



The Seed

Newsletter

The Western
Environment
Centre
wecnl.ca



In this issue....

- Holistic gardening and food preserving
- Tips on eating locally
- Book recommendations
- Voting and the environment
- Updates
- And much more!

Fall 2021

Editorial

As we move into the beautiful autumn season in Western Newfoundland, we can see evidence of the bounty of the summer harvest! This newsletter delves into that theme.

Gardening in fact is one of the few activities that is virtually COVID-proof in the sense that we do not have to venture too far outside our home space to engage in it. Being outside working in the soil is also a welcome breather from our virtual jobs inside. Likewise, most of the materials needed for gardening are easy to acquire locally. In this issue, you can read about the value of holistic gardening, along with some tips on how to practice it effectively. There is also an article on food-preserving as well as useful book recommendations from NL Public Libraries.

Undoubtedly, there is a connection between gardening and reducing our carbon footprint. Much of the food sold in stores in Western Newfoundland is shipped in from other places, sometimes quite far for those exotic food items. The more food that we grow ourselves, the less food we have to have transported here. Likewise, the more we buy from local farmers, the less food we have to buy from off the island. There are tips in this issue that provide insight in that regard. In aggregate terms, the practice of buying locally grown foods can make a difference in fighting climate change.

This newsletter contains a summary of an update from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. These reports are based on the best science available. The updates and reports have been coming out for decades, and the language has become more and more adamant about the need to curb our reliance on fossil fuels. We in Western Newfoundland do not feel the effects of climate change quite as severely as other parts of Canada, such as British Columbia. But everything is connected in some way and there is no more pressing issue than this one.

Citizens can do something about it, and exercising voting rights is a good place to start. You can read in this issue a piece on voting rights from a historical perspective. Because they have taken so long to become accepted by those in power and because it has taken so much effort to broaden their application, voting rights should be taken seriously by those who can exercise them. Voting rights entail responsibilities, not just to vote but also to become informed on the issues so as to vote wisely. Ultimately, if the reason why we vote involves making this world a better place, certainly environmental issues such as climate change should be prominent criteria for selecting worthy candidates.

Edwin Bezzina

Contact info

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 (w) www.wecnl.ca
 Have a look at our redesigned website!

Check us out on Facebook!



You can find us by searching 'WEC NL'

We're also on Twitter



(www.twitter.com/wecnl)

We welcome comments, questions, and submissions!



Feel free to write to the editor (Edwin Bezzina, ebezzina@grenfell.mun.ca)

cover photo: Bottle Cove (photo courtesy K. Temple)

WEC's Mandate

We're dedicated to engaging our community in food and climate action through impactful, educational initiatives.

WEC's Mission

Projects

We aim to initiate, manage, and run interactive community environmental projects.

Engagement

We're committed to engaging citizens in dialogue on environmental issues in a balanced and informed manner.

Community

We strive to help build a community of environmentally active citizens.

How to become a WEC member (and how to encourage friends to become members)

Becoming a member is a fabulous first step to becoming environmentally involved in your local community! As a member, you'll receive the WEC newsletter, updates on WEC events, and free entrance to WEC workshops. Please contact Katie Temple at info@wecnl.ca (the annual membership fee is \$15.00).

We are excited to announce that **we are improving our member program** to help build a bigger, stronger environmental community in western NL! Member fees will stay the same (\$15/year), but we are bringing you some brand new services and resources. Members will continue to receive the newsletter and updates and will enjoy voting privileges at our AGM as well as free access to WEC workshops. Members also will receive access to:

- all workshop videos
- prize draws for eco-friendly products
- input into upcoming WEC projects
- first notification on jobs and volunteer opportunities
- the chance to take part in group-buying opportunities for products like seeds, sprouting supplies, and more
- a private members-only Facebook page where resources will be posted

Other new services or resources may also be added in future. All incoming and current members for 2021 will automatically get access to these services and resources.

Our annual fee is \$15 and can be paid by e-transfer to info@wecnl.ca or cheque/cash to 50 Main St, Corner Brook, NL A2H 1C4

If you have any questions, please email Katie Temple at info@wecnl.ca

Board of Directors

Glen Keeling.....Chair	Anna Burry	Liz Combdon
Simon Jansen.....Vice-Chair	Mervyn Dean	Jeri Graham
Lucas Knill.....Treasurer	Ryan Hughes	Heidi Janes
Edwin Bezzina...Newsletter Coordinator; Secretary	Rebecca Shea	Alice Will
<hr/>		
Katie Temple.....Executive Director	Leanna Butters..... Newsletter Editorial Assistant	

Welcome to Our New Board Members

Anna Burry grew up picking wild berries and exploring the pond and wooded area nearby her childhood home in Little Rapids, Newfoundland. After attending Grenfell Campus, she spent many years in Prince Edward Island, Ontario, and more recently over a year in Costa Rica.



