



Tania Eitberg, 24 hours

A community garden sits near the corner of Bay and Gerrard streets. A dozen downtowners were selected from more than 400 entrants to be allowed to grow fruits and vegetables in the innercity.

A patch of earth to call their own

They may not have sprawling yards behind their homes but that's not stopping 12 downtowners from digging up dirt and growing fresh fruits and vegetables.

The dozen Torontonians were selected from 460 entrants who submitted contest essays all asking for one thing — a little patch of earth to call their own.

Now a plot of inner-city space at Bay and Gerrard streets is home to their very own urban garden.

Tanzool Merchant, 53, and two of his colleagues were

among those selected to put their green thumbs skills to the test.

The group is already testing the crisp goods that have grown from their eight-by-four-foot garden, where they've planted squash, tomatoes, leeks and cucumbers.

"We (recently) harvested our first crop," said Merchant.

"But someone should have warned us that squash takes up a lot of space," he laughs.

The trio — all of whom live in apartment buildings and work about 10 minutes away from the plot — are learning as they plant.

When the tendrils of the cucumbers began gripping onto their tomatoes, they had to redirect their path.

"It's amazing to see," says Merchant.

"We started out with an empty, blank plot and now it's green. To think, it started out of nothing."

While the busy area is best known for looming office towers, sandline-packed parking lots and traffic gridlock that wedges along the downtown artery most hours of the day, it has undergone a small but refreshingly wholesome transformation with the addition of the

space, created through Hellmuth's fit for food campaign.

Merchant describes it as a reprieve from the hustle-and-bustle happening around him.

"Once you're in that garden, you block everything out," he explains.

"It's your own little oasis."

Urban gardens have also sprouted up in Vancouver, Calgary, Montreal and Halifax, giving the fast-paced city centres some extra breathing room with an extra pinch of colour and fresh garden produce that will be cultivated through to September.

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