



APRIL 11, 2016

GORDON NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE—
EXPANDING HERB GARDENS IN THE WEST END

LFS 350 GROUP 20



Executive Summary

For this project Group 20 had the opportunity to work with Gordon Neighbourhood house in West End Vancouver in their herbs extension project. The goal of our community partner is to have more herb garden located in West End and to make herbs free for all community member to enjoy. To achieve this goal our group set the following objectives: identify potential spaces suitable for building new herb gardens, increase the usage of the herb gardens, and compile research findings into a booklet to share with the community in an effort to improve food literacy.

Our group divided into two teams to be more efficient in our objectives. We wrote proposal letters for home owners describing what we need from them and how it will help the community. This letter was approved by the community partner which allow team one to start looking for potential sites and distribute the letters to the homeowners. At the same time Team two begin research to be compiled into a booklet that will contain new herbs that can be grown in Vancouver climate, how to harvest and use the herbs in different cuisines. Further they explore different signs design to attract people in letting them know that the herbs are free to harvest.

Near the end of the term, team one were able to send letters to 15 approved sites from our community out of the 28 sites that we found. The response was that three owners are interested in building the herb garden. Team two was also successful in designing an informative booklet and creating a new sign. We send a survey to the community partner asking her opinion on the quality work of the team two. We received good response in the booklet as it met the community partner's expectation, however, the sign fell short as it was not creative enough.

Reflecting on this project we noticed our shortcomings that might contribute to higher success of the community partner's goal. We didn't want to intrude the homeowners therefore, we were passive in the distribution of the letters. Face to face contact with the homeowners might let more of them give permission. Better communications with our community partner during the design process will lead to better sign that will encourage people to use the herb garden and increase food literacy in the neighbourhood achieved through community engagement in the gardens.

Introduction

For this project, our group of five students from UBC's LFS 350 class collaborated with the West End's Gordon Neighbourhood House (GNH) to expand their community herb garden program. According to the West End Community Profile, the West End of Vancouver includes Davie Village, a hub for the LGBTQ community, Denman Street, a commercial area, and more high-end retail closer to the rest of downtown on Robson and Alberni Street (West End Community Profile, 2012). It is a mix of public green spaces, commercial areas, and residences which houses the fourth most densely populated region of Vancouver (West End Community Profile, 2012). This population is relatively young with 48% being 20 - 39 years old versus 34% in the rest of Vancouver (West End Community Profile, 2012). The West End's demographic is unique in that its percentage of age groups is stable when compared to other areas of the city. In other words, groups of people of the same age arrive and leave about every five years (West End Community Profile, 2012).

This project exists in large part due to food literacy. Block et al from Seed of Sustainability Food Literacy notes that food literacy is composed of three components. They are "conceptual or declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge, and the ability, opportunity, and motivation to apply or use that knowledge (Block et al, 2014, p.7)." This means that the actions and knowledge of the people will affect the food security of the urban community (Teng, Escaler & Caballero-Anthony, 2011). According to the American Community Gardening Association, having a city garden serves as a resource to advance food literacy, reduce food insecurity, and most importantly, helps to build a sustainable community (Holmer et. al, 2007)(2006).

GNH is part of the vibrant tapestry that is the West End. GNH has a variety of different programs for different demographics including food programs organized according to their own defined food philosophy, of which food literacy is an important pillar. This makes it a key player in the local food system (Figure 1). These programs include community lunches, urban farms that partially supply these lunches, and herbs gardens that make use of otherwise unused spaces such as city boulevards and front yards, providing free herbs to anyone who wishes to use them. The ultimate goal of the gardens is to someday render the herb section of grocery stores redundant by providing enough herbs for all the residents of the West End. Our goal, however, was more modest. The primary goal of our project was to expand the herb gardens and to meet the objectives set by our community partner:

Objective 1: Find potential sites suitable for new herb gardens and contact the property owners of the potential sites

Objective 2: Creating visual materials (herb booklet, sign, and map) to enhance community awareness and encourage usage of the herb gardens

To accomplish our goals, we asked ourselves the following questions:

1. How can we make the sites more accessible to people?
2. How can we make the herbs more accessible to people?
3. How would the herb gardens improve community engagement?
4. How would the herb gardens improve the food literacy of a community?

