

# Growing Pains: The Social Role of Community and Urban Gardens During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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## INTRODUCTION

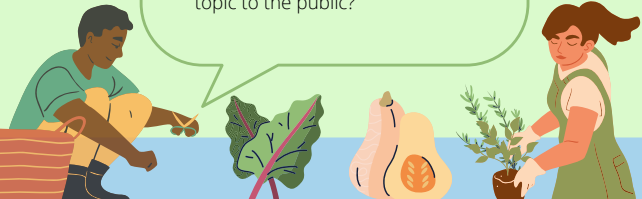
According to previous research, community and urban gardens **provide benefits to gardeners**: they increase feelings of connection and wellbeing, lower household costs by providing fresh fruit and vegetables, provide an outdoor space for physical activity, and bring people of various backgrounds together in a safe, shared space.

Although there has been a **dramatic increase in gardening**, with a high demand for seeds and other garden supplies across the country during the Covid-19 pandemic, my research asks **whether this was the case in the Halifax Regional Municipality, and what challenges community gardeners have faced, if any, during this period.**

My research examines:

- a) the **experiences of community and urban garden coordinators** in the HRM about the role of their gardens during the Covid-19 pandemic and **whether they faced any challenges.**
- b) Whether media **portrayals of these gardens capture the same roles, benefits, and challenges** discussed by coordinators.

1. What has been the **experience** of those running and organizing these spaces throughout the pandemic?  
 2. How has the media **portrayed** this topic to the public?



## METHODS

Using semi-structured questions, **interviews were conducted with various community and urban garden coordinators** from the HRM about how Covid-19 has affected their experiences as organizers of these spaces. Using qualitative coding, the data was then categorized into themes.

Once these themes were identified, they were compared to the codes which emerged from the **media content analysis.**

Comparing the themes from the interviews with those from the media analysis **illustrated the similarities and differences** between the media portrayal and the experiences of garden coordinators during this time period.

## RESULTS

Important themes emerged from the interviews as they were transcribed. **All coordinators mentioned a dramatic increase in those wishing to garden.** Similarly, all discussed the difficulty of **operating the space with Covid-19 restrictions.** Feelings of burnout, lack of resources, and discouragement from the **challenges of Covid-19 were also common themes which arose.**

**Many of these themes are reflected in the quotes from the interviews**

From the media content analysis, the themes which arose were of **opportunity, garden as a refuge, community, and hope.**



## DISCUSSION

There seems to be a discrepancy between the way this topic was presented and discussed in the media, and the experience of the garden organizers.

**Interviews:** Themes of difficulty, challenges, and lack of resources were prevalent.

**Media:** themes of community, connection, positivity, and refuge.

These spaces provided a safe place to socialize and gather during the pandemic, however, there were still challenges and struggles for those working behind the scenes.

More research is needed on the effects of Covid-19 on these spaces and those who run them.



## QUOTES

*"We had to wear masks, we had to be 6 feet apart, we had to have a schedule with the gardeners so people weren't right next to each other. For me it was not a good time.*

*"Even if we wanted to take more people on we couldn't because of the gathering limits and the restrictions"*

**"There was structure. Order. A sense of purpose. [...] We hear about the need for safe spaces, and a garden is precisely that: space where you feel safe and empowered."**

**"Unlike a lot of pandemic activities, this one (community gardening) has given her the opportunity to make new friends – and reconnect with old ones".**

