

Dufferin Grove gardens: a history



1993: First garden by playground: plant material donated by Parks staff

The Parks supervisor, **Carol Cormier**, gave the park a surprise gift of left-over bedding plants. So the garden looked very colourful when **Mayor Nadine Nowlan** came to officially “open” the sand pit, which was then called “the Big Backyard.”

The first community garden began in Dufferin Grove Park in 1993, one year after the City took out the last Parks-planted flower bed, citing lack of funds. The park looked so sad without any flowers that the first garden was dug by some mothers and little kids near the sandpit.

Anne Shaddick took the lead. The backhoe operator, **Paul**, who was digging the sandpit helped by bringing over some heavy 6x6 wood to frame the bed.



1995: Margie Rutledge put in a herb garden

Every few years another garden bed was added, depending on who was interested in helping. Carol Cormier, promoted to Parks manager, sent her crew to Home Depot to buy a whole bunch of rose plants, which soon covered the vegetable garden fence with blooms. Some gang youth called the “**L.A.s**” were paid to dig a garden near the rink, helped by local schoolteacher **Rob Rennick**. People in the neighbourhood had said on a park survey that they wanted native-species gardens. The park got two years of grants from **Canada Trust** to do this. A former Havelock Street resident, **Hedy Muysson**, who had bought a farm near Westport, came back to work with school classes from **Brock School** to plant the first two woodland beds.



1996: Central tree nursery, Canada Trust (species plan developed with Parks/Horticulture)



1994: Rob Rennick talks to Arie Kamp.

They were in the evenings, looking at the gardens. The Parks foreman at the time, **Bill Argeropoulos**, scrounged old benches from park storage areas to set up near the gardens. Those benches were rarely empty.

Then one day **Arie Kamp**, a retired steelworker, came across the garden and offered his help. He became the main flower gardener at the park for the following 8 years. He used to get up at 4 a.m. in the summer and work until 2 pm, go home and nap in the heat of the afternoon, and then work again until it was too dark to see the plants. He also dug new flowerbeds without consulting anyone and then had to work even harder to maintain them to his high standard. But after he began gardening, more and more people started to stroll through the park in the



Park roses on the fence

Artist and landscaper **Gene Threndyle** discovered the park a couple of years later and helped plant a native-species sand-garden near the newly-built bake-oven. Then he planted the tree nursery south of the field house, then the “Remembering Garrison Creek” garden at the southwest corner (the one with the black walnut trees).

A white pine was added to the tree nursery by **Lieutenant-Governor Hilary Weston** in 1997. Kids from **Queen Victoria School** helped her to plant this tree. She gave an award to Arie Kamp, with Queen Vic kids playing steel drums to celebrate the day.

There were no funds within the Parks department to maintain the park gardens, but eventually they began to deliver left-over annuals to Dufferin Grove. One year **Mayor Barbara Hall** came to help plant some of them in the rink house window-boxes. And **Pat MacKay**, a long-time park friend, brought over some best-quality spring bulbs from **Cruikshank's** every fall. Arie planted a lot of them.



The marsh garden

In 1998 **Gene Threndyle** applied to the Toronto Arts Council for a grant to build the little fountain and marsh garden down in the Garrison Creek hollow by Dufferin Street. Parks supervisor **Mike Hindle** helped out by lending a backhoe and driver, and he got his crew to bring over the big old architectural stones that now surround the fountain. The stones had been languishing in the High Park service yard until Gene asked about them. Because of the fountain, new birds and butterflies came to the park, and so did students visiting from other places, studying community gardens.



Second youth garden with cherry tree, unpaved footpath

After the school pizza-day programs began, food plants were put in near the ovens. One year there was grain growing there, the next year lots of sunflowers. Then the summer youth workers got a crew together to put up a split rail fence to keep out the dogs. Tomatoes and herbs were planted, to put on the pizzas. The next year the Parks foreman brought his crew and created a second food garden area.

Ben Figueredo, a retired park neighbour, who lived in the apartment building next door, planted grapes along the rink fence and began helping out in various ways. And **Caitlin Shea** arrived in the park and began doing compost, working alongside rec staff **Anna Bekerman**. Then **Jenny Cook** began to work at the park, and she and Caitlin (who also became a part-time recreation staff) set up "garden parties" where people wanting to help with the gardening would get support and have some fun too.

In 2005, **Georgie Donais** planted the first cob gardens. **Arie Kamp** turned 80, and cut back his gardening to mainly morning glories. In 2006, park friend **Mary Wigle** donated two black maples in honour of her husband **Ziggy Kapsa**. Those trees became the basis for the second cob garden, along with perennials from the home gardens of many cob-builders. The 5-year campaign to have new trees planted finally bore fruit, after many years of no planting. 31 new trees were put in by a Forestry contractor. The new trees were watered and taken care of by Recreation staff working with volunteers.



Cob garden with Ziggy Kapsa memorial



Memorial tree

A Japanese cherry tree was planted beside the cob courtyard in memory of **Emma Frankford**, by her family. In the fall of 2006, **Foodshare** proposed a new youth gardening program in the southwest corner of the park. The City agreed to supply compost and fencing. When Foodshare began preparing the garden, nearby residents halted the project by blocking the gardeners. Parks management cancelled the youth program and the project was transferred to **Erwin Krickhahn Park**. Neighbourhood residents also stepped in to block it there. Foodshare announced that it would no longer try to place its own gardening programs into neighbourhood parks.

In 2007, there was a summer-long drought. **Michael Monastyrskij** volunteered to water trees, and found several other volunteers to help him. All the new trees in the park survived. A Foodshare composting program brought the park three good-quality wooden compost boxes. Park program staff **Anna Bekerman** began working with the **St. Mary's Catholic High School** environment club as they planted their own student garden near the pizza oven. Two new "little forests" were added by Forestry, near Dufferin Street, under their tree program. The "garden club" met twice a week, first to start seedlings and then to care for the park gardens throughout the season. The first Friday Night Supper of the season was used to raise funds for hoses and gardening tools. Also, CELOS got a "taking the show on the road" grant from the Trillium Foundation, and was able to help the **Toronto Community Garden Network** (TCGN) and three other community garden groups to set up easy-to-post websites.



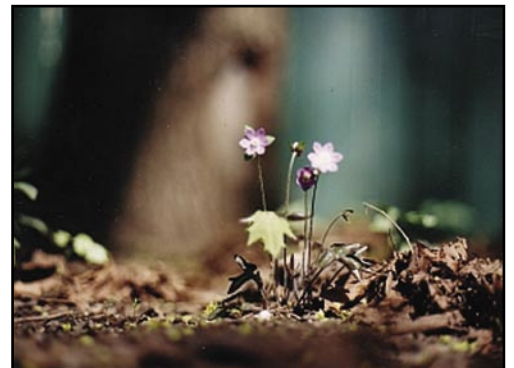
Children's garden

In 2008, Parks management directed Dufferin Grove program staff to submit a proposal for community gardens at the park, for the existing gardens. Part of the reason may have been the gardeners' request for compost. Parks management said they would not be able to deliver any compost until they could decide which administrative section should get the bill: "Food Growing Community Gardens Budget" or "Parks and Horticulture Operating Budget."



Garden club

In 2009, the question was raised – should the food garden program area be divided into individual plots like those at other City community gardens? The consensus was that, instead, groups could be invited to take over parts of the existing food gardens. In April 2010, the "Roots and Shoots" club of the neighbouring home-schooling families took one section of the garden as their joint project.



Hepatica in wildflower garden