

Green Wisdom



## **Foreword**

The *Senior and Youth Environment and Sustainability Project* was created under the auspices of the New Horizon's for Seniors Program under Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) and of the Unione Italiani Nel Mondo (UIM). Its intent was to address the needs for socialization of the seniors in the Italo Canadian Community in Ottawa. The project involved interviews and informal discussions between Italian youths and seniors, to capture the seniors' experiences and knowledge on issues of conservation and environmental awareness. As younger Italo Canadians, we were somewhat apprehensive about the outcome of these discussions. Our interactions turned out, in fact, to be very rewarding as they reconnected us to our roots, permitted us to make new friends and taught us valuable recycling and environmental skills by individuals who practiced them before it was necessary or fashionable to do so. The book is one of the products of this interaction. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed writing it.

*Enzo Bertorelli*

Enzo Bertorelli  
Co Coordinator  
*Senior and Youth Environment  
and Sustainability Project*

*Francesca Ruscito*

Francesca Ruscito  
Co Coordinator  
*Senior and Youth Environment  
and Sustainability Project*

U I M , "Union of Italians in the World" of Ottawa Inc. would like to thank the Government of Canada, New Horizons for Seniors Program, for having made our project "Italian Canadian Seniors and Youth: Environment and Sustainability" a reality. We know that frugal living, growing one's own food and recycling are skills that are in abundance amongst Italian Canadian seniors. Through this project, we encouraged Italian seniors in our community to share those skills and values with younger generations.

The knowledge and wisdom of these seniors will gain currency with younger generations and show that "these old fashioned ways of doing things" are not only contemporary, but good for people and the environment. The publication of this booklet will provide youth, their parents and seniors with a tangible reinforcement of these values.

A heartfelt **Thank you** to all who participated in this project.

The Social Services Committee of U I M, Ottawa





## Table of Contents

Foreword .....	2
Introduction .....	4
Gardening .....	5
Composting .....	5
How to Compost .....	6
Aerating your Compost .....	7
How to Garden .....	7
Phases of Pre-Planting .....	8
Fruit trees .....	9
Flower beds .....	10
Cooking .....	10
Roasting Chestnuts .....	11
Canning of Fruits and Vegetables .....	12
Tomato Sauce .....	12
Home Made Remedies .....	15
Polishing Silver .....	15
Cleaning Leather .....	15
Washing Wooden Floors .....	15
Remove Bad Odors .....	15
Air Fresheners .....	15
Cleaning Rags .....	16
Insecticides .....	16
Watering your Garden .....	16
Shoe Maintenance .....	16
Curing an Upset Stomach .....	16
Your Cat .....	17
Foot Therapy .....	17
Wine Making .....	17
Sewing .....	20
Mending a Hole .....	22
Conclusion .....	23
Thank You .....	24





## **Introduction**

The modern world, until lately, has evolved a disposable culture. Many of the products we use are specifically designed to be discarded after use. While this may seem convenient, on the surface, the underlying dangers to our environment have surfaced in the form of overwhelmed landfills and oceans saturated with synthetic products, having very long biodegradation times.

From an historical perspective, garbage has always existed. Archaeologists have benefited from the garbage dumps of ancient people to glean a practical view of their daily lives. What has changed over time is the nature of what we throw away.

Initially objects were discarded when they actually reached the end of their practical use. Many times, this occurred after the objects had been repaired or renewed several times. The reasons for this may be both economics and the fact that replacements were sometimes not readily available. In the past, people had less disposable income with which to replace old and worn objects, and therefore used objects to their fullest. Today, increased industrialization and disposable income have created a situation where the vast majority of products made are designed for obsolescence.

The concept of recycling and reusing has only lately been introduced to the youth of our Italian community, but for our elders, this has been a way of life since the beginning. Many of our seniors' recycling skills were acquired at a young age in Italy, when economic circumstances, and the Second World War, produced environments where products were not easily obtainable. This created a culture of self-reliance in such individuals, where they developed skills and habits in preserving the longevity of common objects.

With immigration to Canada, these skill sets and habits were retained, regardless of the improved circumstances. As successive generations came to be, many of these skills were not passed on or adopted. Skills that were initially a necessity and a way of life, have since become past-times that preserve our Italian heritage, and if they are not passed on, run the danger of being lost.

Our project will attempt to bridge this gap by creating opportunities where seniors will be able to impart these recycling skills to the youths in our community. This book is one of several artifacts produced by this project, and we hope that the readers will benefit from its contents and contribute to preserving the fragile balance of our ecology in future generations.



## Gardening

Like many of the disciplines described in this manual, the ability to garden was a way of life and a tradition that Italians adopted in order to be able to eat fresh produce. This ability also grew out of necessity due to lack of manufactured/ prepared foods when our elders were younger. As industrialized food manufacturing evolved, less and less of the products found in our cupboards and refrigerators were derived directly from an agricultural process. Our seniors arrived in Canada with specific skill sets and immediately began to garden. Whether they had a patch of grass with tomato plants, or pots on their window sills with fragrant herbs, our seniors were true artisans with valuable skills to pass on.

Let's explore this wonderful world of gardening.



