

Tending Together

A knowledge sharing and collaborative gardening story, of the Future Medicine Berry Patch



photo by Hives for Humanity: green leaves of a young soap berry plant nestled in wood chips with a popsicle stick sign

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photo by Hives for Humanity:
green leaves and cascading pink-red blossoms of a growing flowering-red-currant plant in the midst of the newly established berry patch, spring 2023, in dappled sunshine and shadows.

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About our work: land relations

We are a collaborative of people supported by the non-profit structure of Hives for Humanity Society.

We care deeply about plants and land, who believe in the medicine of our hands in the soil, and of the plants as teachers and healers.

We do this work of care on the unceded, traditional, ancestral and shared Coast Salish lands of the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish), Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) peoples.

The small piece of land we care for together is partly "owned" by the City of Vancouver and "stewarded" by the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation (Parks) and partly by the Italian Cultural Centre "Il Centro".

This work is administrated by the Non-Profit Organisation, Hives for Humanity Society, who both apply for funding through various grants, and hold Liability Insurance, which supports the Indigenous Lead on the Project, Leona Brown in participating in Parks' "Indigenous Stewardship" program, which requires these legal structures of Risk.

We are a group of both settler-descent, immigrant ancestry and urban Indigenous peoples, collaborating as artists, facilitators and tenders of this land, growing our knowledge together of the plants, the soil, the beings more-than-human who offer their bloom, berry, leaves, roots and songs. Read on to meet us and some of the plants we tend together.



photo by Hives for Humanity: logs placed along the base of the sloping berry patch, framed by living maple on the left and cottonwood on the right.

Artist Collaborators



Keenan Marchand

Keenan is a Syilx, Secwépemc and Mixed European multidisciplinary artist closest with their Syilx roots. They create visual art, music and writing.



Sarah Common

Sarah (she/they) is tending the berry patch and sharing their own artistry and plant knowledge through weaving and plant care. They are co-director of Hives for Humanity Society. Their ancestry is Irish.



Leona Brown

Leona is a Gitxsan & Nisga'a mother and plant knowledge sharer.



Cait Gentle

Cait (they/them) is queer and neurodivergent care worker, medicine grower and seed saver of Doukhobor Russian and Irish descent. Their personal practice is named Gentle Geographies, and they are co-director of Hives for Humanity Society.



Gina Badger

Gina (they/she) is a clinical energetic herbalist and queer nonbinary femme of mixed western european ancestry born on Cree territory and currently living on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tseil-Waututh nations.



Franki Francisco

Franki (they/she) is a mixed-race settler who doesn't know a lot *about* plants, but tries to pay attention in learning *from* them.

Hand Holding: digging through colonisation

A conversation with Leona: questions and transcription by Sarah, responses shared orally by Leona, witnessed and nourished by Franki and Keenan at our closing gathering. Where we reference other works, gratitudes and inspirations, we note them below each section with asterix markings.

Sarah: *In doing this work we are existing in multiple tensions - different ways of relating to the land. We are on unceded land. We are in a place where there used to be an open water way, before it was paved over by the colonial system. The berry patch is between two colonial markings of ownership of the land: in this system half is owned publicly by City of Vancouver and stewarded by the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, known as "Beaconsfield Park" – and half is owned privately by the Italian Cultural Centre. We are also – in this work together – being administrated by the non-profit Hives for Humanity, providing the Insurance and Registrations which have been required to access the support of the City and Parks. You have named this as "hand holding" – and we have worked to speak about this tension every time we gather together – might you share more about this tension, and how you navigate it, in accessing the "Indigenous Stewardship" program offered by Parks and in any other ways you want to share?*

Leona: What has been changing is how Parks is envisioning things a bit differently, they were holding my hand at the beginning, telling me what to do, and now I am holding their hand and offering my knowledge, and what policies might change to support pieces of land like this being stewarded. It's great movement, from a lot of anger at the beginning, feeling like I was being restricted, set off to the side in a small space after being asked for my consultation in developing these big pieces, my ideas being taken. It felt like being put on Reserve, when they have hold on all the land. That was the start of my path with Parks and we have come a long way.* I feel I get more input now, that my thoughts are valued. Between now and 2018, when Parks were bringing down Cedar trees in ceremony in Brewer's Park, and intervening to bring in ceremony. Bringing learnings from Resurfacing** to bring that ceremony in. We've tried to keep this idea going, for any time trees come down in parks, that they be re-used instead of mulched.*** Even a rotten tree can sit and help feed the soil. It may look "messy" – it's not the European ideal of a "tidy" garden space with right angles and edges. It has so much use though. Connecting these fallen trees to Indigenous peoples for traditional uses. Moving away from the boxes to forest gardens. (continued next page)

What we are doing is seeing how these plants grow together, how they support each other, and how they grow the soil. We are not only trying to decolonize our minds, but also the lands and soils we want to grow our foods in. We are thinking about compost, about soil, about connection – and in ceremony. We are considering traditional foods, like salmon, incorporating that into the compost to remind the soils of who they are. How does the structure of the soil change as we do this work, and does it help the native plants we are growing – we are going deeper, into the soil, into our ancestral foods and ways.****

