

Seed library initiative taking root at Fredericton Public Library

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Librarian Jessica Larocque browses the bean seeds that are available in the Fredericton Public Library's seed library.

Photo: Rebecca Howland/The Daily Gleaner

Eric Carle's *Very Hungry Caterpillar* would be very happy nestled between the beans and dill at the Fredericton Public Library.

The hot-spot for capital city readers is now home to a seed library which categorizes close to a dozen seeds from A to Z.

"The seed library is, well, it's housed in an old card catalogue and it's just a way for the public to be able to come in and "borrow" seeds for free that they can grow at home," said Jessica Larocque, the children's

services and adult services librarian at the Fredericton Public Library.

“We have 10 different varieties of fruits and vegetables for people to borrow. You can take out six packages of seeds each visit. So, you could come back and get six packets of seeds each day.”

Larocque says the program was started as a way to get people more interested in where their food comes from.

“It’s just to try and encourage people to come in and grow their own food and to learn where their food comes from and (how) to grow it themselves,” she said.

“We hope that people will learn how to harvest seeds. That is how we can keep the seed library going is if they harvest their seeds and bring them back to us.”

The variety of seeds include beans, peas , ground cherries and even herbs, like dill.

All the seeds are colour coded and the ones that take longer to grow are marked with a red or yellow label.

If people want to sign some seeds out, they need to show their library card.

“They can sign up at the reference desk of the second floor to start borrowing seeds,” Larocque said.

The seed library initiative was created in partnership with the New Brunswick Community Harvest Gardens organization, which runs several community gardens throughout the city.

“They’ve supplied us with all the seeds and created information packages for people to help them learn how to plant, grow and harvest any of the vegetables they grow and learn how to harvest seeds,” Larocque said.

“They (NB Community Harvest Gardens) are the ones keeping the seed library stocked, too.”

The package includes planting information for different fruits and vegetables as well as tips on how to harvest seeds.

This information is also on the NB Community Harvest Gardens website.

NB Community Harvest Gardens is also growing some plants, like beets, so they can harvest the seeds and supply the library on their own.

Carol Muncer, the garden coordinator for NB Community Harvest Gardens, is the person behind the seed library program.

She got the idea for the library after one of the garden users mentioned that she couldn’t buy certain necessities because she wanted to buy seeds and plants to plant in her garden.

“I thought ‘okay, this is ridiculous’,” Muncer said. “People shouldn’t have to go without medication or without food to be able to buy plants.”

Muncer and another community garden volunteer began a portable seed library a couple of years ago, but felt it wasn’t always accessible to those who wanted to use it.

“The biggest problem with it is that people are looking for it, but it’s just not always there when you want it,” Muncer said. “You have to be either at an event or you have to be at the garden when I’m at the garden or when somebody else has taken it to the garden.”

The group had been looking for a permanent spot for a while, but the location at the public library just seemed to fall into place.

“The public library, it was kind of a mutual thing,” Muncer said. “I think somebody who works there knew one of our gardeners and I think they heard that we had a seed library.”

Like Larocque, Muncer says programs like the seed library are important because they teach people about where their food comes from, but it also helps them become more sustainable and that is a significant part of having food security, one of the many missions of the community garden group.

“The Community Harvest Gardens wants to make growing your own, affordable food (more accessible,” she said. “It’s helping people being able to afford the seeds they want to (have).”

It also ties in with the new direction the Fredericton Public Library is taking their programing.

“Right now we’re looking at becoming at community space,” Larocque said. “People don’t traditionally think of libraries as a community space, they think of it more as being a place to get books, but really it’s a great place because it’s open to all the public and it’s more of a community hub. That’s why the Community Harvest Gardens thought of the library as a place to have their seed library.”

Muncer hopes the seed library will expand as its popularity grows. She would like to add more seeds and even plants.

“I hope more and more people will access the garden as a seed library,” she said. “But I’m really hoping they won’t need to access it (later) and will be saving their own seeds. That’s the long-term goal.”

For more information on the seed library, visit www.nbchg.org.