

DIGGING IN

NOVA SCOTIA HORTICULTURE FOR HEALTH NETWORK

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The Nova Scotia Horticulture for Health Network is a coalition of people interested in supporting horticulture for health initiatives through resource-sharing, exchange of practices/knowledge, and networking.



Gardening's Social Side

Text by Lesley Fleming, HTR

Photos by Common Roots Bi Hi Urban Farm, L. Fleming & J. Muniz. Unsplash

Research has validated the role positive social interactions play in health, both psychologically and sociologically (Levasseur et al., 2010; Leavell et al., 2019). The health benefits of social interactions where horticulture, gardens and gardening are involved are not as well-known as the physical health benefits of gardening. Gardening's social side—the health benefits of social interactions—is important to understand and integrate into people-plant programming because it can impact a wide range of benefits for individuals, groups, and communities.

What types of social interactions related to horticultural activities provide health benefits? Many would identify sense of community from participation in urban farms, community or school gardens. Membership and affiliation in plant societies are also a form of social engagement, with participation in plant sales, community beautification projects, and attendance at educational workshops. Social interactions related to food security include advocacy, education, and food production, these often undertaken as collective action seeking to improve food access and nutrition.

Groups or movements using horticulture as the catalyst for social interactions have two distinct types of interactions, identified as apolitical or political (Fleming, 2021).

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Garden clubs, master gardener programs, horticulture, and plant societies, and even horticulture industry trade groups are examples of apolitical organizations where a focus on hands-on gardening, community service, expansion of gardening knowledge, and networking, create a sense of community where social interaction is significant. But there are other health benefits correlated to social interactions in apolitical groups:

- cognitive/intellectual improvements where transfer of horticultural knowledge is the conduit of social interactions (Boyer et al., 2002; Hall & Knuth, 2019);
- continuance of cultural values, traditions and sociological connections passed through one on one interactions, group & community festivals & celebrations (Companion, 2016);
- opportunities for affiliation and social engagement through professional membership associations (Dicke & Saitgalina, 2014).

Horticultural activity as a catalyst for social engagement sheds light on the breadth and variety within apolitical groups:

- Gainesville FL. master gardeners interacting with veterans, staff & other volunteers at the Honor Center (military) Garden re garden design, fundraising and ongoing program delivery;
- garden club members' volunteering & acting as docents transferring horticulture information at Ringling Museum's Secret Garden & other community gardens;
- [university students connecting](#) through gardening, gardening labs, and food production activities;
- organizations like Children and Nature Network creating an affiliation between individuals and groups seeking to promote access to nature.



Groups identified as having a political/social change element, and where horticulture is the driver of social interactions, are primarily tied to food security. These include food alliances, food literacy non-profits, and community gardens (see below for more info on community gardens). “The interplay between gardening activities, small scale food production, and social affiliation makes this subset unique, as does its role as a lightning rod for current societal thought and action” (Fleming, 2022). Like apolitical groups, there are a variety of health benefits correlated to social interactions in political groups:

- strengthening communities through improved food access and economies of scale, with shared values & collective action improving food security (Alaimo et al., 2016);
- expanding interactions and partnerships within communities (between local government, food agencies, community gardens etc.) (Bice et al., 2018);