** Gratitude to Krista Voth and to Diana Day 2018 to present.*

*** Gratitude to Jolene Andrews and the Resurfacing History project 2019*

**** Additional Tree Ceremony work including with Hives for Humanity Honouring Willow and Welcoming Willow ceremonies 2021, 2022*

*****Gratitude to Ancestral Food Ways and Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty (WGIFS) and to Britannia Community Centre and Collingwood Neighbourhood House for the Bokashi Project 2023*

Sarah: *We have been planting berries native to these lands, in a gesture* towards a future berry patch that may be tended as commons and shared as medicine – when you imagine this future berry patch, what do you see, hear, feel, smell, taste?*

Leona: *From the beginning, when there were the honey bee apiary and pollinator meadow, to now – it's just the berry patch we are trying to tend, trying to prevent from it being paved over. I want to create more signage, so boundaries are known and seen, so the berry patch is protected. I imagine more kids here, as the berries grow, laughing and playing and picking berries. As we are walking against the winds of colonization, as we are working next to this concrete, development, and today this wood-chipper – this is the soundscape we exist alongside. How much data can we gather as this berry patch continues to grow for the future? This landscape is changing, the water is being resurfaced,** how will this feed the gardens and support them thriving? What water was here before, and how did it flow, and who travelled along it between communities? ****

**Gesturing towards decolonial futures language reference*

***Still Moon Arts Society are facilitating this work of Shedding Light on Still Creek*

****Bruce Macdonald, author of Vancouver - A Visual History, a resource we discuss often as we consider water ways*

Sarah: *In the sound piece we made,* you visit the Burdock and Soap Berry – what draws you to these plants and what do you hope to share/learn alongside them?*

Leona: Burdock is one of the first plants I started learning about, I learned that my use as a medicine is different from food uses in Asian cultures, it's amazing. I've heard of elders up the coast growing dandelion for roots too, for food. And I'm so amazed to keep learning these different uses in other cultures. I cherish this lesson. It was an early outing that we had [Sarah and Leona] to try and find it: from a photo, into the plant and into our hands.

The soap berry is more a memory, the berries red or green in the jar, but now I get to watch how it grows, how it might thrive, how much it can make, and if I can bring it to other spaces and have a big patch to share. It was a treat we didn't get often as kids, but it was so special, and we'd mix it by hand. It brings me back to plants I knew as a kid, in use, but I didn't know what the plant looked like. Devil's club I knew what it looked like but I didn't know how to use it, we just left it alone a while. And now I can show my kids this stuff, I am intentionally showing them, whether they know it or not.

Sarah: *I am reminded as I consider this work, of the open hands of the Hu'ums [Gitxsan word, for what in English is called Devil's Club, shared by Leona] and the node-based growth that is possible with their growing tips, as well as their seed dispersal methods. Their growth is slow, their medicine is strong. Is there anything you want to share about our time with this plant – trying to find the right conditions for their growth, including good soil, running water, shade of trees, and relationships of respect?*

I have a root system at home of Hu'ums from a patch, of about 10 who were growing together, the roots at the crown are moss covered, the roots grow out in many directions, to where new patches emerge from rhizomatic growth, they can go a long way. And then where you see one plant knocked down, it can begin to grow again from the nodes. I've been in places where I'm salvaging, medicine that is growing in a place where it is going to be removed for development.* Usually we would only take what we could use, what we need, but in this case we are salvaging everything we can. I went up there to find more of the medicine of devil's club which we were using for my daughter. We went up to learn about cedar,** how to pull it. I wanted to see the mountains, the forest, what it looked like.

**Sound digitally stitched together by Sarah; all sound recordings made by Leona and with her son, Jack, at our summer gatherings 2023.*

**Katzie territory, Burke Mountain*

***With Resurfacing History project, with Master Cedar Weaver: Leonard Williams, and with Jolene Andrew*

We went up to where developers are cutting into the mountain, past all the new streets and houses, and past the mall below, feeling the trauma and history, thinking about the women- MMIW2S+.^{***} We went up for cedar and we found moss and ferns, and then walking up a ways on the bike path and I turned and there was a patch of devil's club just off the side, her hands huge and waving at me, and I yelled ahead to Jolene and then we returned after cedar to talk about the devil's club, and when we returned Jolene shared that it was the creator showing reciprocity for all the work I'd been doing in community, it was the first time I'd heard that word. And – for now – there is an agreement with the developers that we can harvest until they build without interruption.

^{***} Trigger Warning, violence: this now-mall is the site of the serial murderer's once-farm. A violent atrocity of recent history with ongoing and present impact, and a legacy of colonial violence. The March for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, Two Spirit Peoples + happens on February 14 annually in so called Vancouver, and begins at the Carnegie Centre.

Sarah: *Is there anything else you want to share at this time, in this way?*

Leona: Everything I do revolves around food, it has been such a journey since Covid hit, getting involved in online conversations,* getting invited to more and more and then all of a sudden, I'm running for Mayor.** Where did it lead me, wanting to know about our Indigenous food?!

And now I am growing tobacco^{***} and it brings people in, or soap berry, and it calls people in, all so that Indigenous people can come back to our food, can watch our plants grow, learn how to harvest, how to preserve, bring those systems back.

