

# Parkallen News



Maxine the giant pumpkin gets a ride to Parkallen School in a double chariot stroller.

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- Getting the most out of your workout
- Classified



## **Update from your Parkallen Community Garden**

by Marlene Wurfel

The Parkallen Sprouts: junior community gardening club and The Parkallen Diggers wrapped up the 2013 growing season with an Annual Harvest Potluck at Parkallen Hall. Sunchokes dipped in garlic butter, homemade pumpkin pie, and heirloom tomato salads were among the yummies on our tables.

Sustainable Food Edmonton attended with a prize for "The Biggest Vegetable" awarded to our own Maxine the Pumpkin who weighed in at a modest 127 lbs.

Where is Maxine now? She's at Parkallen School waiting to be carved into... the biggest... jack'o'lantern... EVER!

How did she get there? She was wheeled over in a double chariot by two strong moms and a strapping 5-year-old named Oliver.

Watch for Maxine flickering in front of Parkallen Hall on Halloween night.

Did a gnome mysteriously appear in your garden this summer? The Parkallen



(From left to right) Annika Davidge, Joshua Davidge and Erin Chevrette put their artistic talents to use at the gnome bombing workshop.

Sprouts' gnome bombing workshop, where local kids created and dispersed gnomes into gardens they admire may be to blame.

Did your grade-one student bring home a jar of pickles? 30 jars of crunchy dilled-carrots and cukes were pickled at Parkallen Hall this fall at a successful workshop sponsored by the WWF and the Parkallen Community League. The workshop taught preserving skills to several generations of Parkallenians, including me. Parkallen Community Garden now owns a canning set (boiler, tongs, etc.) for loan to potential

picklers and jammers with a valid community league membership. E-mail [sustainability@parkallen.ca](mailto:sustainability@parkallen.ca) to sign it out.

After this fall's hard frost, Parkallen School's grade 3 class took out the tangle of tomato vines and the blaze of sunflowers in the PCG with a zeal that would make any Viking army or Mongol horde scream: "Yaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaarrrrr." Thanks, grade 3, and enjoy your Pizza & Movie Party this November featuring organic pizza sauce made from tomatoes, garlic and oregano harvested from your community garden.



## What's new for next year:

- We're transitioning to an all-ages gardening model.
- We're setting dates well in advance for work bees.
- We'll be planting more tasty herbs, such as basil for your harvesting pleasure.
- We're adding this new monthly column which will feature recipes, updates and permaculture tips.
- Next month's topic: are you cultivating guilt in your garden? Stop it!

# What do you want from your garden?

by Marlene Wurfel



In my last “from the permaculture patch” article I asked you to evaluate your relationship with your garden and with our community garden. In high summer, do you have a garden full of flowers but can only see the few weeds? Are you grateful the snow is concealing the state of your front yard? When you spot a garden gnome, does his look strike you as smug and reproachful? If your relationship with gardening could be summed up by: “Ugh, I just haven’t been doing enough in the garden,” I asked you to stop sowing those particular seeds of shame and regret. Instead, let’s think of a garden as something that is for people, that gives more than it demands. If a garden is taking more than it is giving, we’re doing it wrong. “Yield” is an important concept

in permaculture. In order to design a green space with intention, we need to know what its purpose is. We need to know what we want our garden’s yield to be. Carrots? Beauty? Renewal? Fresh air?

What do you want from your green spaces?

If you want a private place that smells like spice lilies and sounds like wind chimes, where you can sit and sip sangria with your best friend, then make one of those, and don’t feel badly that you aren’t also growing enough turnips in that very spot to feed the masses.

If you want to fill a root cellar with carrots and potatoes, plant carrots and potatoes, and don’t feel bad that you’re not also growing a row of every type of vegetable ever culti-

vated by man, including lemongrass, eggplant, and quinoa.

If you want a spot where the kids can make mud pies and kick a soccer ball, or where the dog can chew on some raw-hide, don’t worry if wedding parties don’t tend to crash your back yard for photo ops.

If you’re just learning to garden or are new to Zone 3, and you want to experiment with growing cantaloupe, try growing cantaloupe, but be content that both cantaloupe and the knowledge that cantaloupe doesn’t grow very well here are a type of yield.