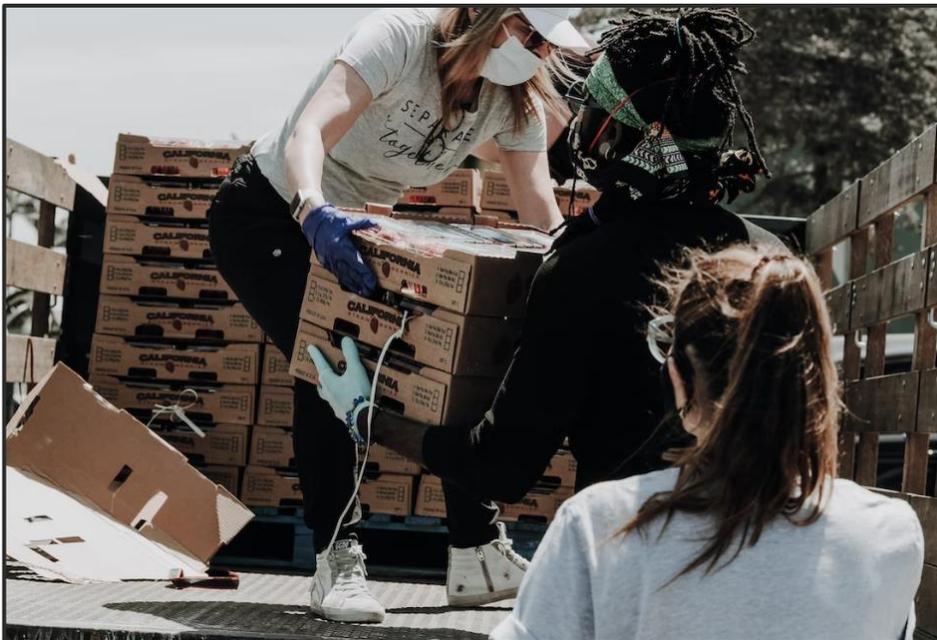
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- collective action re policy reform and advocacy for food action and improved food systems (Eisenmann et al., 2011);
- group initiatives integrating social and ecological activities (related to sustainable agriculture practices, community re-structuring & food security) (Egerer et al., 2020);
- establishing connections between food producers & consumers (Dimitri et al., 2016).

Models of horticulture-focused organizations with political/social change missions rely on social interactions, these critical to their existence:

- [Civil Eats](#), [Foodtank](#) and other digital communication platforms disseminating & sharing information related to horticulture strategies addressing food security;
- [Detroit's Agrihood](#) transforming communities, improving neighborhoods physically & sociologically by bringing people together to interact & garden;
- [urban farms across North America](#) functioning as physical gathering space & inclusive locations to grow food, share plant knowledge & materials among community participants;
- [HEAL food alliances](#) connecting people, to improve food access through purchasing power & food distribution;
- DC UrbanGreens nonprofit active in food desert neighborhoods, educating, transferring knowledge, meal distribution with individuals and groups;
- Cleveland Crops offering agricultural and culinary training to adults with disabilities.



Community gardens and urban farms straddle Fleming's apolitical and political categorization. Individuals and groups involved in community gardens determine the type of social engagement they want to participate in, with some affiliating for political/social change reasons, others not. Nettle's book *Community Gardening as Social Action* suggests that these have become sites for local activism, improvement in urban environments, fostering community engagement and creating community solidarity, each of these using collective social action (2014).

Social engagement that occurs at community gardens offer health benefits in several health domains including the social domain:

- promoting and supporting production of vegetables which in turn positively impact diet, physical activity, and community public health, (i.e. collectively growing & donating produce to local food banks) (Hanson, 2012; Lovell et al., 2014);
- positive experiences, social cohesion and inclusion of marginalized, refugee & immigrant populations at community gardens & urban farms (Heilmayer et al., 2020; Mmako et al., 2019);
- building cross-cultural community connections (Mejia et al., 2020);
- integrating marginalized populations like people living with dementia who can participate in community gardens (Noone & Jenkins, 2018);
- fostering community understanding and resiliency (Okvat & Zauta, 2011; Teig et al., 2009);
- building social capital (Portinga, 2012);
- positive aging benefits especially for older adults with related health attributes of self-esteem, productive endeavours, social engagement and social inclusion (Scott et al., 2020; Soga et al., 2017)

Professionals delivering people-plant programs through horticultural or recreation therapy, after-school or school garden programs understand the benefits of their plant-based activities within physical, nutritional, and even emotional health domains. Increasingly, recognition of the importance, and the role social interactions play in health is expanding across disciplines. Horticulture-focused programs and services, gardening activity and horticulture organizations like the ones mentioned here are no exception. Many provide opportunities to engage, to foster and become part of a community, and to act collectively for the betterment of themselves and their communities. Fostering horticultural activities that can play a role in positive social interactions is and can be a significant contributor to health.

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Lesley Fleming, HTR examined this topic as part of her Horticulture for Health Framework article (2021), as research for the Florida Horticulture for Health Network's [Resource Hub](#), and as a component of the two horticulture for health networks she established in Nova Scotia and Florida. This article is being published concurrently in epubs [Digging In](#) and [Cultivate](#).