And then I ask: so how do I use this space to change policy, to have space for healing: emotionally, spiritually, physically.

Not all these plants grew together, but that's part of the experiment. How do these plants grow together; support each other? It is important to have logs so we can sit and have conversation.

I started in Parks, and now I am trying to work City wide. How does nature come back? The little birds, the bees, the little mice are here with us.

**With Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House and with Vancouver Urban Food Forest Foundation*

*** Leona Brown for Mayor 2022!*

**** With the Centre for Family Equity (formerly Single Mother's Alliance)*

Refugia Futures: vignettes on the land by Gina Badger

By the time I join the berry patch's tenders, months of planning, negotiations, and prayers have gone into creating space for Leona's decolonial vision. The slope has been cleared of Himalayan blackberry and the plantings went in weeks ago. While we're weeding I mistakenly pull out one of the plantings: native trailing blackberry. As I toss it on the compost heap I realize my mistake, and I'm swamped in shame—but this can still be fixed. The blackberry's roots, not yet enmeshed in the ground, are only minimally damaged. I dig another hole, apologize, welcome the roots to their new home. I've been reminded: to find my place here I need to go slow.

Go slow



The parkland

I'm here in a kayak on holiday and the spirit of the berry patch is here too. Everything growing on this tiny island in *číšaaʔath* territory is a food or medicine plant: salmonberry, currant, apple, strawberry, saskatoonberry, yarrow. Some I don't recognize but later ID: evergreen huckleberry, twinberry. A food garden from a time before this time, before the park's conservation mandate, perhaps even before the river and channel were scattered, creating the Broken Group Islands as we know them today? Alongside the rising water and the park and the settlers on vacation, there are *always* refugia.

I'm here as an artist 3.5 km from my apartment on unceded xʷməθkʷə́yəm, Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh and sə́lilwə́taʔ territory and 200 years of settler-colonial disturbance has failed to make this soil anything other than native land. The berry patch, with a parking lot to the north and a turfed-over stream to the south, is full of plants gifted, dug, and blessed: soapwort, red-flowering currant, trailing blackberry, evergreen huckleberry. They've come to join the messy healing process of this hopeful little slope. The life of the land as native land thrives through tending—no conservation here. The life of the land as native land is pure process—no ecological climax state here. Only riot of life in the mess of tending.

The city



Gifts



We watch the seeds of naturalized plants wake up in the soil. Bindweed, Himalayan blackberry, thistle, hedge mustard, mullein, plantain, burdock, queen anne's lace, red clover. Their roots aerate, shade, and knit the soil, fix nitrogen. We pull them out only when they throw too much shade, when they choke out the plantings, before they set their seed. We make baskets. Someone arrives with herring roe, hu'ums beads, a soil test, strawberries, honey. Leona says: when you receive a gift, pay it forward.

Future Medicine, Native Berry Patch: a living map by Keenan Marchand

Map Meanings:

The name lettering is filled with depictions of the different fruits and berries of the garden that will hopefully come in time for those who haven't yet entered that period of growth in their lives!

The "berries" are as follows, with Himalayan Blackberry as the first "t" and the last "h". I thought I'd have the tail ends be Himalayan blackberry, as it is both a reality of the space and an invasive, that despite its destructive qualities does offer delicious berries and other gifts with us.