## Composting

One of the key elements of a successful organic garden is the production of compost. Compost, when produced properly, provides a chemical free nutrient that yields high quality fruits and vegetables that are safer to eat. Composting is essentially the action of bacteria against organic matter.



We are going to get a little scientific here. Experts say it is important to get the right mix of carbon and nitrogen materials in a compost heap. This explains, in complicated terms, what our seniors have learned over a lifetime of trial and error. The dry and brown matter (composed of things like newspaper, straw and dry cuttings) is carbon based, whereas the wet and green matter (like vegetable scraps and lawn clippings) is rich in nitrogen. Our seniors believe that the ideal conditions are 1 part wet/green to 25 parts dry/brown. If you will not have this sort of balance, do not be overly concerned. Just bear in mind an overly dry compost heap will take ages to break down, and one too "green" and wet will start to smell.

Tips concerning the addition of lawn clippings to compost: Care needs to be taken when adding lawn clippings to compost. These are usually very moist and rich in nitrogen. As they are so wet, they will clump together, releasing the oxygen needed by the bacteria, and the pile will get quite smelly. It is best to mix clippings in thoroughly with the pile, or spread the lawn clippings out for a few days to dry a little and then add them.



## **How to Compost**

One direct way our seniors favor when creating compost is to dig a hole and slowly fill it with garden and kitchen scraps, then bury it when it is near full. This covers the basic elements of composting: contact with the earth permits earthworms to enter your compost and do their thing (Oh! Did we forget to mention? Worms are part of this process too. They eat the organic matter and expel compost). The problem is that you then have to dig up the compost after a while to use it in your garden. Here are a few other easier options.

- **Tower Composter**

The next best thing to a hole in the ground is the tower composter. The real conservationists and do-it-yourselfers will build theirs from wood scraps. The tower composter is composed of plastic sections (insist on recycled) that fit together and are topped with a cover. You typically throw your organic waste at the top, and it works its way down to the bottom to a small door where you will scoop out your compost on a continual basis. The walls of the composter have open slots to let oxygen in to speed up the composting process. When you buy one, place it in a relatively dry patch of your yard (remove any grass to expose the dirt under it - this permits the worms to crawl up into the unit and help out). As well, the bacterium from the ground will also move up the tower. Our senior friends suggest that to help a new composter start, mix in a few shovelfuls of nice black soil to insert the bacteria into the pile quickly.

- **Rotation composter**

A recent addition to the composting world is the rotation composter. The unit is basically a drum with a door on its side mounted on a stand with a crank mechanism to rotate the drum. The instructions are simple. Open the door, throw in your organic waste and rotate the drum for 3 or 4 revolutions.

Using a rotation composter is the fastest way to create mulch because the waste you threw into it got mixed in with the existing compost. Therefore, two things happen; i) the compost maintains a low density, and ii) oxygen can easily get into it, the bacteria spreads out, and has more food to eat (this in turn, allows them to release compost).



We showed a composter to our Italian seniors and explained how it works. They were very disappointed that the unit was not painted red as this, according to one of them, “e’ una Ferrari”.



## Aerating your Compost

This is a good time to talk about aerating your compost. We said that compost is created through the interaction of bacteria with organic matter from your garden and kitchen scraps. In order to work, the bacteria, like all living things, needs oxygen to thrive. So it is important that oxygen gets to the entire pile of compost. This exposure to oxygen will determine the speed with which the compost is created.

## How to Garden

Now let us look at how to garden following simple advice given to us by our Italian friends:



1. Key tools for starting a garden:

To begin, you need some solid and durable tools. According to our seniors, a good garden spade is essential for the preparation of the garden (no rototillers, those are for amateurs!). You then need a garden hoe, a rake, a water hose, a pair of garden shoes - preferably an old comfortable pair, and lastly, a strong back, because it is now time to dig up your garden!

2. Before digging your garden, it is necessary to plan the layout. The layout of the garden is based on several important factors that include exposure to the sun, inclination of the property, and the yield that you require from it. Indeed, it would be a terrible mistake to plant tomatoes, which need a lot of light, in a section of the garden that receives little sunlight.
3. Once you have laid out your garden, you will proceed to dig up the ground about 1 foot deep and flip it over (this will further compost your garden).
4. Using a garden hoe, break down your earth clumps and create a nice uniform surface. While you have your hoe in hand, layout the sections for the various vegetables you have chosen and create ditches that will separate them.
5. Level out the dirt and with your hands or the hoe, and create some grooves that will allow water to reach the plants when watered.

Good job! You are now ready to plant! You have two options when it comes to planting; you can either plant seeds or little plants. Certain fruits and vegetables can be planted directly from seeds, such as strawberries and lettuce, while others that require a longer growing season, such as tomatoes and eggplants, will require to pre-plant the seeds in smaller containers, and grown in a protected area in a shed or greenhouse until the weather permits planting into the ground. It is important to plant them in the spring to ensure they will be ready for June. Make sure to protect them from cold drafts and give them as much sun as possible. Otherwise, those plants will not grow fast enough during the Canadian growing season to yield ripe produce.



## **Phases of Pre-Planting**

If you plan on growing your own plants from seeds, you will need to follow a few simple, but necessary, steps.