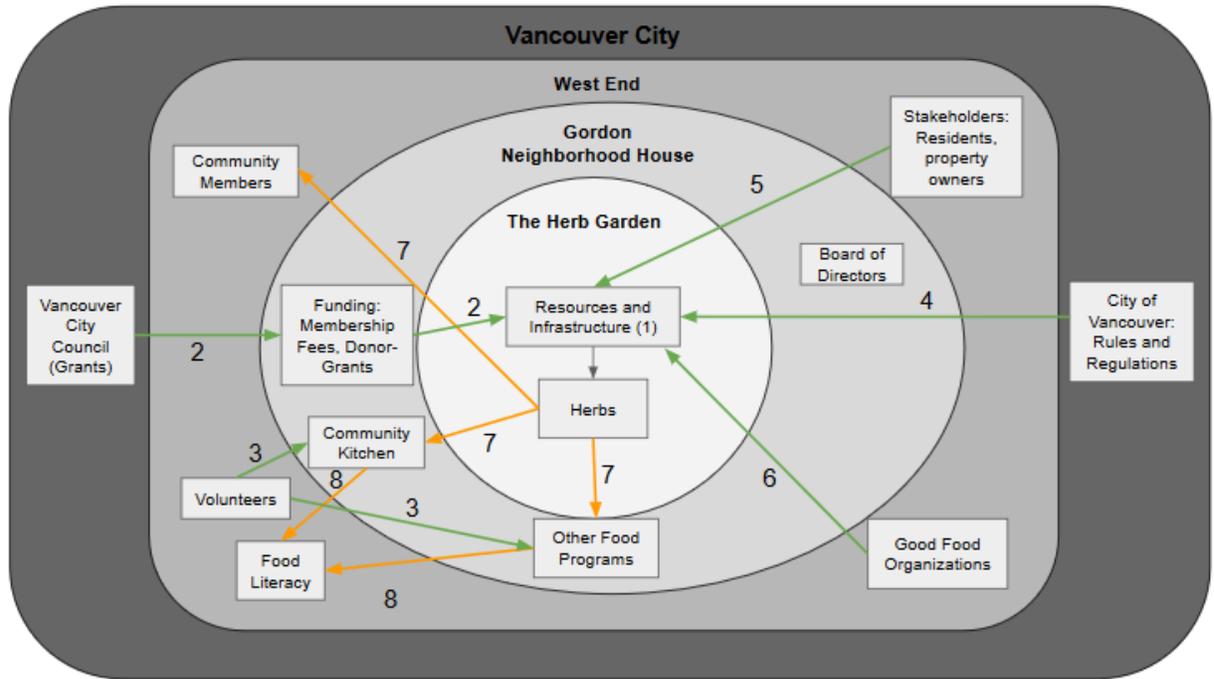


Figure 1. Systems Diagram of GNH's Herb Gardens

Legend

1. Resources and infrastructure: soil, seeds, labour, weather, water, beneficial organisms, tools, pests
2. Provides funding
3. Provides labour
4. The City of Vancouver has guidelines on boulevard gardening which influences the amount of appropriate space available.
5. The stakeholders provide support for the herb gardens and in the case of property owners, land
6. Provides support
7. The herbs are supplied to these other components of the food system
8. Usage of the community kitchen and participation in other food programs contributes to increased food security

Methods -

The first step of our data collection was the meetings with Susanna Millar, the Lead Farmer of the GNH Urban Farm, who is currently managing the herb gardens. We determined that the tasks could be divided into two parts: new site hunting and marketing of the herb garden program. We planned to collect both qualitative and quantitative data for our research (Table 1).