T: Himalayan Blackberry

H: Salmonberry

E: Soapberry

N: Oregon Grape

A: Red Flowering Currant

T: Trailing Blackberry

I: Wild Raspberry

V: Black Huckleberry

E: Red Huckleberry

B: Salal

E: Black Gooseberry

R: Pacific Crabapple

R: Smooth Sumac

Y: Evergreen Huckleberry

P: Blackcap Raspberry

A: Coastal Strawberry

T: Thimbleberry

C: Wild Plum

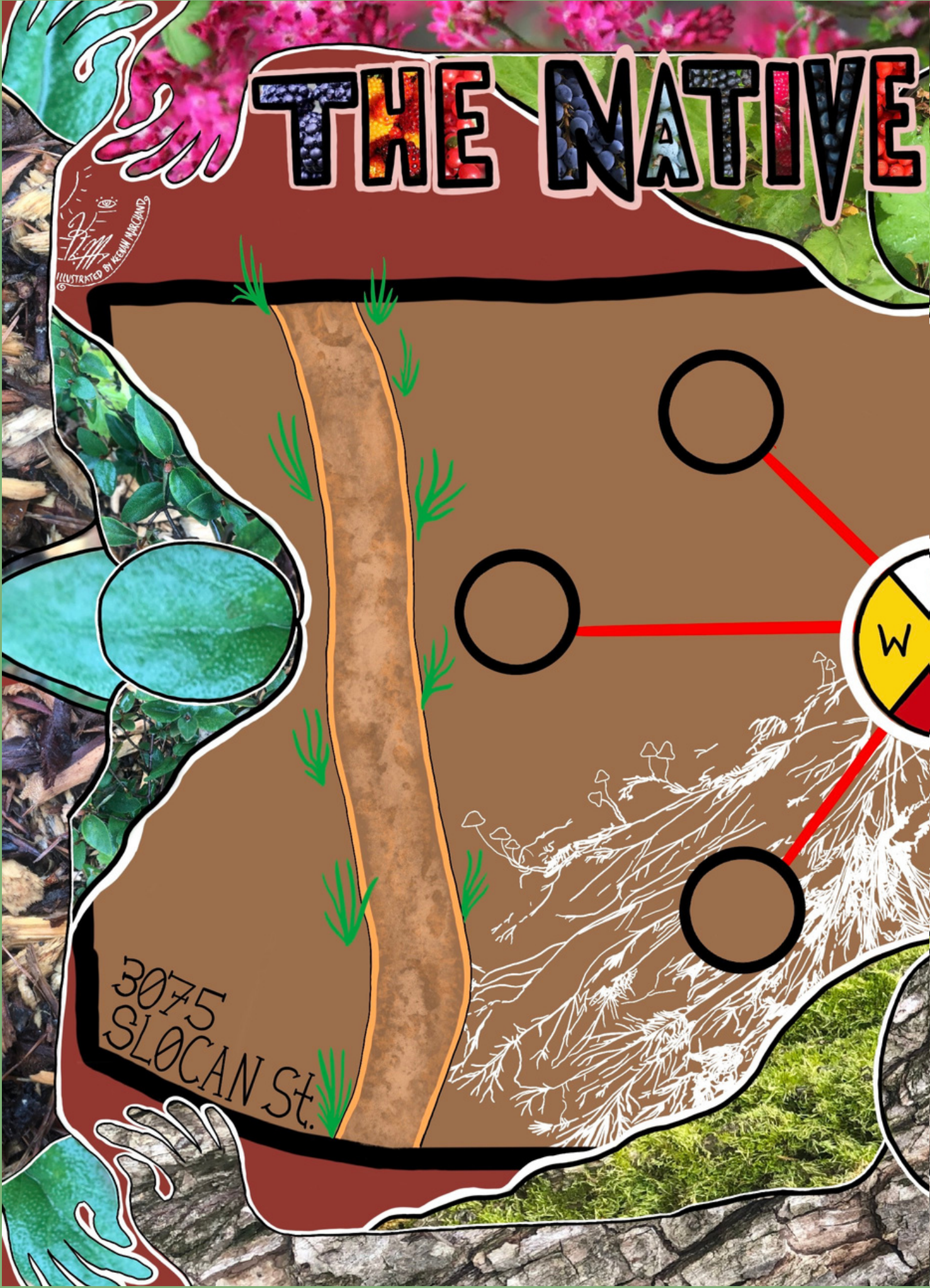
H: Himalayan Blackberry

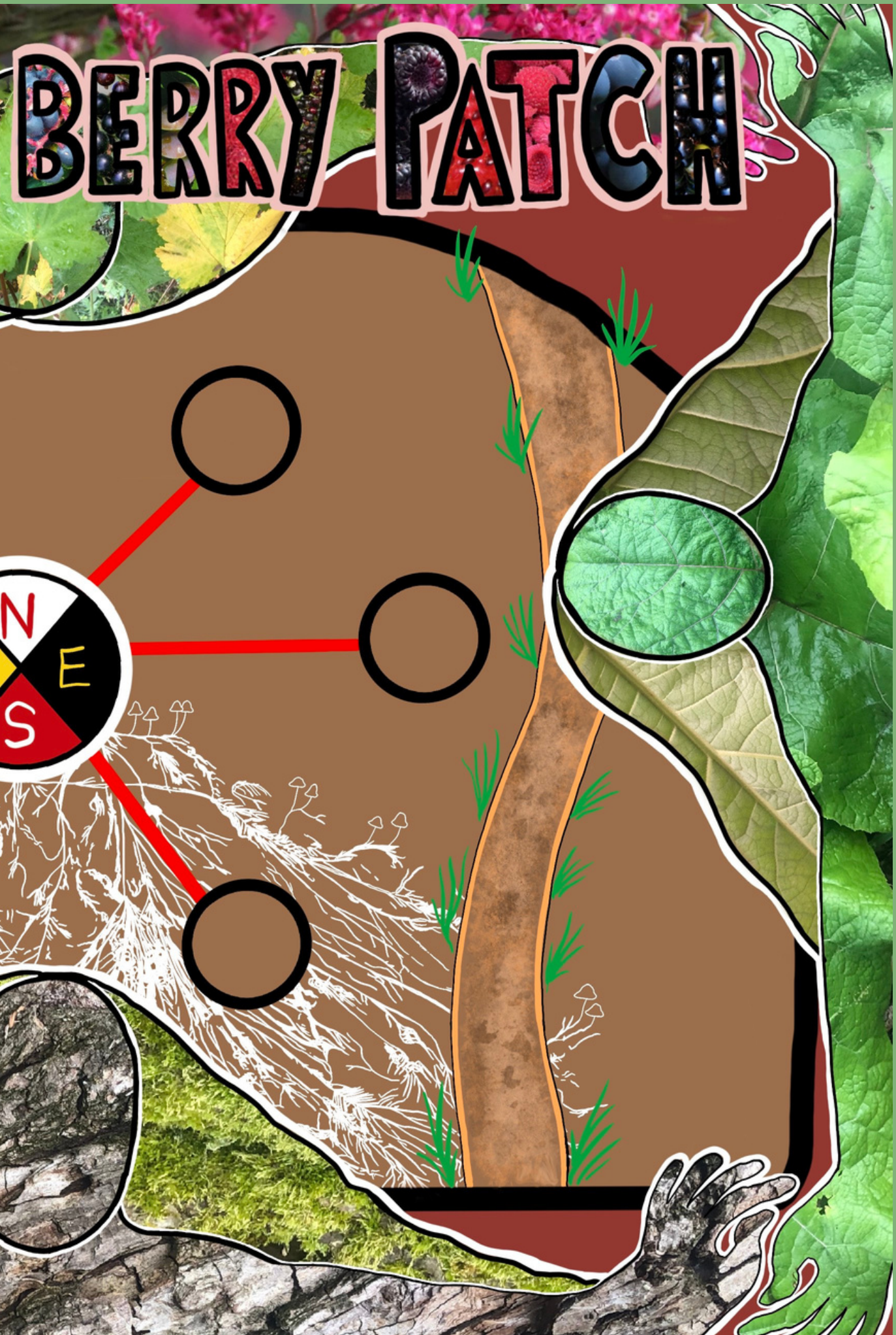
[continued after map centrefold on next pages ...]