Do you want a quiet and private spot to feel the sun on your shoulders? A place to notice the seasons changing? Something pretty to look at out your kitchen window while you do

dishes? One really beautiful tomato to make the best sandwich ever each September? Someplace that renews and recharges your senses and your spirit? A physical challenge?

The really empowering thing about knowing what we want our gardens to yield is that it allows us to perform the essential calculation of: yield – investment = profit. Taking the time to calculate how our green spaces are benefitting us, or not, can help us make good decisions. We may need to repurpose our spaces and/or recalibrate our relationships with them. Making intentional choices can help us remove ourselves from the grim soldiering through of gardening as a chore, something we do because we must, because that is the way it is done, because that is the suburban dream dreamed up before we got our particular chunk of it and that is the way it has always been dreamt.

What is important about a gar-

den to you? Is it how it looks to neighbours and to passersby? How it looks to you? How it feels to be in that space? Is your goal to spend as little time as possible working outdoors? All or any of these are valid. Knowing what we want our “yield” to be helps us make good decisions about what we invest to obtain it. Yield is such a basic concept that it’s easy to overlook.

Is there a yield you want from the Parkallen Community Garden? Is it basil? Connections within your community? Solitude? To learn from more experienced gardeners? To teach what you know to less experienced gardeners? To put some food on the family dinner table whether you are 4 or 44? The wherewithal to look the next smug and reproachful gnome you meet in the eye and say, “Look here, lil’ buddy, I helped make the Parkallen Community Garden awesome.”

If there is a yield you want from the PCG, I encourage you to go and get it. Take it. Plan to

take more from it than you give. Manage your time commitment – guiltlessly – to produce a positive yield.

The Parkallen Community Garden is a unique, permaculture project and the rule book is still being written – by us, the Parkallen Community – on what the relationship between gardener and garden should look like. It’s up to us to create a healthy gardening community, and part of that, as individuals, is to consider what relationship we want to have with the community garden and to take from it what will nurture and sustain us.

The PCG operates under consensus. Your ideas and feedback are always welcome. E-mail [sustainability@parkallen.ca](mailto:sustainability@parkallen.ca) at any time of year to be placed on the Parkallen Community Garden mailing list and to receive communications about all ages workbees and gardening events.



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## Register now and start Preschool in January!

Call the Green Circle classroom at (780) 435-3129 to make an appointment to visit the classroom, meet the teacher and pick up a registration package.

For more information please visit our website at [www.greencirclepreschool.com](http://greencirclepreschool.com) or call Jessie at (780) 977-3772 for more registration information.

*“A place where friendships begin and children blossom”*

# The birds and the bees: encouraging our natural landscapes in Parkallen

by Marlene Wurfel

Wildlife gardening is making green spaces attractive to mammals, birds and insects. We might think of urban centers as devoid of wildlife and properly so. I don't want coyotes hunting in Ellingson Park where my kids play, nor do I want wasps nesting under my deck. But songbirds, butterflies, damselflies, ladybird beetles, wild bees, and little brown bats play essential, beneficial roles in our urban landscapes by controlling pests and pollinating plants. If we create vast swathes of lawn that are attractive to mosquitoes but inhospitable to the species that like to lunch on them, our picnics will suffer in myriad ways. Not only will we spend more time swatting skeeters, but without wild pollinators, our food security is threatened: foods like tomatoes, watermelon, chocolate and coffee can only be pollinated by wild bees. If we create habitats that are attractive to scavengers such as magpies but not to songbirds such as redpolls, well... then our parks will be devoid of bird song.

One easy way to increase biodiversity in an urban landscape is to provide habitat for cavity nesters. Cavity nesters make homes in dead trees, burrows, dense thickets and hollow plant stalks or seed heads. Because old hollow trees and dead plant stalks are the first thing we "clean" up from our parks and yards, wild populations that depend on finding natural cavities in which to raise babies safe from predators, weather, and human intervention can't thrive. By installing appropriate nest boxes and feeders in our yards and parks we can help give native, wild species a foothold, instead of giving the leg-up to invasive, pest species.

Whether you own a balcony or an acreage, wildlife gardening is as simple as providing food, water, cover and/or nesting sites for mammals, birds and insects. It's the type of activity that can demand as much or as little time and money as you'd like to invest in it.

