

# MiSustainable Holland

## About this series

The MiSustainable Holland column is a collection of community voices sharing updates about local sustainability initiatives.

## This Week's Sustainability Framework Theme:

**Community & Neighborhood:** The places we live and the individuals we interact with support the development of our personalities and perspectives on life. Encouraging vital and effective communities is essential.

## Gardening in the city is a community thing

By Beckett Eich  
Community Gardener

Living in downtown Holland has its advantages, and one of them is being able to grow my own fruits and vegetables nearby – in the public garden at Windmill Island!

I have always been interested in growing my own food and growing plants. In 2017, when I was 9 years old, I first heard about public gardens being available to rent seasonally at Windmill Island. I jumped at the opportunity.

The idea of renting a garden plot at Windmill Island appealed to me. It was close enough to bike to, and our family has a small city lot downtown, which made it hard for us to have a garden at home due to limited space.

The community gardens also were appealing because all the supplies are included, including the watering hose and the tool shed with many different types of gardening equipment.

I appreciated the importance of the community gardens for an all-organic approach to farming, even if it meant dealing with some pests. This meant the soil stayed clean of chemicals and safe for everyone to plant.

The newer, sturdy, and well-built fence is one of the biggest reasons I continue to rent a plot each year. It keeps out the larger pests that would have otherwise eaten the plants if I planted them at home.

Along the way, I have learned many things about gardening.

One of the first important bits of information I had to learn was how to read seed packets. On the back of each, there is a lot of information about the plant, including planting distance, water needs, and time until the plant will produce. The planting distance instructions helped me avoid overplanting.

I also learned the importance of tilling the tougher clay-like soil and, in more recent years, the need to dig trenches and mounds. These trenches and mounds collect and direct water, which means better watered plants in summer heat.

At first, I had some struggles, too, with melon-eating bugs that would destroy my watermelon sprouts. Because of the all-organic approach, I had to find a work-around instead of using pesticides. I found that by planting the seeds later in the season, the bugs wouldn't eat them at all.

I choose to continue to rent a plot at Windmill Island for many reasons. One reason is because the cost is very affordable, at \$40 for the season in a one-time payment for the year. The garden offers 48 plots.

The proximity to downtown makes it a great walk or quick bike ride, too, which means it is easy for me to access at any time of the day.

The community garden provides a unique experience for anyone willing to put in the time and patience. Any “want to be” gardeners should definitely look into learning more about what it takes to grow your own garden at [cityofholland.com/1143/Our-Gardens](http://cityofholland.com/1143/Our-Gardens).

- *Beckett Eich is a resident of downtown Holland.*