

A welcoming design



By Nate Smelle

STANDING BAREFOOT IN the soil just after sunrise, I gathered a handful of tomatoes and another full of lettuce to fill my breakfast bowl with a fresh garden salad. Having grown a garden at my home in L'Amable each year since I moved here in 2006, I have learned a few useful things about growing food on my home turf. Not to say that I am an expert in growing food within the microclimate in which I reside, however, each year I jot down my observations in a book dedicated solely to the purpose of collecting wisdom from the garden.

Paying attention to all of the comings and goings in, on and above the soil has given me a deeper appreciation of the richness of our local biodiversity and how important it is to our personal health and well-being. Dedicating even more of my attention to these nomadic neighbours I have even come up with two lists: One of the creatures that help with pollination in the garden; and another of those that may have nibbled a little more than I would have liked. By no means is this a 'naughty or nice' list, it is strictly a record of what's happening in the garden. As valuable as these observations have been, they have still not been enough to ramp up my yield to a point where I could open up a booth at one of the local farmers' markets, like I had envisioned before my first growing season.

Another consistency in the annual gardening routine that I have recognized over the last nine years is that our growing season in North Hastings is anything but predictable. 'Has it always been this way,' I thought to myself as I plucked another tomato from the vine to eat on my walk back to the house. When the taste of freshness hit my tongue I looked around at the fruit still on the vine and realized how much better this season's tomatoes have done in comparison to the last couple of years. Having left a large number of host plants like milkweed among the tomatoes this year to encourage the Butterflies and Bees to spend a little more time in the garden pollinating, my strategy seemed to have worked. This idea came to me from a book I read a few years ago by architect William McDonough entitled, *Cradle to Cradle*. On numerous occasions in these paradigm shattering pages, McDonough encourages fellow architects, designers and creators to start building and creating things as if we planned to stay. He goes even one step further stating that we need to incorporate this design philosophy into our creations in a way that communicates with other species that they are also welcome to stay.

Traditionally builders, gardeners and designers do their best to keep the critters out of their gardens, off of the roof and away from any openings in their structures that may encourage any non-humans to settle in and share the space. McDonough believes instead that by accommodating for other species in our urban planning and architectural designs, we can start to live, work, play and grow in what he calls a more 'eco-effective' manner that respects the intrinsic value of all living things. Applying this design principle to my garden this year seems to have worked...at least that's what the tomatoes are telling me.