If you want to help increase biodiversity without spending a dime, Google searches for "build a bird feeder from junk" and "build a birdhouse" render millions of results. Of those millions, a milk-



carton bird feeder resembling Dr. Who's iconic spaceship, The Tardis, constructed entirely from stuff I had lying around the house, is a clear winner for me.

Visit the Parkallen Diggers' blog at [parkallendiggers.org](http://parkallendiggers.org) to find a video tutorial and templates if you'd like to build your own Tardis birdfeeder.

A bit of research is key to wildlife gardening: the type of food in a feeder and the size of hole in a nestbox are important in attracting a particular species over another.

If you've never visited Edmonton's Wildbird General Store I would encourage you to – it is a gem in Edmonton's south side at 4712 99 Street.

Another great resource is the National Wildlife Foundations website: [www.nwf.org/How-to-Help/Garden-for-Wildlife.aspx](http://www.nwf.org/How-to-Help/Garden-for-Wildlife.aspx).

The Parkallen Sprouts have purchased several nesting boxes and a large bird feeder to hang in the trees surrounding the Parkallen Community garden. Our aim is to increase biodiversity in our community and to fill the boughs with birdsong. If you would like to hang one of the birdhouses and to keep an eye on it now and again (time commitment = low), email [sustainability@parkallen.ca](mailto:sustainability@parkallen.ca). We also have a large birdfeeder to install and require volunteers to keep it full. One caution with feeding birds is that it's not fair to feed sporadically: if birds rely on a food source

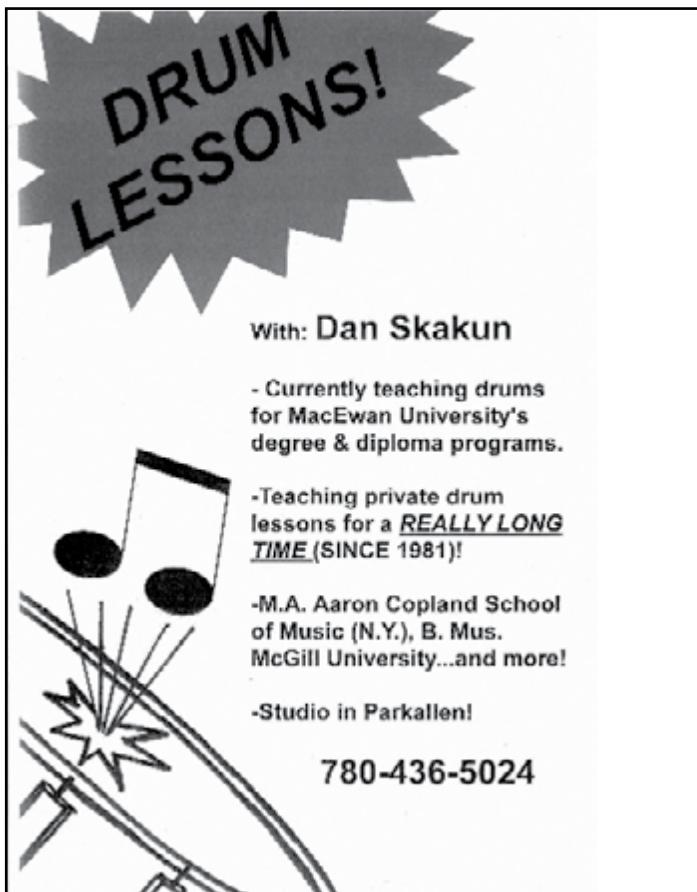
an abrupt stoppage can be devastating. I can commit to keeping a supply of bird food in the garden shed year-round and if I can recruit 12 volunteers to each commit to making sure the feeder is full on a weekly basis for one calendar month of each year, we can successfully feed the birds in Ellingson park for, you know, tuppence a day. E-mail [sustainability@parkallen.ca](mailto:sustainability@parkallen.ca) if you'd like to take a 1-month shift as a birdfeeder at the Parkallen Community Garden.

## Hall Happenings for Winter 2014

**Parkallen Playgroup**  
Mondays 1 pm - 3 pm

**Girl Guides**  
Tuesdays 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm

**Parkallen Knitters**  
Wednesdays 12:30 pm - 3:00 pm



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*"A place where friendships begin and children blossom"*

## A Case for Bugs

by Marlene Wurfel

We don't want bugs. We don't want bugs in our beds, in our hair, or to catch a bug. Bugs bite, bother and, well, bug us. Bugs wreak havoc in computer software and bugs violate our privacy. We want people we don't like to bug off and the things we don't like can bug us out. "Bug" is not a good word. We know about Louis Pasteur. We know about germs. We've heard about C. difficile on the news, and we don't want that bug – it's terrifying.

