

Indigenous Foodscapes

(x^wməθk^wəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sk̓w̓x̓wú7mesh (Squamish) and səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Territories)

Program Model

Indigenous Foodscapes is an Indigenous plant and pedagogy pilot project taking place on the unceded territories of (x^wməθk^wəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sk̓w̓x̓wú7mesh (Squamish) and səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. The project set out to bring native plants and traditional knowledge into the minds, hearts, and bellies of children and youth. This project was inspired by a growing interest within school communities to bring Indigenous pedagogies and practices into the classroom, honouring truth and reconciliation mandates in the new BC Curriculum. In 2016, Farm to School BC's Vancouver Area Region Community Animator, Samantha Gambling, worked with Métis herbalist and educator Lori Snyder to secure funding from the City of Vancouver's Greenest City Grant to launch this program.

Summary

Indigenous Foodscapes numbers:

- 9 schools across Vancouver
- 15+ community partners
- 40 teachers/school staff and community partners involved across school based teams
- 55 classes involved

Key Partners and Roles:

Vancouver School Board (VSB) - Indigenous Education and Sustainability Departments: connecting to resources and cultural teachings, supporting teachers, navigating school board policy



Indigenous Foodscapes Coordinator: Lori Snyder, a Métis herbalist and educator, working with schools to conceptualize projects and lead workshops, maintaining relationships with each school to support them as their projects progressed.

Farm to School BC and Public Health Association of BC: Community Animator worked with schools to connect to resources, organized Pro-D opportunities and learning circles, convened the working group, wrote grants, created partnerships, and built relationships. Navigated colonial systems and institutions for the project's success and supported others' participation in the project.

Indigenous Foodscapes Committees: Each school formed a committee of 2-5 people (teachers, administrators, community members) to lead the project at the school level.

Indigenous Foodscapes Working Group: This working group included individuals from the school district, Vancouver Coastal Health, local Nations, and non-profit organizations that were involved in Indigenous food and education programs around the City of Vancouver. This working group supported the process of funding schools to build and engage with native plant gardens, providing ongoing support as a network for schools to integrate native plants and pedagogies. The goal of the working group was to provide guidance and feedback on the grant process and support schools in identifying resources, contacting experts, sharing protocols, and troubleshooting problems.

Susan McCallum: Local artist who created imagery for the native plant posters.

In-kind donors: Environmental Youth Alliance (EYA) (donated native plants), Su'walkh (donated/sold native plants), Net Zero Waste (donated soil).

Funders: City of Vancouver Greenest City Grant, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General Civil Forfeiture Grant, Provincial Health Services Authority; BC Ministry of Health



Program Activities

September - December 2017

The first step of this project was the formation of Indigenous Foodscapes working group, to guide the development of this project. The working group members identified schools that were both interested and ready to participate in the project, and developed a collaborative granting process. The first part of this collaborative granting process included hosting a Learning Circle comprised of interested schools to discuss project visions and provide feedback on how funding could best be spent to advance Indigenous garden and pedagogy projects at their schools. The schools collectively identified three core activities that was included in this Indigenous Foodscapes program:

1. **Educational workshops:** hosted by local Knowledge Keepers, as well as opportunities for professional development
2. **Living Library (infrastructure):** three schools received funds to create new native plant gardens; two schools received funds to repair existing gardens; the remaining schools decided to plant native plants in existing school garden beds
3. **Celebration:** All schools participated in an Indigenous plant and pedagogy celebration, funded and coordinated by Farm to School BC and partners from the working group.

January - April 2018

Initial school site visits were held with the Indigenous Foodscapes Coordinator to assist with garden planning. This was done in partnership with UBC post-secondary students to identify existing native plant assets on school grounds that could be used by teachers and students for workshops and classroom activities. In the spring schools were directed to local non-profit native plant nurseries to source local

native plants for their gardens. During this time, the schools also used their first round of funding to host Indigenous plant and pedagogy workshops with local Knowledge Keepers.

