

# **Growing with attention: An exploration of gardeners' awareness of the more-than-human and relational fabrics of their garden**

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Urban gardens are complex spaces where nature and culture intersect. While they are influenced by non-human factors such as evolution, climate and soil, their existence is also integrated with the complex mental, emotional, and physical nature of their gardener who serves as an organizing factor for their garden. This study explores this complex relationship between gardens and their gardeners. Open-ended interviews were conducted with urban gardeners in Kamloops, BC, in the summer of 2024 beginning with the prompt *"Can you tell me about your garden?"* The interviews showed how gardener-garden interactions exemplify both relational and more-than-human geographies. Relational geography understands space and place as active co-creators of experience rather than a backdrop for human lives and activities. Kamloops gardeners are aware that their gardens are active spaces where complex relationships take place between themselves and the more-than-human world. Gardens are ongoing productions of relationships between many factors, including gardeners, plants, soil, sunlight, water, pollinators, bugs, and pests. This awareness extends to an ethics of care for the world of the more-than-humans they are in relationship with; Kamloops gardeners pay attention to the likes and dislikes of their plants, the conditions they need to thrive, and the seasonal processes that they follow. They become attuned to the specific conditions and microclimates of their garden, and how they impact the plants that are growing. They understand how things such as tree removal, unusual weather, and watering restrictions affect their plants, and impact the overall health of their garden, and they adjust their gardens to support the wellbeing of their relational plant community. Not only do gardeners notice the preferences of their plants, they also notice the preferences and routines of pollinators, birds, and other wildlife in their garden. This deepens their engagement with the more-than-humans that are themselves co-creators of the space. Gardening encourages gardeners to engage with their garden in a relational, more-than-human way.

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