

Subject-based Zine Finding Aid: Environmentalism

Date: January 30th, 2025

Contributors: Emma Beckman, Karyn Bellamy-Dagneau, Natalie Greenberg, Claire Loewen, William Sinclair

This finding aid was created as part of INFS 645: Archival Principles & Practice, McGill University, School of Information Studies, Winter 2025 taught by Prof. Gracen Brilmyer.

Introduction

1. Introduction to Themes

Themes of Our Zines

Environmentalism and environmentally sustainable practices are the overarching themes of our zine collection. Environmentalism is a broad and multifaceted topic. We define environmentalism as the:

political and ethical movement that seeks to improve and protect the quality of the natural environment through changes to environmentally harmful human activities; through the adoption of forms of political, economic, and social organization that are thought to be necessary for, or at least conducive to, the benign treatment of the environment by humans; and through a reassessment of humanity's relationship with nature. (Elliott 2024)

In the context of our zine collection, we define environmentally sustainable practices as any action, big or small, that one can continually take to contribute to a more environmentally thoughtful future, e.g. actions that cause little or no harm to the natural environment ("Sustainability" 2025).

Within our broader theme is a sub-theme of "how-to" or DIY instructions. We wanted to assemble practical information and steps on how one can become more eco-friendly in their everyday life, particularly in urban spaces, therefore providing realistic guidelines to promote our main theme of environmentalism and environmentally sustainable practices. The practical information included in the zines we collected ranges from green gardening tips and urban agriculture, plant identification information, dumpster diving, and steps to support sustainable agricultural systems and local environmental justice movements.

Statement of Positionality

As Duff and Harris state, description is always biased as it reflects a particular worldview (Duff and Harris 2002, 277). Selecting, grouping, and describing creates a

narrative for these zines, foreclosing other options and meanings. We hope to make visible our positionality to bring transparency to the “dynamics of power relations” of which we are “active participants” (277), and “disclose [our] assumptions, [our] biases, and [our] interpretations” (278) in a way that can be referred to in the future, as worldviews evolve beyond what we can imagine in 2025.

This finding aid is informed by our commitment to providing accessible, practical knowledge in light of the ongoing climate emergency. We acknowledge our varying positions of relative financial, educational, ability, gender, and racial privilege that inform the choices we made. At the same time, we understand the powerlessness often felt in the face of accelerating environmental decline. For this reason, we chose to describe materials that empower individuals to engage with tangible sustainable practices. We agree that respectfully drawing on the knowledge of those who came before us is crucial to working toward planetary health.

Context & Histories

While the broader theme is environmentalism, the focus of these zines is on a particular subset of the larger environmentalist movement, namely sustainable, community-based, DIY urban gardening (McKay 2011; Certomà and Tornaghi 2015; Tornaghi and Certomà 2018), which uses city spaces to cultivate edible and non-edible plants (Certomà 2015, 13). The contemporary urban gardening movement can trace its roots back to both the back-to-the-land in the 1960s and the urban gardening that began in New York City in the 1970s. In New York City, gardening offered beauty to impoverished neighbourhoods, challenging capitalist usages of urban spaces (Certomà 2015). The back-to-the-land movement in the 1960s saw young people move to rural areas and farm, embracing “peace, self-sufficiency, and anti-consumerism” (Janovicek 2016, 35) and providing “a viable alternative to profit-driven global food systems” (37). Both these movements contribute to the political and practical aspects of the urban gardening and DIY sustainability ethos expressed in the zines. Further, the time frame of the zines chosen reflects the interest in small-scale farming and food production in the 1990s, sparked by the growing awareness and anxiety about the health effects of genetically-modified, industrial agriculture (Blue 2010, 147).

Urban gardening, as many of the zines allude to, serves to do more than reshape public spaces for human inhabitation and improve the city’s food system, decreasing local food insecurity (Weissman 2012), but also rebuilds “communities of practice” (Tornaghi n.d.) through education, reclaiming agricultural knowledge lost due to industrialization (Federici 2009). As guidebooks, the zines both educate and demonstrate to readers about how to grow, forage, and identify edible plants, and also sustain and grow the urban gardening community they were created within

(Gunderloy 1990). Through gardening and DIY practices, zine readers and writers challenge, protest, and resist neoliberalism, colonialism, and industrialization.

