

Growing Wellness through Gardening during COVID-19



Supporting Indigenous wellness during COVID-19

This fact sheet is part of Thunderbird Partnership Foundation's commitment to provide culturally-grounded and strength-based supports for First Nations people during COVID-19. These resources can provide guidance as our communities navigate the current global health crisis, while continuing to face existing health challenges, including substance use and mental health issues.

We can physically connect with culture by touching the land and thanking Mother Earth for her gifts. Wellness is a balance of the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical.

(Thunderbird, 2020).

If there ever was a time to plant a garden, it's now. Look to native gardens for inspiration and ways to strengthen your relationship with the land. Any fears about not being able to feed your family in a healthy way during COVID-19 can turn into a feeling of abundance, pride and resiliency.

Indigenous Peoples are no strangers to food security as colonial policies have forced people from their lands and restricted their rights to hunt, fish, gather and plant to feed their families.

Our hearts are filled with so many emotions, such as love, sadness and happiness. Family and community are important. So is our relationship with other living beings, such as animals and plants. We feel well when we have connections to people, land and Creation in our lives – Elder Jim Dumont. (Thunderbird, 2020).

We are all related. Gardening and eating food you have grown provides a direct connection to Mother Earth. Gardens represent more than just food, they are a symbol of our belief in our future, resiliency, strength, wellness and culture.

GETTING STARTED

- look for seeds, seed-saving and sacred medicines information online
- gardening can be done alone, making it easy to maintain physical distancing
- introduce gardening to youth
- phone or face time with an Elder to learn from their experience

Tips on gardening success

- Start small, try a few pots, or a small in-ground plot.
- Start with easy to grow options (tomatoes, peppers, beans, radishes, carrots, onions, leafy greens).
- Try growing a medicine wheel garden with natural healing plants such as echinacea, camomile, sage.
- Create companion plantings that benefit from each other, such as the Three Sisters, (corn, beans and squash).
- Considered to be gifts from the Creator, the Three Sisters are a holistic model of health and well-being in their expression of cooperation and sharing (Thunderbird, 2015).
- Add colourful flowers to attract pollinators (bees, butterflies, hummingbirds) because plants won't grow without them.
- Conserve moisture and keep weeds down by using mulch (lawn clippings, leaves or pine needles).
- Poke tiny holes in the necks of old plastic bottles and stick them neck down in the soil to water automatically.
- Save seeds to preserve history and spiritual connection to the Earth. (Woodward, 2020).

REFERENCES

- Dumont, J. & National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation. (2014).** *Honouring our strengths: Indigenous culture as intervention in addictions treatment project.* National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation.
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- Woodward, S. (2020).** *Gardening advice from Indigenous food growers.* Yes Media. Retrieved from: <https://www.yesmagazine.org/environment/2020/05/20/garden-advice-indigenous-food-growers/>

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