall in northwestern Ontario. When the wild rice is out, woodland creatures and waterfowl can be seen making their preparations for winter. Ducks are especially fond of wild rice.

Finished wild rice can sell for nearly \$10 for a 340 g bag. Even unroasted, the best quality can go for \$5 for 450 grams.

Lyons does not sell the rice she gathers. But she trades it for moose meat. And she eats it almost every week throughout the year. "I'm told it's a healing food," she says. "I use it for everything. The nutrition is better than white rice and brown rice."

Lyons makes wild rice soup. She pops it like popcorn. And she has experimented with turning it into flour.

"We have people who do it for economic reasons, to make money. It is usually the men who will go out and pick and pick and pick," says Lyons. "And then you have the other ones who do it for spirituality. This is where I think I fall in. But I make money too. It's my spirituality combined with business development. And I'm sharing a way of life with people who want to learn."



01



KCI-NIWESQ · NWAC

FOR PATTY JOE,

Gardening Brings Worldview Back to Center of Indigenous Lives

Patty Joe has some advice for first-time gardeners: Start small.

Joe, a member of the Esgenoôpetitj First Nation north of Moncton, N.B., is renowned for her beautiful garden and has helped others to get growing through the Indigenous Women in Agriculture Project run by the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC).

"I always encourage people to get started," she says "You don't have to have a humongous garden at the beginning. Start small first, then gradually increase. Put in an extra this or that every year."

Like many Indigenous families on the East Coast, Joe's maternal grandparents were far more into fishing than farming.

"We had a big field in the backyard where we used to pick berries and stuff like that," she says. "But we were never farmers or grew a garden."

Then, when she was about seven years old, she went to visit her father's Acadian parents. They had a huge garden. And she

was astonished. "I never knew that's where food came from."

Joe says she remembers her grandmother telling her to pull a vegetable out of the ground. "I remember the first carrot I pulled, we just wiped it on our pants and ate it. And I thought it was the most amazing thing ever."

When she got married, she told her husband she wanted a garden – so he built her one. And over the years, it became something lovely. It is now a place where school children are welcomed to learn about agriculture on a small scale.

"It is always so amazing to see their faces that they're surprised that you don't just go to the store to buy your vegetables," she says.

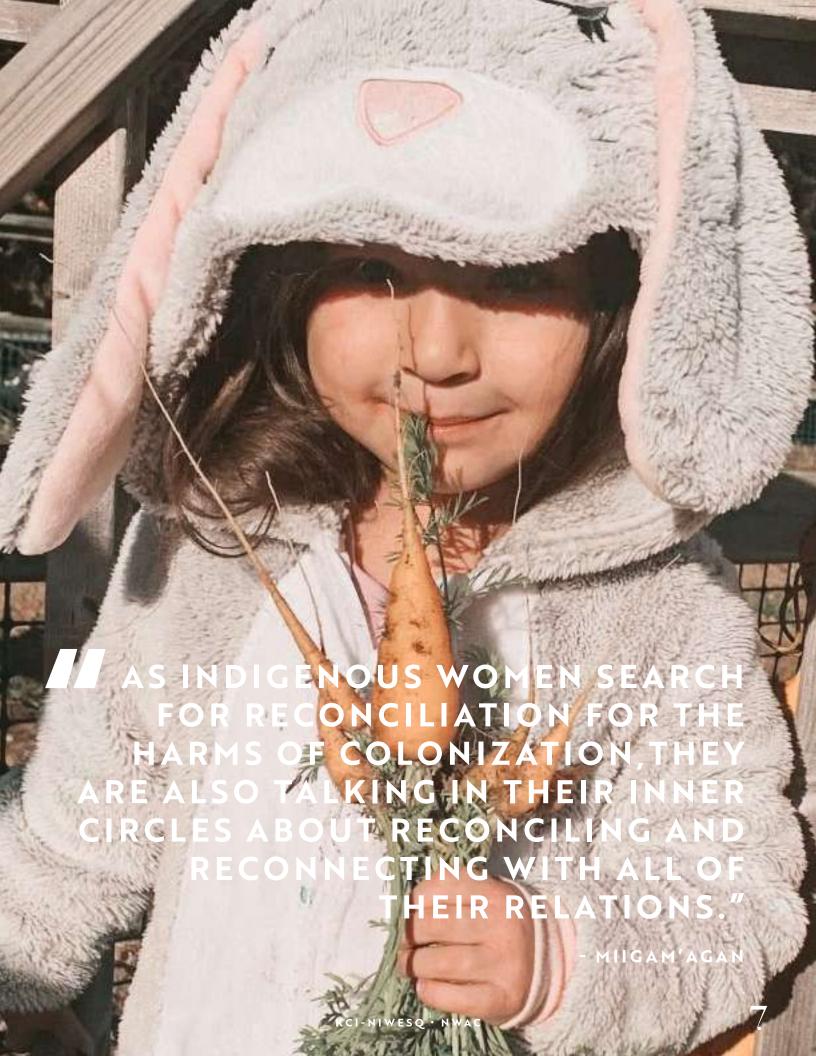
Gardening is sometimes assumed to be a European practice that was introduced to this continent by settlers. But there was a strong historical agricultural tradition within many First Nations cultures across North America.

