

Northern SUN

Stories of
growing &
gathering



Fall 2015



Planting potatoes and strawberries with Gillam Garden Club participants in June.

Gillam Gardening Club

Way back in February, on a cold, snowy day, the students in Gillam School's Garden Club were enjoying a unique treat - fresh lettuce they had grown indoors! All through the winter, the students learned about gardening while growing greens and herbs under grow lights. Their fresh produce was harvested throughout the winter and enjoyed by the club and the staff of Gillam School.

Despite a cold spring, the Garden Club continued caring for their seedlings under the grow lights indoors. Once the snow melted, they got to work on the outdoor garden beds. The club met many times in June to sow seeds and transplant the seedlings. They soon had more helpers joining from the playground, many of whom said they'd like to join the club next year.

The Garden Club supervisors were not experienced gardeners before this adventure, but the students' enthusiasm kept them motivated and they learned along with the children. The garden was



“There is definitely interest in planting and growing food in the North. The students at Gillam School have shown that it can be done!”



The Garden Club kids enjoy some of their freshly grown lettuce.



Bags of freshly harvested lettuce, ready for the kids to take home.

successful thanks to community donations and the help of many parents who looked after the weeding and watering during summer vacation. Some of the participants were so committed to their gardening projects that they took plants home with them over the summer. One student actually brought her cucumber plant with her on her summer vacation down south!

Plans are already in the works for next year’s garden, including planting more strawberries, establishing a rain barrel system and building a small greenhouse.

There is definitely interest in planting and growing food in the North. The students at Gillam School have shown that it can be done!



Getting to Know Your Soil

We always hear that good soil is the key to growing healthy vegetables, but what does it mean to have good soil and how do you get it? Last issue, we showed how to improve soil by adding organic materials (see Making Soil for your Garden, Northern Sun, Spring, 2015). In this issue, we want to talk about the basic components of soil to help you understand what kind of soil you have, and how to make it even better.

Soil is made of broken up rock material that has been worn by weather and time. Clay particles are the most broken up, so tiny that you cannot see them individually and they stick together in clumps. Sand particles are larger and more coarse. Silt is in between the two.

If your soil is too sandy, water drains too quickly, taking nutrients with it. Too much clay can lead your soil to flood, drowning your plants. The ideal soil is a mix of sand, clay and silt, known as a loam, and with regular additions of organic matter it will provide the nutrients, water, air and heat that your plants need to thrive.

The ribbon test is a simple, hands-on way to learn how much clay, silt or sand is in your soil.

Instructions

Collect two cups of soil from the top six inches of soil. Remove rocks and debris. Add a small amount of water at a time until it makes a moist dough that begins to stick.

Try and form a ball of the soil by squeezing it in your hand. Does it form a ball?

If too dry add a few drops of water. If too wet, add more soil.

YES
NO
Is the soil too dry or wet?

Squeeze ball between your fingers and thumb. Gently try to form a long ribbon shape. Does it form a ribbon?
NO
Too sandy

YES
NO
A little bit sandy

How long can you make the ribbon before breaking?

Less than 1 inch
1-2 inches
More than 2 inches
Great soil
A little bit of clay
Too much clay





Now that you know your soil, you can make some decisions about how to improve it.

- Adding 1-2 inches of finished compost to your soil every year (regardless of type) introduces more nutrients, improves drainage, encourages worms and microorganisms and breaks up clay soils.
- Clay soil has lots of nutrients, but is difficult to work with. Adding organic material such as leaves, peat moss, shredded paper, or grass clippings helps clay become workable.
- Never till or work with clay soil when it is wet. Even standing on wet clay soil will leave it hard and compacted.
- Sandy soils will also benefit from lots of compost to help hold water and provide more nutrients. Without enough compost you will find yourself having to water sandy soil very often.
- To adjust your soil and improve quality, mix in other types of soil. Mix 3 to 4 parts sand with 1 part clay to get a loam texture. Do the ribbon test on nearby soil sources, such as under poplar stands, to find the right type to mix into your garden.
- Stick with it. Adding material every year allows the soil to slowly improve and stay healthy.
- Consider building a raised bed to prevent compaction and improve drainage.

Farm to School, South to North:

Getting affordable produce
to remote communities



Have you heard about the Farm to School Fundraiser? Participants sell Manitoba grown vegetables in bundles and get to keep 50 percent of their total sales. The fundraiser is a great opportunity for communities in Northern Manitoba as there are no shipping charges on the produce ordered through the fundraiser, so \$20 dollars spent in the north can buy as much good food as \$20 spent in the south. A \$20 bundle includes carrots, parsnips, onions, potatoes and cabbage, and weighs in at just over 20 pounds.

In Brochet, the local school has participated for six years. At Brochet's only grocery store, a 10 lb bag of potatoes alone can cost as much as \$19! Principal Elinor Clark says the fundraiser is easy to organize and the returns to the school make it well worth their while, let alone knowing the benefits of making these healthy foods more accessible for the community.

Sponsored by the Province of Manitoba, Manitoba Association of Home Economists and Peak of the Market, the fundraiser is available to all K-12 schools and licensed daycares in the province.

Visit www.FarmtoSchool.ca to enroll.



Moose Ragout

Ingredients:

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 lbs moose, cubed
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 x 398 mL can tomatoes,
or 2 large fresh tomatoes, chopped
- 2 teaspoons tomato paste
- 1 1/2 cups celery, chopped
- 1 cup sliced mushrooms
- 1/4 cup flour



Preparation:

1. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high, then add onion and garlic. Cook for 5 minutes, until softened.
2. Add meat and paprika. Cover and cook over medium heat until meat is browned.
3. Add tomatoes, tomato paste and celery, and cover and simmer for 1 hour.
4. Add mushrooms, then cover and continue simmering until meat is tender, about another hour.
5. Combine flour with enough water (or stock if you have some) to make a paste. Pour into the stew and simmer for 5 more minutes to allow the stew to thicken. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
6. Serve over cooked noodles.

Recipe adapted from 'Canadian Wild Game Cookbook'

Apitaye Massou! Wiisinin! Bon Appetit!

From the Medicine Cabinet:

Wee-gass/Wiike/Sweet Flag

Contributed by Carol Sanoffsky



Wee-gass is one of the most potent of our medicines, it can be added to any other medicine to strengthen it.

Wee-gass is picked in the fall, and is found in low lying lakes and river beds. The root is dug up, cleaned and hung to dry. It will dry out in about two to three weeks and last up to two years if kept hanging in a cool, dry area.

Wee-gass is used for many things. It can be shredded and boiled to make a tea to drink to ward off a cold, or add ginger, lemon and a bit of honey to the tea to break a fever. Wee-gass tea can also be used as a wash when you have aching muscles, or on the chest when you have a cold. You can chew wee-gass to give you energy, and place some in your tooth when you have a tooth ache.

To find out more about the many uses of Wee-gass, try consulting a knowledge holder in your community.



What to look for above ground.

Submit a story

Please send along your northern food stories and photos to share your stories with neighbours in the north.

Send your story ideas to:
anna@foodmattersmanitoba.ca



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Funding provided by:

 Public Health Agency of Canada  Agence de la sante publique du Canada

Manitoba 

Designed by:  simplelifedesigns
www.simplelifedesigns.ca

Printed by:  ALL NATIONS PRINT LTD.
www.allnationsprint.com