



Blooming Caravan

Cooking to Jump-Start the Growing Season in Long-Term Care

Creative ideas for establishing a garden kitchen to connect residents with local food

By Emma Rooney



Serving up soup with homemade bread, hand-shaken butter, and freshly cut chives.

Introduction

Years ago, as a brand-new horticultural therapy intern at Providence Farm, I discovered the joy of cooking and eating our garden harvest. The seniors of St. Ann's Garden Club filled the kitchen with their enthusiastic chatter as we cleaned and prepped our homegrown produce for a daily soup. Recently, I shared that joyful experience again, this time with the seniors of the long-term care home where I work part-time as a horticultural therapist. Once a month, we fill the cozy Garden Kitchen with the aromas of fresh-baked bread and a hearty pot of vegetable soup. A soup that features the very same carrots residents

pulled out of the soil earlier that day with their own hands. Nothing is more satisfying to witness.

When selecting recipes, I always like to feature local, seasonal produce. In the summer, we can use what we've grown in the courtyard raised beds. But it's really this time of year, in the early spring, that the Garden Kitchen is an essential ingredient for keeping residents engaged while we all wait impatiently to get outside. Cooking makes us hungry to get growing. The other day, when I brought in Toronto-grown watermelon radishes to admire and sample in thin slices, we immediately

heard requests to grow these radishes in the residents' garden. Their enthusiasm signalled it was time to haul out the seed catalogues and start drawing up our spring plans for the Garden Kitchen. We also explored the shape of various food seeds and identified the countless seeds that are staples in our diet, such as rice and pulses.

In May, we'll listen to part of Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, in which she describes the wonders of asparagus. Then we'll prepare the cream of asparagus soup that we've all reminisced about since last spring. One resident tells me that if

she had to choose between steak and our asparagus soup, she'd pick the soup every time! No sooner will spring have gotten underway than I'll hear chatter in the kitchen about the strawberry jam we'll need to make in June. Cooking with local ingredients not only orients residents to the current season, it also fills them with hope as they plan out what they'll need to sow now for future reaping.

Emma Rooney
Creativity Facilitator
Blooming Caravan





Kitchen work bee in full swing with a role for everyone

Tricks of the Trade

Creating a successful seasonal cooking program using local produce

- Create comforting routines like setting the table with a fabric tablecloth
- Feature fresh or dried herbs to provide a full sensory experience
- Keep a supply of chives on hand by dehydrating and freezing chives from the garden
- Use a [local food guide](#) to determine what's available in your area throughout the year
- Make your own locally sourced vegetable broths using staples such as carrots and onions as your base
- Identify the local ingredients in your recipe with a symbol on the printout or by having residents guess as they review the day's recipe



Top left: Cream of asparagus soup Top right: Plating with edible flowers Bottom: Picking fresh salad greens

- Discuss what part of the plant you're cooking with and how the vegetable grows
- Explore whether the local produce was grown in the field or in a greenhouse, and create a calendar of when it was likely picked
- Puree soups to allow more residents on modified diets to participate in sampling
- Look for quick breads; our favourites come from *Bread Toast Crumbs: Recipes for No-Knead Loaves & Meals to Savor Every Slice* by Alexandra Stafford



Garden-grown goodies that can go straight into salad bowls. Cherry tomatoes and mouse melon cucumbers are a must for any communal growing space!

Essential kitchen tools and supplies

- Use **fabric aprons** instead of single-use options to keep clothing protected and turn cooks into chefs
- Purchase a **reusable set of dishes and cutlery** to make your kitchen more environmentally friendly and take your presentation up a notch so that residents feel proud of their creations
- Purchase a **large lettuce spinner** to properly clean fresh leaves and get residents of various abilities in on the action
- Invest in good-quality **vegetable scrubbers** to give residents the satisfaction of getting root vegetables sparkly clean
- Peeling vegetables is a familiar task for many older residents. Set out several **peelers** to involve as many people as possible in soup preparation.
- Get a **mortar and pestle**. Using one is not only empowering, but also brings out the scent of spices and is an easier alternative to chopping garlic.



Experimenting with growing from table scraps

Food-growing activities to try indoors

- Watch vegetables regrow from table scraps. Spring onions are quick and easy, and they make a great soup topper!
- Grow your own pea shoots, another topping that'll bring spring aliveness to your soup cup. They are low fuss to grow at a windowsill, even with less than ideal light.

Potential extension activities:

- Supply the home's kitchen with fresh lettuce leaves handpicked by residents. Cherry tomatoes and tiny mouse melon cucumbers are another easy-to-grow, easy-to-use salad selection.
- Take an outing to a local farmers' market
- Make your own preserves to savour the bounty of the season in the dead of winter.
- We've found mixed garden pickles are a great way to use up whatever's plentiful in the garden
- Create a community cookbook to share your favourite recipes for eating locally all year long
- Invent your own recipe to share your home's key ingredients and tips for cooking together as a team (recipe card template provided)



It's not all vegetables in the garden kitchen. Fruit crisps and compotes are always a hit.

Local Food Resources

- *Toolkit: Serving Up Local for Long-Term Care Mealtime Engagement* from the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance (GHFFA)
- *Get Growing Guide: A Guide to Gardening with Older Adults* from Ecosource

This article originally appeared in the Spring 2020 Newsletter of the [Canadian Horticultural Therapy Association \(CHTA\)](#) and has been reprinted with permission.

Cut out the cards on the following pages to put together your own recipe to share your home's key ingredients and tips for cooking as a team.



Blooming Caravan
Creative Companionship for seniors
(416) 843-0584
info@bloomingcaravan.ca
www.bloomingcaravan.ca

Recipe for Cooking Together

From: _____

Ideal cooking companions: _____

Preparation time: _____ Serves: _____

Key Ingredients:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



Recipe for Cooking Together

From: _____

Ideal cooking companions: _____

Preparation time: _____ Serves: _____

Key Ingredients:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



Directions:



artwork by Megan Rooney
www.blossomingcaravan.ca



Directions:



artwork by Megan Rooney
www.blossomingcaravan.ca