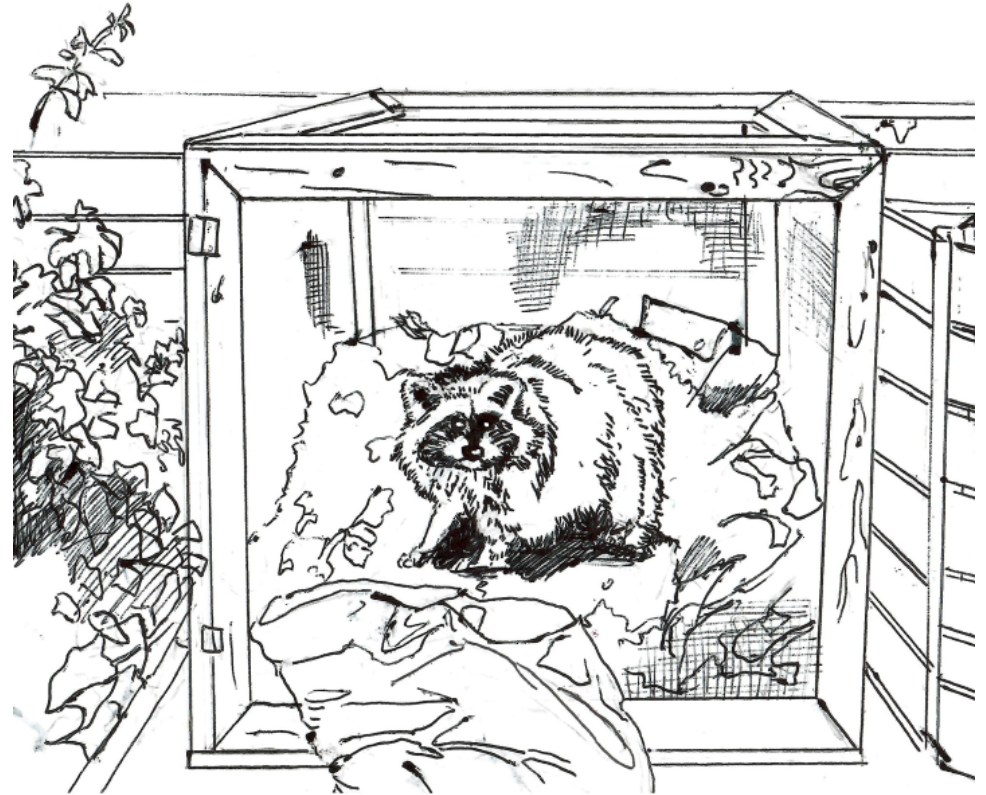


Garden on a shoestring

The Free to \$500 garden



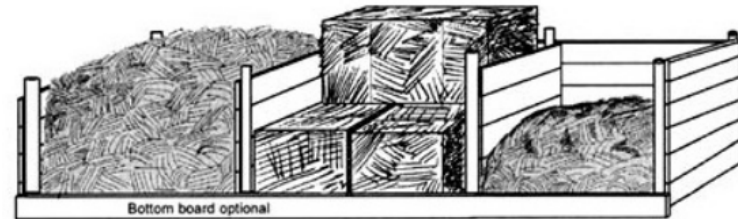
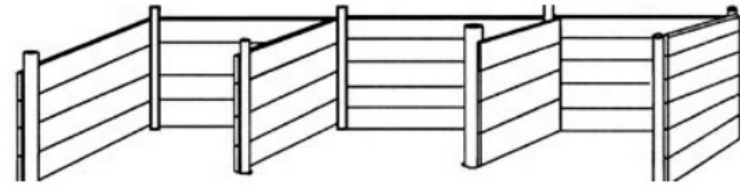
Jenn Stotland 2025
www.haifaxearth.ca
OC Copy with attribution

I've been broke, and it's no secret that I like gardening. Plant lore and food culture are intrinsically human passions can be found around the world. I've worked with budgets from zero to \$10 thousand and more. Here are some tips I've picked up for the 0-\$500 garden.

For further information see *Toolbox for Sustainable City Living* by Scott Kellog, and *The Poor Proles Almanac* podcast.

Getting plants

Schools, churches and yard sales all sometimes have plant for cheap.



The best compost combines nitrogen rich inputs like Lawn clippings, kitchen scraps, dead bodies, manures and seaweed with carbon inputs: Sawdust, shavings, straw, autumn leaves, paper, pine needles or plant stalks

Some of the best soil I ever made was autumn leaves that I topped up again and again

Every yard or patio is a unique ecosystem and so there are infinite different ways to Garden. Although I think it takes about 10 years to learn to Garden well and produce a large amount of your own food the rewards are immediate. It is totally possible to acquire some yield in the first year and we begin to live more closely in harmony with our species appropriate behavior which is agriculture.