She enjoys learning from others and the sharing of ideas. Her happy place is her flower garden and a renewed interest in growing her own food and foraging, some of which she preserves using a variety of methods. Her passion for sustainable living, community engagement and a healthy climate are what brought her to being a part of WEC.

Alice Will

Originally from Portugal Cove, Alice settled on the west coast of the island after working across Canada and globally in the adventure tourism industry and with Parks Canada. She has a love of nature, active living, and community building. Holding a M.A. in Geography focused on the human dimensions of wildlife management, Alice has an interest in park planning, understanding how communities can become more connected to their natural environment, and working to foster strong environmental community values.



Her background in adventure tourism, environmental resource management, guiding, interpretation, and natural & social science have given her strong skills in project management, communications and community engagement. In her free time, Alice can be found volunteering with the Bay of Islands Search and Rescue Team, gardening, cycling, hiking, and teaching yoga and spin classes.

New Board Members *(continued from the previous page)*

Liz Combdon is deeply passionate about living holistically in all aspects of life. Yoga came to her during a time of healing in 2010. In 2013 she followed the Universe's call and took her 200-hour Hatha yoga training in Western Canada. She has trained in Hatha, Meditation and is a Reiki & Crystal Reiki Master & Healer, incorporating her knowledge into all aspects of her work. Expanding on her love for living holistically, Liz completed a Holistic Nutrition Program in 2019, becoming a registered professional with the Canadian Association of Integrative Nutrition. Liz is deeply dedicated to living close to the Earth and can be found with her toes deep in the dirt on her homestead or wandering in the magic of the wilderness in The Long Range Mountains with her husband and furbaby.



Other Great Ways to Get Involved in WEC

join one of the working committees *join the Facebook group and invite others to do the same*

attend WEC events and workshops *become a WEC volunteer*

participate in the WEC community garden *attend the WEC AGM*

Kids' Corner

By Atlas, age 6



Send your kids' environmentally themed art submissions to info@wecnl.ca and it may be featured in our next newsletter!



A Garden of Life: The Interconnectedness of Holistic Gardening

The word 'holistic' means to look at something as a whole and not at the sum of its parts, to provide a connectedness with the environment and the person. By incorporating holism into gardening, we are creating an environment that creates synergy between the earth, the plants and you, the gardener. There is a special bond that is created when you sit to eat a nutrient-dense meal grown holistically with your own hands and energy.

But what is holistic gardening? It's a space created to encourage flourishing ecosystems, eliminate the need for chemical pesticides, and heal the earth and the body through the removal of toxins and the renewal of healthy nutrients. A holistic garden is teeming with a sustainable diversity of life.



Styles of Holistic Gardening

Organic Garden

An organic garden focuses on growing food without the use of chemicalized pesticides.

Biodynamic Garden

Biodynamics is a respect for the energy within a garden space. This style of gardening uses techniques such as moon-guided planting, composting, manual weeding and worm farming to create interconnectedness among all things.

Permaculture Garden

Permaculture is conscientiously recreating natural ecosystems to offset the depletion from monoculture farming. With a focus on replenishment, techniques such as no-till digging, companion planting, and crop rotation are used.



Mini ecosystems interacting within the greater ecosystem of your garden create connectedness with you and the environment that surrounds you. Plant food to nourish your body. Plant flowers to support the ecosystem and create a beautiful visual experience. Plant herbs to heal and calm the body. Use physical work to connect your energy with the energy of plants and the earth. Spend time in quiet within the garden to reflect, meditate, and heal the soul.
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A Garden of Life: The Interconnectedness of Holistic Gardening

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Tips for gardening holistically:

- Grow only what you need; share the extra with your community.
- Composting is essential to creating a healthy garden.
- Reuse the rainwater the earth naturally provides to you.
- Don't rush the process of your garden. Enjoy each aspect of growth.
- Respect the earth as a living being with what you use to how you care for her.



Natural products you can use in your holistic garden:

- Bananas, peel and fruit: Blend with water and feed to cucumbers, tomatoes and peppers. This will support early growth and cellular development. Calcium is also critical for the uptake and metabolism of nitrogen, which is needed for foliage growth.
- Kelp: Being abundant in this province, kelp is an excellent natural fertilizer, with over 70 micro-nutrients needed by plants for healthy growth.
- Epsom Salts, magnesium supplement: Mist onto the leaves of your plants to assist in photosynthesis and carbohydrate metabolism.

When I walk into my greenhouse and pick a tomato fresh from the vine, I know the process from seed to consumption and I know the nutrients that I'm putting into my body as I bite into that fresh tomato. When I take a bowl and a pair of scissors and wander barefoot through the fresh growing produce while I pick my supper, I know I'm connected holistically to my garden. Like our bodies, each ecosystem, zone and location has different needs. A holistic garden takes your environment and incorporates many styles of gardening to create a space that feeds you body, mind and soul. By focusing on creating biodiversity that works for your specific needs and environment, you are creating a holistic garden.



