

Groundswell Network Society 2024 - Year End Report



By Deborah Griffith, Partnership Director – November 2024

Overview:



Another successful year at Groundswell! The Market Garden was abundant with veggies and fruit thanks to our two staff: manager Stephanie Stevens and intern Landon Dales and a wonderful volunteer team. Groundswell providing Garden Education to both adult and youth. The Apple Rescue program brought in 1.6 tons of apples and other fruit. The Community Gardens beds had gardeners coming from up and down the valley to rent the 47 raised bed gardens at two separate locations: Mt Nelson and the Groundswell greenhouse.

Groundswell's increased communication and involvement in the Food Sustainability conversation with 20 local groups. A group from Alberta came to see our greenhouse and learn about our education program and our operation. A renewed year of gardening education workshops, tours and student programs

Groundswell Mission

"The focus of Groundswell's work begins with a food focus and holistically connects to the 'Big Five' - Food, Energy, Water, Waste, as they relate to Climate Action. Our community outreach initiatives and educational operations support learners of all ages to acquire the skills and build the capacity to solve some of the most difficult challenges of our times, as they relate to the East Kootenays."

- Our focus also includes food production, increase food security, and food sustainability in our local communities. In the Groundswell Living Classroom we encourage and teach natural methods of food production, regenerative gardening, permaculture, no dig gardening, green energy, composting, water conservation, and recycling.
- All of this results in living soil and sustainable food production for more people in the Upper Columbia Valley. Groundswell's work makes a significant and growing contribution to the physical and mental well-being of the people of the East Kootenays.

Programs:

Gardening Education Program:

For the past 15 years, Groundswell has welcomed students and adults into our greenhouse and gardens to learn valuable lessons about the origins of their food and the essentials of gardening. In recent years, Food Sustainability and Security have become more of our focus, with the realization that more people and children are going without sufficient food in our communities.

Groundswell has been busy again in 2024 teaching adults and children about gardening! Barbara Thrasher, Education Coordinator, organizes these informative gardening education programs throughout the year. This year we had 585 students participate in various programs.



Student Gardening Programs:

J. A. Laird Elementary in collaboration with Barb Thrasher and the Groundswell education program, successfully secured several grants to purchase and install 10 metal garden beds for J. A. Laird students. This exciting development was made possible by a generous grant from the Invermere Health Care Auxiliary Thrift Shop.

The Student Garden Ambassador Program: This year, the Garden Ambassadors visited the David Thompson High School culinary arts class to create some fancy focaccia bread, using vegetables from Groundswell to decorate the flatbread. They also helped their school launch its own gardening program on school grounds.

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Additionally, they participated in a tour of the Old Blue Truck Farm, where they learned about beyond organic methods from owner Dale Wilker. The Student Garden Ambassadors at J.A Laird taught students basic gardening skills, spoke to council, created a blended bed in the Invermere downtown, spoke to local business, spoke to district to educate them on the importance of gardening.

They also supported bee workshops. Our local Weavers Bee company was out to Edgewater Elementary school to talk about honeybees with students and visiting adults. The Kind Bee Farms held Leaf Cutter Bee workshops at several schools: Edgewater Elementary, Windermere Elementary and the Youth Hub. As well we had a bee workshop at Groundswell and now have friendly resident Leaf Cutter Bees in the greenhouse.



Eileen Madson Primary School students planting at Greenhouse Community beds with their teacher Hannah Garfield.

Leaf Cutter Bee workshops at many of the local schools and the Youth Hub.

J. A. Laird Garden Ambassadors visit Andrea Salzbrenner for a lesson on using veggies in focaccia bread.

Eileen Primary school's teacher Hannah Garfield and her grade two class grew their own garden at the Groundswell Greenhouse community garden

David Thompson High School: Groundswell invited David Thompson classes into the gardens and greenhouse for gardening programs and to help with the spring and fall cleanup and planting. DTSS Culinary Chef Training classes had hands on experience of using Groundswell fresh veggies and fruit in their meal planning for their DTSS Cafeteria. Student from Industrial Arts built ornaments for the Garden of Lights event in December. Other high school students from the Career and Science program came and helped working in the greenhouse and outdoor gardens to transplant, weed, mulch and cleanup areas. They also helped with setup for our Garden of Lights event. Arts students visited the garden or greenhouse to do sketching.



Tours, Workshops and Events:

Garden Tours:

Windermere Gardens: This summer 4 homeowners invited the community to their unique gardens in Windermere and Radium. Participants learned that there are many ways to approach gardening and that it is a lifetime of learning!

Radium Gardens: We also had the pleasure of visiting the Radium Rotary Garden and then having tea at Dee Conklin lovely garden this fall.