Table 1. Criteria for Data Collection

	Quantitative data	Qualitative data
New site hunting (Appendix B)	<p>For all potential sites in the West End community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assess sunlight exposure (note sunlight obstructions) ● size of land field available to use ● the maximum height allowed for the herbs to grow <p><u>Data collection:</u> on-site data collection with pictures</p>	<p>Make a survey with questions assessing our quality of work so our project partner can provide feedback (Appendix A).</p> <p><u>Data collection:</u> survey</p>
	<p><u>Data interpretation:</u> use a descriptive table including all the aspects to present to community partner, allowing them to critically evaluate the strengths and the limitations of each site</p>	
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● size of each current herb garden site ● the area available for the advertisement posters and handbooks ● the exact location and ways to access each current and potential site <p><u>Data collection:</u> on-site data collection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Research the functions, cultural background of all herbs and ways to harvest them. <p><u>Data collection:</u> research from literature</p>
	<p><u>Data interpretation:</u> process the data collected in a form suitable for marketing (eg. posters, booklet, and brochures)</p>	

The main ethical issue for our project was that we had to make sure to be as non-invasive and non-pressuring as possible when seeking permission from landowners to build a garden on their land. We also made sure to keep our community partner apprised of our progress to ensure their continuing approval.

Results

Objective 1: Find potential sites suitable for new herb gardens and contact the property owners of the potential sites

We prepared a proposal letter that explained the organization goals and purposes of expanding herb gardens; on the letter, we also requested permission to use spaces at their property or boulevard in front of the property (Appendix C). Based on GNH's request and the city's regulation on boulevard gardening, we found 28 new sites. Out of these 28 sites, 15 were approved by our community partner. Three property owners have responded. The beds will be built soon in April and this will enable them to start planting the herbs for the summer.

Objective 2: Creating visual materials (herb booklet, sign, map) to enhance community awareness

Our group created an herb booklet based on the information requested by our community partner. The information includes harvesting, preservation methods, and culinary uses for the available herbs. The booklet is intended to improve community awareness on how to properly use the herbs (Appendix D).



Figure 2a. original signage



Figure 2b. suggested signage

The community partner mentioned that the sign was not visible enough and it seemed that only a few people actually use the gardens. We encouraged our community partner to improve the original signs by including the phrase - "free herbs" in order to catch people's attention. Another issue that occurred with the sign was that the signage wears out quickly due to high precipitation. Based on our research, we recommended our community partner to use acrylic material to protect the sign since it is durable and can tolerate rainfall.

Throughout our findings, we realized that the West End has plenty of potential herb garden sites. The limiting factors were whether or not the property owners were willing to participate and if they receive the letters successfully. One other concern was whether the community gardens will be used by local residents after the garden beds have been built since currently the herbs are harvested mainly for GNH meal programs. We conducted a survey for our community partner. The feedback was generally positive (Appendix A). However, we misunderstood the differences between "handout" and "booklet." The community member mentioned that there were some information missing such as the concept of the herb gardens.

Collaboration with property owners and GNH would enhance community engagement. Property owners can inform his/her residents that free herb gardens are available for people to use and learn more about herbs.

Discussion

The key issues we have identified in our community based project were accessibility to herbs, community engages and food literacy. Therefore, the project objectives were developed based on these issues and we have achieved the projects. The significance of our achievements means that there are three more locations for people to harvest herbs. This increases the accessibility for some as they might be able to walk to the nearest herb garden. Further the completion of the booklet, sign and map will improve community engagement and food literacy because the booklet is informative about the usage of the herbs and culinary uses in different cuisines.

When we were searching for potential sites, we found resources that the west end had to offer. Spaces that can be converted into gardens were not lacking and these places were easily accessible to the residents. This will prompt community engagement because people harvesting will be sharing their knowledge about food and herbs. Further, they can get knowledge from the booklets displayed near the herb garden. With this circulation of knowledge, people can start to grow their own garden and people who grow their own food can "offset food expenditures"; potentially increasing household income (Ackerman et al, pg. 190). They can improve their food security and health status because they will be able to afford more food. Being able to afford food is important because the obstacle to access fresh and healthy food is high food cost and low income (Block et al, 2012). Therefore, the garden will benefit the most food insecure citizens. There are a lot of benefits from having community gardens, but it is also studied that they are not easily managed because problems will arise from lack of funding, participation, materials for the garden, and land (Drake et. al., 2015). Gordon Neighbourhood House has communicated with us the importance of the sign and information booklet because these apply only to the west end. The problem there is that people are not aware and not utilizing the garden. Gordon Neighbourhood House does not have problems with funding, volunteer participation, materials, and land; since the City of Vancouver provides funds to neighborhood associations. Herb gardens need little management, as previously identified, there are a lot of usable space around the west end including the city's boulevard space. Finally, Gordon Neighbourhood House has a contract with