Liz Combdon

photos courtesy L. Combdon

Food Preserving

Since this is my first article for the WEC newsletter and harvest season is upon us as I write this, I thought writing about the benefits and methods of preserving the harvest bounty and other foods would be a great start. I am writing not as an expert on the subject but rather as someone who has a strong interest in preserving food for later use (please consult your national food agency's website for the most up-to-date information on best practices for safe food preservation).

The history of food preservation goes back to ancient times. Nomadic peoples would follow grazing animals, which was their main food source, and the hunter-gatherers would hunt and forage food to bring back to their home or village for their food supply. As agricultural practices were developed globally over generations, people were able to settle in an area and build communities by growing crops and raising livestock to feed themselves and their communities. The need to preserve food sources became very important for the survival of growing communities, especially as seasons changed and weather, food production and other factors fluctuated in way that could negatively affect the availability of fresh food sources.

Preserving food stops or greatly slows down the spoiling process. There are many reasons why someone would practice the art of preservation even if grocery stores are nearby: dietary restrictions, cost-savings through buying wholesale or discounted food items, living remotely, seasonal foraging, making use of a high yield in your garden harvest, or the interest in choosing simpler ingredient recipes as well as scratch recipes for sauces and condiments. Also, food preserving enables us to have ready-made meals from big batch recipes divided into small portions, which are great to have on hand for unexpected illness, family or work priorities. Food preserving in general hones our ability to make healthy alternatives over heavily over-processed pre-made meals or the need to dine out often.

Preserving can be done any time of year, but whenever food sources are available and at their peak freshness is the best time to preserve them. Most foods can be preserved: fruits, vegetables, herbs, edible wild flowers, syrups, sauces, condiments, eggs, beans, lentils, meats, poultry, seafood, ready made meals, master batch mixes, and so much more. Keep in mind that although many of those food items can be preserved, some methods may be better suited for some foods than others. If unsure how to proceed, definitely research different recipes, but aim for recipes that are tried, tested, and true so that you and your family can enjoy them safely.

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Food Preserving (continued from the previous page)

There are a variety of methods for preserving food. Most of them are familiar to us:

- freezing which also includes freeze drying
- canning also known as 'bottling' (pressure, steam, dry, and water bathing);
- drying (through the use of the sun, oven, air, and dehydrator technique);
- cool and dry storage (root cellars, basements, containers, refrigerators, straw, and newspaper);
- pickling;
- salting (brining & dry curing);
- sugaring (granules, sugar syrup, and honey);
- preserving in alcohol;
- preserving in food grade oils;
- "water glassing" farm fresh eggs; and
- vacuum packing.

Preserving is not just for Doomsday preppers, or survivalists, off-gridders, homesteaders, or hobby farmers. Urban dwellers and really anyone can enjoy the benefits of food-preserving. Even children are able to learn with the right guidance and adult supervision. It is a knowledge that for many has been passed on from generation to generation. Fortunately, for others, today we have many sources that provide instruction about food preserving such as social media sites and groups, blogs, books, etc. Anyone using a few basic supplies and correct safety practices can learn to preserve their own food for later use. If new to preserving, please research the topic beforehand and start with easier techniques like pickling, fermenting, and making jams. Happy Preserving!

Anna Burry



Photos courtesy A. Burry

Living Sustainably and Eating Local

One of the most powerful ways you can up your living-sustainably game is by eating local foods! The convenience of grocery stores has changed how people think about food because we have options coming from all over the world at any time of year. But these products consume an enormous amount of energy to be shipped to our island. However, if we shift our eating habits to eating locally and with the seasons, the use of fossil fuel is greatly decreased.

You can't get more local than your own yard! Start a garden, even if it's just one pot of tomatoes at your step or an herb planter on your windowsill. More than likely, you'll want to expand next year!

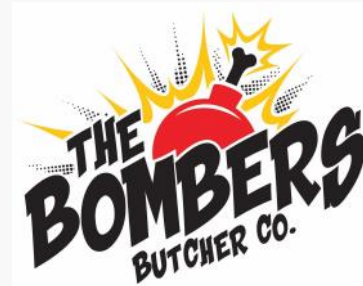
Another part of eating sustainably is reducing the amount of meat that we consume. Cutting out some meat or even eating it less frequently, especially red meat and large predatory fish, can help significantly lower your personal carbon footprint. We are very fortunate to live in a place where wild game is often available; so being able to eat locally hunted meat is another great option.

So where can you buy local? Here are a few places to start!

Birchbark Farm (produce)
Main St, Pasadena, 640-7653



The Bombers Butcher Co. (fresh beef, pork, lamb, cured meats), 23 Stentafor Ave, Pasadena
jason@bombersbutcher.ca



D & D Farm (fresh beef, pork, lamb), 110
Tamarack Dr, Cormack, 635-3834



Wright's Family Farm (produce) 99
Main St, Pasadena, 394-1500



And check out the Western NL Food Hub (www.nlfoodhub.ca) where you can order from a variety of local producers once a week and pick up your order at a central hub in Corner Brook.