"In our communities, we're talking about reconciliation with the settlers after the history and the enforcing of colonial dominance," says Miigam'agan, a Wabanaki/ Mi'kmaw grandmother who also comes from the Esgenoôpetit First Nation and who is dedicated to reviving her culture and promoting an understanding of Indigenous matriarchal systems.

Miigam'agan, is part of the NWAC Agriculture Program well Wapna'kikewi'skwaq, which means Women of First Light and was created to heal Indigenous communities by remembering and returning to the traditional ways of the ancestors. She says that, as Indigenous women search for reconciliation for the harms of colonization, they are also talking in their inner circles about reconciling and reconnecting with all of their relations. That is part of the worldview shared by many Indigenous peoples who believe that the earth and sky and all plants and animals are related.



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"So, I reckon, we are also reconciling with our non-human relations," she says, "being more conscious now, being out there and growing our food and engaging in our cultural practices, our worldview is coming into the center of our lives again ... having ceremonies, calling forth the bumble bees to come and support us and, by working with our plants, having them provide food to us. It is empowering," says Miigam'agan.

It is also a learning experience for many.

Joe recalls the time that four or five Elders in her community got together to form a gardening group. They took a big field and decided to grow potatoes. But that required planting and watering and tending and harvesting on a large scale.

"I said, 'this is a big, big thing for you guys to be doing by yourselves," she says. "So, the next year I suggested instead of doing a big field of potatoes, why don't you just start off with a tomato pot. I helped them, and we had good tomato pots and cucumber pots."

Many of the people in her community have put in raised beds, says Joe. "One started late in the season and I told her put green beans, yellow beans," she says. "They grow fast and I said that will be especially good for your child to see them and know that they could eat right from the garden. I said you don't have to do anything fancy the first year."

Some made the mistake of planting their carrots to close. Some burnt their vegetables with unneeded fertilizer. Joe's own cousin thought her cucumbers had failed when they were just hard to see because they had grown outside the box.

Gardeners can make mistakes and have lots of questions. But Joe says she is always glad to answer them when she can. And, she says, watching the reaction of children is one of the best parts of growing things.

"I have my great nieces that are here almost every summer with me and one (named Leanne) just turned four. She's been with me since she was two years old, gardening with me. This year, when she was playing in her room, she was pretending to make food, and she said 'oh, carrots, yeah, just one minute. I'm gonna go get them in the garden."

Other benefits of growing your own produce include the cost savings and the flavour, says Joe. People who bite into the cucumbers or tomatoes that come straight from her backyard, she says, always exclaim: "Oh my goodness, it tastes so different."