urban designer to create a system of self watering garden beds. To fix this problem unique to West End community, food literacy becomes an important concept. The components that make up food literacy comprise of “knowledge, skills, and behaviours required to access, select, prepare, eat food and plan for meals” (Velardo, 2015). Hence, having the herb garden with the booklets and more locations will encourage people to use herbs in their food and change their behaviour of going to gardens to get food instead of stores as their only choice to access food.

Our project was limited by the fact that we didn't want to be intrusive or pressuring so our method of contact was restricted to letters. This resulted in a lower response rate as we were not certain if the property owners had received the letters. Further limitations were that no change was made to the sign because our community partner wanted to keep the style of the original sign, so the space for modification is small. We designed maps for the handout before confirmation of all the new sites. The map only included the current herb garden's location and not the new ones that we found because the term ended before the owners could confirm.

There were several things we could have done differently. First, we could have tried to contact the property managers and arranged for phone or face-to-face meetings to discuss the reasons for expanding the herbs gardens and the philosophy behind them. This would also serve as a way to answer any questions or concerns they may have, increasing the chances of obtaining their permission to use their land. As well, we could have expanded our area of search away from the area around GNH. Lastly, we could have communicated more with our community partners during our design process to talk about our problems and concerns.

Conclusion

Over the course of the past four months, we were able to accomplish the goals set out for us. Three property owners have responded to our requests to make use of their land and informational material was created to help the community navigate and use the herb gardens. We found that there was no shortage of suitable spaces for herb gardens in the West End as evidenced by the number of sites we found in the area just near GNH. The limiting factor is, again, permission to use these spaces.

Since we only had a short amount of time to spend on our project, we won't be able to answer the questions that would require more long term study like whether or not the herbs will be used more after the implementation of more beds or if the residents will become more aware of the concepts connected to food literacy and security after making use of the herb gardens and informational material.

We would recommend expanding the herb garden web page on the GNH website by providing an online link to the booklet as well as pictures of the herb gardens and a map of all current locations. Providing a link to this web page on promotional material such as on the signs in the garden may increase awareness without expending many more resources.

Critical Reflections

Student 1

The CBEL project in LFS350 was a valuable and unique experience compared to lecture-exam based courses. I am glad that I have the opportunity to collaborate with Gordon Neighborhood House to be part of the herb garden expanding project. The community partner was very straightforward about what they expected and our end goal was very clear from the beginning. We found quite a few potential sites, although unfortunately, due to the time constraint, we are not able to build the garden beds and plant the seeds with GNH. Potential site hunting was a wonderful experience that enabled me to realize how many usable spaces in the city we can transform into edible gardens. I was worried that the letters would not reach the property owners, but it turned out that out of 15 potential sites, we had three property managers who were willing to lend the lands to GNH. This was a very good start, although our goal was to find ten sites. Throughout the course, I found it hard to relate some of the required readings to our project or blog posts. We were also constrained by the rubric and cannot freely write what we had actually experienced or how we really felt. Ultimately, I am very thankful that we were able to contribute to local food system. I am also very excited to see how these herb gardens will be utilized by the local residents.

Student 2

The first meeting with the group and the community partner lead me to have a high expectation of what our group can achieve in such little time. This is due to the detailed and clear instructions from the community partner and what they wanted us to achieve. Our group was split into two groups based on the strengths of each person. The first group was tasked to find potential sites so that there can be six more gardens built in addition to the originally four herb gardens. The second group was to lead the community in utilizing the gardens. This I found was very effective team work and led me to enjoy the team overall. However, through the term there was growing concern because after finding 28 sites, we could only ask for owner's permission at 15 sites. This concern continued as only three owners shown some interest. Through this experience, I learnt that unlike other classes where you put in the effort, the results will be reflected from it. This experience has a lot of factors that are beyond our control and we did everything our community partner wanted, but we could not achieve the goal that was set out from the start. I am still glad we were able to help the community partner by getting the three sites, suggest new herbs to plant in garden, and finishing herbs information booklet.