### **Phase 1**

To begin planting seeds, you will need to obtain some vases and paper egg cartons. Tear off the covers of the egg cartons (do not forget to recycle them) and then fill the little recesses with nice black mulch that you created the previous year using your compost and a little composted manure (the manure can be sheep, horse or cow, but cow is better). Water the containers and leave them out in a protected area within as much sunlight as possible. As simple as this may seem, remember that Mother Nature does not build a little greenhouse around every seed that falls to the ground. So do not be disappointed if not all of your seeds successfully grow into a plant.



### **Phase 2**

When the seeds have germinated and the little plant looks strong, it is time to transplant them into a larger pot. You can tell when they are ready by pulling one of the plants. The roots should be well developed and should occupy the entire mulch ball. You can now transfer the plant directly in the garden, or in a larger vase. If you wish to put it in a vase, break up the egg carton and plant each little compartment into the larger pot, egg carton and all. The larger pot should be reusable.

We do not suggest metal coffee cans as they rust easily due to the acidity and moisture in the mulch. Nowadays you can buy plants in small, decomposable containers, which can be planted directly into the garden. If you can only find plants that come in plastic containers, be sure to buy them from flower vendors that will take back the extras after you have sufficient stock of them. Many will even give you money back (as any immigrant will tell you, a penny saved is indeed, a penny earned). Try to be creative in reusing plastic containers, as plastic does not degrade easily.

### **Phase 3**

Time to plant. Planting occurs when the danger of frost is completely eliminated. Remember that while daytime highs can be very pleasant in the spring, night time lows can descend below freezing and frost will build on your plants and kill them. Always have a backup plan that consists of plastic garbage bags or tarps to cover the plants if a sudden dip occurs. Both could be reusable.

### **Phase 4**

Throughout the growing season, the garden will require a regular maintenance schedule that includes watering, weeding and the occasional mixing in of compost and manure as required.







Gardening is a very healthy pursuit, well beyond the fact you are producing truly organically grown fruit and vegetables. The gardener also benefits from gardening in many ways as it affords a safe and beneficial exercise regiment for the senior. It is also a quiet and serene pursuit that is calming and provides a high level of personal satisfaction and sense of accomplishment.

## Fruit trees



When we interviewed our seniors on this subject, it was interesting to hear how difficult it was for them to have fruit trees when they first arrived to Canada. Our seniors came from Italy, a country that rarely sees snow except for the far north. In Italy, the fragrances of cherries, apricots, oranges and lemons were an integral part of their lives. It is then logical that they would try to replicate those fragrances here. However, there was one problem. Early on in the 1950s, Canada only had 2 areas that supported fruit trees year round: The Okanagan valley in British Columbia and the Niagara Peninsula in Ontario. These micro climates permitted fruit trees to have relatively long summer growth seasons, and protected environments in the winter (and we all know that it does get a tad chilly here in winter).

Undaunted, our seniors persevered to bring a piece of Italy to Canada. While we have no confirmation, we suspect that a few cuttings made their way into Canada in suitcases. Early efforts were difficult and yielded poor results. With time, researchers in both the private and public sector managed to develop fruit tree hybrids that could thrive in Canada's cold climate. Very quickly, saplings of these trees were being planted in thousands of Italian back yards. It took decades, but now many Italian families benefit from a ready supply of fresh fruit.

### **Maintenance of Fruit Trees**

Typically, fruit trees are fairly self sufficient. However, they are subject to various pests depending on the type of plant. While sprays are usually the solution to this problem, there are issues associated with them, the most important being that the chemicals tend to fall on everything under the tree, including you. While many chemical solutions exist, try to look for organic based solutions that are becoming more and more prevalent. The new organic insecticides are citrus based, as well as copper oxide based, and are relatively safe to humans (or look for a home remedy solution mentioned later on).



### **Pruning**

Try to prune your trees in late autumn or very early spring when the tree is stripped of its leaves. Prune branches that appear dead when their leaves are still on them. Mulch and compost the branches.



## **Flower beds**

Flower beds follow the same procedures as your garden. Ensure to water and weed them regularly. This is important as weeds are opportunistic parasites that grow quickly and rob your flowers of important nutrients.

Important note: if you are composting your weeds, ensure that the composting is thorough. Failure to do this will lead to planting seeds for new weeds.



## **Cooking**

While cooking remains a predominant facet of Italian daily life, this is not intended to be a cook book. However, we decided to break this rule given our love for Italian cooking.

One of our friends, Angelo, just celebrated his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. He is still going strong and is a great example of how our seniors continue to improve the lives of those who surround them. Angelo has a unique distinction: he is the only member living outside of Italy of the *Confrateria del Baccalà*. This organization is dedicated to the promotion of cooking Baccalà dishes worldwide. Its members, called “cavalieri” or knights, have a proven expertise and distinction in the preparation of Baccalà dishes. Baccalà is the fish commonly referred to as cod, which once fished, is conserved in salt. It is fished in several predominant areas in Canada, one of which the coast of Newfoundland. This relatively humble food yields spectacular results in the hands of masters such as Angelo.

### **Recipe for Baccalà alla Vicentina**

Ingredients: Baccalà, Oil, Garlic, Onion, Salt and pepper, Anchovy fillets, Parsley, Milk (2%), heavy cream (35%), cinnamon, flour, white wine, and grated Parmigiano Reggiano.