THE NATIVE

ILLUSTRATED BY REGINA MARCANDI

3075
SLOCAN ST.





The four plant figures [forming the border] are:

North: Red Flowering Currant

West: Soapberry

East: Burdock

South: Willow

I took the idea offered by folks [tending together in the garden] of a web of stories and different tenders of the garden to create a sort of “web wheel”.

The intent is for [the wheel] to act as a changing gallery through seasons of different focuses, whether that is plants or other stories of importance in relation to the garden.

The spokes of the wheel are red, meant to convey that even though we may not always be aware of it ourselves, it is seen by the spirit world, whether that is our ancestors or the ancestors of our plant and fungal relatives, as well as the land itself.

Knowing our Soils: Sarah Common

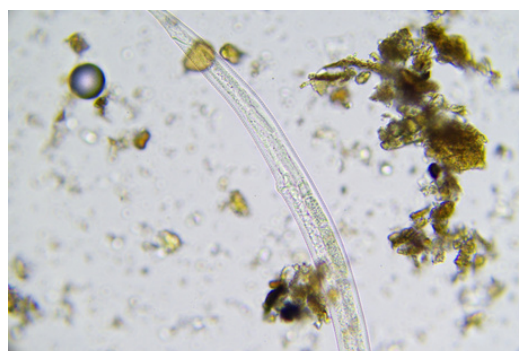
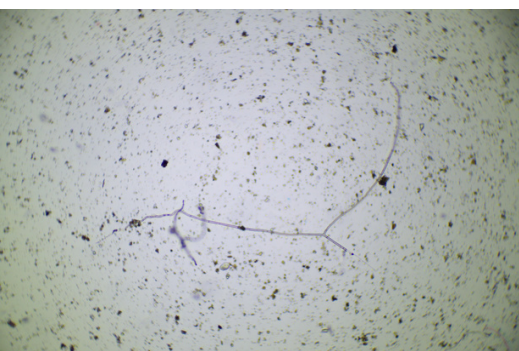
As we think about how to tend the land, we reach our hands into the soil. We gather at the Berry Patch and notice, who is here, and who is not? We notice and identify the invasive plants, and where they are bringing bloom, where they are holding soil, where they are taking over or constricting growth of others. We remove those who are not sharing the room to grow, we know the dynamics may shift with time, that we will come back another day and make a different decision, and our work is to notice the change and learn from it. The invasive blackberry, the morning glory, the wild carrot, the tansy, the knotweeds, the thistle – what are they teaching us?

We notice and celebrate the native berries, and the naturalized medicines showing up in the patch. The burdock which was there before our work together, and is now thriving with more room to grow; the honeysuckle we planted which is trellising itself in the Nootka rose, protected by burlap, offering an edge to our space; the flowering red currant, bright blooms cascading sweet nectar through summer, the berry which we have found best suited to this location, this season; the soap berries which were asked for, which made their way to us through gift, finding their way.

We had two volunteers join our work who contributed their skills and resources and attention in learning our soil, so we might better understand who grows here, who does not, who thrives here, who struggles to survive – the conditions for growth that are present – in the plant, water, mineral, fungal, bacterial and other living components of our soil. Thank you Ryan for taking our soil samples through your process and sharing your report and Fekre for looking under your microscope to identify life in our soil. Our soil report (next page) contains three sites: 1) the Hastings Folk Garden at 117 East Hastings, 2) the Berry Patch soil after we amended with plants, wood chip and burlap mulch, soil and ash, and 3) the Berry Patch without amendments.

Our plan at this time, as we get to know our soil, is to amend with additional carbon-rich mulch, both to suppress the leafy annual weeds, feed the woody perennial berries, and promote a fungal rich soil, to emulate the soil conditions of the natural forest edge habitat of many of these berries.

Photos below by Fekre Yohannes Mulgeta, left to right: fungal strand, nematode and soil aggregates, fungal strand.



