

May 28, 2020

I mentioned a couple of weeks ago that at the beginning of WWII, many countries including Britain and Canada embarked on schemes called “Victory Gardens”. The idea was to encourage town dwellers to dig up their flower beds and lawns and grow potatoes, tomatoes and other vegetables and fruits. This was a matter of necessity as imported food supplies were considerably reduced because of the hostilities. After the war, food was still in short supply and was in fact rationed. Families had Ration Books and how much of a commodity you could buy depended on the number of people in the family and the ages of your children.

As the economy improved and food was more readily available, flower beds and lawns made a comeback but the habit of growing food did stick: to this day there are many in towns who cultivate their vegetables in what we, in B.C., call community gardens.

Since we came to Canada over fifty years ago, food has always been plentiful and affordable. For my family at least. This started to change in the late eighties when food banks were born and have since become more and more important to a growing segment of our population. COVID-19 has driven even more people to food banks, food supplies are not as secure as they were, and prices are rising. We don't have rationing in a formal way but I do see signs limiting the purchase of some items like eggs and hand sanitizer. Who knows what to expect later in the year?

So I have been thinking again about Victory Gardens. Why not take the time to go out and dig up some ground to plant vegetables? There are a number of benefits to be gained that make this a great idea. Many of us have more time than usual so this is a good use of time out in the fresh air. A second benefit is that when you grow your own food, it is fresher and tastier than anything you can buy anywhere at any time. Third, because you are using your own labour, the cost per unit is cheaper than when you have to buy your food. You are in fact paying yourself to work and increasing your real income - and it is tax free! Finally, not only is food likely to be more expensive by the end of summer but some things will possibly not be available.

Even if we all went outside right now and planted lots of vegetables, I don't think we'd undermine the success of our local Farmers Markets. Growing our own food makes sense therapeutically and economically, but you can still support, and rely on, local growers and makers, at your Farmers Market. It's not realistic (in fact, it's delusional) to aim for complete self-reliance – but by strengthening our local supply chains, we can cultivate a stronger sense of community. That's what victory looks like to me.



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