April - June 2018

In the last couple months of the school year, check-in meetings were held with the schools to confirm future funding needs for their living libraries and to report back on progress to date. By June 2018, any new garden plans were sent to the school district for formal approval.

September 2018 - September 2019

Over the following school year, numerous activities happened across the nine schools involved in the program. This included building and restoring garden beds, planting native plants (a second round of native plants were offered to schools in spring 2019), and building other infrastructure. Some schools engaged in a variety of educational activities with students, including carving, mason bee workshops, bringing in Elders and other Knowledge Keepers, and foraging on school grounds and in the community. In addition to the funds made available for hosting workshops and purchasing garden materials, there were professional development opportunities available to teachers at the nine participating schools. Teachers who were a part of this project were given opportunities to engage in workshops and other Pro-D/community building activities to support their projects.

May - June 2019

A Spring Celebration was hosted at Xpey Elementary school to celebrate diverse Indigenous Foodscapes projects across Vancouver. This celebration included a meal highlighting Indigenous foods from [Chef Maluh](#), honouring Indigenous women who were championing Indigenous food sovereignty programming in the local community, celebrating the nine schools involved in the program, a native plant giveaway and more. A [summary video](#) was released showcasing the schools' projects and the overall program.

September 2020 - September 2021

We are currently in the process of finalizing educational posters and signage for the nine schools (see below for more details).

Communications

An "Indigenous Foodscapes" Google List-serv was created as a space for teachers, school staff and administrators, non-profit partners, community partners, and other Knowledge Keepers in the Vancouver Area to share events, workshops, meetings, photos, and other resources relating to Indigenous food projects and programs at schools. The Indigenous Foodscapes working group had a separate email list to organize meetings, share minutes, and discuss logistics and share internal documents. Email lists were created for each of the Indigenous Foodscapes school committees at all nine schools to provide project and grant updates, discuss project logistics (e.g. organize soil deliveries), and other communications. Additionally, the Indigenous Foodscapes Coordinator often visited the schools and maintained informal communications with each of the school committees. VSB reached out to the local Nations and had a contact at each Nation related to this project.

Signage and Posters

During the Indigenous Foodscapes program, teachers identified the need for additional curricular support to help connect their garden with their classroom lessons. Posters were created in consultation with the local Nations featuring drawings of six native plants, their traditional uses, and their names in Skwxwú7mesh Snichim, hən̓q̓əmin̓əni̓, English and Latin. This process took time to allow for appropriate input from local Knowledge Keepers. Upon completion of the posters, teachers from each of the nine schools are planning to attend a Learning Circle with local Indigenous Knowledge keepers who will provide teachings around the plants featured in the posters and signage¹².



Those involved in the Indigenous Foodscapes program also saw a need to engage passive users of the garden (such as community members walking by) and to draw attention to the activities happening in the garden through garden signage. To achieve this, a large sign will be mounted on garden beds or adjacent fencing, featuring illustrations of the same native plants on the poster series, along with an invitation or prompt to look for these plants in the garden and in the neighbourhood. This signage will be at each of the nine schools and act as an invitation for engagement with the garden and the Indigenous Foodscapes program.



Reflection

The enthusiasm for this project demonstrated that there was an incredible interest and dedication within the school community to explore native plants, Indigenous culture, and land-based learning at schools. Participants highlighted how these projects supported students' connection to nature and the development of skills including problem-solving and patience. Involvement in the Indigenous Foodscapes program also supported educators in deepening their own understandings of the First Peoples Principles of Learning and how to embed those principles within their teaching practices.



One asset of this Indigenous Foodscapes project was its broad network of partner organizations, many of whom joined the Indigenous Foodscapes working group. Thanks to the generosity of these partners, the program received in-kind and material donations including native plants and soil. Collaborations emerged between these partner organizations around Professional Development opportunities. Resources were shared and ideas and knowledge exchanged. These partnerships allowed the program to stretch the funding and offer diverse learning opportunities for teachers that Farm to School BC or the school district alone would not have been able to provide.