Farm Tours:

Putting your Garden to Bed Fall Tour at the Old Blue Truck Farm with Dale Wilker. Dale showed the participants how he covered his beds, mulched, amended and prepared his beds in the fall for spring planting.

Homestead Harvest Farm tour: Farm tours with Lana Banham and her husband Garth exploring all their production, composting methods and produce.

Winderberry Farm tour: we helped market a Wildsight hosted farm tour at Winderberry and Edible Acres this spring.

Greenhouse and Garden Tour: Groundswell hosted the Ardrossan Recreation and Agriculture Society from Alberta on a four-day fall event learning about our iconic Greenhouse and Gardens as well as visiting organic and permaculture farms/gardens in the area: Old Blue Truck Farm, Winderberry Edible Acres, Homestead Harvest and Radium Rotary Garden. We had glowing reports, and the group felt inspired by what we are doing here at Groundswell.

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Workshops:

Greenhouse tomato workshop: Our Greenhouse and Garden Manager Stephanie Stevens highlighted how to maximize yields over summer, fall and into winter with a leaning tomato plant system. As well Stephanie showed participants how to prune to increase yield and demonstrated her amendment system.

Straw Bale growing workshop, again led by our talented Greenhouse and Garden manager Stephanie Stevens. Participants learned about using straw bales as garden beds, how to prepare them plant and care forget gardens. A hands-on workshop with everyone taking part.

Events:



Seed Swap event: An early spring well attended event encouraging people to save seeds and to come out to talk about what they do and swap seeds. Invermere Library Seed bank, Old Blue Truck and Winderberry joined us this year. Mateja Heningman, past board member, spoke of all the benefits of saving seeds and emphasized that you could also give some of your seeds to the new Library seed bank.

Spring Plant Sale: Bedding vegetable plant sale, grown naturally by a team of volunteers and ready to plant. The event includes artist and artisans and local community offerings, but also some flowering plants such as Dahlias from our local expert Len Sandrin... Plants were all grown by a team of volunteers headed up by our wonderful volunteer and team leader Marion Andrus!

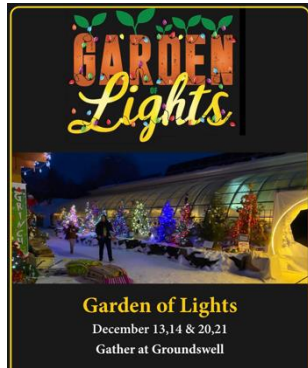
Fall Harvest Festival: This well-attended event celebrated a successful harvest and expressed gratitude to all the staff, volunteers, and members who contributed to Groundswell's success over the summer. Participants enjoyed delicious veggie dishes made from produce grown in our Groundswell greenhouse and garden. Additionally, we served lovely juice made from our sour cherry trees and gleaned crab apples through our Apple Rescue program.

Winter Garden of Lights: A fund raiser to support growing Groundswell as an organization and winter and seasonal December fun. Lots of local support from businesses and volunteers. Be dazzled by the lights and local student and adult choirs and musicians.

A year end celebration of all things good and kind.

A multitude of volunteers and local businesses make this a successful event. Fun for families during the December holidays. A special thanks to Barb Thrasher and her team of volunteers for orchestrating this yearly event.

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Over 100 sponsors both cash and In-Kind including RDEK, BC Fair and Festival, District of Invermere Event and Columbia Valley Tourism grants are supporting the 2024 Garden of Lights event!



Market Garden Produce:

Another year of incredible growth in the Garden and Greenhouse: Thanks to our manager Stephanie Stevens, her assistant Landon Dales, and their dedicated team of volunteers, we saw a bountiful harvest of naturally grown veggies and fruit. The team worked tirelessly all summer and into September and October, focusing on growing, watering, amending, and selling produce.

Supporting the community: Our produce was distributed to the Food Bank and the DTSS Chef Training classes for cafeteria lunches. We also sold produce to the local community through the AgriPark Farmers Market and our on-site retail sales.

A successful growing season: We had an outstanding tomato crop in our greenhouse, which continues to produce tomatoes and herbs even in November

Apple Rescue Program:



A very successful Apple Rescue year: Anna Grant, our Apple Rescue Coordinator, led a fantastic team of volunteers who picked apples throughout the valley. We gleaned 1.6 tons of apples and other fruit, which

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were distributed to schools, the Food Bank, tree owners, volunteer pickers, farmer livestock, and the community.

Congratulations to Anna Grant, who managed dual roles this season as both the WildSafeBC Coordinator and the Groundswell Apple Rescue Coordinator. We also extend our gratitude to the volunteer team of pickers who worked from August through October to glean apples that would have otherwise gone to waste or attracted bears and deer. A special thanks to the District of Invermere and Wildsight for helping fund the Apple Rescue program this year.