Rebecca Shea

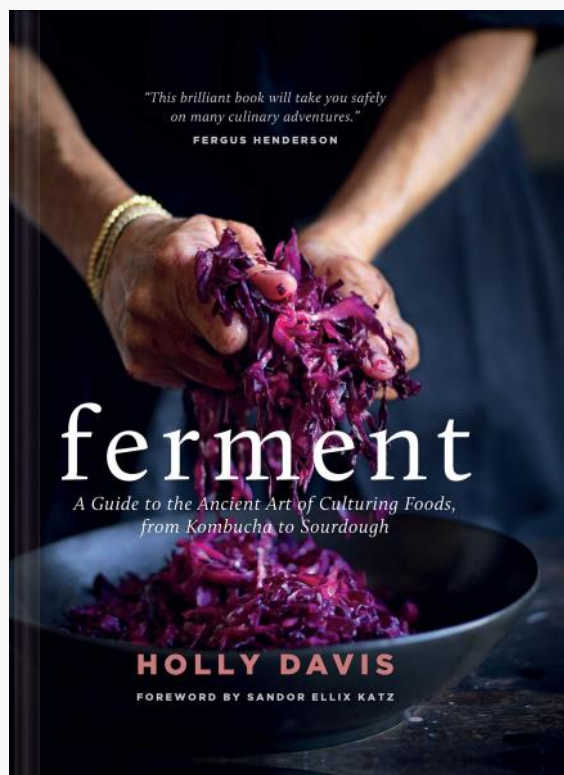


Book Recommendations from the Newfoundland and Labrador Public Libraries!



Batch: Over 200 Recipes, Tips & Techniques for a Well-Preserved Kitchen by Joel MacCharles & Dana Harrison

“Joel and Dana’s journey into preserving began with an innocent lesson in making jam. Almost a decade later, their website, wellpreserved.ca is an extraordinary resource for both beginners and experts alike. A showcase of seven different preserving techniques – waterbath canning, pressure canning, dehydrating, fermenting, cellaring, salting & smoking, and infusing – taking readers on a trip to the market in twenty-five ingredients.” MacCharles, Joel & Dana Harrison. *Batch: Over 200 recipes, tips & techniques for a well preserved kitchen*. Appetite, 2016. Horizon Library Catalogue (hip.nlpl.ca).

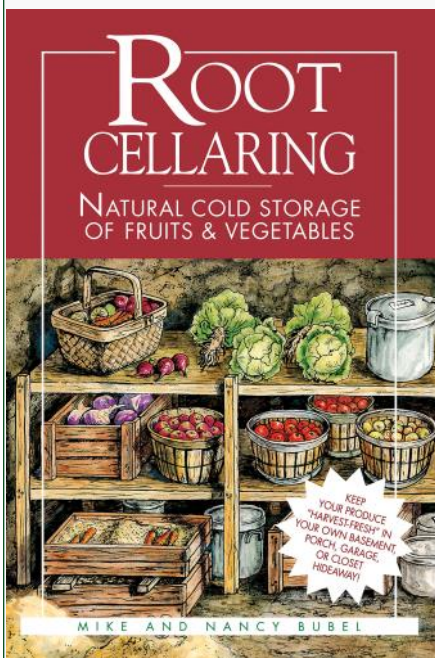


Ferment: A Guide to the Ancient Art of Culturing Foods, from Kombucha to Sourdough by Holly Davis

“Celebrated the world over for their health benefits and dynamic flavors, cultured and fermented foods are becoming everyday meal mainstays. In this extensive collection, fermentation pioneer Holly Davis shares more than 120 recipes for familiar – and lesser-known – cultured foods, including yogurt, pickles, kimchi, umeboshi, scrumpy, and more. This inspiring resource contains more than 100 photographs, plus plenty of helpful how-tos and informational charts offering guidance on incorporating fermented ingredients into the diet. With a luxe textured cover and brimming with engaging projects for cooks of all skill levels, this cookbook will be the cornerstone of every preserving kitchen.” Davis, Holly. *Ferment: A guide to the ancient art of culturing foods, from kombucha to sourdough*. Chronicle Books, 2019. Horizon Library Catalogue (hip.nlpl.ca).