But the biggest joy, she says, may just be the chance to get some dirt under your fingernails and to reconnect with Mother Earth. "I always tell people it is good vibes only when you come to my garden or my greenhouse," says Joe.

"IT'S A SAFE PLACE, A PEACEFUL PLACE. YOU CAN FEEL THE SUN SHINING ON YOU. YOU GIVE THE PLANTS WATER. IT BRINGS YOU RIGHT BACK TO MOTHER EARTH WHERE YOU FEEL HER ENERGY AND YOU FEEL THE POSITIVENESS. WHEN I'M WORKING IN THE GARDEN IT IS MAGICAL."





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OUR HEALING IS WRAPPED UP WITH HEALING OF THE EARTH BY ALMA BROOKS, ELDER

Pictured: Alma Brooks

OUR HEALING IS WRAPPED UP WITH HEALING OF THE EARTH

Elder Alma Brooks recounts a spiritual experience in communicating with nature

QUESTION: WHY DO INDIGENOUS WOMEN HEAL BY PUTTING THEIR HANDS IN MOTHER EARTH?

We are the Wolastoqiyik (People of the beautiful river). The DNA of our People and the land from which we come is one and the same, according to Dr. David Suzuki, the world-renowned Canadian environmentalist.

Traditionally, our people had a unique way of perceiving the universe, and we had a deep spiritual relationship with the Earth as well as other life forms, including the four-legged creatures, the creepy crawlies, and those who fly in the air or swim in the waters. We were/are recognized and acknowledged as extended family.

Colonization has altered our perception of the world around us, brainwashed many, and created conditions so painful and horrific for Indigenous People that they are almost unspeakable. We have been put through the meat grinder, to the point that we no longer can make sense of our world.



The psychological conditions in which we find ourselves are normal human responses to an extraordinary human experience. The same forces that have destroyed us as a "People" are those that are now blindly and willfully destroying life on this planet.

It is imperative that we - especially the women - reconnect spiritually to the land from which we come and begin to reconnect with our original instructions: understanding our relationship with the Universe.

Like the Earth, women carry the seeds and water within us for the reproduction of future generations of our species. We are the only doorway into this world for the human family.

All things have a right to live, and all things have a longing to reproduce themselves. In our ceremonies, we acknowledge "all my relations" which includes all other life forms in the natural world.

We have been deliberately brainwashed to believe and behave in accordance with the Western hierarchical system, created by men for the benefit of a few. The assimilation processes continue to this day.

I usually do not speak publicly about experiences in sacred ceremonies; but I think it is time to share the following. This experience happened a few years ago, and I have no explanation. I can only share what happened and allow people to come to their own conclusions. This is my experience with plants.

I was packing a suitcase, getting ready to go to Nova Scotia for ceremony which was being conducted by medicine people from the South American Jungles, when Jim, my ex-husband, came to my house (we lived in separate homes) to tell me that his doctor had just told him he had multiple myeloma.

He was very emotionally distraught, as anyone could imagine. I didn't really know what to say to him, except to listen, and I

told him about the ceremony I was going to attend. And, in an effort to make him feel somewhat better, I told him to bring me something with his energy on it, and I would take it into ceremony and pray for him. He brought me a shirt.

At the ceremonial spot in Nova Scotia, the medicine people instructed us to set up our tents and prepare for a sweat lodge. We were allowed only to eat spirit food, and then go to bed.

Early the next morning we had some more spirit food and went into the sweat lodge again before paddling across to a beautiful Island that had a fast stream running through it.

The first day I was in the medicine, I simply sat near the trunk of a beautiful tree, that grew on the edge of the stream. I watched with amazement at the beauty of the sun sparkling through the canopy overhead.

I took notice of other things too, such as my friend upstream cleansing herself from head to toe. She even emptied her purse into the stream, which made me laugh. She looked so beautiful standing there; long black hair, lovely ribbon skirt and a white blouse with red berries embroidered on the neckline and puffy sleeves. I watched her cleanse for a long time.