Student 3

Though I was initially uncertain about how much I would gain from this course, I'm now glad that I've been able to participate in this experience. First of all, it was great to work with Gordon Neighbourhood House on our CBEL project. Our project partner made it easy for us to do our work as all of our objectives were clearly laid out and reasonable. Through this experience, I learned how to temper my optimistic hopes with the reality of time restraints and feasible efforts. While we may not have been able give as much aid to our partner as we would like, I still feel like this was very worthwhile. I'm also thankful for another opportunity to work as a team with our group members, especially since we meshed well together. Having to collaborate with other people was a valuable preview of how professional life will be like after we graduate, one that other classes rarely offer. Our lectures and out of lecture were important as

well. The former allowed a platform to discuss the themes common to all of our CBEL projects and our food system while the latter presented a learning format to clarify the aforementioned themes in a different way from our usual lectures. All of this makes me thankful that I was able to take part in LFS 350.

Student 4

In my LFS350 course this term, the Community based experiential learning project is a quite unique part that brought me into a different aspect of learning. In the project, our community partner is quite clear about our tasks, which makes everything more efficient. For my part, I designed the herb related booklet and the map. It is really excited to put the skills into practical design. We tried to put everything simple for people to read, including the method of harvest and preservation and also the usage of different herbs. We hope that the booklet can help people in west end community feel more comfortable to harvest and use different types of herbs in better way. While designing the sign, by keeping the style of the original sign, it was really hard to make changes. I thought it would be better if we communicate with our community partner about out confusions. Overall I am really grateful about our experience.

Student 5

LFS 350 course is going to be my last experience with the LFS series in UBC. While in LFS 100, I started to have an understanding of the concept of community learning, which was totally another perspective for me as a university student. In LFS 250 I have experienced the in-depth discussion with regards to food security, food literacy, and food sovereignty. In this course, I was expecting something more advance to enhance my knowledge towards the community learning. And I'm glad that we have so much interactions with the community stakeholders and other community members to actually practice our skills learned before, and to learn more about the community with the actual experience within the community. I feel really thankful to our community partner who had identified clearly all her expectations to us, so that we always had a clear idea about what we were going to do. Although we tried our best to complete the tasks that we've discussed with the community partners, we still felt we did not meet exactly the community partners' requirement. This might be due to the lack of communication with our community partners. Our community partner was very reachable, however, when we encountered a problem within our group, we did not contact and update our problem and confusions with our community partner. As a consequence, when we submitted our final product to the community partner we did feel some dissatisfaction from our community partner.

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Appendix A

Q1: Are the signs well-designed, simple, informative and attractive?

Neutral

Q2: Do you think the sign encourages more people to feel comfortable about pick herbs from the garden? Please comment.

Improved visibility due to the location and sign material is helpful, but no changes were made to the sign to specifically increase use.

Q3: Are the books well-designed, and informative?

Agree

Q4: Do the books include basic information about herbs, the correct methods of harvest and the usage of herbs?

Yes

Q5: Are the handouts well-designed, simple, informative and attractive?

Respondent skipped this question

Q6: Do you think the handouts could let more people know about GNH's herb garden? Please Comment.

A map was designed to act as a handout, and the map is informative and helpful, but as a handout it is missing information that introduces people to the concept of the herb gardens.

Q7: Do you think the handouts can encourage more people to come by and harvest herbs? Please Comment.

Yes, due to the map, otherwise missing information.

Q8: Are we able to find the expected number of qualified sites?

Yes

Q9: Did people respond to our letters? How many? and Do stakeholders express an interest in participating?

3 new property managers reached out from the letters which is better than expected for this form of outreach.

Q10: General Comment. Thank you.