Preparation: Baccalà alla vicentina begins by pounding the fish into tenderness and then soaking it in cool water for a few days. Once softened, dry the fish with a paper towel, flour it and fry it in a pan with oil. Add the garlic, onion, salt and pepper, anchovies, milk, cinnamon, parsley, and wine. Simmer everything for one hour. Add the cheese and heavy cream, and continue simmering for an additional 2 hours. Serve with polenta and homemade wine.

N.B.: As in many recipes from our seniors, specific measurements are not usually given as they tend to do everything “ad occhio” (or “by the eye”).



## Roasting Chestnuts

To continue with the theme of cooking, this section is an interesting one as it touches not only on an Italian tradition, but on one that is prevalent in much of Europe, while being relatively unknown here. In the winter, our friend Luciano Pradal can typically be found in the Ottawa Byward Market roasting chestnuts the old fashioned way for passersby. For some people, this evokes memories of le *passeggiate* in small Italian villages on a cool fall or winter day, but for many Canadians, this is a very new experience that Luciano brings every winter.

The chestnut is commonly found in the autumn months in Italy, when chestnut trees release their offspring onto leaf-covered grounds. Nothing is wasted as Italians enter forests, bags in hand, to pick the fallen bounty. The chestnuts can either be cooked or they can be used in a variety of desserts and dishes.

In order to cook chestnuts the traditional way, make a small slit on the flat side of the nut with a knife and roast them over a wood fire or in an oven. The small slit permits the steam to escape, thus avoiding the chestnut to burst. The result is a delicious snack that is both healthy and natural, because as Luciano mentions, chestnuts contain vitamin C and are gluten and cholesterol free.

Luciano has also given us a recipe for 'Castagnaccio' a traditional Italian chestnut cake. This is done by mixing 500gr of chestnut flour with 500-800ml of water, then adding handfuls of raisins, pine nuts and walnuts, 6 Tbsps of olive oil, and a dash of rosemary. As we mentioned before, specific measurements for our seniors are not as important as attention to proper consistency. In this case, you are looking to obtain a smooth mixture that can be poured into a pan and cooked for 30 minutes in a 350 degree °F oven. Cut the cake into strips, refrigerate and enjoy with a nice glass of homemade wine.

Luciano also regaled us with the legend associated to the Castagnaccio, which dates back to 1449. The story says that a man who eats Castagnaccio offered to him by a lady, will fall in love with her and will marry her! Grazie Luciano!





## Canning of Fruits and Vegetables

You just read about how to garden and, with a little luck, a lot of work and a clement growing season, you will wind up with a bumper crop of very delicious and nutritious fruits and vegetables. While we are able to enjoy the produce fresh during the end of the summer, we tend to grown them in larger quantities than we can eat. It would be a terrible waste of natural resources to dispose of the excess produce (and our seniors do not waste anything).



One way to avoid this waste is to preserve your produce so that you may continue to enjoy it during the winter season. Most, if not all, Italian immigrants to Canada have “cantine” or “cold rooms” filled with homemade canned vegetables and fruits, from canned peppers and eggplants to various fruit preserves. The children and grandchildren of these immigrants in turn, have undoubtedly witnessed the infamous Italian tradition of canning tomato sauce. The reason why Italians are well known for their tomato sauces, we believe, is because of the quality of the homemade canned goods versus goods that are processed and store-bought.

Canning is essentially processing fruits and vegetables in air tight containers and then destroying any bacteria within that container. When this is done, the content of the container will be sterilized and can conserve itself for literally years when stored in a cool and dark place.

Let us look at a basic tomato sauce. We are risking controversy here because there are as many recipes as there are seniors in our community. We will attempt the task anyways and risk their wrath. The following is really a compendium of our discussions and captures the predominant techniques to safe and successful canning.

### Tomato Sauce

To make a good tomato sauce, you begin with a bushel of ripe and firm tomatoes (or leave them to ripen and ensure that they are not bruised). Naturally, the first question that arises is what type of tomato is best? People have many different favorites and sometimes, they can tomatoes based on the dish in which they will be used. Typically, you would use round tomatoes to make “crushed tomato sauce” and elongated tomatoes to make “peeled tomato sauce”. The importance is that you pick smaller tomatoes with little seeds and a bright red color.





Depending on the type of sauce you would like to make, different methods of preparation apply. In this manual, we will show you how to prepare a “crushed tomato sauce”.

To begin, clean the tomatoes and wash them thoroughly. Remove the green ends of the tomatoes, cut them in half, salt to taste and cook them in a big pot for 10-15 minutes, or until the tomatoes begin to release some juice.



Once cooked, it is time to remove the peels and seeds. This is usually done using a special machine that comes in both manual and electric formats. Choose the unit best suitable to you based on patience and volume of tomato cans produced. An electric unit is more expensive but makes short work of removing skins and seeds. The manual unit is slower but still gets the job done well.



Here is a good tip. Our friend Lidia reminds us that tomatoes are, in fact, a thin skinned fruit. Consequently, most of the sweetness is found in the skin. She recommends running the ejected seeds and skins through the machine once more to increase the sweetness of the sauce.