I saw another friend who was doing her ceremony on a large rock out in the middle of the stream. The stream was fast, but it was not deep; with large rocks sticking out here and there. She reminded me of a mermaid, and I think she thought she was one too. She was looking at herself in the water.

I also observed a family of ducks just floating swiftly down stream, and they looked and sounded so very happy.

When the ceremony ended the first day, we paddled back across to camp, ate, and went into another sweat lodge and then to bed.

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The next day we repeated the same thing. I had time to admire all of the plants growing around the area, and realized that there were spirits everywhere.

On the third day, I decided to sit on the ground close to the stream, and beside me was a little aspen shrub. I was there for about two hours when I heard a voice speaking to me. At first I thought it was the medicine man who was tending the sacred fire. But the voice spoke to me again, and seemed to come out of nowhere – just above me.

I was being told to make a sound. I felt kind of shy, like a child, but I tried it anyway. The voice gently coaxed me to try again. So, I took a deep breath and made a sound and, as I lifted my voice up, and when I hit a certain frequency, a bright yellowish colored light encircled my head and I could hear a humming sound. All of a sudden, the light swished downward toward the aspen tree and my attention followed.

When I looked at the little tree, its leaves were turned toward me and it was shimmering. I remembered my Dad showing me trees whose leaves were turning up toward the sky; he said that they were drawing rain.

As I sat on the ground, I became aware of energy coming up through my feet. It filled my whole body and my hands began to tingle and feel warm. The little tree was still shimmering its leaves towards me, so I put my hands close to its aura/energy field. I felt the amazing flow of energy and I knew instinctively that I was in communication with this plant. The only word that comes close to describing this energy is "love," although I knew it was more than that.

This happened in the morning, and by the afternoon I was instinctively made aware of what I had to do to help Jim. I did exactly as I was instinctively instructed to do, which took most of the afternoon. Everything I had observed during the two days before was significant in assisting with my understanding of what had to be done in the ceremony.

We finished our ceremony on the fourth day and headed home. We were told to not go into crowded places for a while as we were all open channels and could pick up negative things.

Two or three weeks later, my exhusband came again to my house to tell me that he had gone to a doctor's appointment and was told there was no sign of his cancer. We were both happy about this news, but never ever spoke about the ceremony.

I make no claims about this situation because I cannot explain it. All I can do is tell you what happened.

Did this tree help in this healing? Was the energy a form of communication between human and plant life? Is this what our ancestors knew and understood about the natural world? If so, we need to be so grateful after the way humans have treated those relatives who give us the very air we breathe to live, and maybe so much more.

Our healing is wrapped up with healing of the Earth. Therefore, we must, once again begin communications with our relatives in the natural world.

"THE SAME FORCES THAT HAVE DESTROYED US AS A 'PEOPLE' ARE THOSE THAT ARE NOW BLINDLY AND WILLFULLY DESTROYING LIFE ON THIS PLANET."

- DEANNA LAITY





FOR KAREN THURLOW,

GARDENING HOLDS KEY TO FOOD SECURITY

Karen Thurlow's home on the Eel Bar River First Nation sits on a plot measuring just 30 metres wide by 60 metres deep. On that small piece of land in northwestern New Brunswick, Thurlow grows all of the vegetables that she and her husband eat throughout the year.

She has bought another property off the reserve of about 100 acres. She intends to start farming it this spring – and to share it with other members of her community who want to start their own gardens.

But, for the past four years, the small lot on which she lives is all Thurlow needs to keep food on the table.

"I know we're never gonna go hungry," she says.

"AND IT FEELS GOOD, WHEN YOU SIT DOWN TO A MEAL AND EVERYTHING ON YOUR PLATE CAME FROM THE LAND, IT DIDN'T COME FROM THE GROCERY STORE. IT WASN'T MASS-PRODUCED WITH A LOT OF CHEMICALS."