Soil Report

Job Name: **Ryan Nassichuk**

Date: 6/5/2023

Company: **Ryan Nassichuk**

Submitted By:

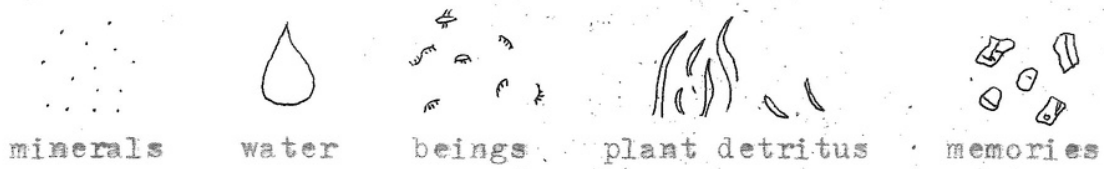
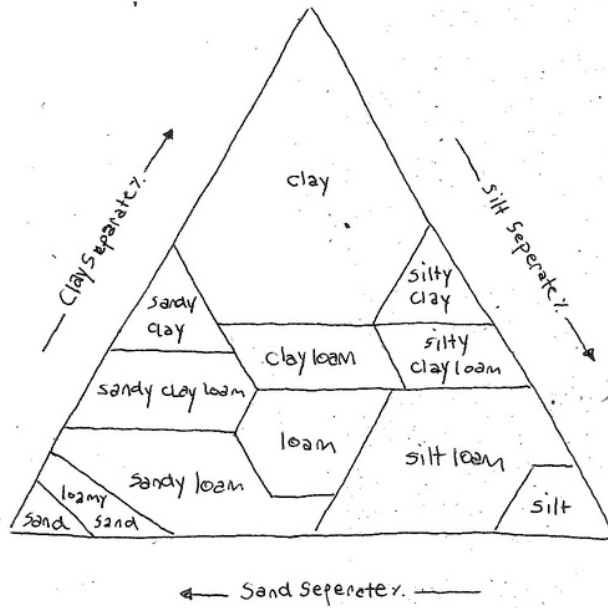
Sample Location		Folk	Beacons Fld	Beacons Fld			
Sample ID		Garden	Nat Berry	Unamended			
Lab Number		135	136	137			
Sample Depth in inches		6	6	6			
Total Exchange Capacity (M. E.)		14.53	10.42	11.32			
pH of Soil Sample		7.1	6.6	7.0			
Organic Matter, Percent		18.91	8.53	6.82			
ANIONS	SULFUR: p.p.m.	15	17	9			
	Mehlich III Phosphorous: $\mu\text{s (P O) }^2$ lbs / acre	785	556	430			
EXCHANGEABLE CATIONS	CALCIUM: lbs / acre	Desired Value					
		Value Found	3951	2835	3080		
		Deficit	5075	3230	3866		
	MAGNESIUM: lbs / acre	Desired Value	418	300	326		
		Value Found	217	201	199		
		Deficit	-201	-99	-127		
	POTASSIUM: lbs / acre	Desired Value	453	325	353		
		Value Found	147	246	200		
		Deficit	-306	-79	-153		
	SODIUM: lbs / acre	56	33	34			
	BASE SATURATION %	Calcium (60 to 70%)	87.34	77.46	85.35		
		Magnesium (10 to 20%)	6.22	8.03	7.32		
Potassium (2 to 5%)		1.30	3.03	2.26			
Sodium (.5 to 3%)		0.84	0.69	0.66			
Other Bases (Variable)		4.30	4.80	4.40			
Exchangable Hydrogen (10 to 15%)		0.00	6.00	0.00			
TRACE ELEMENTS	Boron (p.p.m.)	0.72	0.57	0.77			
	Iron (p.p.m.)	226	194	191			
	Manganese (p.p.m.)	22	16	20			
	Copper (p.p.m.)	4.87	2.47	9.23			
	Zinc (p.p.m.)	24.01	9.43	22.43			
		534	1088	1289			
	Aluminum (p.p.m.)						
OTHER							

Logan Labs, LLC

Sensing our Soils: Cait Gentle



soil texture triangle

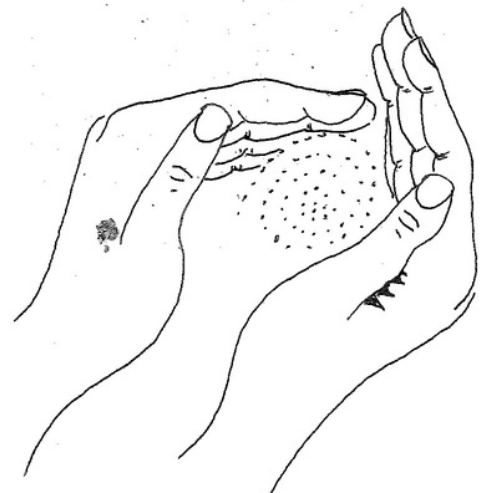


feel test: rub moist soil between your fingers and describe how it feels

SOIL TEXTURE

FEEL TEST

SAND	Grainy, little floury material
LOAMY SAND	Grainy, slight amount of floury material
SANDY LOAM	Grainy, considerable amount of floury material
LOAM	Evident graininess but fairly soft + smooth
SILTY LOAM	Slight graininess and floury.



sensing soil

what are we haunted by?



