Home Food Gardening in Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

7 October 2020
preliminary results

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Study Overview

Aim of Survey: To investigate the prevalence and varieties of and attitudes to home food gardening in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology: A representative survey of Canadians was conducted from September 28, 2020, to September 30, 2020, in partnership with Angus Reid. The survey was conducted online. 1,023 valid responses were collected.

Margin of Error: +/- 3.1%, 19 times out of 20. Any discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.
Key Findings

(1)

51% of respondents grow at least one variety of fruit or vegetable in a home garden. Of that, 17.4% of respondents started growing food at home in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

43% of home food gardeners spend 10 hours or less per week gardening.

52.5% of those who grow food at home are women, 47.1% are men, and 0.4% identify as neither male nor female. 5% more women started growing food at home since COVID-19 than men, which is in line with the overall gender breakdown of those who grow food at home in general.

96% of Canadians purchase at least some of their fruit and vegetables from a grocery store. With only 1.7% of home food gardeners able to supply all of their monthly fruit and vegetable consumption, home food gardening is not a significant source of financial competition to grocery stores.

A majority of home food gardeners have a university degree/certificate/diploma.
Key Findings

(2)

The frequency of organic fruits and vegetable purchases is not a determining factor in home food gardening. 51.9% of home food gardeners sometimes buy organic produce, while 51.7% of non-home food gardeners sometimes buy organic produce.

Dietary preferences and requirements do not have any significant impact on home food growing. 79.7% of home food gardeners have no dietary preferences. 4.4% of home food growers are some form of vegetarians or vegans, while 5.2% of non-gardeners are vegetarians or vegans.

A greater percentage of British Columbians and Prairie residents are home food gardeners than those who are not. Ontario is almost exactly even between those who grow food at home and those who do not, at 50.1% and 49.9%, respectively. Out of all the respondents who grow food at home who live in Atlantic Canada, 23.7% of respondents started gardening this year. It is the highest proportion of new gardeners within a region in the country. 87.2% of Prairie residents who grow food at home have done so for more than a year.
Key Findings

82.4% of home food gardeners live in a single-family house, which corresponds to the fact that 70.2% of home food growers grow at least some of their home produce in front and/or backyards.

18.6% of gardeners are growing at least some food on balconies. Out of all the respondents who grow food at home who live in Quebec, 31.3% of respondents grow at least some food on a balcony, the highest percentage in the country.

41% of new gardeners do not have children, versus 29.9% of long-time gardeners (for a total of 32% childless gardeners)

55.5% of home food gardeners consider gardening to be good exercise; 69% of home food gardeners find gardening relaxing.
Key Findings

(4)

51.8% of long-time home gardeners agree that they grow food at home because it is safer than what they can buy in store. For those who started growing food at home during the pandemic, only 42.9% agree that food safety was a factor in their decision to garden.

52.6% of respondents are at least somewhat worried about food shortages during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is reasonably consistent for both home food gardeners (55%) and non-gardeners (50.1%). Only 7% of total respondents are not at all worried about food shortages. Among new home food gardeners, 53.9% are worried about food shortages, compared to 55.2% of long-time gardeners.

39.8% of total respondents at least somewhat agree that finding certain specific food stuffs has been challenging during the pandemic.

85% of total respondents are concerned that food prices will rise because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is consistent for both long-time and new home food growers and non-home home growers. This concern is not noticeably impacted by whether or not respondents had lost income due to the pandemic.
Scope of Home Food Gardening in Canada
Q: Do you grow vegetables and/or fruits at home?

51.0% YES
49.0% NO

The highest percent (36%) of home food gardeners are 54-72 years of age.

The second highest percent (34.1%) of home food gardeners are 24-38 years of age.

For gender:
- Male:
  - Yes: 47.1%
  - No: 49.5%
- Female:
  - Yes: 52.5%
  - No: 50.1%

Other details:
- Male: 0.4%
- Female: 0.4%
- Other: 0.4%
Q: Do you grow vegetables and/or fruits at home? (by geographic region)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>50.1%</td>
<td>49.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec</td>
<td>47.7%</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prairies</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>54.7%</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlantic Canada</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Region</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Q: What is the main reason you don't grow vegetables and/or fruits at home?