As soon as you passed the tomatoes through the machine, pour the resultant sauce into glass mason jars, preferably washed in a dishwasher. If you do not want to use a dishwasher, wash them well by hand with soap and water.



Close the mason jars with new lids because while it is possible to reuse glass jars everytime you make tomatoes, you must purchase new lids to avoid botulism.

### Sterilizing Jars

Once the jars have been closed, put them in a big pot, alternating a layer of jars with a layer of dishcloths or newspapers in order to avoid the jars touching and breaking when the water boils. Fill the pot with water, ensuring that the jars are completely covered with water. Leave the jars to boil for 25 minutes. Boiling the jars is the most important part of making tomato sauce. When boiling them, you will hear a clicking sound indicating that the vacuum seal of the lids has occurred. Once boiled, let the jars cool and remove them from the water. Store them in a cool, dark place for roughly one year.



Tip: Did you know that by adding a table spoon of lemon juice to your tomato sauce prevents it from browning over time?



Buon Appetito!



## **Home Made Remedies**

Before people had easy access to cleaning products, medication, and anything else they needed to make the slightest adjustment to their home, they would create their own concoctions that allowed them to clean their homes, heal illnesses, and make homely repairs.

Our Italian immigrants are rich encyclopedias filled with “formulas” for such homemade remedies, staying away from chemicals that can be harmful to both our health and the environment. From getting rid of bugs in your garden, to washing wooden floors, our seniors share with us some simple preparations that can be made with common ingredients found in your pantry (obviously, try to follow these remedies with caution given that they are “home made”).

### **Polishing Silver**

Instead of using toxic products to polish your silver, our friend Rosa says that the best way to polish your grandmother’s silver tea pot is to squeeze some ketchup or toothpaste on a paper towel, and then rubbing the pot with it until it shines. Rinse and towel dry.

### **Cleaning Leather**

According to our friend Anna, the best way to condition a leather couch or jacket (and staying away from harmful sprays) is to heat up some milk, and then gently whipping it on with a cotton swab.

### **Washing Wooden Floors**

Using commercial cleaning products can be damaging to wooden floors, for this reason, our friend Claudia recommends cleaning them by adding a few tablespoons of white vinegar to your bucket of water.

### **Remove Bad Odors**

Not many people enjoy the smell of fish in the air after dinner, but do not be tempted to spray air fresheners all around you. In order to remove bad odors, our friend Claudia recommends bringing to a boil a cup of water with 1/4 cup of white vinegar and a few squeezes of lemon juice. Bring the mixture down to a simmer and allow the steam to circulate the house. The house will smell as fresh as ever.

### **Air Fresheners**

If you are one of those people who enjoys having their home smell like the rain forest, there is a safer alternative to scenting air than burning candles or incense (which release toxic fumes). Our friend Filippa recommends peeling an orange, tangerine or lemon, and placing the peels in your fireplace, or on top of your radiators. The heat will allow the





essential oils of the fruit peels to be released into the air, giving your home a fresh citrus scent (or dry to make homemade potpourri).

### **Cleaning Rags**

Instead of purchasing cleaning rags or wasting rolls of paper towels, the best way to clean mirrors, counters, table tops and dusting, is to use old cotton T-shirts. Our friend Annamaria suggests that the next time you consider throwing out your used clothes, rip or cut them into the desired size, and use on all surfaces along with cleaning products.

### **Insecticides**

It is common knowledge that insecticides used in gardens are bad for the environment and our health. If you are looking for a safer way to keep bugs out of your garden and from eating your vegetable plants, our friend, il signore Vittorio, recommends sprinkling black pepper on your plants every couple of days. This should keep your vegetables intact, and maybe even a little spicy!

### **Watering your Garden**

People living in Canada, especially Ottawa, have been blessed with finicky summers with half rainy days and half sunny days. Although we assume that the rainy days are sufficient to keep our gardens and grass satiated, our plants constantly demand water when faced with days of drought. Il signore Vittorio takes advantage of every rainy day that comes his way. By placing buckets under the gutters of his house, he collects enough water to keep his plants hydrated throughout the summer. By doing this, he saves on both natural resources and water costs.

### **Shoe Maintenance**

If you own a good pair of leather shoes, you will want to ensure that they last you a long time. Our friend Tony, an experienced shoemaker, has given us some tips on how to care of leather shoes. He suggests that you regularly clean the dust off your shoes, and moisturize the leather with some neutral cream every 2-3 months (to prevent the leather from cracking). Tony also says to keep a shoe-shaper (or old newspapers) inside the shoes, and to store them in places that are not too dry (to prevent cracking of leather) and not too damp (to prevent the occurrence of mold).



### **Curing an Upset Stomach**

We have all experienced an upset stomach due to unfamiliar foods. Instead of reaching for medication, try nonna Francesca's concoction. In one cup of water, add 2 Tbsps. of lemon juice, one Tbsp. of sugar and a pinch of salt. Heat and drink like tea while still hot. This will stop you from running to the bathroom at awkward moments. She also recommends eating a heaping table spoon of sugar for feelings of nausea.





## Your Cat

You may not believe it, but our seniors also had a tip to help our furry friends. Enrico recommends putting a sliced olive in your cat's food if he/she is having trouble eating. Cats seem to love olives and their appetites will be back to normal.

