

Arts & Entertainment

Learning to take care of the food cycle

From Page 31

With a childhood spent in his family's fish and chip shop, Ian's life has always centered around food. When first in Vancouver, he started as a busboy and dabbled in the kitchen. Between trips abroad, he attended university, but didn't like it.

He knew what he wanted to do—operate and control a kitchen—and because as he says, "Cooking is not a retiring job, it's the opposite, it's a lifestyle." So at 26 years of age, he attended Vancouver Community College, got the credentials he needed, and ended up training apprentices in a hotel.

He realized he liked teaching, so he joined the staff at Dubruille Culinary School and now works at Northwest Culinary Academy.

When Ian asks his new students about the rutabaga, "Does it grow above the ground or below the ground?", they don't know.

Ian figures that if anyone understands how the food cycle works, they will take care of it, be respectful and responsible for the earth, and appreciate the local bounty. That was where the seed of his idea began.

Ever increasing his knowledge base, Ian spent some time at the UBC Farms where they operate a project that unites downtown eastside kids with westside kids and seniors to farm the land. His idea began to germinate and when he drove by London Farm he thought, hey, I could do this in my own backyard.

The idea sprouted in no time. London Farm agreed to give him land to use. Quilchena agreed to give him their Grade 3 and 4 students.

"These students are at an intellectual stage of life—analytical and champions of tomorrow," says Ian. "When we get them involved, they get excited and spread awareness.

"Our job is to nurture them, show them a model of potential, give them a gathering place."

season plot out the land, search for the right seeds), competition (who can pick the most carrots); sharing (they give the excess to the Richmond Food Bank) and ethics ("Am I wasting food?").

Ian's idea is to re-instill in youth what we've lost. To discover where food comes from and through intergenerational mixing, give youth hope for the future and deep respect for all people. By bringing different cultures together, they learn that the earth offers a common language where ideas can be exchanged regardless of age or physical limitations.

"These students are at an intellectual stage of life—analytical and champions of tomorrow."

—Ian Lai

It's also about slowing down. Students expected the seeds to grow with the same speed they connected to their MP3s, but it takes 14 weeks to see MN's (Mother Nature) output.

On the rainiest day in October, Mr. Hunter's class trudged out to the

fields and picked carrots. "Can you eat this?" they asked.

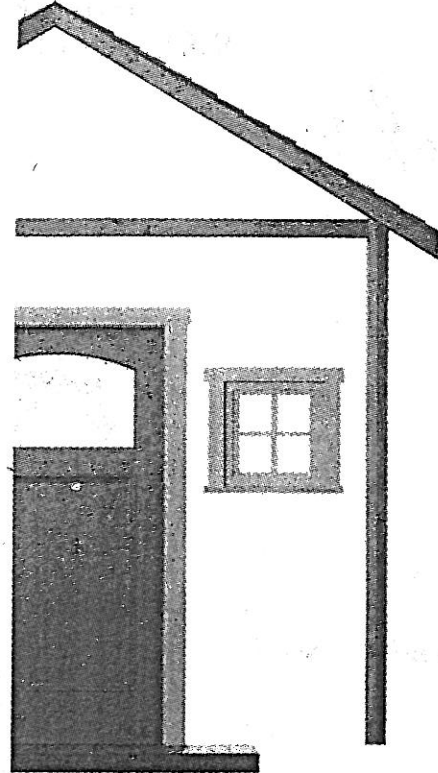
This is why Ian is so passionate about the project. There's no fortune, notoriety, or political gain in it for him. It's about building community, wanting to make a difference. His attitude is that if you feel you can contribute in some way—do it.

He wants the community to be aware of this project and be ready for involvement when it comes to their school, or better yet, ask their school "Why aren't we doing this?" Start an edible school yard revolution. Help Richmond become a model project for the rest of the world.

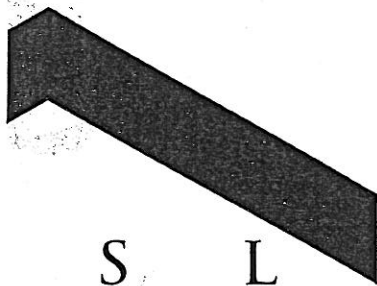
Ian receives no funding. Seeds are donated, the city offers use of the land, London Farm and the Fruit Tree Sharing Project loan their tools, but Ian needs small sized gloves, rain ponchos and hats, transportation from schools.

He's asked the city for an "Ian's Kitchen" to be built on site at Terra Nova, so the kids can taste what they grow—perhaps an omelette with the eggs gathered at London Farm.

The Edible Schoolyard Project is an opportunity for kids to play with food



FEEL
D FRONT



S L
CAN HELP!

nada Mortgage and Housing provides practical, objective the energy efficiency of your and improve the environment... our own home.

home? Renovating to make your efficient? Ask how CMHC's e Loan Insurance can help you

ome repairs? For low-income tance may be available through abilitation Assistance Program.

the Government of Canada's ng Canadians deal with high

or to get your free CMHC e,