



HANDS in the SOIL

CELEBRATING A GARDEN IN EVERY GULF ISLANDS SCHOOL

By **ROBIN JENKINSON**

Photos by Robin Jenkinson and Gulf Islands schools

WE'VE GOT SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE!

The Gulf Islands School District is the first in B.C. with a garden in every school!

In fact, the school garden phenomenon is sweeping B.C., Canada and the world. New non-profits are popping up each year to support garden projects, with increased government funding, better teacher training and international conferences on school gardening. This interest is driven by a desire to get kids outdoors, encourage healthy eating, improve food security in the face of climate change and to strengthen cross-generational community connections.

It's no surprise that the Gulf Islands are leading the way. These islands are full of avid year-round veggie gardeners, small, lush organic farms, with a strong back-to-the-land mentality and a deep appreciation for nature and outdoor learning.

GULF ISLANDS SCHOOL GARDENS

Each of these projects is championed by volunteer teachers, staff, community members and parents, and each has a slightly different focus. All provide a special way for the schools to connect with their community and the outdoors, to learn about healthy eating and to celebrate the agricultural culture of the islands. Here are snapshots of the gardens from interviews with each school.



PENDER ISLAND

In 2009, the Spring Leaves group constructed a garden for the school using donated materials. A parent and expert in Japanese Shumai natural agriculture helped students learn to grow food in ways that respect the local ecosystem, running a lunchtime garden club and assisting with class lessons and workshops. Over the years, they've built a composting centre and a greenhouse, plus a garden classroom which includes a cob storage shed, a living roof with water collection, a solar panel and a cob pizza oven, where the school has held harvest luncheons. For several years, the Gulf Islands Centre for Ecological Learning (GICEL) has held a summer Garden Daycamp there.

summertime DINING

RESTAURANT AND DINING GUIDE



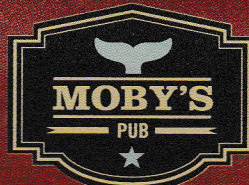
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GALIANO ISLAND

Get this! They actually have a paid, part-time school garden coordinator in partnership with the Community Food Program. They also share a community greenhouse for starts and year-round snacks. Every two weeks, small groups of children get to learn about, help grow, and then harvest and cook snacks with garden foods for the rest of the school. They also celebrate Nettlefest and Applefest each year. In the summer, the garden coordinator helps maintain the garden and works with the summer program.



SATURNA ISLAND

The community garden, located on school property, has been a part of the school program to varying degrees over the years. Right now, the Strong Start program plants its own bed. The rest of the beds in the garden are used by community members and it is a valuable link between school and community.

MAYNE ISLAND

The garden at Mayne Island School was created as an outdoor classroom and teaching garden to commemorate the school's 125th anniversary in 2010. MIS has made connections with local farmers, businesses and organizations to enhance learning and production on many levels and in various areas. MIS developed a multi-year ongoing garden plan for re-structure, enhancement, sustainability, food production and learning. With the help of grants and donations this transformation has gone ahead at an amazing rate with the latest addition of a tumbling composter, a wicking bed and another multi-variety fruit tree.



ON SALT SPRING ISLAND

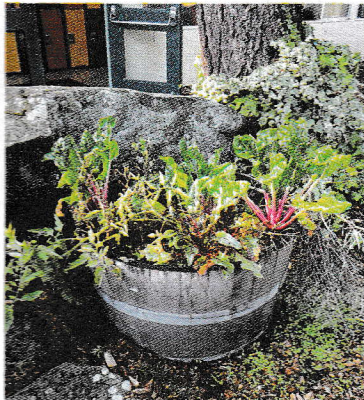
GULF ISLANDS SECONDARY SCHOOL

The GISS Culinary Program inspires all the schools with its innovative aquaponic-hydroponic greenhouse, micro-greens and herb sprouts, composting system, salad food-cart, indoor lettuce-growing stands, and healthy farm-grown cafeteria lunches and extraordinary food-based education!



SALT SPRING MIDDLE SCHOOL

Grapes, native plants, flowers, kale, chard and ornamentals thrive in the inner courtyard near a small fish pond. Plans for 2019 include more veggie plantings and expanding to install deer-fenced raised beds in a sunny area off the parking lot.



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FERNWOOD ELEMENTARY

Established in the early 1990s by the teachers and volunteers involved in the Let's Grow for it Program, this garden includes a sophisticated greenhouse and a solid toolshed. After a rest period, the garden program was revived several years ago with help from a mentor from the Salt Spring Island Garden Club, and then by invested teachers and parent volunteers. School chickens were popular with kids, but not with maintenance staff. Greenhouse starts and their roadside farmstand help sustain the program.