## Foot Therapy

This remedy surprised us a little. As we know, the most common use of cornmeal in our community is to make polenta. One of our seniors indicated that cornmeal also helps to fight fungus. They suggested that the best way to eliminate foot fungus and bad foot odor, is to allow cornmeal to soak in water for 30-45 minutes, then add warm water and immerse your feet. We felt a little silly trying it, but were surprised to see that it works great!

## Wine Making

Wine making in Italy dates back to ancient Roman times. Today, Italy is one of the largest wine producers in the world, exporting well-known names such as Barolo and Chianti. One of the reasons for this success is the Italian "theory" that no meal should be consumed without a glass of *vino*. Our friend Giovanni was convinced that "un bicchiere di vino al giorno e' buono per la salute" (a glass of wine a day is good for your health). He may not have been a doctor, but physicians today would agree that a glass or two of red wine during a meal may indeed have very beneficial effects on one's cardiovascular system. Why make your own wine? Because while it is easy to drive to LCBO and buy a bottle, the satisfaction and pride that comes from creating, serving and tasting your own homemade wine using the skills and techniques passed on by our ancestors, is invaluable.

Winemaking is one of the many incredible skills brought by our seniors to Canada upon immigration. In the early days in Italy, winemaking was a rudimentary process, and our seniors had to be very ingenious in order to produce a palatable wine. In fact, several challenges existed.



First of all, grapes did not exist in sufficient quantity in Canada to permit home production of wine. While the Niagara peninsula yielded some grapes, they were far from the outstanding varieties that exist today. These were eventually created by wineries through cross breeding. The nearest large scale supply of grapes was in California. In the 50's and 60's, some individuals began importing trainloads of grapes into Canada mere days after they had been picked, for resale to home winemakers. Premium varieties are now also available from Italy (of all places), France, Spain and South America.



The second challenge was equipment. In the past, fermentation was done in old whisky barrels. The inside of the barrels were burned to add a thin coating of charcoal which permitted the whisky to mellow as it aged. Wine, however, did not ferment well in this environment. It was therefore necessary to scrape out the charcoal to expose the oak interior of the barrel. Once clean, the barrel was filled with water to remove the remaining whiskey from the wood. A hole was drilled at the bottom for a spigot to be inserted, and the barrel was placed on a stand ready to be filled. We should mention that the oak vastly contributes to the aroma of wine fermented in these barrels. Today, most people use synthetic barrels purchased at specialized wine equipment stores. One trick is to add oak wood chips to the fermented mixture to further enhance flavor.



Other equipment necessary to the home wine production process are:

- Carboys (commonly known as demijohns). These are glass containers of sizes varying from 5 to 57 liters and are used for secondary fermentation.
- Bottles. The wine's final destination.
- Wine press. This will press the remaining skins and stems after the wine is drawn from the fermentation barrels.
- Miscellaneous instruments such as funnels, filters, siphon tubes, etc.

Like gardening, canning, and cooking, the skill of wine-making is also controversial as everyone believes that they know the "best way" to make wine. The arguments amongst *paesani* in the little cafés along Preston Street (Corso Italia) can get pretty heated on the subject. The purists swear by stomping the grapes with boots (or bare feet); the technocrats say that this is useless and use mechanical grape crushers. Either way, you will be left with crushed grapes made up of must (grape juice), stems and grape peels. All are necessary in the fermentation process as they contribute chemical compounds that will give the wine its specific characteristics.



While most of our seniors are not organic chemists, they could be as they consistently manage to create wonderful wine using one of the most complicated chemical processes around. Fermentation of wine for Italians is usually done in a garage or a wine cellar, and traditionally in the month of September when the weather becomes unstable. Fermentation needs heat to start, but must be controlled in order to avoid oxidation of the resulting wine. Our seniors tell us that the 1 or 2 weeks it takes for the

wine to ferment (again, subject to controversy), is a busy time involving opening and closing garage doors and windows to cool down or warm up the room. The mixture will slowly bubble as it ferments and you will notice that the peels and stems float to the top and form a cork, sealing the fermenting wine from air and oxygen that could oxidize it.



When the fermentation ends (notice that the bubbling stops), you will begin the process of transferring the juice from the barrels to the carboys. Simply open the spigot at the bottom of the barrel and draw the wine into a bucket and then into the carboy with a funnel.

Once in the carboy, the liquid will undergo a secondary fermentation and will begin the clarification process by depositing the sediment at the bottom. In the next few months, it will be necessary to decant the wine from one carboy to another to remove the sediment. Nowadays, we can stray from tradition and use a powered wine filter to speed up the process and recover all the wine. However, this is also subject to controversy as many of our elders feel that the filters strain out some of the elements that give certain wines their unique bouquet and aroma. Once the liquid has been filtered, the aging process begins. Some wines can be aged longer than others, and after a few years the wine can be bottled.

### **Sanitizing the Equipment**

It is important to note the importance of not only clean, but also sanitized equipment. Wine is finicky and will easily be affected by equipment that is poorly cleaned. All glass containers should be cleaned with a bleach-based wine equipment cleaner, rinsed completely in boiling water and allowed to dry before use. This will ensure that all wine residues from the past will be scrubbed away completely.

