

THE PEOPLE'S APOTHECARY GARDEN: FOR THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE

In mid-June, during the first month of ThINC's Summer Food Security Program, the idea to start a community medicinal garden was pitched to the ThINCpod by Elisabeth Bond from Jollity Farm. Elisabeth and Carolyn (Askew) had long been talking about the possibility of turning Carolyn's fenced-in garden into a community space for Thetis Islanders to learn about and harvest medicinal plants. What started out as a side activity for the Pod, blossomed into one of our larger design projects.

Upon visiting Carolyn's garden for the first time, we were (happily) overwhelmed by the delicious smell of roses. After sufficiently filling our nasal capacities we set to work, taking stock of what was there, what needed to be removed (ahem, daphne and blackberry), and ideated on what we could get done within the timeframe and hours available for the project. During the ideation phase, we brainstormed what each member would bring to the development of the garden, what resources we had available to us, what resources we needed, project sustainability, steps-to-success, and a brief timeline to keep us on track. We did this ideation piece twice, once in June, and another time in August when we discovered that we would have until the end of October, thanks to a new grant, to reach our project objectives. Our goal was simply to "establish a foundation for future medicinal garden development and maintenance". To meet this goal, we tackled the following tasks:

1. Remove invasive plants
2. Source / place rocks for path
3. Prune roses
4. Source / plant medicinal plants
5. Document / map-out existing plants
6. Source cedar for entrance
7. Path: plan, dig, and collect/lay cardboard
8. Mill wood for entrance
9. Wood chips: gather wood, chip, dump
10. Construct / install entrance
11. Remove turf
12. Make spiral garden
13. Transport composted horse manure
14. Collect autumn leaves for mulching
15. Prepare beds (using the lasagna method)
16. Create sign
17. Re-establish composters
18. Share with the community!



The ThincPod team hard at work l to r: Aislinn Cottell, Connor McRae-Pharo, Alex Spacek, Lara Jensen and Charlotte Fesnoux.

Throughout the project's design and delivery, we revisited the planning and reflection stages frequently. We often had to modify and/or adapt our plans due to unforeseen challenges, many of which were environmentally driven. For example, due to the high fire risk level during the summer, our chipping activities were put on hold, and the smog from the summer fires made outdoor labour hazardous. But in both cases, it's much better to be safe rather than sorry! All in all, it was a messy process, both figuratively and literally (incessant dirty nails, muddy knees, and scratched-up arms).

Throughout the experience we encountered many "epiphanies". One explored the question, "What defines a weed?" This came to us one day while weeding at Jollity Farm. We realized that many of the plants we had been removing were in fact, medicinals, precious medicinal plants. No longer did we view these plants as pesky weeds, but instead as precious treasures that needed to be treated with the utmost care. After all, "what's one's weed, is another's treasure"... as the saying goes. Over the course of the next couple of days we managed to "weed" out myriad plants: Corsican mint, mullein, self-heal, plantain, dock, yarrow, and deadnettle, and transplanted them into the Apothecary Garden.

Another important realization we had, arguably the greatest, was how much of the project was truly a community endeavour. From beginning to end, we had the support and engagement of the Thetis Island community. Whether it be for expertise, volunteering, or donations in the way of wood, plants, rocks, and tools, Thetis Islanders came forth with generosity and enthusiasm. In some cases, freshly milled wood was gifted, or rather than requesting monetary payment, a basket brimming with fresh produce was traded. The only things we actually purchased were the latches for the gate and the cider for the community walkthrough (which was money well spent in our humble opinions :D).

What we've created so far is only just the beginning. The plants in the People's Apothecary Garden are approaching dormancy for winter, but it is nonetheless replete with opportunities; just imagine what Springtime holds. With garden furniture to be crafted, signs to be made, and plants added to the medicinal library, Thetis Islanders have lots to look forward to.

The People's Apothecary is a partnership between the Thetis Island Nature Conservancy and the Thetis Island Farm Co-operative, and was supported by funding from the Thetis Island Community Fund, Stewart Fund, Thetis Island Residents' and Ratepayers' Association (TIRRA), Canada Summer Jobs, and WorkBC.

Charlotte Fesnoux



Gok Sarioglu and others at the Apothecary Garden opening