I grew up in the 20th century visiting doctors who would prescribe antibiotics at any threat of infection. I watched TV commercials the showed happy homemakers unleashing clouds of Lysol into every nook and cranny of their kitchen so that their babies could crawl "safely" upon gleaming, sterile floors. My grandmother's generation used DDT. The 21st century feels a bit different, though. For one thing, we know now that there are different kinds of bugs – there are some microorganisms that cause disease (like influenza) and there are some microorganisms that promote health (like the probiotics in our guts and in the well-stocked yoghurt aisles in our grocery stores.) We know that insects and microbes also clean up, they decompose things that need to be decomposed, and they can help control the bad kinds of bugs. Our doctors prescribe antibiotics with caution because they know that super-bugs can evolve when we kill 99.9 percent of germs leaving



Photo courtesy of Myrna Pearman of [www.ellisbirdfarm.ca](http://www.ellisbirdfarm.ca)

behind the toughest 0.1 percent to reproduce.

At the same time, we have shelves of products to get bugs out of our gardens. Like us, our gardens need beneficial bugs – and we need more gardening techniques that encourage healthy insect life or micro-organisms in our garden.

Creating an environment that is insect and microbe-free is neither practical nor desirable. It's about creating a healthy balance, one in which insects and microbes quietly take care of the lion's share of the work for us in myriad and complex ways. When I talk to children at Parkallen School about bugs, I don't need to introduce the idea of beneficial insects to them. They already know.

"We need dragonflies to eat mosquitoes," they tell me, "and we need bats." "We need bees to pollinate flowers." And, "we need worms to poop in the soil." I asked

Myrna Pearman, an Alberta biologist, author, nature photographer and operator of Ellis Bird Farm ([www.ellisbirdfarm.ca](http://www.ellisbirdfarm.ca)) what urban gardeners can do to improve their garden ecosystems. "You can do three key things," she says. "Reduce or eliminate the use of cosmetic pesticides, learn to tolerate some dandelions (maybe a perfect lawn is not the goal) and bring on the bugs! Insects are the underpinning of all ecosystems, so welcome a diversity of native insects and spiders into your yard.

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Please weigh-in at [parkallendiggers.org](http://parkallendiggers.org) to complete a short 4-question survey or e-mail [sustainability@parkallen.ca](mailto:sustainability@parkallen.ca) with your comments/questions/concerns.

## Hall Happenings for March 2014

Parkallen Playgroup  
Mondays 1 pm - 3 pm

Girl Guides  
Tuesdays 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm

Parkallen Knitters  
Wednesdays 12:30 pm - 3:00 pm

## What is a Bee Hotel?

by Marlene Wurfel

Most people know what honeybees and bumblebees look like and how they pollinate our food. Honeybees, a non-native bee, are used agriculturally. Hives of thousands of honeybees are transported from crop to crop by professional bee keepers when required. It is not legal to maintain hives of honeybees within the City of Edmonton. Bumblebees (a native species) and honeybees (an imported species) are social bees. When their colony is threatened, social bees have a "protect the hive" response. They release pheromones telling each other to swarm and defend. Not all bees are social – there are many types of solitary bee species too. If we aren't biologists, we might not recognize them as bees: some are very tiny, some are not black or yellow but metallic and iridescent like flies, and they don't sting people or pets. When solitary bees are threatened, they retreat or abandon their nests. They don't live in colonies; they live in solo dwellings, which is why they are called solitary bees. In the springtime, solitary bees look for hollow plant stalks or small holes bored in wood to raise their young. There are over 4000 types of wild bee species in North America. In Parkallen's

Ellingson park, bejeweled orchard bees, busy sweat bees and tiny adrenids pollinate our flowers. They are solitary, native, wild bees.

Wildlife gardeners can help wild pollinators by building artificial nests for them. You can build a "bee hotel" or "bee condo" by collecting natural materials like hollow plant stalks, lengths of bamboo, and logs or bricks of wood or clay with tiny holes drilled into them. Tubes roughly the size of a drinking straw or smaller are appropriate. This type of nest is attractive to solitary pollinators only, and not at all to social bees and wasps.

