



## Living Food Boxes for those in need.

*If this pandemic is teaching us anything, it is demonstrating the importance of relationships – to each other, to place and neighbour, and to food and plants.*

It turns out that despite drastic measures of social distancing and circumstances of scarcity, goodness emerges in unexpected ways.

Funded by a City of Melbourne COVID-19 Response grant, Cultivating Community and Planted Places are partnering to plant and distribute 50 “Living Food Boxes” for city residents experiencing hardship. This project brings two organisations together around a common cause – to build connections between people and plants.

These not-for-profit groups intersect with a love of plants. Cultivating Community’s (<https://www.cultivatingcommunity.org.au>) mission is to work with diverse and low-income communities to create fair, secure and resilient food systems. By improving access to healthy, affordable and culturally appropriate food, Cultivating Community nurtures well-being and belonging in shared outdoor garden spaces.

Planted Places (<http://plantedplaces.org>) cultivates relationships between people, plants and place, with a specific focus on the transformative power of indoor houseplants and their companionship for people seeking asylum. Housed at the end of a laneway at the centre of the CBD, Planted Places operates the Green Room, a dense interior green space where plants are propagated, and friendships formed.

In an effort to think outside the box, the edible garden project puts green life in a box and grows gardeners. With community gardens currently closed and access to outdoor shared spaces restricted, Cultivating Community had the idea to bring gardens inside to people.

With a short, one-month timeline, project participants will create and deliver 50 garden boxes around the city of Melbourne. Portable grow beds will provide vulnerable people with healthy food for months and enable them to continue growing food across all seasons. Versatile and sustainable, mini gardens can be set up indoors with ample light, on a balcony or patio.

The garden boxes, supplied by Greensmart, come as a complete growing system with a self-watering function that hold 40L of potting mix. The first patch of seasonal plants includes winter vegetables and herbs such as lettuce, tatsoi, silverbeet, rocket, parsley, thyme, oregano, among others.

As a volunteer member of the committee for Residents 3000 and the director of Planted Places, I am thrilled to see this innovative, plant-powered response at a time of significant challenge. I’m grateful to live and work in a neighbourhood where city resources and community members create life-giving projects like this one.

Emerging from extraordinarily trying times, it is clear that our relationships to food and plants have ascended to top priority. This is good - we need one another. Together we can celebrate the reality that homes need gardens, both indoors and outside, and gardens are always looking for homes.

For anyone who is interested, here’s the link for registration to be part of the project:  
<https://airtable.com/shrI5QAPtrwBksLBk>