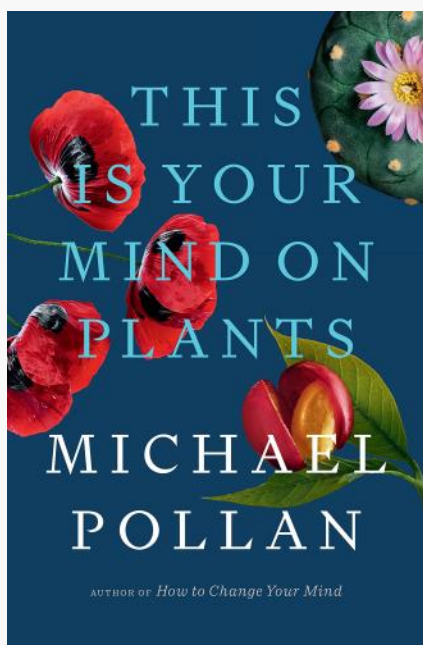
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Newfoundland and Labrador Public Libraries Book Recommendations (*continued from the previous page*)



Root Cellaring: Natural cold storage of fruits and vegetables by Mike and Nancy Bubel

“Keep your produce harvest-fresh for months in your basement, garage, or closet hideaway using the time-tested methods of energy-free food storage. With the root cellaring methods, you’ll learn in this book, you will be able to stretch the resources of your backyard garden further than you ever thought possible – without devoting hundreds of hours to canning. This informative and inspiring guide shows you not only how to construct your own root cellar, but how to best use the earth’s naturally cool, stable temperature as a cost-effective and eco-friendly way to store nearly 100 varieties of perishable fruits and vegetables.” Bubel, Mike and Nancy. *Root Cellaring: Natural cold storage of fruits and vegetables*. Workman Publishing, 1991. Horizon Library Catalogue (hip.nlpl.ca).



This is Your Mind on Plants by Michael Pollan

“In this unique blend of history, science, and memoir, as well as participatory journalism, Pollan examines and experiences these plants from several very different angles and contexts, and shines a fresh light on a subject that is all too often treated reductively – as a drug, whether licit or illicit. But that is one of the least interesting things you can say about these plants, Pollan shows, for when we take them into our bodies and let them change our minds, we are engaging with nature in one of the most profound ways we can. Based in part on an essay published almost twenty-five years ago, this groundbreaking and singular consideration of psychoactive plants, and our attraction to them through time, holds up a mirror to our fundamental human needs and aspirations, the operations of our minds, and our entanglement with the natural world.” Pollan, Michael. *This is Your Mind on Plants*. Penguin Press, 2021. Horizon Library Catalogue (hip.nlpl.ca).

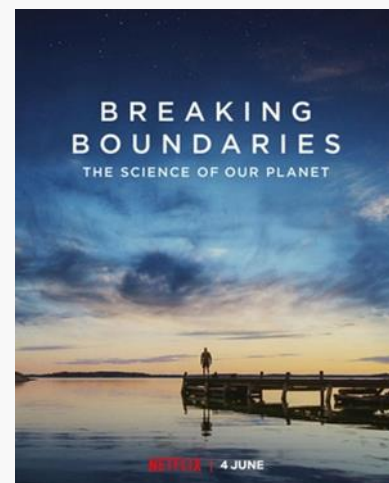
To request a copy of a book, search the Library Catalogue at www.nlpl.ca. If the title is available on the [eLibrary](#) a direct link is provided. You can also call or email your [local branch](#). To register for a library card, visit getthecard.nlpl.ca.

Natasha Wells, Western Regional Librarian

New Eco-Documentaries (available now on Netflix)!

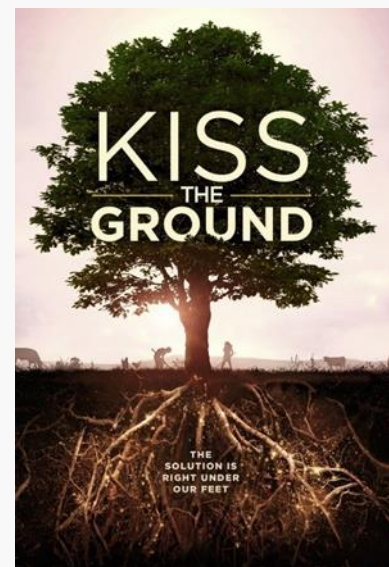
***Breaking Boundaries: The Science of Our Planet.* Directed by Johnathan Clay. Silverback Films. 2021. 1hr 13mins.**

In this documentary, David Attenborough and scientist Johan Rockström explore planetary thresholds that must not be crossed. Learn about nine natural processes on which all life depends and what we can do to maintain balance.



***Kiss the Ground.* Directed by Joshua Tickell and Rebecca Harrell Tickell. Benenson Productions/Big Picture Ranch/The Redford Centre. 2020. 1hr 24mins.**

Could soil help address the climate crisis? This optimistic documentary says 'yes'! Learn from science experts and celebrity activists who believe soil could hold the key to preserving our planet.



***My Octopus Teacher.* Directed by Pippa Ehrlich and James Reed. A Netflix Original Documentary/Off the Fence/The Sea Change Project. (2020. 1hr 25mins.**

A filmmaker befriends an octopus living in a kelp forest off the coast of South Africa, altering the direction of his life. This documentary offers an emotional glimpse into the relationship between one person and the natural world, of which we are all a part.