The location scouting and outreach with the letters was very helpful to spread the word and also to acquire new sites. Thank you!

Appendix B
Potential sites

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/58ecj7hxxnqufxg/AAAv4sJL030bSqrI9OYjGPfva?dl=0>

Community partner approved : Plots 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 20, 23, 24, 27

Appendix C



1019 Broughton St, Vancouver, BC V6G 2A7
Phone (604) 683-2554
Fax (604) 683-4486

www.gordonhouse.org

2016 Feb 29th

Cavalier Apartment

1122 Haro Street, Downtown, Vancouver, BC

Dear Property Manager,

Gordon Neighbourhood House is a place-based community organization, working alongside our community, sister organizations, local businesses and policy-makers to animate and support dynamic programs, services and initiatives that respond to the needs and dreams of the community.

One such initiative is the development of **Community Herb Gardens**. Gordon Neighbourhood House is working with west end residents to build and maintain community herb garden boxes on boulevards and front yards. The west end has limited areas to grow food, and so community operated herb gardens provide neighbours with access to fresh and free herbs throughout the year. We all can appreciate the difference a handful of fresh basil makes on pasta, or fresh dill makes on grilled fish, or fresh rosemary makes on roast chicken, or fresh cilantro makes on a bowl of soup.

Gordon Neighbourhood House would like to have you be part of this vision. We have identified an area in front of your building that would be ideal for a Community Herb Box. To ensure the project's success we need front yard space or permission to use the boulevard in front of your property.

After receiving your permission, *Gordon Neighbourhood House* will:

- Contract a landscape company to build the herb garden box on the agreed space. Boxes are usually 3x5 feet (though it will be made to fit the area around you)
- Maintain the garden regularly, year round. Boxes are self-watering!
- Invite community members to free workshops on cooking with and storing herbs.
- Provide volunteer opportunities for gardening.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Susanna (Farmer/Community Programmer) at susanna@gordonhouse.org or 604.683.2554.