Nova Scotia Plant Societies & Gardening Groups

Compiled by Lesley Fleming, HTR & Beth House, BRec

Photos by K. in Sight & Y. Zok.Unsplash

Plant Societies

[Atlantic Canada Master Gardeners](#)
[Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticultural Society](#)
[Dartmouth Horticultural Society](#)
[Historic Gardens Annapolis Royal](#)

[Nova Scotia Association of Garden Clubs](#)
(Cape Breton, Eastern, Central North, Central South, Halifax, Valley, South Shore, Western districts (7) ([Map of garden clubs](#)))

- ❖ Local Garden Clubs in Hammons Plains, Antigonish, Basin, Chester, Lunenburg, Pictou, St Margarets Bay, Wilmot

[Nova Scotia Dahlia Society](#)
[Nova Scotia Rock Garden Club](#)
[Nova Scotia Wild Flora Society](#)
[#Operation ReLeaf – Nova Scotia \(Tree Canada\)](#)
[Sackville Community Food Garden](#)
[The Friends of the Public Gardens](#)



Facebook Groups

[Nova Scotia Gardeners](#)
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2396945834/?ref=share>

[Native Plant Gardening Nova Scotia](#)

[Nova Scotia Greenthumbs: Indoor-Outdoor Gardening & Backyard Farming](#)

[Nova Scotia Mycological Society](#)

[Sackville Community Food Garden](#)



Community Farms Promote Sense of Community

Text & photos by Lesley Fleming, HTR

Community farms are becoming more popular. But what are they? And what do they offer?

Community gardens, sometimes called urban farms, are defined as a single piece of land gardened collectively by a group of people (Okvat & Zautra, 2011). They come in all shapes and sizes and are typically overseen by organizing committees which set some rules. They are often supported by local community groups, civic organizations, and churches, and provide some basic features like tools, water, soil and leadership from an on-site farmer.

Common Roots Bi-Hi (CRBH) Urban Farm in Halifax, NS provides a good look at what community farms can be. Originally located in 2012 beside downtown Halifax hospitals, its location moved to accommodate hospital expansion. Its new location and partnership with Metroworks began the second phase of Common Roots Bi-Hi. The photos (below) provide a look at some of their structures.

Four growing seasons into the current location at the bottom of Bayers Road, the community farm continues to be inclusive, productive, engaging and very prolific in growing healthy food. It, like many community farms in Nova Scotia and throughout North America, provide a safe area to grow food, interact with others and support individuals and organizations dealing with food insecurity through food donations. Community farms also offer educational opportunities and strengthen community bonds.

Who gets involved and how are they using the community garden? Led by a paid farmer and supported by volunteers undertaking a variety of tasks like composting, watering, safety oversight, workshops, Common Roots Bi-Hi is a typical model. Generally, all participants are growing food on the site. A patchwork of plots are laid out on site, with some assigned to individuals (or family units), others assigned to community groups. These may be in partnerships within the community, as outreach in support of refugees, youth, people with disabilities, or other populations. In addition to growing food, community gardens offer fellowship, communal celebrations, educational workshops, and some promote advocacy of food and nutrition security, often participating in food donations to food pantries. The mix of people who use community gardens spans all ages, abilities, and horticulture skills. The sense of belonging to the garden or urban farm strengthens sense of place, community pride, and access to food.

How is a community garden structured? A variety of growing areas are put in place, with supporting structures like tool sheds, watering stations, compost and soil areas, rest stations and sometimes play areas. Most are sited mindful of sun exposures, decent drainage, access to water, accessible paths, washrooms (porta-potty or other), some shaded areas, and often near public transportation. The physical growing spaces include:

Individually assigned plots (raised or in ground beds)

Group plots for organizations and school groups

Farm stand food production beds (market garden)

Common plots supporting free food for the taking (*help yourself* signage is really smart)

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This deters others from taking from individual's plots, and promotes inclusiveness, food security, transfer of plant knowledge, and sense of community.

Raised beds accommodating wheelchairs (higher raised beds with knee clearance)

Socializing areas - benches, picnic and shaded areas, shared boxes, tool areas, farm stand booth

Educational areas - with info and demonstrations on solarized beds, trellises, communal beds, hoop houses, interplantings, spacing for mature plant growth, flowers for beauty and edible use, straw as mulch, plants that thrive in this location, edibles popular with other cultures, educational signs (seeds, soil), garden sanitation, water access and drainage

The success of community gardens depends on each and every person who is involved. Trust, respect for all gardeners, and regular care of plants are integral to these sites, with a healthy dose of fun, camaraderie, seed sharing and sense of community.