Growing your own produce also reduces your carbon footprint," says Thurlow who is an instructor and adviser with the Indigenous Women in Agriculture Project run by the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC). "What I'm doing now does affect the next seven generations."

Thurlow is not Indigenous. Family lore says her great-grandmother was Mi'Kmaq, but there is no way to verify that. "It's like she dropped down from heaven. There was no paper trail on that woman."

Thurlow grew up in Massachusetts in a house where her grandparents maintained a large garden and orchards. Her family canned much of the food that was eaten through the winter,

they gathered berries, and both of her parents hunted and fished.

"So," she says, "we were pretty self-sufficient as I was growing up."

As a teenager, Thurlow saved up enough money working on farms and managing her uncle's farm stand to buy her own farm in Massachusetts when she was 20 years old. It was just a little over four acres, but she also leased 21 acres from her neighbour and raised dairy goats, sheep, cattle, and pigs in addition to growing a wide assortment of fruits and vegetables. "We had a little bit of everything," she says.

Including honeybees. By the time she moved to Maine 22 years later, her apiary had expanded to 100 hives and she was selling bees and queens and honey.

At the same time, Thurlow was paying regular visits to New Brunswick, which is where she met her husband, Earl LaBillois, who organized the sweat lodges and sacred fires on the First Nation she now calls home.

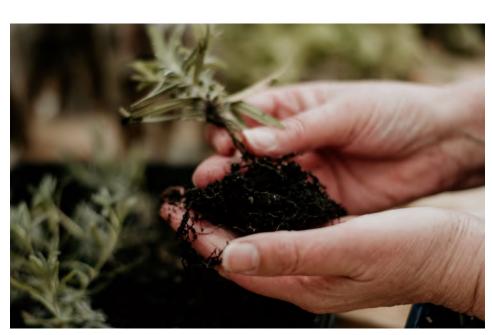
"I'd been coming up to Eel River Bar for about 15 years. And I also know quite a bit of traditional plant medicine, which I learned from my family," she says. "I came up here too fast and to attend sweat lodges. It was a seven-hour drive from where I was living, the community was very accepting for me to come up and follow the ways in my heart."

Thurlow and LaBillois were both married to other people when they were first introduced. But neither marriage lasted. "We were friends, and we just became better and better friends over time. And eventually, we got married," she says.

Thurlow moved to Canada in 2018 and very quickly was offered the job with NWAC. She had to leave her apiaries behind but was determined to restart her farming if only to put food on her own table.

Over four years, she has put bee hives and a small greenhouse in her backyard.

There was one existing building back there, which is used as a workshop. But even with a



All Photos by: Amy Bernard | Pictured: Karen Thurlow, Maskwacis Early Years program in Maskwacis, Alberta



couple of vehicles "I still have enough room to grow vegetables," says Thurlow. "You just have to be creative I guess."

She collects or purchases seeds in the fall and starts them under grow lights in the workshop in her backyard. Then, in the spring, she sets the seed trays in the greenhouse, many of which hold the starter plants that will grow all summer out in the garden.

"I have all my winter squash to start there, as well as the summer squashes and cucumbers and flowers," she says, "Everything that can be transplanted into the garden is started in the greenhouse. I even start the corn plants in the greenhouse and then move them outside because our season is so short. If I can have something sprouted and two to three weeks old before it goes on the ground, I've just added almost a month to my growing season."

