

# McGill REPORTER

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## Garden of eating

### Growing food in every nook and cranny

**BY CHRISTOPHER DEWOLF |**

Is it possible to eat McGill? A group of environmental activists, volunteers and McGill researchers want you to think so. Last week, they launched the Edible Campus, a container garden located next to Burnside Hall.

Operated by Alternatives, a social and environmental advocacy group based in the McGill ghetto, the garden will supply up to one-third of the food needed to feed Santropol Roulant's meals-on-wheels program. At the same time, it will provide an opportunity for researchers from McGill's Edible Landscapes Project to study the effectiveness of container gardening as a tool for urban food production.

"Gardens are not just a leisure activity," said Dr. Vikram Bhatt, a professor in the school of architecture and the director of the Minimum Cost Housing Group, which runs Edible Landscapes. "They play a profound role in the lives of the elderly, immigrants and people who are just lonely."

Every week, about 15 volunteer gardeners will spend more than 100 combined hours growing food at the Edible Campus, which was previously located on the roof of the Université du Québec à Montréal TÉLUQ building. (TÉLUQ is now undergoing extensive renovations that will include the construction of a permanent green roof and rooftop garden.) Rotem Ayalon, Alternatives' Rooftop Garden and Environment coordinator, hopes the new garden will attract the public's attention. "McGill is very visible, very public, so it's a place where people can see the possibilities of what they can do at home on their balconies or rooftops," she said.

Alternatives will offer gardening workshops throughout the summer. "It's really a community space," said Ayalon, "so it challenges our notions of what a university can do." In fact, without the public, the Edible Campus would not be possible. "We have a very dynamic group of volunteers but the growing season is when students aren't around," said Bhatt. Being in such a high-traffic location is thus vital to the garden's success. "Nice ripe tomatoes might get picked, but that's a risk we're willing to take. What's important is getting the message out."

That message, Bhatt says, is that container gardens are one of the cheapest and most flexible ways to integrate city-dwellers into the food production process—especially in a tenant-dominant city like Montreal, where balconies far outnumber back yards. "The objective is to introduce productive planting into the city. Every nook and cranny becomes a potential garden."

For more information on the Edible Campus and Edible Landscapes, visit [www.rooftopgardens.ca](http://www.rooftopgardens.ca) and [www.mcgill.ca/mchq](http://www.mcgill.ca/mchq).

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