19.8% tried to grow food at home in the past with little to no success (their plants died)

3.3% do not have favourable soil conditions and/or sun exposure on their property to support a food garden

1.8% are not physically able to tend to a garden

1. I don't have space 41.5%
2. I'm not interested 25.0%
3. I don't have time 15.0%
4. I can't afford to 2.0%
5. Other 16.6%
Q: Do you grow vegetables and/or fruits at home?
‘Yes’, highest level of completed education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced University Degree</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Degree, Certificate or Diploma</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College, CEGEP or Other Non-University Certificate or Diploma</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Apprenticeship or Trade Certification or Diploma</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma or Equivalent</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some High School</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

48.2% of home food gardeners have at least one university-awarded qualification.

44.7% of individuals who have an annual household income of $75K-$149K grow food at home (versus the 40% of individuals in the same income bracket who do not).

8.2% of individuals who have an annual household income of less than $35K grow food at home (versus 16.2% of individuals in the same income bracket who do not).
Q: Did you grow vegetables and/or fruits at home before the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Yes: 82.5%
- No: 17.4%

66% of new gardeners agree that the COVID-19 pandemic influenced their decision to start growing food at home.

27.1% of continuing gardeners are growing more food at home than before the pandemic.

32.7% of continuing gardeners are spending more time gardening this year than before the pandemic.
Q: Which of the following best describes where you currently reside?

respondents who have a home food garden

- Urban Core: 25.30%
- Suburban: 37.20%
- Small town or rural: 37.60%

respondents who do not have a home food garden

- Urban Core: 36.10%
- Suburban: 45.30%
- Small town or rural: 18.56%
Q: What best describes your housing situation? (respondents with home food gardens)

long-time food gardeners

- Single-family detached dwelling: 76.3%
- Single-family semi-detached dwelling: 6.3%
- Condominium or apartment with fewer than 8 units: 8.1%
- Condominium or apartment with 8 units or more: 2.1%
- Other: 7.2%

gardeners who started growing food during COVID-19

- Single-family detached dwelling: 13.2%
- Single-family semi-detached dwelling: 3.3%
- Condominium or apartment with fewer than 8 units: 11.0%
- Condominium or apartment with 8 units or more: 59.3%
- Other: 13.2%
Q: Where do you grow vegetables and/or fruits at your home?

- Backyard: 59.2%
- Balcony: 13.3%
- Front yard: 11.0%
- Other: 8.3%
- Windowsill: 8.3%

27.5% of respondents who started gardening during COVID-19 grow at least one food on a balcony, versus 16.7% of long-time gardeners.
Q: Think about how many vegetables and/or fruits were consumed by your household in the past month. Approximately what percentage did you grow yourself?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>75%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Long-term gardeners grew a greater proportion of their monthly fruit and/or vegetable consumption versus new gardeners who started gardening during COVID-19:

- 20.2% of long-term gardeners got 50% of their monthly produce from their own gardens versus 12.1% of new gardeners
- 37.8% of long-term gardeners got 10% of their monthly produce from their own gardens versus 46.2% of new gardeners
Q: What vegetables and/or fruits do you grow? Check all that apply.

89.3% of home food gardeners grow tomatoes – by far the most popular crop

57.9% cent grow lettuce, the next most popular, followed by cucumbers at 54.6%

32% of gardeners grow strawberries, making it the 11\textsuperscript{th} most popular crop

Other than tomatoes, home food gardeners grow substantially more vegetables than they do fruit
Q: What do you do with the harvest from your garden? Choose all that apply.