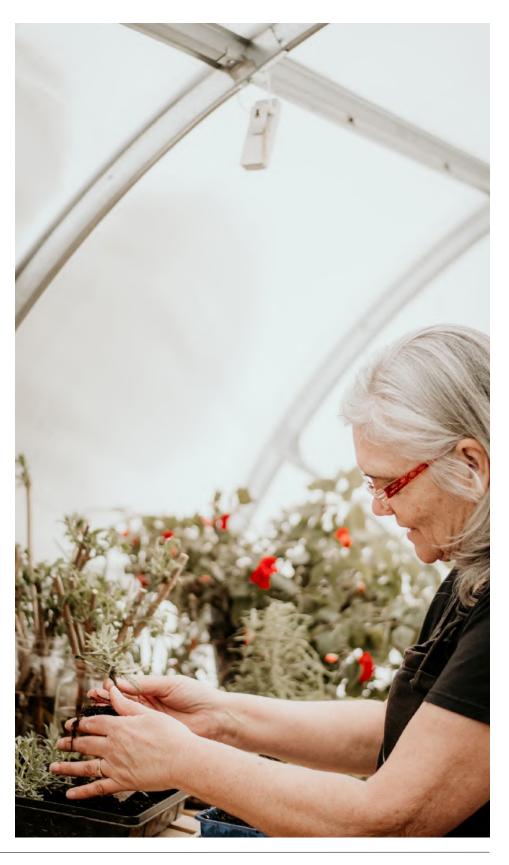
Heritage seeds, which she gets from specialized seed companies, are critical to the success of her garden, says Thurlow.

"I could go to Walmart or Canadian Tire and buy my sets to put in the garden. But then I have no control over what I want to grow," she says. "I don't buy hybridized plants because they are two different varieties of the same plant crossbred together. If you save seeds from that tomato, you don't know what traits you're gonna get."

In the yard, she has a "three sisters garden" which is corn, beans and squash which many Indigenous communities recognize as the most important three crops that also help each other thrive.

She also grows salad fixings like onions, lettuce, radishes, and cucumber. She has peas, carrots, rhubarb, garlic, and lot of herbs. And the greenhouse is great for tropical plants and those that like heat, like peppers and tomatoes, but Thurlow says she ends up taking pots in and out of it, depending on the heat.

All around the garden "I plant a lot of stuff for the bees," says Thurlow. "I plant buckwheat every place that I'm not walking or there's not another plant. It's a great ground cover because it suppresses weeds. And pollinators love it because it's got a lot of nectar. And I use it for microgreens."



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A small, insulated area in the basement of one of her outbuildings serves as a cold room to store the foods she preserves. With the help of a system of vents, it stays around 10 degrees C all year round. And she has a large freezer for meat, fish, and vegetables.

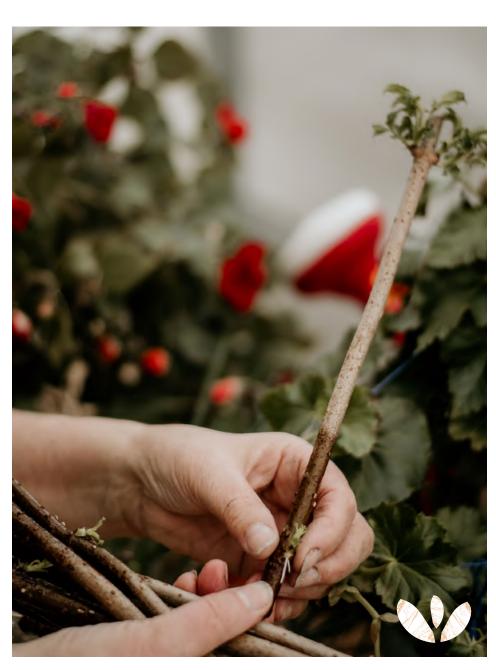
A typical winter meal for Thurlow and her husband might be stew made out of moose meat they have hunted, with all the main ingredients coming from her own storage.

"I just went to the grocery store and I spent \$20 for this week," says Thurlow. "That's why I try to get people to understand that you don't have to be spending \$100 at the grocery store every week. I spent \$100 on seeds last year, that \$100 worth of seeds is feeding us for 12 months."

Eel River Bar is putting in a community greenhouse with the assistance of a federal grant. It is expected to help with food sovereignty in the longer term and Thurlow says she is eager to see how it goes. In the meantime, she is excited to start growing things on the farmland she has purchased.