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Connecting with Nature Through Landscapes: Natural Spaces + Man-made Places

By Lesley Fleming, HTR

Photos by L. Fleming, K. Carroll & Nova Scotia.com

Wild landscapes' natural beauty provide connections to nature. Expanding on these by designing man-made facilities opens the sites up to greater number of people and experiences. Plant-rich natural environments where designed space becomes part of the wild landscape is something special, valued perhaps even more since COVID 19. Nowhere is this more evident than in Nova Scotia.

Where do these places exist, where designed landscapes compliment natural spaces to make unique locations even more magnificent?

Location	Natural Place	Designed Space	Photo
<p>Truro Tidal Bore</p> 	<p>Flatlands' marsh with twice daily tidal bore</p>	<p>Adjacent playground & amphitheater</p>	
<p>Grand Pre National Historic Site</p> 	<p>Rich fertile meadow farmed by Acadians in 1682; dykes were early agricultural feature</p>	<p>Public park and historic site with museum & cultural displays</p>	

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<p>Ovens Natural Park & Sea Caves</p> 	<p>Naturally occurring sea caves on North Atlantic Ocean</p>	<p>Camping & recreational area on site of early Gold Rush</p>	
<p>Halifax's McNabs Island</p> 	<p>Island in Halifax Harbor; First Nation's seasonal habitation</p>	<p>War fortification (1812 & WWII), now with 40 km of nature trails, tours</p>	
<p>Yarmouth County Rail Trail</p> 	<p>Mixed forests, rivers & coastal shoreline</p>	<p>87 km multi-use trail celebrating nature, Acadian culture, repurposing old rail lines</p>	
<p>Annapolis Royal Historic Gardens</p> 	<p>Overlooking tidal river valley</p>	<p>Botanic garden built in area known as strategic site of multiple military interactions</p>	

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<p>Peggy's Cove</p> 	<p>North Atlantic cove with unique rock topography & sweeping ocean views</p>	<p>Accessible paths, viewing areas & heritage trail</p>	
<p>Chester Golf Course</p> 	<p>South Shore marshland on the ocean with gently rolling hills</p>	<p>Public golf course built in 1914</p>	
<p>Victoria Park, Truro</p> 	<p>A 3,000 acre woodland set amidst town of Truro, established in 1761, with the park established in 1887</p>	<p>A heritage park with trails, wooden rails, 100 step wooden staircase, pool, bandstand, mountain biking trails</p>	

Each of these locations share a common thread - natural spaces whose beauty attracts people to connect with nature, and where designed landscapes, diverse but appropriate for each site, have been developed. People enjoy the intersection of natural beauty and designed landscapes where these complement the other. There are many more natural spaces + man-made places in Nova Scotia – Crystal Crescent Beach, Baddeck shoreline, Cape Breton Keltic Lodge, Port Maitland Beach Provincial Park, and White Point Hiking Trail.

Lesley Fleming, HTR photographed many of these places in 2022, appreciating the interplay between wild and designed landscapes, and the beauty of Nova Scotia.



Canadian Horticultural Therapy Association: HT/TH Professional Titles in Practice

By Bianca van der Stoel

Originally published in 2022 in *CHTA Newsletter Spring/Summer Issue*

Photo by J. Fleming

Each horticultural therapy professional needs to consider their professional title, and how it can honor their educational and professional experience. One of the unique components of this field is the diversity of professional and personal backgrounds a practitioner brings to the work. However, this can also be a semantic challenge when we choose how to reflect our experience and practice to our peers, clients, and employers.

The Canadian Horticultural Therapy Association (CHTA) Board has been in conversation regarding titles and jargon recently and is striving to protect the scope of practice tied to a professional title, while also encouraging practitioners to be proud of the unique lens and training applied in their work. As these conversations continue to evolve, CHTA wanted to share the most recent clarification on titles, as determined by membership feedback and the CHTA Board.

The first title, Registered Horticultural Therapist (HTR) or, often simplified as Horticultural Therapist, reflects a successful completion of the professional registration process with the CHTA. This title identifies that the professional has maintained membership in good standing and received a CHTA-approved designation. This would be considered the top tier of practice and puts a professional in a position of reciprocal responsibility for the field of horticultural therapy/therapeutic horticulture (HT/TH), offering this individual an opportunity to offer training and mentorship, provide HT/TH education, or participate in the Registration Committee.