Google "bee hotel" or "bee condo" to see designs ranging from birdhouse-shaped structures full of bamboo lengths to the grandiose K-abeilles hotel in France, built for an architectural festival, which features a walk-in observation deck with seating for people.

My bee hotel, pictured here, is a small bundle of bamboo and stalks from my garden held together with two elastic bands and suspended in a tree with a little bit of floral wire. The bees can't order \$6 orange juice there, but I think they'll love it. I



Marlene Wurfel's bee hotel

asked Dr. Matthias Buck, the Assistant Curator of Invertebrate Zoology at the Royal Alberta Museum, if wild bees were likely to inhabit such a structure in Edmonton. "For sure," he told me.

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Please weigh-in at our Community Consultation Sunday, April 27, 2014 1p.m. – 3p.m. Parkallen Community League Hall

## Summer Day Camps at Parkallen Hall

### Hip Hop Dance – ages 6 to 9

Monday July 7 to Friday July 11, 2014

1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Course code: 517700

### Multi-Mania – ages 8 to 12

Monday July 28 to Friday August 1, 2014

9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Course code: 518606

### Mmmonsters! – ages 3 to 5

Monday August 11 to Friday August 15, 2014

9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Course code: 517666

### Nature Explorers – ages 3 to 5

Monday August 11 to Friday August 15, 2014

1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Course code: 517708

Registration opens April 29, 2014. Register early to avoid disappointment! Browse all camps at [edmonton.ca/daycamps](http://edmonton.ca/daycamps)

### To Register:

- Call 311
- Online at [eReg.edmonton.ca](http://eReg.edmonton.ca)
- In person at any City of Edmonton Recreation & Leisure Centre

## What is a Bat Box?

by Marlene Wurfel

A bat box is a type of nesting box used by wildlife gardeners who want to provide a safe, secure place for bats to raise their babies. Little Brown Bat is the name of the most common bat species in Alberta. They're little. They're brown. And yup, they're bats. They weigh less than half an ounce (8.5 grams) and have a wingspan of up to 8 inches (20 cm). Bats eat night-flying insects and live throughout Alberta. Alberta Conservation describes bats as "among the most gentle, beneficial, and necessary animals on Earth." Bats eat pests and pollinate flowers. They are shy creatures, and the world's only flying mammals.

Bats locate their dinner by sonar. If you want to see bats in Edmonton, go for a walk in the river valley at dusk. Throw a handful of small pebbles or popcorn up in the air to mimic a small cloud of flying insects. Little Brown Bats will swoop down to feed when they "hear/see" the objects flying through the air. Their velvety-fast flight is a marvel to behold. Don't worry: bats won't hurt you or crash land with you. They're incredibly agile flyers and bats don't attack people. Fish and Wildlife estimate that there are roughly 1 to 1.5

million little brown bats peacefully co-existing with us here in Alberta.

While bats aren't dangerous, their diseased corpses or feces could be. As with any animal, you shouldn't play with injured or dead bats, or with their poop. Bats belong outdoors, not in your house. Don't clean up bat poop or handle dead bats without protecting yourself, especially your lungs. If you see a dead or injured bat (one that isn't flying away from you) anywhere in the City, contact our local Environmental Health Officer (Edmonton Main Office: 780-735-1800).

Parkallen Community Garden's bat box has been hanging up for two nesting seasons. It looks like a birdhouse but is open on the bottom where a floor would be. The inside is rough wood which nesting bats would cling to (upside-down!) while nursing their pups. Our bat box is mounted on a hockey light stand more than 4 meters above ground with a clear swoop zone. It gets lots of sunlight during the day (which bats like) but has yet to be inhabited. Maybe next Spring?

Bat boxes can contain a colony of 50-500 mama bats. They're often



Typical bat box

called nurseries because only mothers with pups use them, and only in the spring, to nurse their pups. Bats don't live in or hibernate in bat boxes; they go elsewhere for the winter.

You can buy a bat box (bats are never included) or build your own – there is lots of information online. One common misconception is that a bat box will reduce the number of mosquitoes in your yard. Bats, however, fly farther afield to feast so they're more likely to clean up a neighbour's yard. You're welcome, Allendale.

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