

Raise a glass to the 'Village Gardener,' a new beer that celebrates community spirit



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Village Brewery celebrated the launch of Village Gardener beer on Wednesday October 5, 2016. Volunteers from several community gardens helped grow and harvest the hops that were used to create this year's community garden beer.
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Take a generous helping of locally grown hops. Add a pinch of a special ingredient, such as basil, from Calgary gardeners. Mix in a whole bunch of volunteers.

The result? The Village Gardener — the latest beer from Calgary-based Village Brewery, which has also bottled up an ideal recipe for community spirit.

Each fall, the brewery releases a new version of the Gardener, the genesis of which came from a flurry of social media posts, explains Village co-founder Jim Button.

A few years ago, one of Button's partners gave him a photo of hops that were growing near his home. Button posted the photo on Facebook and dozens of people began talking about the best use for the hops.

Village Brewery decided to use this type of locally grown hops — and a unique additional ingredient each year — to create the beer known as the Gardener.

The brewery now works with a dozen or so community associations each year and gives them hop rhizomes to grow in community gardens. In the fall, volunteers work together to harvest the hops, along with the annual unique ingredient. (It's basil this year; in past years, it's been nanking cherries, cucumber and rose hip.)



Hardy volunteers, organized by ATB Agriculture, display some of this year's harvest of hops grown locally for this year's Village Gardener beer. Photo courtesy Terry Andryo CALGARY

“The real purpose is to do something to get people together and to get people to understand the importance of community gardens,” says Button. “People meet their neighbours and participate together . . . while learning something about the gardens. It . . . teaches the importance of where food comes from.”

The concept behind the Gardener is one that fits with work being done at ATB Financial, says Terry Andryo, senior agriculture marketing manager for the organization.

People come together to create stronger communities and, in this case, they’re participating in a project that provides a link between urban and rural, while promoting an understanding of agriculture in a fun, engaging environment, he says.

ATB supports the initiative and this year organized a group of about 40 volunteers to help with the harvest.

“Another great thing here is the rejuvenation of community gardens and the understanding of a local food aspect,” says Andryo.

The initiative will result in about 2,000 bottles of the Village Gardener available at local beer retailers.

“Our mandate is about gathering people around community,” says Button. “Beer brings people together, so why not leverage it?”

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