"Last fall we planted grapes and plums, and there are apple trees already on that land," she says. There are 26 sticks of elderberries on her kitchen window waiting to be transplanted. She is going to move her bees out there. And she is looking forward to members of her community digging their own gardens on the property and starting their own vegetable plots.

"I want the community to have food security. So I want to have a garden big enough to share food," says Thurlow. "That's how our communities are supposed to work. That's how the communities are gonna stay strong."



YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE SPENDING \$100 AT THE GROCERY STORE EVERY WEEK. I SPENT \$100 ON SEEDS LAST YEAR, THAT \$100 WORTH OF SEEDS IS FEEDING US FOR 12 MONTHS.

- KAREN THURLOW



WAC ROOFTOP GARDEN: GROWING TRADITIONAL INDIGENOUS FOODS IN URBAN SETTING

It will be a small swath of green perched in a concrete landscape. The roof of the new Social and Economic Innovation Centre that has been constructed by the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) in downtown Gatineau, Que., is being designed as a field of plants and shrubs surrounding a greenhouse.

"It's about growing traditional food in an urban setting," says Laura MacGowan, the horticultural technician who has been hired to create the soothing and yet functional space. "Its objective is to promote Indigenous women in agriculture, even on the roof."

The Centre, which is set to open in April 2022, will be the new headquarters for NWAC.

It is where the organization will conduct its research and advocacy. But it will also house culturally designed meeting rooms that can be rented, a boutique that sells Indigenous artisan crafts, and a café that specializes in Indigenous cuisine. Some of the herbs and vegetables that will be used in the state-of-the-art kitchen for the menu of the cafe will be grown in the greenhouse.

The structure, which measures seven metres by five metres, is built of double-paned glass and is both heated and ventilated so it will grow plants all year round.

MacGowan says she has connected with organic farmers in Quebec who will provide boxes of seedlings grown from heritage seeds to start the first indoor garden.

This spring, she says, she will plant different lettuce mixes, as well as herbs like basil, dill, thyme, and oregano. And the Elders who have been guiding the project are keen to grow edible flowers like bergamot, day lilies, calendula, and nasturtiums.

Then there will be more traditional edibles like cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, and peppers.

"We have to be selective. It's not a bigproduction greenhouse," says MacGowan, "but I'm going to work really hard at having things seeded and then ready for the kitchen. I am setting up a seed planting schedule so that things will be constantly available."

Surrounding the greenhouse, NWAC is putting down membranes and then covering them with a half-metre layer of planting medium.

MacGowan is also designing a garden of medicinal plants, bushes, and fruiting shrubs, like strawberries and blueberries, as well as those that emit pleasant fragrances. Everything in the rooftop garden will have to be able to withstand full sun. And because there are load limits for the roof, so MacGowan cannot plant anything that needs deep soil.

A reservoir and a drip irrigation system will ensure that the plants get plenty of water.

Some of the staff of NWAC will be trained in maintenance of the garden and the greenhouse. Most of the herbs and vegetables will be grown in three steps - seeding, transplanting to larger containers, and then harvesting, says MacGowan who will help teach those who will keep everything green and growing. There will be opportunities for education in horticulture, she says.

But the overall goal is to bring a tranquil space to Gatineau's downtown.

The Social and Economic Innovation Centre is across the street from the buildings that house the federal departments of Indigenous Services and Crown-Indigenous Relations, and government workers will be invited to enjoy the space. There will be benches set up where people can sit with a coffee and look across the Ottawa River to the Parliament buildings. The point, says MacGowan, "is to get people really feeling like they're surrounded by greenery."



NWAC Rooftop Garden, artist renderings



I'M GOING TO WORK REALLY HARD AT HAVING THINGS SEEDED AND THEN READY FOR THE KITCHEN. I AM SETTING UP A SEED PLANTING SCHEDULE SO THAT THINGS WILL BE CONSTANTLY AVAILABLE.