### **Storing the Wine**

As mentioned, when you feel your wine has been aged enough, you will transfer it into glass bottles. The easiest thing to do is go to the store and buy bottles, however, a more eco-friendly option is to visit local restaurants and banquet halls and ask them for their empty bottles. You can then wash them yourself and purchase some corks. Once filled, the bottles should be stored horizontally to ensure that the corks remain wet and retain their seal. Some of our elders store the wine in the carboys until shortly before their use, but this is generally done according to preference.

### **Making Wine from Juice and Concentrate**

Finally, we would be remiss if we did not mention that wine can also be made from either concentrates or from fresh juice that can be pressed for you by grape suppliers (our elders would probably think this is blasphemous). This new method of making wine has become very popular due to its relative ease of use. In addition, it is far less labor intensive and messy. This method however, has both its proponents and detractors. Our seniors seem to be somewhat divided on the subject. However, all agree that it is desirable to retain some stems and skins from the pressing facility and introduce them into the juice before it begins to ferment. Like crushed grapes, the stems and skins contribute positively to the body and aroma of the resulting wine.



## Sewing

An important aspect of home life for a woman in Italy was the production of cloth, and the confection of clothes and other items from that cloth. It was not so long ago that this was the only way to clothe your family, as well as provide the necessities for your home such as mattresses, blankets, and tablecloths. This task required a large amount of skill and ingenuity on the part of our Italian ladies. Once they immigrated to Canada, they brought with them these skills and continued to produce beautiful items. Today, these are done more as a hobby and to preserve Italian tradition.



Back in Italy, a humble flock of sheep and a tall patch of hemp owned by a family meant that they had the raw materials to produce items to keep family members warm and comfortable. When wool is shaved off the sheep, it is spun into yarn and stored until it is used to knit clothes and cloth items. It is interesting to note that wool was once used as stuffing for mattresses. The core of the mattress was composed of corn husks (nothing was wasted), and the wool then formed the finished top and bottom of the mattress just under the cloth liner that was weaved from hemp.

Both wool and hemp are renewable resources. Wool from sheep grows back after it is shorn from them, and hemp is one of the most prevalent fiber producing plants on earth. Hemp is a hardy plant that requires relatively little natural resources to grow, unlike synthetic cloth that is derived by petroleum products - a finite resource..

Note: Hemp is a plant that grows to great heights and produces strong fibers. The leftovers from the production of hemp fibers were used as compost - a very efficient reuse of existing resources. Similarly, when woolen fabrics were no longer useful for clothes, they were shredded and used for filling in heavy quilts. Linen and hemp were also shredded and turned into paper. Again, we see how natural resources can still be recycled into something new after they reached the end of their first use.



Our friend Loreta shared her knowledge on how to turn wool shorn from sheep into wool that could be used to spin into yarn to be knit into shawls, scarves, socks, gloves, sweaters, undershirts, or woven into fabric for jackets and coats. She also mentioned that hemp was usually spun into yarn to be used in making sheets, towels, pillowcases and mattresses.

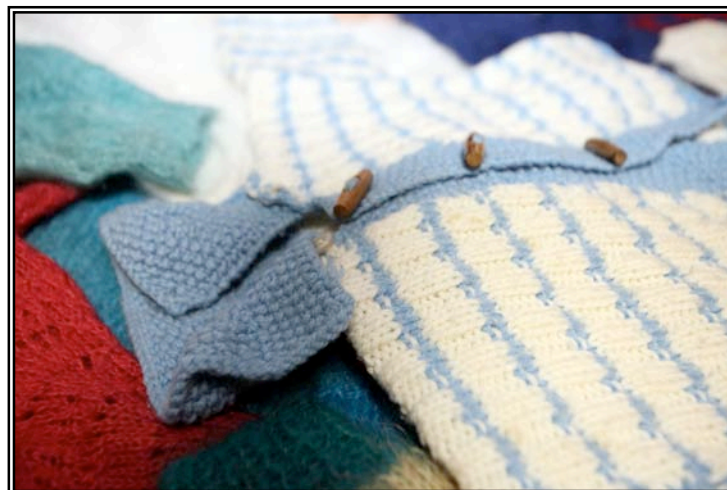
In the 1950s in Pratola Peligna, Italy, Loreta and her sisters worked together to produce items from wool and hemp that were used both by their family, and to sell to members of their community. Loreta was a spinner and a weaver. In her home, she had a large room where she could measure out the



long lengths of yarn needed for her loom. The traditional looms used in weaving are large with their design dating back almost a thousand years. Weaving would typically be done over the long winter months. Loreta mentioned that it took a lot of skill to weave fine cloth, and that once the cloth was produced, it had to be bleached. This was done in the most economical way possible; long strips of cloth or thread were soaked in water and spread out in the sun to slowly bleach them.

Although people made or purchased clothes and cloth products for their own homes, it is important to note that traditionally in Italy (as in many countries) young women would accumulate dowries in preparation for marriage. This included towels, sheets, pillow cases and nightgowns. So families would buy *ruotoli* (rolls) of fabric to have the items made by Loreta and her sisters. In fact, Loreta brought several of these rolls to Canada as a reminder of her work in Italy. However, since arriving in Canada, she has not woven given that she could not bring the large loom with her on the ship. Nonetheless, Loreta and her sisters continued to knit, making sweaters and dresses for their children, thus maintaining the wonderful tradition alive.