walking

the edges

in quiet

witnessing time & space



considering borders & boundaries

between

states

the striation of realms



building tools for perception.

we leave such curious clues to the ways we live



the soil memories



dusty, rooty

sandy loam



cottonwood buds

pottery



another future foretold

standing in the middle

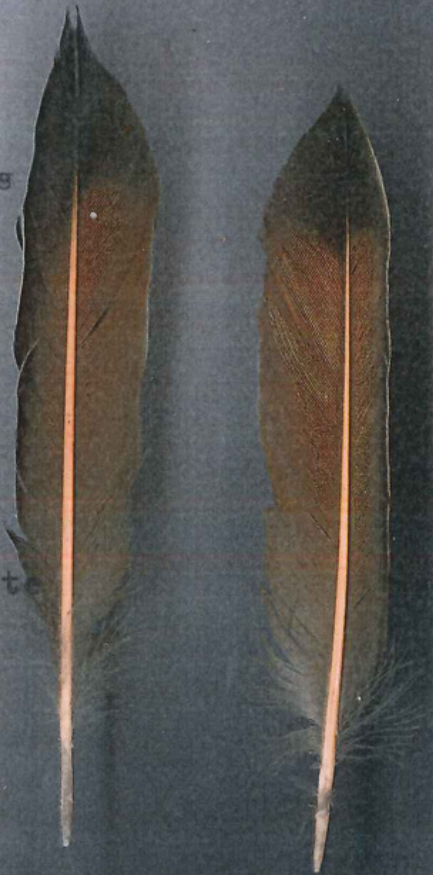
in the incoherence of
beginnings and ends
of futures past

stay low,
i tell myself

notice shapes,
relationships and conditions
at the boundary layer

how will we be remembered?

how will
our wholes
break
down
into
parts?



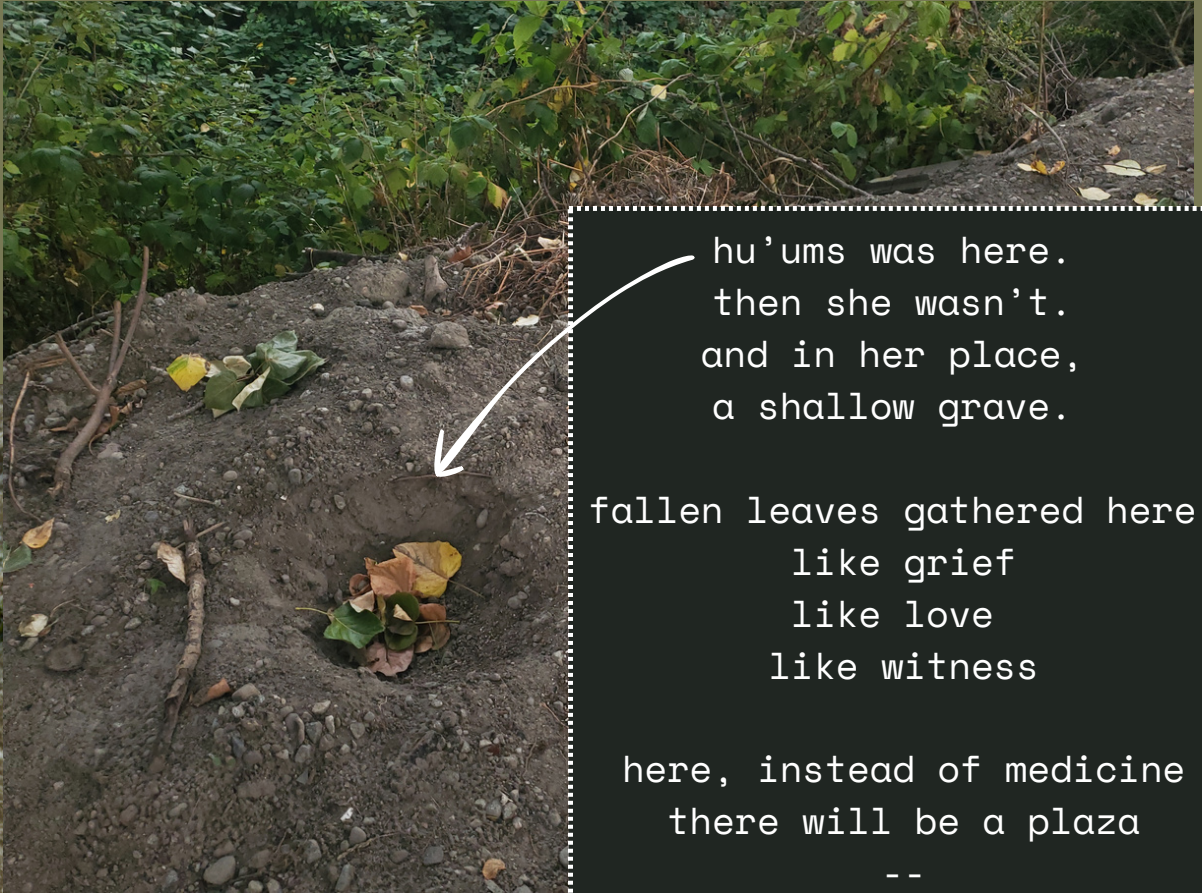
deteriorate
back
into
the
earth



how might the

last remembered

Hu'ums was here (franki)



hu'ums was here.
then she wasn't.
and in her place,
a shallow grave.

