



*FROM **FARM** TO TABLE*

Patchwork Gardens

Chances are, if you've had a great meal at a Kingston restaurant in the last 20 years, you've had some produce from Patchwork Gardens on your plate.

Megan Joslin and Ian Stutt with their dog Millie

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The farm, just north of Kingston, has built a strong network of local restaurants and grocery stores, supplying them with organic produce including salad greens, tomatoes, carrots, potatoes, beets, onions, and garlic. Owners Megan Joslin, Ian Stutt, and Eric Williams began the farm in 2004, committed to make a positive environmental and social contribution to the local food system.

Patchwork Gardens has always been a certified organic farm, which means that no synthetic fertilizers, insecticides, or herbicides are ever used. The trio have spent a lot of time building healthy soil on the farm's 25 acres in order to maximize vegetable production. "We treat the soil as a living thing," Ian says, "and not just a growing medium." Rotating crops, utilizing cover crops to minimize weeds, monitoring the air, water, and nutrients in the soil are all part of the farm's toolkit to achieve best results. So is understanding the soil: Southeastern Ontario soil can be heavy in clay. That means it is harder to work with than a sandy soil. On the other hand, clay soil holds moisture well and it provides a broad mix of minerals to growing vegetables, and that means more flavour. "Our customers say they can taste the difference," adds Eric, "especially in our carrots."



Eric Williams checks his phone for new vegetable orders.

In the early days of Patchwork Gardens, the trio had a stall to sell vegetables and plants at the Kingston Public Market. But over the years, they made more community connections and made the switch, in 2017, to supplying local grocery stores and restaurants exclusively.

Every week, Eric sends out an email to local restaurants, letting them know what vegetables are available. Orders come in by Tuesday, and every Wednesday, the Patchwork Farms van makes its deliveries. In mid-May, the only crop in the fields at Patchwork Gardens is garlic, which was planted in the fall and which will be harvested

in late summer. But in the farm's three large greenhouses, there are rows upon rows of seedlings, ready to be planted when the weather warms up a little. First will be lettuce, then carrots, beets, tomatoes, and greens. Then onions are planted out. By mid-June, all the vegetable seedlings will be out of the greenhouses and planted in the fields. "It all happens so fast!" says Megan. But if June seems like a blur of activity, then it can also feel like a long wait until the first vegetables are ready to eat. Also in the greenhouses, they grow radish and pea microgreens, highly in demand by local restaurants as nutrition-dense additions to both salads and entrées.





Nothing tastes like summer like a fresh tomato. In July, Patchwork Gardens tomatoes start appearing on restaurant menus. Over the years, says Megan, they have whittled down the types of tomatoes they grow for their restaurant partners. "There are some tomatoes – that I love – that grow so big that they get soft very easily. If we put them in a carrying tray, they'll be bruised by the time they get to the restaurant." So now, the team offers specific varieties to restaurants, ones that are full of flavour and can also handle a short truck ride. These include five big varieties and five cherry tomatoes.

Every year, Patchwork Gardens grows about 100,000 pounds of vegetables. Some of the vegetables with a short growing season, like tomatoes, are now eagerly awaited by Kingston chefs to showcase on their summer menus. Other, hardier vegetables – onions, cabbage, carrots, beets, and squash – will be cellared to provide a year-round supply.

Next time you are at a Kingston restaurant, take a moment to savour the vegetables on your plate and to appreciate the magical combination of soil, sun, rain, hard work, and care that it took to grow them.

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Megan Joslin waters seedlings in one of the three greenhouses. By mid-June, all of these seedlings are planted outside.