



Jill Dalton, Urban Agriculture Coordinator amongst some of the newly built 20+ plot community garden in Cecelia Ravine Park. **Photograph by: Lyle Stafford, timescolonist.com (March 2012)**

Community garden plots see growing demand

Five on list for Burnside-Gorge site, which hasn't even opened yet

By Derek Spalding, Times Colonist April 1, 2012

Dustin Boggs was one of several volunteers who suffered the wet weather Saturday afternoon to help complete the latest in a rapidly growing number of community gardens in Greater Victoria.

Fifty-five volunteers put in 300 hours over the past few weekends, constructing 24 above-ground garden plots at Cecelia Ravine Park, near the Gorge Waterway.

Like many, Boggs wants to show his children that food doesn't come from plastic bags. This push for food security, demonstrated in 100-mile diets and heightened awareness about where food comes from, has increased the popularity of urban agriculture in communities all over North America.

Vancouver Island is no exception. There are about 1,000 garden plots in Greater Victoria alone, according to 2010 estimates made by the Capital Regional District. At that time, there were about 34 community gardens.

New projects are in high demand, with wait lists for plots stretching anywhere from three to seven years, according to LifeCycles Project Society, a non-profit organization that promotes food security in Victoria.

"The wait lists are very long. We need more community gardens," said Jill Dalton, urban agriculture coordinator at LifeCycles, the group that organized the project at Cecelia Ravine Park.

The work was not easy. Each raised garden bed required six posts for the long, rectangular frame.

Each post required workers to dig at least 30 centimetres deep into an area of infill consisting of mostly rock and clay.

Boggs repeatedly raised a sledgehammer above his head Saturday, driving it down to loosen a large rock inside one of the holes.

The work helps get him and other volunteers high on a list for one of the plots.

The garden hasn't officially opened yet and already there are five people on the waiting list, according to the Burnside Gorge Community Association.

The group worked with the City of Victoria to spearhead upgrades to Cecelia Ravine Park, including a new sports court and bike skills park. Area residents wanted a community garden to replace the one removed in 2004 when the new community centre was built.

"With a wait list so early, it gives an indication of how much people wanted this," said the association's Kim Perkins.

Most community gardens in Greater Victoria have about 20 plots, with the exception of several in more rural centres such as Saanich, where gardens can have 80 or more plots, said Dalton.

The CRD's estimates show the number of plots per garden range from seven to 137.

Boggs and his family intend to grow high-yield crops that are more expensive at the grocer. That way, he said, the family saves money, and his two young daughters, 10 and four, learn how to grow their own food.
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