The second formal CHTA-approved designation is a Horticultural Therapy Technician (HTT). This title is reserved for a professional who has successfully completed the CHTA's professional registration process for this level of designation and has maintained membership in good standing. This would be considered the second tier of practice as it requires slightly less experience to attain, requiring 7 application points rather than 10 points. A Horticultural Therapy Technician is well equipped to run

horticultural therapy or therapeutic horticulture programming but may not use the title of Horticultural Therapist (this is reserved solely for HTRs).

For an individual who has not attained either of the above CHTA-approved designations, there are a range of titles that may be appropriate. The first title, which is becoming more common across Canada, is Horticultural Therapy Practitioner. This is a title that we encourage professionals to use only once they: 1. are eligible to apply for professional registration (CHTA member for at least one year); 2. are on the path / intending to register as a professional HTT or HTR; 3. completed the 'education' points (minimum of an HT certificate); and are now acquiring 'practical' points; 4. are actively practicing horticultural therapy (HT), not therapeutic horticulture.

These parameters are set to ensure that use of this title indicates an intentional, dedicated pathway towards eventual professional registration.

Similarly, an individual may fit the first 3 criteria listed above but have a clearer focus on therapeutic horticulture practice, meaning the title of Therapeutic Horticulture Practitioner would be a fit. This is a title CHTA encourages professionals to use once they are 1) eligible to apply (CHTA member for one year minimum); 2) are on the path / intend to register as a professional HTT or HTR; and 3) have completed the 'education' points (minimum of an HT certificate), and are now acquiring 'practical' points. The difference is that they are actively practicing therapeutic horticulture (TH).

Therapeutic Gardener is another title that can be utilized to reflect the above qualifications and training of a professional who has horticultural therapy or therapeutic horticulture training, but is not a 'Horticulturist' (alternative to being titled as a 'Therapeutic Horticulturist'). Consider if you do indeed have training in a therapeutic modality if you are using "therapeutic" in your title. Otherwise, there may be a more appropriate alternative.

For an individual who does not intend to pursue registration, but who does include horticultural therapy or therapeutic horticulture practices into their profession, there may be a title that more succinctly complements your unique, valued professional background! These can be titles with the precluding specialization of 'nature-based', such as a nature-based educator, a nature-based program coordinator, a nature-based facilitator, or a nature-based counselor, among others.

If you're not sure what the best title for you is at this time, please feel free to reach out and CHTA can brainstorm together (education@chta.ca).

Whatever the right fit may be for you, know that there are immense strengths in being a nature-based professional, drawing people back to healing and wellness through this unique approach, and it is fitting to have a title that clearly communicates that!

Bianca van der Stoel is the CHTA Education Committee Coordinator. Learn more about HT/TH education: chta.ca/education

The Canadian Horticultural Therapy Association (CHTA) community continues to spread its roots across Canada, and recommends HT Professionals pursue CHTA membership as a way of promoting networking, a sense of professional support, and to receive the most current and updated resources and messages. CHTA resources are being created and updated. Membership information can be found at <https://www.chta.ca/membership>

Resources Winter 2023

Resources focused on kids and gardening are plentiful. One of the most innovative and interactive is the organization/website/networking forum called [Kids Garden Community](#). It offers different types of networking groups - early childhood gardening, kids at home, school food gardens, open forum & seed saving/exchange in addition to resources including recorded community chats available on-line:



Photo: J. Borba.Unsplash

[Creating a Learning Garden](#) – how to begin a garden, engaging students year-round, greenhouses, accessible programs & gardens for kids of all abilities.

[Garden Layout](#) – creating an accessible, interesting and effective outdoor learning space with a focus on the design elements; accessibility, shade options & sourcing materials. On-line resource links to *School Garden Guide*, *Greenhouse Manual*, *Convert-a-Bench*, *Green Schoolyards Covid Outdoor Learning Initiative*.

[Planting Considerations for Youth Gardens](#) – planting dates, soil health, using seeds, wildflowers, finding local and on-line resources.

Another on-line site with tremendous number of resources is [Green Schoolyards.org](#). Topics span validation of outdoor learning & health benefits, living schoolyards & climate resilience, school meals outdoors, enrichment classes/programs/activities, & strategies for outdoor play.

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Spring 2023 Issue of *Digging In*:
Halifax Public Gardens & Carpet Beds

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