- Eat it fresh from the garden: 96.00%
- Share it with friends or family: 52.90%
- Preserve or store it: 50.00%
- Leave it to rot: 7.30%
- Other: 4.40%

Almost every home food gardener eats some of their produce fresh. 77% of those who preserve their harvest learned how to do so at least in part from a family member. Canadian home food gardeners preserve all the varieties of produce they grow by turning them into jams, jellies, pickles, and preserves, and/or freezing them.
Reasons for Growing Food at Home
Q: I grow food because it is safer than food from the store.

long-time food gardeners

- Strongly agree: 19.3%
- Somewhat agree: 32.5%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 25.3%
- Somewhat disagree: 10.4%
- Strongly disagree: 12.5%

gardeners who started growing food during COVID-19

- Strongly agree: 17.6%
- Somewhat agree: 25.3%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 25.3%
- Somewhat disagree: 16.5%
- Strongly disagree: 15.4%
Q: I grow food because it has more flavor than food from the store.
Q: I grow food to save money.

long-time food gardeners

- 12.8% strongly disagree
- 12.5% somewhat disagree
- 24.4% neither agree nor disagree
- 18.3% somewhat agree
- 32.0% strongly agree

gardeners who started growing food during COVID-19

- 11.0% strongly disagree
- 17.6% somewhat disagree
- 17.6% neither agree nor disagree
- 16.5% somewhat agree
- 37.4% strongly agree
Q: I grow food to reduce my environmental impact.

As a factor in home food gardening, attitudes about environmental considerations are fairly consistent among long-time and home food gardeners who started gardening during COVID-19:

- 50.8% of long-time gardeners agreed
- 49.5% of new gardeners agreed
- 20.4% of long-time gardeners agreed
- 19.8% of new gardeners disagreed
Q: Growing food is a family tradition.

long-time food gardeners

- Strongly agree: 28.8%
- Somewhat agree: 15.5%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 10.4%
- Somewhat disagree: 28.8%
- Strongly disagree: 10.4%

gardeners who started growing food during COVID-19

- Strongly agree: 14.3%
- Somewhat agree: 29.7%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 17.6%
- Somewhat disagree: 17.6%
- Strongly disagree: 13.2%
Q: I grow food to teach my children new skills and knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Long-time food gardeners</th>
<th>Gardeners who started growing food during COVID-19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t have children</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Implications and Conclusions
Recommendations

• **Popularity of home food gardening:**
This study was completed at the end of the first summer of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada, after most of Canada’s citizens were under lockdown from mid-March 2020 to June 2020, to prevent and control the spread of the disease. A follow-up survey should be completed September 2021 to discover if as many Canadians are still growing food at home and if more Canadians have joined the home food growing movement.

• **Land use policy:**
The results of this study have significant implications for land use policy in densely populated cities. 25% of those who live in the urban core of a city grow at least one fruit or vegetable at home, usually on a balcony. 19.1% of non-gardeners claim the lack of space is why they do not grow food at home. Municipal governments need to increase awareness of their community gardens: every major city in Canada has a community garden program, some of which are quite extensive, offering financial support for tools and seed in addition to the free use of municipal land. Studies should be conducted among city residents to discover the level of interest in growing their own food in a community garden. Such results could provide meaningful policy recommendations to municipal and even provincial governments.
Recommendations (continued)

• **Land use policy continued:**
The number of condominium and apartment home food gardeners is also on the rise. 15.42% of home food growers live in a condo or apartment building, while 13.2% of new home food growers live in a building with 8 units or more, while 13.2% of new home food growers live in a building with 8 units or more. This presents a unique opportunity for condo boards, renters’ groups, and neighbourhood organizations to start home food growing associations. Studies should be carried out specifically focusing on small-pot and container gardening among condo and apartment residents. Resident-building based community gardens could also be an opportunity.

• **Canadians’ perceptions of food supply:**
The COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing, with no end in sight. Regardless of if they grow some of their own produce, Canadians need to better understand their food supply systems. Because of the rate of change in socio-economic conditions caused by COVID-19, frequent surveys of Canadian consumers exploring their attitudes to food and food security need to be carried out.
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