FARM SCHOOL EMPOWERS COMMUNITY, EMBODIES RECONCILIATION IN ACTION

Educational farms are working toward Indigenous food sovereignty, with overarching goals of Indigenous cultural independence and reconciliation.

We sat down with Charlene Seward, Indigenous Foodways Engagement Facilitator at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, to discuss how university teaching farms work and why it's so important for Indigenous Knowledge to be included in these teachings.

Q: WHAT ARE THE FOOD SYSTEM PROGRAMS AT KWANTLEN POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY?

A: I work with the Institute for Sustainable Food Systems (ISFS) and my work consists of engaging with First Nations, Metis, and Inuit communities across British Columbia and supporting our Indigenous programming on the ground. The work is focused on building respectful relationships and helping communities to understand what their goals and vision are in terms of food sovereignty.

Then, working with the Institute to help them secure funding, and build out these projects. Some of the biggest initiatives that ISFS has is a farm school located on Tsawwassen First Nation, and our partnership with the Sikh E Dakh Nation Farm School.

Q: HOW LONG HAS THE ISFS FARM SCHOOL BEEN OPERATING?

A: This is actually our second year working with the Sik E Dakh Nation and we have 25 students from the community participating. They are a fairly small community, so we have about a quarter of their population being trained. It's absolutely amazing to work with the community and support them to see their visions and dreams come true. It's an opportunity for the community to empower themselves to take control of their food system.

Q: HOW DO EDUCATIONAL FARM PROGRAMS TEACH THE NEXT GENERATION ABOUT FOOD SOVEREIGNTY?

A: I see these as opportunities to support Indigenous communities to build food security on their path to food sovereignty. It's about creating space for Indigenous communities to return to traditional ways -- to rekindle their connection to the land and their food system. And, to very much acknowledge this as a sacred obligation that we have as the original inhabitants of these lands.

Q: CAN YOU EXPLAIN HOW THE TEACHINGS WITH THE UNIVERSITY TIES INTO INDIGENOUS CULTURE?

A: The schools primarily teach regenerative agriculture. I was brought in, specifically, to support the connection to Indigenous food ways by creating space for Indigenous voices within this work. We're trying to figure out how we balance this absolute need for food security for Indigenous communities with prioritizing Indigenous food ways.



Q: WHY DOES KPU PRIORITIZE ENGAGEMENT-FOCUSED LEARNING? AND HOW IS ENGAGEMENT-FOCUSED LEARNING IMPORTANT FOR INDIGENOUS FOOD SYSTEMS?

A: Our work is guided by a provincial Indigenous Advisory Circle made up of community members from across British Columbia. These members include Metis and First Nations representatives with diverse backgrounds across many different Indigenous populations, as well as on-reserve advisory members and youth advisory members. Our goal is really to ensure that this work is done in a good way and that this process is led by Indigenous people.

Q: HOW DOES THE FARM SCHOOL BLEND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE WITH WESTERN SCIENCE IN ITS TEACHINGS?

A: In terms of the Sik E Dakh Farm School, there is Indigenous Knowledge built into the training itself. It includes Indigenous foodways, such as gathering traditional medicines. Indigenous food ways are an important part of the to Kwantlen Farm School program.

Q: HOW DOES PRIORITIZING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE IN TEACHING FARMS AFFECT INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES?

A: I see this work as an act of reconciliation. It is an opportunity for the university, and for the Institute, to start undoing some of the harms that were caused by colonization—that were caused by the Indian Act—and really, an opportunity to support Indigenous communities to reach sovereignty.

I see it, very much so, as the physical manifestation of reconciliation in action. The Institute is dedicated to working with Indigenous communities to support their endeavors; to support their vision. We don't come into a community and dictate solutions. We're here to support and help as an extra set of hands to get this work done.









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