Learnings and Observations:

POLICY CHALLENGES:

While this program explored a different way of approaching a "school garden" (i.e. as a foodscape, a broader concept than just the garden space), this can conflict with policies at the school district level. For example, some school districts only allow raised beds and focus on annual food crops, while some Indigenous Foodscapes participants wanted to emphasize in-ground planting of perennial berry and food plants.

PARTNERSHIPS:

The strength and number of partnerships enriched this project greatly; however, these relationships and partnership development take time and coordination to maintain.

TIME AND RESOURCES:

The potential and interest in this program was high, but the continuity, sustainability, and maintenance of the foodscapes requires time-intensive management by dedicated school and district staff. Maintaining the gardens in the summer season can be difficult. Staff changeovers also challenge and limit the institutional knowledge held by a school or classroom, as well as the sustainability of native plant garden activities and engagement in the Indigenous Foodscapes program.

CONTINUED SUPPORT:

Teachers feel that they need continued support to enrich their learnings related to the native plants and garden maintenance, as well as more opportunities to bring in Indigenous Knowledge Keepers.

Nightingale Elementary

“ The garden is an integral space in the school to actually have people take a deep breath and relax and reset. - Teacher at Nightingale

Engaging with Indigenous Plants and Pedagogy

Students engaged in many activities in the garden, including, but not limited to: mason bee workshops, planting, seed saving, collecting sunflower heads, and building a birdhouse. Organizing different activities throughout the season allowed for students to learn about natural life cycles and the rhythm of environmental indicators, while tying these learnings to the science curriculum. For younger students, a key learning activity was just letting them play and explore the foodscapes on their own!

Once the garden was established, an Indigenous Unveiling Ceremony was held in 2019. Elders were invited to bless the garden. The Ceremony involved the entire school community on a parent-teacher evening, and strengthened community connection to the foodscape. Today, the garden is still in use. The school's artist in residence also brings in Indigenous artists and uses the “[garden] space as a way of inspiring art and bringing students in touch with the land in very creative ways.” - Teacher from Nightingale Elementary.

Garden Description

- Ten raised beds, two compost bins, trees (fig, apple, maple, grape vine)
- Mixture of Indigenous and non-Indigenous plants (other fruits and vegetables) and wildflowers
 - Roses, lupins, kale, beets, raspberries, strawberries
- Mason bee house with nesting tunnels
- Stumps and logs used as beds, large boulder as a congregating space; mix of sunny and shady spots
- Calm space, therapeutic location

“It's part of something that's lacking for a lot of youth and urban dwellers right now. So the more in tune we can get with the land and nature, I think it's better for us..all around..The students at the school, when they have time just in the community or turning over some soil or planting some things, it just brings a sense of calm and connection.

- Teacher from Nightingale Elementary





Impact on School Community

- **Connecting outdoors:** The opportunity to connect to the outdoors, one that could be lacking in many urban settings, brings a sense of peace and connection to the students and teachers.
- **Community connections:** More and more teachers and parents are seeing the value of outdoor learning and getting involved in this community based project.
- **Increased involvement from the staff:** approximately half of the staff are now engaging in the garden and are “thinking about the garden space not just as a play area but as a place where learning can happen as well”. (Teacher at Nightingale) Conversely, before the development of the Indigenous Foodscapes project, only a couple of teachers were involved in the school garden.
- **Student excitement:** Being involved in these projects has sparked an interest and curiosity about nature in students. According to one parent: “My kid is trying to grow everything or saving seeds.”



Learnings and Observations

Some key challenges in the project included the regular maintenance of school gardens over the summer months, and competing with other priorities when it came to finding funding and teacher resource allocation. Additionally, some teachers feel that they still have some learning to do about Indigenous plants and their growth and maintenance, as well as all of the health benefits and traditional uses. Teachers also want to find a balance between teaching their students themselves and working with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers to provide specific teachings.

“The Indigenous Foodscapes project has triggered even more learning for me which has been really rewarding. I’m learning so many more new things by being involved in it.

- Teacher from Nightingale Elementary School