Leanna Butters

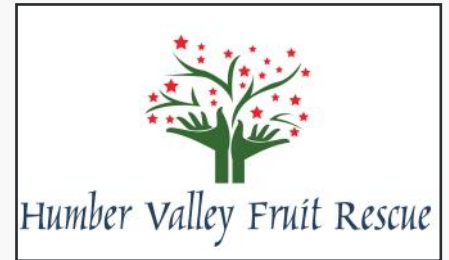
The Humber Valley Fruit Rescue

Got fruit? If you're unable to harvest your own fruit trees or bushes, we are here to help!



The Western Environment Centre is launching its fruit rescue project again this year. The Humber Valley Fruit Rescue Project will send trained volunteers to your house to safely pick cherries, pears, plums, apples or other fruits (or even veggies!) that would otherwise be wasted.

The harvest is split three ways: 1/3 is offered to homeowners, 1/3 is shared among the volunteers, and 1/3 is delivered to local organizations feeding the hungry in our communities. Contact us at hvfruitrescue@gmail.com or 640-1734 to arrange a pick!



Another great garden get-together this morning at the Humber Heights Garden!

Thanks to the Autism Society volunteers and our gardeners for all chipping in to sift compost, improve walkways and weed the communal bed. We even planted a few seeds for some fall greens. Looks great up there! Looking forward to the next get together soon.



Helping WEC as You Recycle

Here is a creative way to donate to WEC financially. WEC has an account at Scotia Recycling on 55 Maple Valley Rd (709-634-2025). When dropping off your recyclables, donate by telling the people at the desk that you wish to give the proceeds to the Western Environment Centre. Visit the Scotia Recycling website:

<http://scotiarecyclinggroup.com/services-by-location>.

For information on recycling in Corner Brook, visit <http://www.cornerbrook.com/default.asp?mn=1.24.100> or phone their recycling line at (709) 637-1630.



The Latest Update on Climate Change from the IPCC

AR6 Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis, In Brief

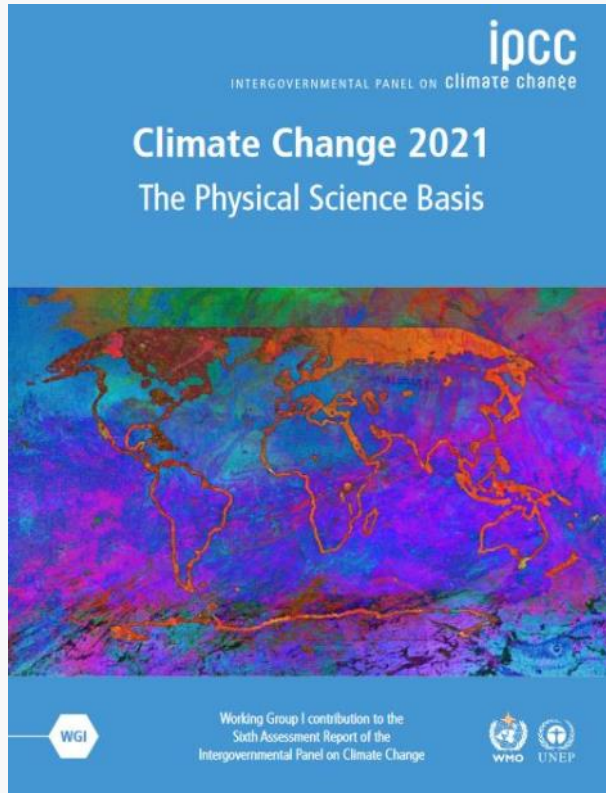
On August 9, 2021, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released the first installment of a series that will become the Sixth Assessment Report (AR6). *The Physical Science Basis*, a contribution by IPCC Working Group I, examines the physical science component of climate change in the past, present, and future. The group assessed a range of topics including greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, extreme weather patterns, glaciers and ice, and ocean/sea level in order to assess the current state of the climate and predict potential climate impacts on a global scale.

The report identifies climate-related changes in every region across the Earth's climate system, now and into the future. For instance, global warming is anticipated to exceed 1.5-2.0°C in the coming decades unless there are immediate and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. This global warming will bring more intense heatwaves, longer warm seasons, and shorter cold seasons. Climate change is also impacting the water cycle, resulting in more intense rainfall and flooding in some regions and more severe droughts in others. It is anticipated that coastal areas will continue to see sea levels rise, leading to more frequent flooding and coastal erosion. Warming will also increase the rate of permafrost as well as the loss of seasonal snow cover, the melting of glaciers, and the loss of Arctic sea ice during the summer season.

The Physical Science Basis provides a clearer picture of how climate change has progressed over time. It also provides roadmap of what changes to expect and what can be done to address and prepare for these projected impacts. It offers a glimmer of hope as well, arguing that the strong and sustained reduction of greenhouse gases could limit the effects of climate change. For instance, reduced emissions could see improved air quality and, in 20-30 years, global temperatures could thus stabilize. In sum, human actions still have the potential to affect the future direction of climate change.

