

# Gardens of the North

by Pam Huerto, BSc RD

As many are aware, food security in isolated northern communities is a pressing concern. When I first moved to **northern Saskatchewan** in 2015, I visited the grocery store in **Fond du Lac** and found that a pumpkin cost \$61! In the next aisle, you could purchase a single bell pepper for \$17, or a jug of milk for \$20.

I have read articles addressing this topic where people have commented that community members should just “grow their food already”! What these individuals don’t realize is that the terrain in these communities is not terribly suitable for gardening – our land is made mostly of sand & rock, and only hardy weeds, thin trees & certain berries tend to grow here.

But this summer we were able to use some of our **Nutrition North** funding to start some interesting new projects, one of which is the **Garden Tower**! The rotating Garden Tower 2 is a composter that grows 50 plants in 4 square feet nearly anywhere. It turns kitchen scraps to organic fertilizer via vermicomposting (aka worm power). The Garden Tower replicates a natural

ecosystem allowing plants to access nutrients recycled through the composting processes. It has a minimal footprint and eliminates weeding, electricity, nutrient loss and most water loss associated with conventional gardening.

In two of our communities, **Stony Rapids & Uranium City**, we were able to bring in and distribute towers. **Stony Rapids** received a total of 84, and **Uranium City** a total of 21 towers. And despite



not being eligible for the **Nutrition North**



funding, the residents of **Camsell Portage** contributed personal funds so that they could purchase a few garden towers of their own.

Towers with casters & grow lights were given to the local schools & our long term care unit so that they could experience year round growth. The rest of the towers were distributed to community households – an opportunity for empowerment by allowing people to grow their own produce, a chance to learn how to garden & compost, and potentially some personal healing through a little gardening therapy.

Although, the garden towers were the most





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innovative gardening project each of our five communities in the Athabasca basin is doing their best to encourage gardening in the north. **Fond du Lac** continues to maintain and expand on the tunnel garden that was built a few years ago with the assistance of **Murray Gray**, and are now giving out produce to community members (Elders & prenatals especially). And **Black Lake** purchased greenhouses this year with their **Nutrition North** funding, erecting them on parish grounds for the community.

We're happy to see all these gardening projects sprouting up, and we hope they will continue to grow & flourish over the coming years!

If you're interested in a garden tower, **Frank Tecklenburg** is your guy – he can be reached at (306) 280-8026 or through <http://earthconnectionscorner.com/>

