

A Garden by the Sea: Learning Growth on Galiano

 MAY 31, 2022



Written by Rena Graham, Galiano Island

If you've ever been to [Galiano Island](#), you know that rolling off the ferry onto Sturdies Bay Road brings an instant sense of rural calm and comfort. The spectacular nature whispers reminders that its beauty holds the basic resources of life. There's an endless array of green—even in the wintry lichen and moss. And, being an island, it has ocean lapping at every edge. It's the perfect contrast to the non-stop activity of city life.



My experience moving to “the gem of the Salish Sea” a year and a half ago has been a contrast of its own. When I stopped working, I finally stopped moving, and I found myself retired, sixty-five years old, and living on a tiny strip of land I never planned to move to. Getting to know the mood of this place, I couldn’t help but notice the particular strain of chatter that begins and ends with the word “gardening.” And as I became friendlier with the couple whose property I share, I’d arrive home in the late afternoon to find a battered cardboard box on my porch with rainbow beets, a sturdy type of purple kale, and an occasional knobbly carrot inside. Soil clung to the roots and leaves. At first it felt as if I’d been asked to clean a fish.

My relationship to fresh produce had always been the curated, cleaned, and neatly stacked fruit and vegetables at a Farmer’s Market. Having spent my “productive years” working long hours and meeting deadlines, I would make a mad dash to a market once a week to buy the basics. Lunch was often ordered in and eaten at my desk, dinner was a quick salad at home or a meal out with friends or colleagues. While I loved to cook, there

was little time for it and the idea of growing something to eat was beyond consideration when I didn't own a single houseplant.

Yet, earlier this year as I thought about what was next, world events gave gardening a new meaning, if not a sense of urgency. I reasoned that learning to grow food would give me a much richer experience as someone who liked to eat that food. I began to educate myself and, with a wish to experience bodily nurturance from my endeavors, I dug deep into whatever might grace my dinner table in the near future. I'd been visiting island gardens but whether they were massive or modest, I'd often find myself embarrassed by not knowing what I was looking at. With the realization that I was living in an enviable environment with time on my hands, I shrugged off the steep learning curve and slowed down

enough to notice plants in all their components, which led to an understanding of the process of growth itself.

With no experience to draw on, I relied on my intuition. I also relied a lot on YouTube. The first few days were spent watching and discarding earnest, well-meaning gardeners who were intent on entertaining. The [Farmer's Almanac](#) said we were in zone nine. After some sleuthing, I found a plain-talking guy with an admirable tendency toward frugality, and while he's in zone six, his basics became my basics. I also skimmed gardening books and blogs and began to understand the impact timing has on our growing season.

On Friday mornings, I would head to the [Redirectory](#), a miniature thrift store next to the recycle depot. It's the local orphanage for pots of every size and shape. After a good wash, many of them became my pots. When I saw a deer fence I liked, I hired the carpenter to create a twenty-foot-by-twenty-foot enclosure, connecting it to a small shed. Starting in March, I set up a seed-start factory on my dining table and bought a slick set of LED lamps for my storage shed. A compact heater kept the place a good steady temperature and as my seedlings began poking through, I grew enervated by new life.

By April, the Galiano Island [Garden Club](#) began in-person meetings after a long hiatus and I was one of the first in the door. The chatty gatherings are social and informative, with great local speakers. Five healthy cherry tomato plants accompanied me to that first meeting but on arrival, I was told they were a month early. Even so, I traded three of them for a couple of curly kale seedlings, enjoyed the company of the other women, and left knowing I would return. I now wander from conversation to conversation, taking in what other people find interesting.

Spring has been wet and late this year. Epically so. All I can do with root-bound seedlings is transplant them into three-inch cups and keep them under the lights. My tomatoes and runner beans have been covered in plastic cages in a garden that looks like a science experiment. I suppose that is what it is.

By mid-May my first garden proudly boasted romaine and butter lettuce, snap peas, onions, spring garlic, and parsley, rosemary, and thyme. My cilantro was making a showing and my bok choy and spinach had poked through. My daikon looked promising and though it took several tries to get healthy seedlings for my tomatillos, they will be perfect when the sun finally arrives.

What my lovely little garden lacks in grandeur, I make up for with personal touches. Life at every stage should include good food, good friends, and new experiences. I hope to have my own battered box full of produce to share with others in the next few months.



Our
collectio
n
of
islands



Join our newsletter

Email Address

SUBMIT

About Us

Corporate Office: 357 Old
Scott Road, Salt Spring
Island, BC V8K 2L9

We are grateful to live on and visit the Southern Gulf Islands and acknowledge that the lands

and waters that encompass these islands have been home to Indigenous peoples since time immemorial, part of the traditional unceded territories of the Coast Salish Peoples, including WSÁNEĆ First Nations and Hul'quimi'num Treaty Group.