Community Gardens:

Two sites Mt Nelson and the Greenhouse have 47 raised beds which we rent to gardeners from up and down the Upper Columbia Valley so they can grow food for their families. Lots of wonderful produce from these gardens. At the Mt Nelson site a crew of volunteers converted 5 more beds to wicking beds, thanks to Invermere Health Care Auxiliary Thrift Shop grant, saving so much water in a dry year, and the wicking beds produced 3 times as much produce.

This year we invited the Columbia Basin Environmental Education Network (CBEEN), the Shuswap band, the Metis organization into the garden to grow tobacco, sage and 3 sisters' beds of corn, squash and beans.

As well, Garth from Homestead Harvest Farm came out and delivered a composting workshop to bed renters at each site.

Operations:

Board Members



Michele Wall - Chair
Melanie Ferster - Secretary
Karin Ogilvie - Treasurer
Deborah Griffith - Partnership Director

Bert Boulet - Operations Director
Elizabeth Farthing - Membership & Volunteer Director
Catherine Plumb - Community Gardens Director
Wilma Slenders - Director at Large

We meet once a month through out the year to tackle the Budget, Strategic Plan and Operations. Our board

also oversees Staff, Outreach, Grant Writing, Communications, Community Gardens, Member and Volunteers.

Staff:



Groundswell employed three staff in 2024.

Stephanie Stevens - Greenhouse & Garden Manager
Landon Dales - Greenhouse & Garden Intern
Anna Grant - Apple Rescue Coordinator

Stephanie and her intern Landon managed the Gardens and Greenhouse, overseeing planting, amending, and harvesting with the help of volunteers. They also handled the sale of the abundant

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produce. The greenhouse was filled with vistas of hanging tomatoes, while the outside gardens boasted amazing greens and root vegetables, along with succulent fruits from the Food Forest. Stephanie and Landon also greeted visitors, conducted mini tours, and assisted Community Bed renters. Anna played a crucial role in our Apple Rescue program, coordinating with many volunteers to pick apples and other fruits throughout the valley.

Volunteers:

Volunteers support our operations, events, workshops, apple rescues and help in the greenhouse, market garden and community gardens.

Members:

Our members support and attend our gardening education programs, events and are some of our most valued volunteers.

Successful Projects:

Solar Panels



Installed 12 new Solar panels to greenhouse roof (total now of 27 solar panels since 2020) and a new electric panel. Thank you, CBT Non-Profit Smart program!

Installed shelving, and more lights for growing plant starts in greenhouse. Thank you, Stephanie Stevens, and friends!

Removed several old greenhouse beds & replaced them with movable beds. Thank you, volunteers Bert Boulet, and Tim!

Shed

Built a weatherproof storage. Thank you

New vents installed
Resiliency program.



shed for our tools, pots, lawn equipment & fall apple RDEK RED! program and carpenter Jim Harrison!

in the greenhouse. Thank you, CBT Climate

Outreach:

Groundswell continues to increase our memberships, sponsors, and volunteers as well as visitors to the greenhouse and garden. We are also increasing our involvement with the Rocky Mountain School District.

We welcome all community members and visitors to the greenhouse and gardens and to take part in Groundswells events and gardening education programs.

Groundswell communicates our local communities in the upper Columbia Valley through a monthly Groundswell newsletter, social media (Facebook and Instagram) and local newspapers.

Fund Raising:

Partnerships/Sponsors/Donations/Revenue/Grants

Partners: The following partners help through funds or in-kind support District of Invermere, Rocky Mountain School District #6, Columbia Valley Food and Farm, Wildsight.

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Partnership development: Food Security: Groundswell worked in 2024 with 20 other local groups and organizations to collaborate with regards to food security and local engagement.

Sponsors: a multitude of local/regional sponsors have supported Groundswells events and projects. Over 40 local sponsors have supported Groundswell work during 2024. See a list of Partners and Sponsors: <https://groundswellnetwork.ca/>

Donations: Local community members and businesses are also generous with donations every year. Special mention goes out this year to Mayvis Goranson and Anne Zurbriggen for their legacy building donations!

Revenue: Groundswell's revenue comes from produce sales from our market garden, plant sales in the spring, workshops, tours, and events. We are striving to become more self sustainable financially but have some way to go, so we appreciate all the help we can get as we GROW.

Grants: Every year Groundswell receives grants from regional, provincial, and federal organizations to help with staff wages, projects, and events. This year we have had grants support from: RDEK ReDi Grant, Get BC Working program, Kootenay Coop, Agri Canada Youth Employment and Skills Program, BC Fairs and Festival Events fund, West Coast Seeds, Travel Columbia Valley.

We want to thank all our partners, sponsors, grant organizations, staff, members & volunteers for their support this year and through the last 15 yrs!