Soils

A good gardener grows soil. The soil grows plants. Soil is made of mineral components (sand, silt, and/or clay), and living and dead organic matter. We should add organic matter to our soils to feed bacteria, fungi and other microorganisms that help our plants grow and hold onto soil nutrients. This helps take care of some pollution through dilution and chelation, and helps soil hold onto the right amount of water without becoming boggy.

Composting

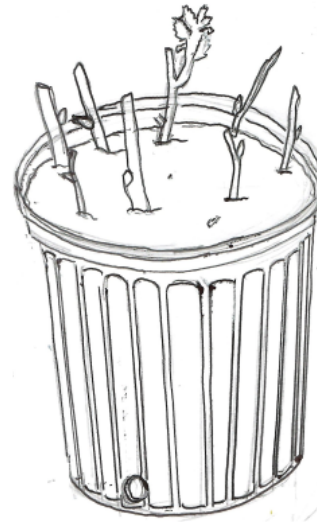
You can buy soil to fill raised beds but if you want cheaper soil it will take longer to create in place. All gardens will need ongoing soil care: enrichment and protection with mulch and cover crops. Rather than having trucks take our scraps to facilities, emitting greenhouse gases, we should compost them and use them again in place, in cities where nutrients are needed most. Keeping rats and raccoons away from compost will take investment. I line compost boxes with 1/4" mesh. Speedibins are solid steel but \$400 each.

Worm composting can work indoors but is labour intensive and can harbor pest insects if they are already in the building. If you farm worms, buy or score red wigglers (*Eisinea foetida*) rather than the fat gray ones that live outside. They prefer mineral subsoil to compost and will not eat quickly. *Worms Eat My Garbage* is a classic in the field available at the Halifax public library.

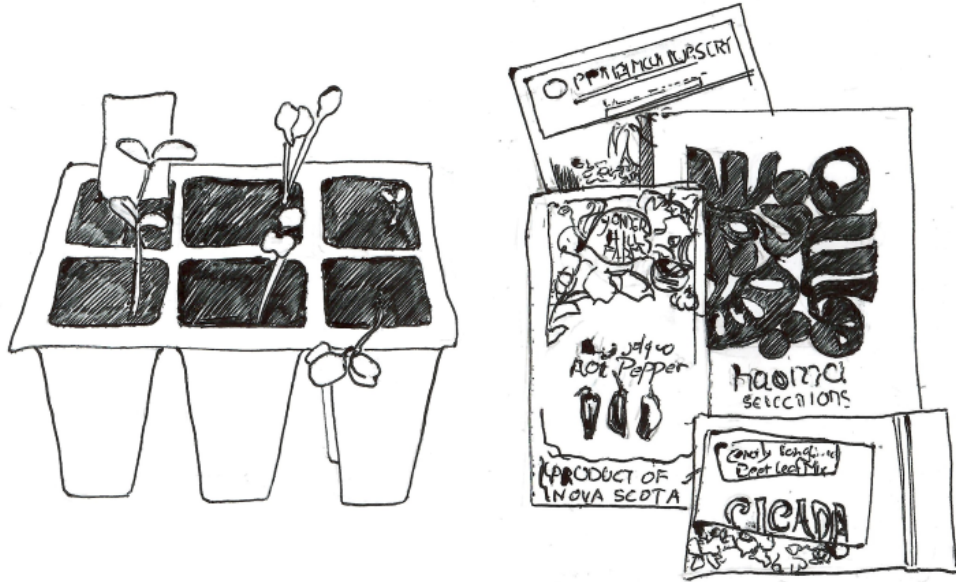
Perennials

Sunchokes, rhubarb, fiddlehead ferns, asparagus are all easy to grow and will provide a yield of many years. Raspberries, service berries, currant and black elder clone easily and will give a yield in part shade. Mint is famous for spreading. If you grow mint, try to find one that tastes good!

Currants, grapes, Black elder and Highbush cranberry are all cloneable. Cut off live twigs in March, stick them most of the way in soil and water well until summer is well under way. Then set the plants out in the fall in the ground. Never try to keep a tree alive inside over winter.



For cane fruit: raspberry, blackberry, and their hybrids, buy a mother plant that is a good cultivar. This will put energy into large fruit, rather than suckers and thorns.



Heritage seeds are saveable.

You can try saving seeds from your own groceries, big box store or unknown origin seeds, the fruit might not be edible but heritage seeds will match our local climate.

Easy seeds to save are peas, tomatoes, lettuce, parsley, kale, and beans.