The Physical Science Basis is available for download online: <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/#FullReport>

Leanna Butters



- Wildfires burning in B.C.: 209
- Since April 1, 2021: 1,584 wildfires
- 868,604 hectares of area burned (as of Sept. 7/21); source: Vancouver Sun

Voting to Contribute to a Better Environmental Future

Sometimes, one feels so overwhelmed by the developing climate crisis. Odd winter weather patterns, glaciers melting at an alarming rate, rising sea levels, unusually extensive forest fires that rage on the Canadian west coast for months in the summer—all of these calamities can deflate our will to action and lead us to throw up our arms and let the dice fall where they may. We must always remember, however, that each one of us is part of a greater community; individual actions can make a difference because they can inspire others and contribute to a greater momentum. Voting is one activity where we can contribute to a better environmental future. With voting, it is easy to feel that one's vote does not matter in the bigger scheme of things, so why bother? This article does not chastise those who do not exercise their voting rights; likewise, this article does not tell people which candidate to choose. The intent here is to give a historical sense of how important voting rights are; they are important because they have taken centuries to develop. Arguably, the process is still ongoing and sometimes takes backward steps. Overall, when we realize the long and monumental effort that went into conceiving human rights, then codifying them, putting them into practice and expanding them to a broader segment of the adult population, we begin to appreciate this precious right.

Human rights certainly were not born in the twentieth century and precursors and precedents can be traced back far earlier. To cite an Early Modern example, during the French Wars of Religion between Protestants and Catholics in the sixteenth century, ideas about the liberty of conscience and the rights of a religious minority became the subject of many printed texts. The right to public office regardless of one's faith, the right to practice that faith freely, the right to gain entrance to professions or educational institutions regardless of one's faith – such ideas as these were codified into edicts, most significantly in the Edict of Nantes of 1598. However, even though the rights of the Protestant minority within a predominantly Catholic kingdom were deemed to be “perpetual and irrevocable,” they were not human rights in our modern sense because they were still dependent on the reigning monarch's whim.¹ When the new monarch who ascended the throne was less flexible than his predecessor, those religious liberties became vulnerable to revocation, which is exactly what happened in the later seventeenth century. As a result, hundreds of thousands of Protestants fled France to safer havens abroad. Still, the experience of this religious minority and their demands for religious freedom provided building blocks for later generations to broaden and universalize the idea.

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Check out the wonderful website of the David Suzuki Foundation!

The David Suzuki Foundation website not only showcases its well-researched scientific and policy endeavours, but also provides the environmentally conscious citizen with so many tips on how to make your life and your home more environmentally sustainable, how to get friends and family involved in nature, how to write a letter to the editor of a newspaper, how to protect wildlife, how to grow your own food, and so much more. <https://davidsuzuki.org/>



Voting to Contribute to a Better Environmental Future *(continued from the previous page)*

While writers and thinkers in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment began to more carefully formulate specific ideas about natural human rights (based on natural law),² it was the American and French Revolutions of the later eighteenth century that crystallized these ideas into declarations and concrete constitutions. The Declaration of Independence of 1776 states, “we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among



John Trumbull, *The Declaration of Independence*
(public domain via Wikimedia Commons)

these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”³ It was echoed in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen thirteen years later in the early phase of the French Revolution in 1789. These declarations, however, were only broad statements of principles. The actual details of who would receive voting rights in particular would be clarified in the constitutions that followed in the wake of both these declarations. As it turned out, voting rights were limited to men of property. The men who came to power in these decades deemed it dangerous to believe otherwise. Religious minorities fared well, but enslaved black people in the newly formed United States of America would not be emancipated until the end of the American Civil War, receiving voting rights a few years afterwards through the Fourteenth Amendment.⁴

As for women, the French Constitution of 1791 stipulated that women are “passive” citizens who would enjoy rights such as freedom of speech; but only men, with certain property qualifications were deemed “active” citizens who would enjoy the right to vote.⁵ In fact, as the French Revolution radicalized in the early 1790s, it paradoxically restricted women’s rights even further. Admittedly, to their credit the radical republican government emancipated France’s slave populations in 1794, thus extending human rights to people of colour (partially in response to massive slave rebellions that forced the issue).⁶

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On September 8th, The Western Environment Centre organized a debate on key environment issues for our province including oil & gas, a green and just recovery, and food sustainability. The candidates who were able to attend were Gudie Hutchings (Liberals) and Kaila Mintz (NDP). This debate was part of an initiative that happened across the country, as environmental debates took place in many communities and thus brought these critical issues to the forefront.