Looking forward to hearing from you,

Yours Sincerely,

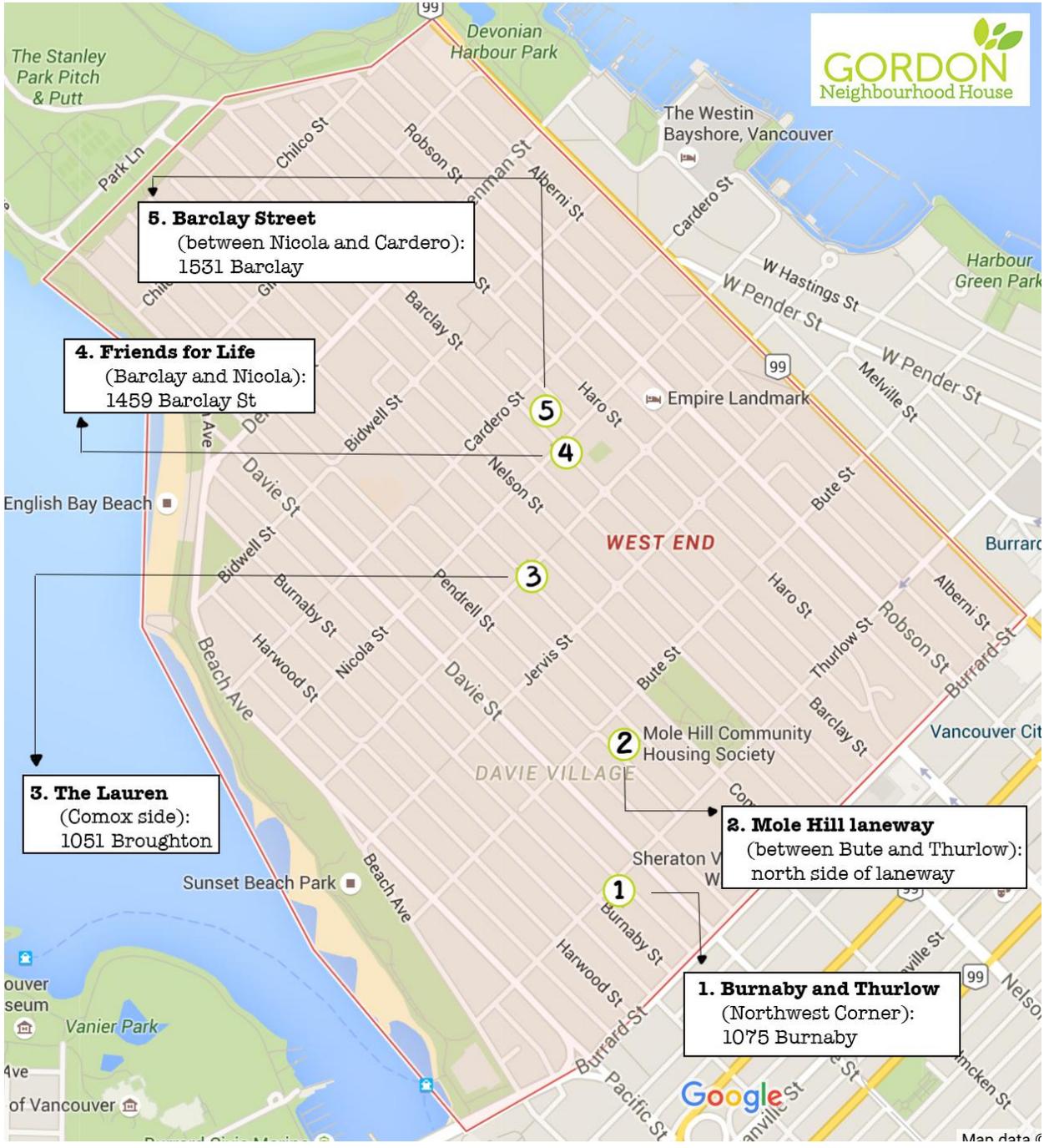
Susanna



You're invited to check out our existing Community Herb Gardens at the following locations:



1. Burnaby and Thurlow (Northwest Corner): 1075 Burnaby
2. Mole Hill laneway (between Bute and Thurlow): North side of laneway
3. The Lauren (Comox side): 1051 Broughton
4. Friends for Life (Barclay and Nicola): 1459 Barclay St
5. Barclay Street (between Nicola and Cardero): 1531 Barclay



5. Barclay Street
(between Nicola and Cardero):
1531 Barclay

4. Friends for Life
(Barclay and Nicola):
1459 Barclay St

3. The Lauren
(Comox side):
1051 Broughton

2. Mole Hill laneway
(between Bute and Thurlow):
north side of laneway

1. Burnaby and Thurlow
(Northwest Corner):
1075 Burnaby

Appendix D (Booklet Sample)

Oregano



How to harvest?
Once the plant has reached 4-5 inches tall, you can start cutting sprigs for use



How to preserve?
Dried or frozen and sealed



Usage of Oregano

- To make soups, stews, meat pies, pasta sauces and shellfish
- Goes well with vegetables, roast beef, lamb, chicken and pork.



Sage



How to harvest?

- Find the "V" spot with 2 other stems
- Cut above it



How to preserve?
Dried or frozen and sealed for later use



Usage of Sage

- Sage on asparagus with shaved pecorino
- Sandwich an anchovy between two leaves, batter and fry for great antipasto
- Freeze in ice cubes for summer drink
- Sage tea is a great remedy for sore throat



Lavender



How to harvest?

- Prune and harvest when the flowers bloom
- Cut the lavender a few inches above the woody growth
- Remove the dead leaf matter



How to preserve?

- Dry the lavender in bunches or on screens
- Store in a cool, dark place



Usage of Lavender

- With Fish and poultry dishes
- Vegetable marinades, salad dressings, jams, puddings
- Greek yogurt and beverages like tea, baked goods



Mint



How to harvest?
Snip sprigs and leaves as needed



How to preserve?
All cuttings can be used, dried or frozen for later use



Usage of Mint

- With soups and salads
- Plain meat
- Fish and poultry
- Good with chocolate or lemon based dessert
- Make ice drink