Basically they will perform "virgin birth" and not cross-pollinate.

Difficult seeds are carrot, cabbage family (broccoli, kohlrabi, burrsels sprouts, cauliflower, kale) turnip and squash.

These will need distance from any crop that could cross pollinate with them.

If you like a tree, it might have babies growing under neath it that can be transplated. Service berry, hawthorn, montain ash, Linden, crabapples are all small trees that provide yields that can be transplanted this way.



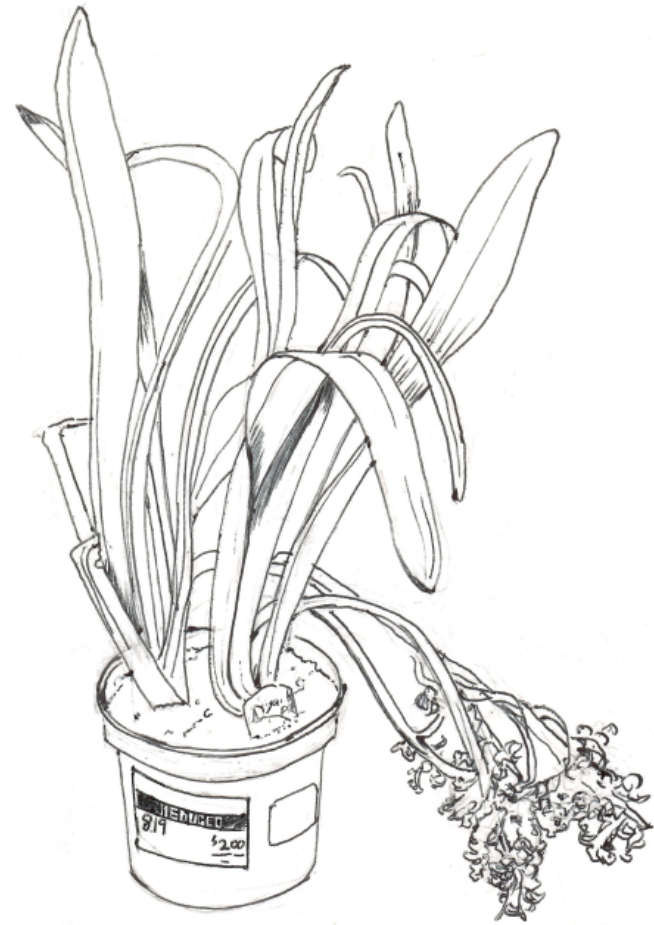
Some plants are growing on land slated for development. in a walking path, or are clonal and well-represented. Plants want to survive, grow, reproduce and spread. Plants do not know about private proerpty and land ownership.

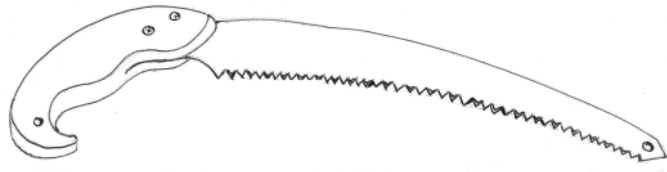
They would love to be sustainably harvested and re-planted, and if the new plant in your garden isn't invasive, your older plants might like this too.



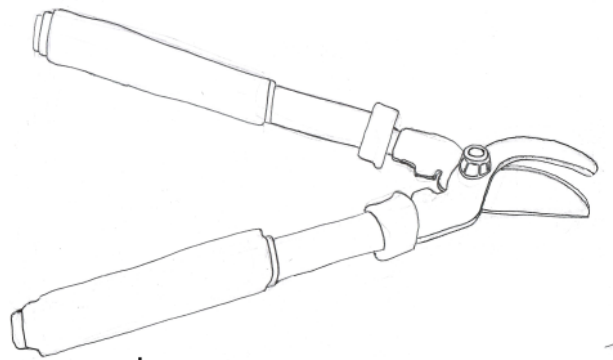
Someone put this pot, soil and dead plant out on the curb. The plant died because there are no holes punched in the bottom of the pot as a predatory capitalist move of planned obsolescence so people blame themselves for the death of the plant and buy more plants. Now you have a pot and some soil. Punch holes in the bottom of the pot.

It's March and crocuses, hyacinth and daffodils have finished blooming at chain grocery stores. They are on sale. If planted and given water and light, they will recover, and bloom next year and for many years to come. This hyacinth still has healthy leaves, but the plant will come back even if it has died down to the bulb. .