Voting to Contribute to a Better Environmental Future *(continued from the previous page)*

The point to be made here is that it would take centuries before voting rights could be effectively extended beyond a narrow group. In fact, in the American example, the southern states resisted the Fourteenth Amendment and made voting rights all but impossible for people of colour. Those barriers were not removed until the Johnson Administration passed the Voting Rights Act in 1965. Likewise, property qualifications for voting rights in countries like Great Britain were eroded across the nineteenth century. For their part, women of any shade would have to fight and struggle well into the twentieth century to gain voting rights. In Canada, women did not gain the federal right to vote until 1918, and some provinces took much longer. Status Indigenous peoples and other Indigenous peoples in Canada did not win the franchise until 1960.⁷ These long, difficult struggles to gain voting rights were fought through protests, pamphlets, boycotts, speeches, marches, demonstrations, petitions and even occasionally violence. Eventually, governments began to listen, but they would not have implemented corresponding legislation on these rights were it not for the actions and perseverance of ordinary people who fought to extend voting rights beyond their earlier narrow conception. *(continued on the next page)*



Photo of the signing of the Voting Rights Act, August 6, 1965 (photo by Yoichi Okamoto; courtesy LBJ Library)

Voting to Contribute to a Better Environmental Future *(continued from the previous page)*

This long struggle was not necessarily a linear tangent to a final conclusion in our time. Voting rights can be won, and they also can be taken away. The “Jim Crow” legislation in the southern U.S. after the Civil War proves that point. A democracy like Canada or the United States can live up to and bring to life their ideals; or a democracy can slide backwards, as former U.S. President Barack Obama reminds us.⁸

When each one of us exercises our hard-won right to vote, we manifest a commitment to maintain that right. It does take a bit of work, because to exercise the right to vote properly, one has to be informed on the issues and the candidates, reading multiple news sources of varying political biases, attending debates and town halls around election time, perusing each candidate’s profile, consulting their Facebook pages, asking candidates questions. Does the candidate demonstrate a well-researched knowledge of environmental issues? Can the candidate speak intelligently and with concrete proposals about such issues or does the candidate respond only with generalities? How will the candidate’s proposals meet Canada’s greenhouse gas reduction targets and thus abide by the Paris Accord? In what ways does the candidate balance environmental and economic imperatives? Above all, engaging in the voting process is one of the most effective ways that a private citizen can effectuate profound environmental progress and change, by voting for candidates who will do something meaningful about what is certainly the most pressing and most existential issue of our time.

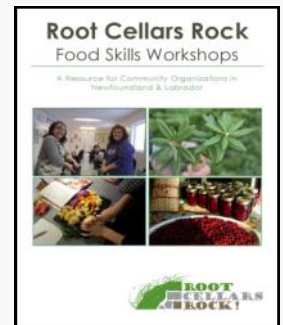
Edwin Bezzina

Endnotes

1. See Bernard Cottret, *1598, L’Édit de Nantes: pour en finir avec les guerres de religion*, 10, 176-181; Geoffrey Treasure, *The Huguenots* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 224-228 ; France (government, etc.). *L’Édit de Nantes (texte intégral en français moderne)* (éd. Danièle Thomas), (Bizanos: Héraclès, 1998), p. 33, esp. pp. 34-39.
2. Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2007), p. 28.
3. “Declaration of Independence: A Transcription,” National Archives, United States of America, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript> (consulted September 18, 2021).
4. Sue Peabody and Keila Grinberg, *Slavery, Freedom, and the Law in the Atlantic World: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s Press, 2007), pp. 95-97.
5. Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights*, p. 148.
6. Lynn Hunt, ed. *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History* [Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s Press, 1996], pp. 7-8, 10-12, 114-116; Sylvia Neely, *A Concise History of the French Revolution* (Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008), pp. 96-97.
7. Indigenous voting rights in the provinces took several years longer in some provinces. See *The Canadian Encyclopedia* s.v. “Indigenous Suffrage,” <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indigenous-suffrage> (consulted September 19, 2021).
8. *A Promised Land* (New York: Crown, 2020), pp. xv-xvi.

The Food Skills Workshop Kit!

The workshop kit is a free resource created by [Food First NL](http://www.foodfirstnl.ca) designed to support community groups across the province with hosting hands-on workshops building local food skills and preserving traditional food knowledge. Topics include: container gardening; composting; edible wild plants; seed saving; preparing local vegetables; using culinary herbs; canning; and root cellars. Download the workshops for free and start using them in your community today: <http://www.foodfirstnl.ca/our-resources/food-skills-workshops>



The St. Lawrence Coalition

From their mission statement: The St. Lawrence Coalition was created to persuade government bodies to issue a moratorium on oil and gas exploration and exploitation in the Gulf of St. Lawrence as soon as possible. The St. Lawrence Coalition aims at bringing the gulf communities together, which share the same concerns and appreciate the natural resources of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Our coalition is inter-provincial as five provinces are involved: Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Québec, and Newfoundland and Labrador. website: <http://www.coalitionsaintlaurent.ca/en/coalition>

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