FULFORD ELEMENTARY

Established in the later 1990s by parent volunteers, the garden includes fruit trees, a small pond, a greenhouse, composting areas, a bird bath and many raised beds. At one time, there was an after-school garden club. The current garden is focused on class plantings for an annual harvest lunch in the early autumn, with different grades harvesting and preparing different parts of the meal, and then sharing a whole-school feast!



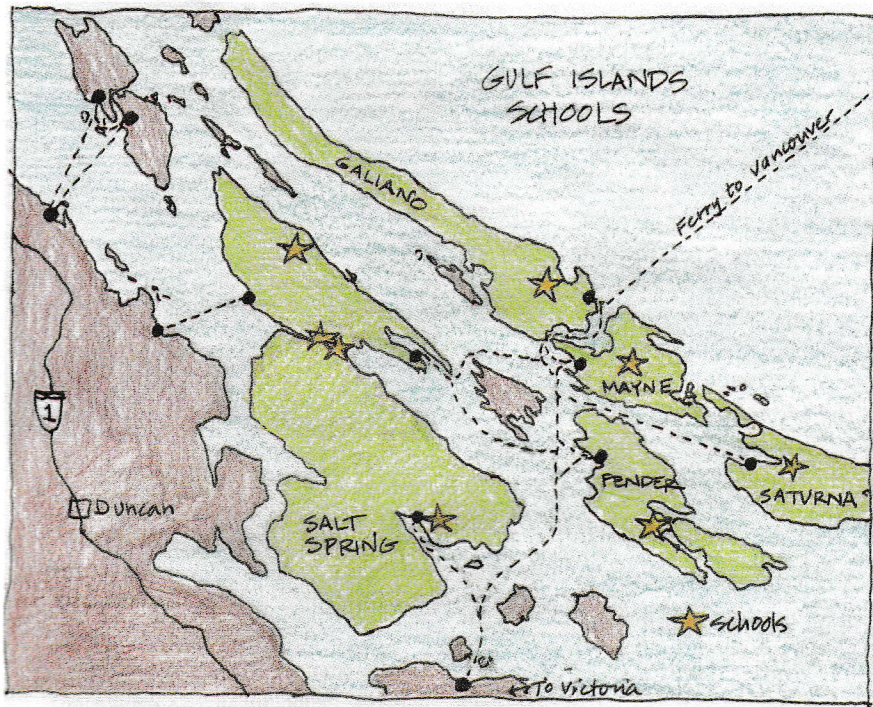
PHOENIX SCHOOL

With many raised beds, a large apple tree, a goat-paddock, cob pizza oven and rainwater catchment, this school embraces garden learning. The garden serves as another classroom, and the community has been deeply involved in this project for many years. This year, a new family has taken on the project.

SALT SPRING ELEMENTARY

Many people have worked over the past decade to get gardens going here. It is truly a community project, with 45 business sponsors plus individual donors and volunteers this year alone. All of the classes now use the gardens for activities ranging from agriculture to art, storytelling, mathematics and play. School families and community volunteers maintain the gardens at monthly work-parties. Plantings are focused on growing food for all-school, seasonal harvest lunches, and a greenhouse is planned for this coming year.





Above: Robin Jenkinson's map of where Gulf Islands schools are located.
 Next page: Photo from the Spring 1905 edition of Queen's Quarterly of a school garden in Richmond, Ont.

A SHARED VISION

Picture a child in a veggie garden. They explore, senses alive, smelling flowers and chasing after butterflies, plucking and crunching fresh pea pods, squealing over ripe strawberries, and digging in the soil for wiggly worms. At school, they might munch kale flowers while reading in the shade of an apple tree, learn practical math skills by estimating seed spacing, or write poetry inspired by a dark-eyed junco singing on a sunflower.

Along with all these beautiful experiences, children who spend time learning in gardens at school enjoy well-documented benefits. Numerous studies show social, emotional, academic and health advantages for students at schools with active garden programs. Plus, their teachers are happier with their work.