fallen leaves gathered here
like grief
like love
like witness

here, instead of medicine
there will be a plaza

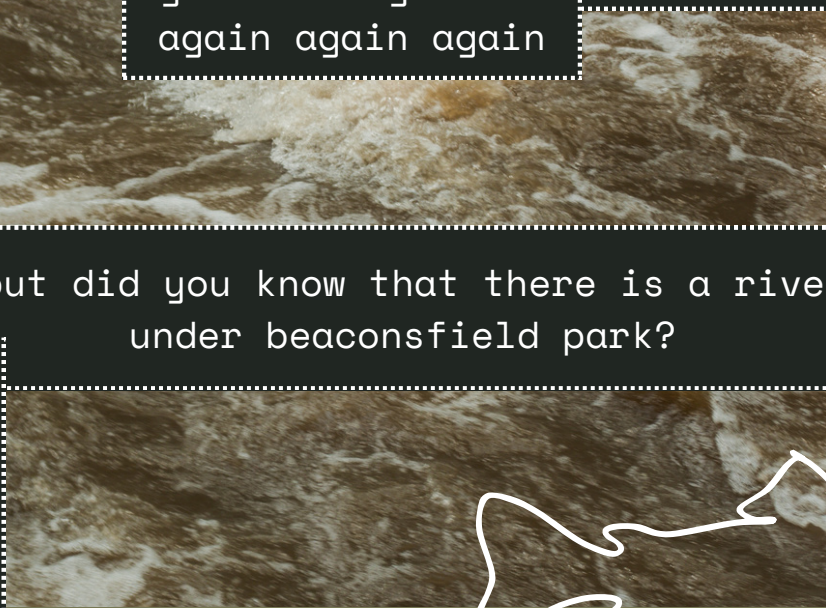
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way must be made

this. again and
again and again and
again again again

but did you know that there is a river
under beaconsfield park?

under a
manhole
cover, a
subterranean
rush of
water strong
and fast
enough to
sweep
someone away



root and seed and rushing water
-- way must be made

Resourcing the work: Hives for Humanity

Hives for Humanity provides administrative support for community engaged work, including grant writing/reporting, relationship deepening and hosting role for events. The Berry Patch we tend together in this work is resourced through the Neighbourhood Matching Fund, supported by the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation (Parks).

2022: The Neighbourhood Matching Fund (\$10k) supported a series of workshops to plan, prepare, plant and care for the Berry Patch. This involved the mowing of the (invasive) blackberry, the digging out of their roots, the planting of native berry plants, and the tending of those plants into winter.

Parks provided in kind donations of soil and plants, as well as tools, to this project. In addition, Hives for Humanity volunteers provided in kind donations of time, on rainy days digging blackberry roots and planting native berries: Ali, Horace, Willie, Rob, Frazier, Jim, Vera. And Hives for Humanity Staff gave their care and skills: Paula, Kian, phin, Travis.

2023 Neighbourhood Matching Fund (\$10k): supported a series of workshops with artist collaborators highlighted in this report, to bring together and share our knowledge of plants, tend the land for future medicine, and create resources to publicly share what we grew in understanding over the season.

Parks provided in kind donations of soil, wood chips, plants and logs to the space this year. Hives for Humanity community members gave additional in kind donations of their time and skill: Fekre, Ryan, Bailey, Zac, Steph, Chloe, Elle, Noah, Jack - thank you for your care.

Photo by Hives for Humanity: team of tenders celebrating the shared time and signage installation at the berry patch, summer 2023 - Fekre, Bailey, Zac, Keenan.



Photo by Hives for Humanity: team of tenders celebrating the planting of the berry patch, fall 2022: Horace, Frasier, Keenan, Sarah, Ali, Rob, Willie.



Notes...

Notes...

Join Us: Accessing the Berry Patch

Beaconsfield Park is located at 3075 Slocan Street in so-called "Vancouver, BC". The park has flattened gravel pathways that slope, and the berry patch is located on a steeper sloped embankment at the North end of the Park.

There are logs for seating along the lower edge of the Berry Patch, by the pathway.

Gloves and hand tools are provided to volunteers, and we bring seating and a shade tent to our gatherings, along with light snacks of berries and salmon - honouring the food of this land, the water and the forest inextricably linked in health and healing, nourishment and care.

We are working to establish a native berry patch that (re-)naturalises to this slope. There is a creek submerged beneath the concrete and fill of the Park and pavement of the surrounding city, which local advocates are working to resurface.

For now, we bring additional water to the patch, as the plants reach their roots down to find water. This water is accessed through a spigot and job site lock box 200m away, which contains a long hose, sprinkler heads and the water key.

If you would like to volunteer with us we will share with you how to open this box and bring water to the garden. Look for news on next season's collaboration in the Hives for Humanity newsletter:

www.hivesforhumanity.com



**photo by Hives
for Humanity:**

the berry patch
in late summer
sun as we
water and tend
the soil and
plants; the
bright grass of
the park
shines, where
soon, waters of
Still Creek will
be re-surfaced!