No matter how beautiful freshly made garments were, older and used pieces were never discarded. Socks were mended, rips in clothes were sewn up and larger garments were recycled into smaller ones (such as beautiful white wedding gowns that were taken apart and made into first communion dresses for girls). Our seniors came from a time where nothing was wasted, but where things were used as much as possible. Today, our seniors enjoy the fruit of their savings and hard work, and the opportunities that Canada has given them. These skills are still seen as wise ways of conserving and having a smaller impact on the environment.





## Mending a Hole

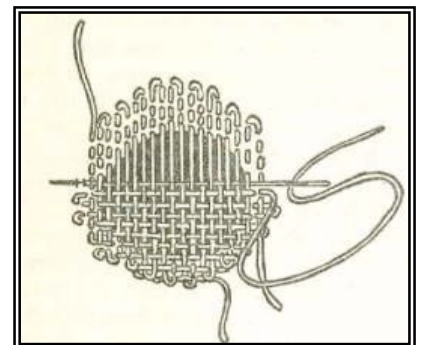
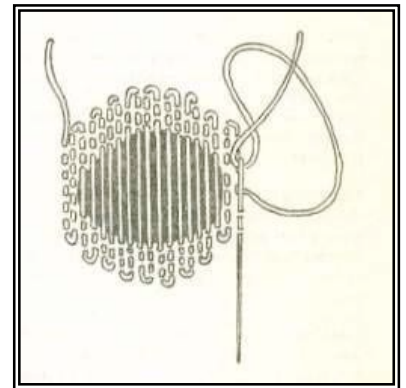
One of the common failures in cloth is when wear creates holes. When most people get a hole in, for example their socks, they either:

- Discard them (our seniors call this the ‘modern’ solution – the word ‘modern’ said with disdain) so that more resources can be wasted to replace them, not to mention more materials in landfills; or,
- They do a quick sewing job just plugging up the hole and being left with a little nub or bulge on the bottom of your sock that hurts your feet when you walk with it.



Our seniors would never throw something away because of a hole – instead, they would fix it! The following option creates a repair that is both resistant to wear, can be repaired over and over, and that is comfortable to walk on. Here is how:

1. Turn the sock inside out.
2. Begin by cutting the frayed edges of the hole, and make sure not to remove too much material.
3. Sew the hole (with a needle and matching thread) with the sewing pattern vertically as shown below. Note the reinforcing stitches at the top and bottom to support the thread or yarn crossing the hole in the cloth to be mended.
4. Start the horizontal stitches just like before and put the reinforcing stitching on the two side areas that were left unstitched.
5. Worst case scenario, if your sewing skills are poor, use the sock to make hand puppets for your kids! ☺





## **Conclusion**

Well, we have reached the end of our manual. In the short time we spent with our seniors, we were amazed at the breadth of knowledge that emanated from such skillful individuals. While we only learned a small fraction of the vast life experiences they possess, as well as the tips, tricks and techniques that they learned over lifetimes, we feel privileged to have engaged with them. They welcomed us into their homes, sometimes before they fully understood the scope of our visit. Many were surprised that we were actually interested in knowing more about their life.

We believe in the project more than ever since having experienced firsthand the stories and musings of these dear people. We were also privileged to work with an ever enthusiastic group of youths. They all commented that their perception of our seniors had changed radically, particularly in the higher level of admiration that they now have for their ‘nonnini’.

We do not believe that this is the end of our project. We will continue with the teaching process in informal events within our community, especially now that we all know each other so well. This project gave us an understanding of the importance of traditions and the inheritance of transmitted life skills. Let us take advantage of the knowledge and wisdom of our elders today, so that we may enjoy a better tomorrow.

*Enzo Bertorelli & Francesca Ruscito*



## **Thank You**

We would like to extend a heartfelt **Thank you** to all the skilled artisans who participated in the project: Delia DalGrande, Luciano Pradal, Tony Toscano, Angelo Andrella, Giuseppina Lofaro, Loreta Dipelino, Anna Petrocco, and Ivana Londero, as well as all the youths, who with their enthusiasm, made our task even more enjoyable: Hanna Gibson, Julian Gibson, Giuseppe Borrello, Gianmarco Mafri, Alessandro Mafri, Juliana Manoogian, Charlie Crocker and David Mantil.

We would also like to thank the Social Services Committee of UIM: Lucio Appolloni, Ariella Hostetter, Carla Minoli-Lappa, Giovanna Panico, Maddalena Ianitti, Berardino Carrozzi, Clara Panarella, and Sal Iacono for their collaboration.

A special thank you goes to Giovanna Panico, Claudia Rocca, Elizabeth Ruscito, and Alessandro Morelli who helped us with the translation, Enrico DelCastello of the *Italian Canadian Youth Formation Center* for allowing us to recruit the youth, and Filippo Falsetto for helping us with the graphic design.

Finally, thank you to The New Horizon's for Seniors program.



Human Resources and  
Social Development Canada

Ressources humaines et  
Développement social Canada