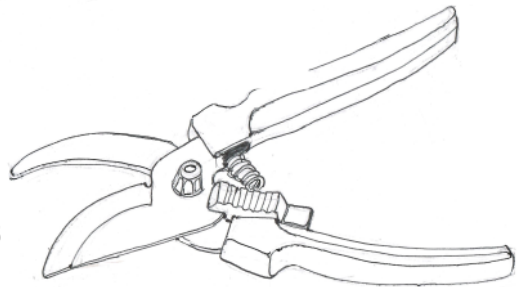




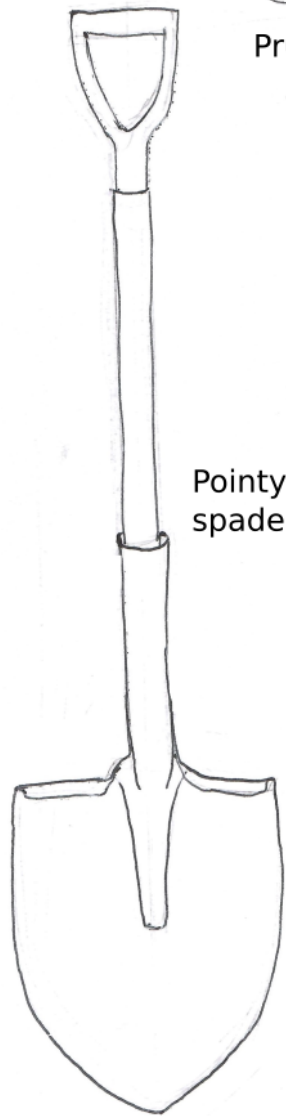
Pruning saw



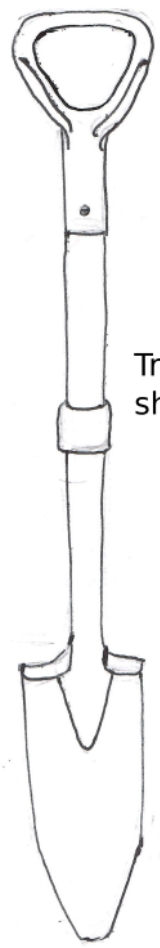
Loppers



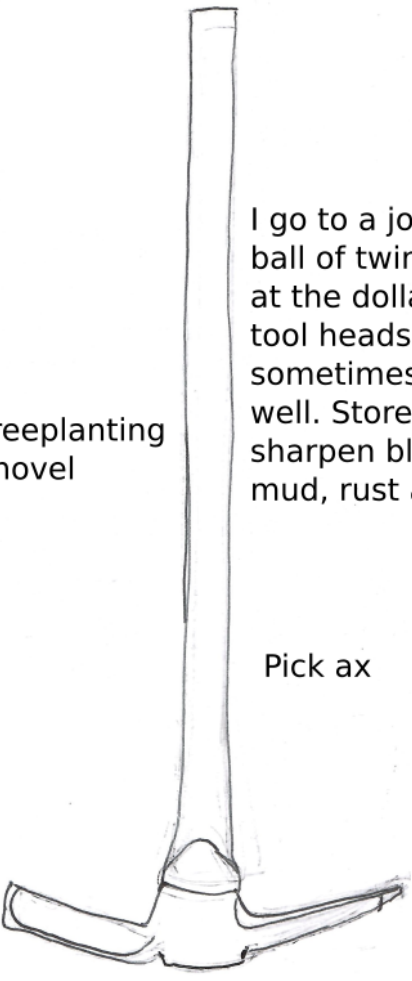
clippers (secateurs)



Pointy spade



Treeplanting shovel

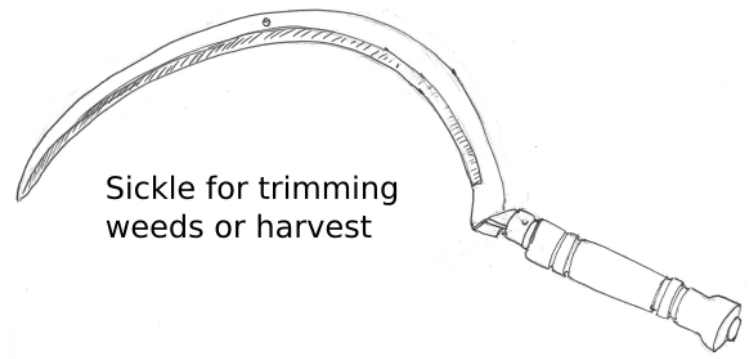


Pick ax

I go to a job with at least these tools; and a ball of twine. Sometimes these can be found at the dollar or antique store, and sometimes tool heads can be found on the curb, and sometimes handles without tool heads as well. Store tools indoors out of the rain, sharpen blades with a whetstone, clean off mud, rust and sap, and oil them if necessary



hand trowel



Sickle for trimming weeds or harvest