



Coquitlam's Farming Traditions

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"The hard work, ingenuity and determination of Coquitlam's early residents, and this area's warm summers, mild winters and fertile soil were factors that led to suitable land for both animal and vegetable farming. Coquitlam's history is deeply rooted in the tradition of farming," Sandra Isabel Martins of the Coquitlam Heritage Society and Mackin House Museum said in an article published in 2015. "Farming histories and stories have shaped the Coquitlam we know today – economically, geographically and socially."



The pioneer women of Coquitlam were known for nurturing the earth around their homes and bringing forth an abundance of hearty fruits and vegetables that could be shared with their families and the community. Nothing was wasted; much was harvested. From large farms such as the ones at Colony Farm or the family-owned Booth and Brehaut farms, to smaller garden plots behind houses, Coquitlam sustained itself agriculturally for decades.

Today families continue to grow herb gardens on their high-rise terraces or vegetables in Community Garden plots, or shop for fresh, local produce at farmers markets on weekends. The Poirier Street Farmers Market, for example, is the longest running suburban farmers market in the Lower Mainland. From May through October, a wide variety of vendors gather to showcase their products each week – made, baked, grown, or raised in BC.

The tradition of connecting with the earth has not been lost as the city's population has expanded.

Historically, pioneer families had backyard garden plots, and what was grown there filled their pantries or contributed to the family's economic survival. Eggs and chickens could be brought to market, and produce sold door-to-door or canned for use in the winter season.

Photo: Jeanette Roberts

There was a role for everyone in the family garden. The book "Coquitlam 100 Years" preserves the stories of many who remember that gardening was one of their daily chores. "I worked outside, weeding. We all had to dig in and do our bit," recalls Lillian Emerton.



Caroline LeClair, like many, recalls that her mother "...used to can a lot. She didn't have a summer kitchen, but she did have what she called her fruit room and, in that, she would put down between 700 and 1,000 quart jars of produce from the garden." Cooking with food grown by your own hand was not a rarity or a delicacy. Garden-to-table cuisine was not an expensive alternative but, in some cases, the only choice for Coquitlam's early residents.

Everyone had family recipes and everyone boasted that their's were the best. Jams, jellies, preserves and baking could be entered in local competitions, in particular at the Coquitlam Agricultural Fair. Fall was a time to celebrate. Many a prospective winner carefully did everything in their power to exceed the criteria of the judges.

Jams, jellies and marmalades were often assessed on appearance, texture and of course taste as noted below.

APPEARANCE 30%

Colour – Characteristic of fruit (15%).

Clearness – Jellies translucent (10%).

Container – Glass, practical design, clean, sealed lids, neatly labeled,

Specific size (5%).

TEXTURE 35%

Jelly – Tender. Should quiver, cut easily and retain shape, no crystals.

Preserves – Pieces firm and whole. Clear thick syrup.

Marmalades – Small thin pieces. Clear, thick syrup.

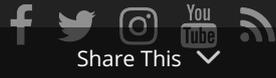
Jams – Crushed fruit. No separation of fruit and juice.

FLAVOR 35%

Characteristic, without excessive sweetness or overcooked flavour.

This summer, take time to share your family's Coquitlam garden or farming story or try your hand at making pioneer style preserves. Getting back to your roots can unearth some fabulous memories. Please share them at www.coquitlam125.ca/stories.

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