Moreover, for many communities, school gardens are a way to teach children how to care for themselves and the environment in the face of climate change. They are a practical response to uncertainty about our children's futures, offering traditional skills and self-sufficiency in a time of rapidly advancing, complex technology. They encourage a back-to-basics form of eating and an off-the-couch lifestyle to combat Canada's obesity epidemic. The slow pace of life

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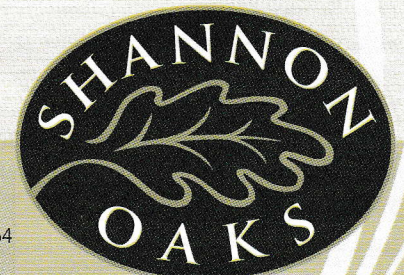
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in the garden contrasts with the modern social norms of speed and instant gratification. In contrast to economic globalization, school gardens are necessarily embedded in local, social, cultural and ecological communities. Gardens highlight biocultural diversity, as inviting places where cultural traditions may be honoured in relation to culinary and agrarian arts. Perhaps most importantly, they foster curiosity and wonder.

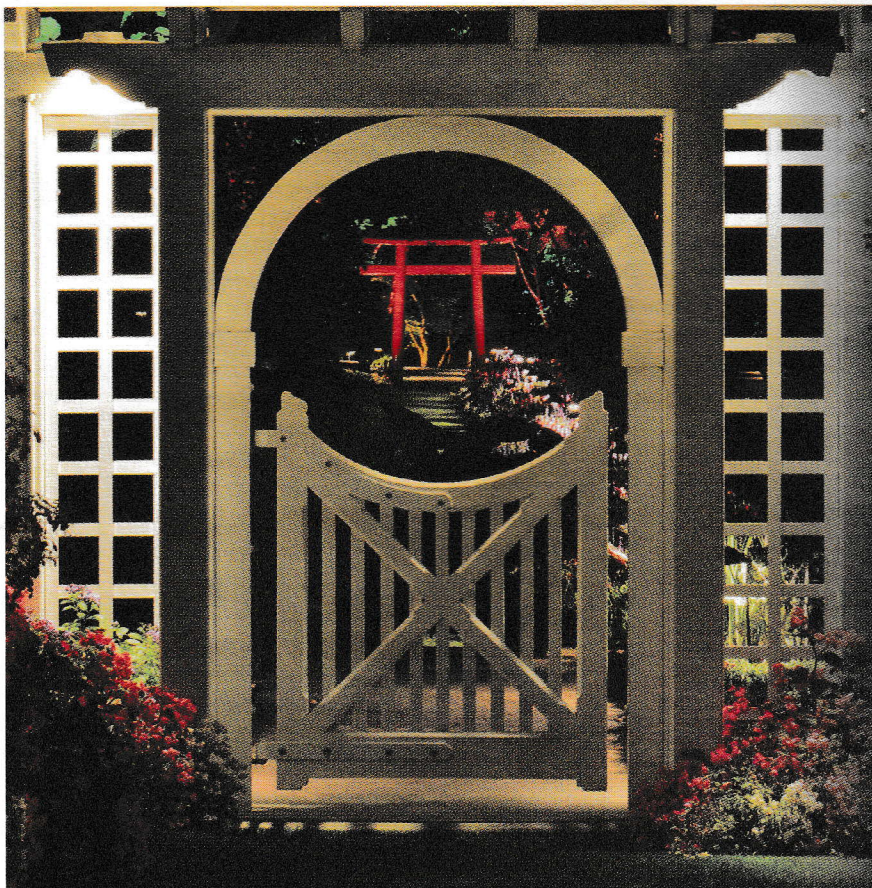
Looking to the future, these gardens will be further woven into the fabric of our schools and communities, with seasonal harvest celebrations, community garden mentors and lots of play as well as focused learning time in these “nature playgrounds.”

A schoolyard landscape symbolically communicates a society’s core cultural beliefs to its children. Here in the Gulf Islands, these school gardens make it evident that we are sharing with our children what we collectively love: community, the natural environment, and farms. These gardens are a way to connect across generations, grow and share food, and enjoy the simpler things of life. ✨



Intriguingly, from 1870 to 1926, school gardens exploded across North America during the transition from the Gilded Age to the Progressive Era. By 1906, there were an estimated 75,000 school gardens across the U.S., and by 1918, every state in America and every province in Canada had school gardens.

They say that history repeats itself. The Gilded Age (1870-1900) heralded rapid industrialization and technological advancement, large-scale migrations, and corporate monopolies. This was followed by the Progressive Era (1900-1926), when social justice, public health, nature conservation including the establishment of National Parks, and Women’s Rights uplifted us all. A 1904 book called *Children’s Gardens for School and Home, a Manual of Cooperative Learning* stated that one important reason to garden with youth was to teach “children to become producers as well as consumers.” Could we be experiencing a similar societal shift today?



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