2. Overview of Items

Zine Criteria

When looking through the collection of zines at the QPIRG site, the first criteria each zine had to meet in order to be included in the collection was that it had to be based on the environment, specifically in terms of DIY sustainability, sustainable practices, or eco-friendly living. Once a pile of zines meeting these criteria had been created, the topics were further separated by specificity, with those which focused more on sustainable activism, or which were more politically motivated being rejected in favor of those better suited to our theme of “how-to” and DIY.

We did find a few zines which almost fit the criteria but fell short. The first was on biking and where/how to bike around a city. While this featured a way to sustainably travel within an urban area, the description of where to bike alone was not enough of a “how-to” guide to fall within our list. Another bike related zine almost fell within the scope of our collection by featuring instructions on how to perform bike maintenance, but was excluded as bike maintenance was not framed as being environmentally imperative. The biking zines sparked debate as they are a ‘green’ method of transportation, but ultimately we felt these fell outside the scope of our finding aid.

The second zine was one on home remedies. This zine featured different herbal remedies for treating common ailments, and while it did fall under a “how-to” or “do-it-yourself” style of guide, it was not focused on sustainability or sustainable living. Therefore, it also did not make the cut. We had one zine which we did include in the collection even though it featured content which was not directly related to our concept. The zine *Beneath the Concrete* is a DIY farming zine, and in that it includes how-to gardening information and directions on urban farming it does fit our theme. However, there is also a lot of description about the art of drawing as a lifelong journey. This does not directly fit our theme, but we decided to include the zine for two reasons:

1. Much of the “how-to” instruction in many of our zines is hand-illustrated, and thus drawing could be an art which relates directly to the “how-to” idea we focused on.
2. Much of this zine was missing (we found 12 pages out of an original 198), and we believe that including this information could be relevant so that none of the original content is forgotten or erased.

The remaining zines in our collection fit the criteria very well. In order to fit our theme for this grouping, the zines had to be specifically about how the average person living in an urban place can live more sustainably and/or to be more

eco-friendly in daily living. They had to contain practical information, and at least some of it had to be organized in a DIY or “how-to” manner. Thus, zines which held practical information, instructions and steps for how to become more eco-friendly, and easy ways to support local environmental movements were included. The collection includes zines on urban gardening and farming, tips on how to grow, preserve, and eat seasonal vegetables and fruits, and other similar information.

Scope, Content, and Arrangement

The zines chosen span 1995 through 2013, a period that saw changes in zine culture and zine distribution (Radway 2011). Many societal and technological changes happened during that time frame also.

We decided to organize our finding aid in chronological order. This collection lacked a clear original order to reference, which led us to think about what order would best suit the users of the zine library and showcase the relationships between the zines. We felt that by ordering the zines chronologically, a user could get a sense of the historical progression of this small part of the environmental movement. Further, as this is a collection of zines with instructional resources the chronological order also enables users to seek out the most current guides. These priorities were informed by reflection on Elizabeth Yakel’s article *Archival Representation* (2003), which states that arrangement and description are fluid practices that derive from the perspectives and social contexts from which the archivists emerge. Thinking in terms of arrangement as “a representation of an intended and well-tended order that probably never existed in the originating context” (Yakel, 2003, p.2), we felt that placing them in chronological order in lieu of original order would best represent the historical context of these records, while also providing utility for future users.

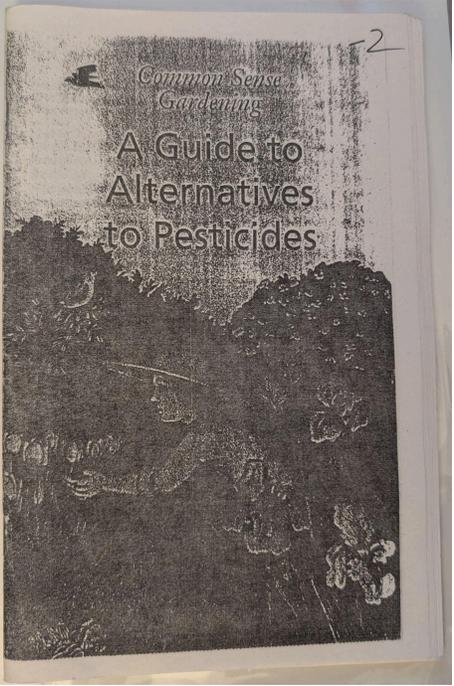
A guiding principle we followed to establish the scope was to evaluate the practical value of the zines. We selected zines that contained instructional content for environmentally-minded users who are seeking resources to learn about sustainable practices that they can pursue. Our zines ranged from structured guides on low-impact pesticide methods, to more general reference material such as mushroom identification guides.

Background Information

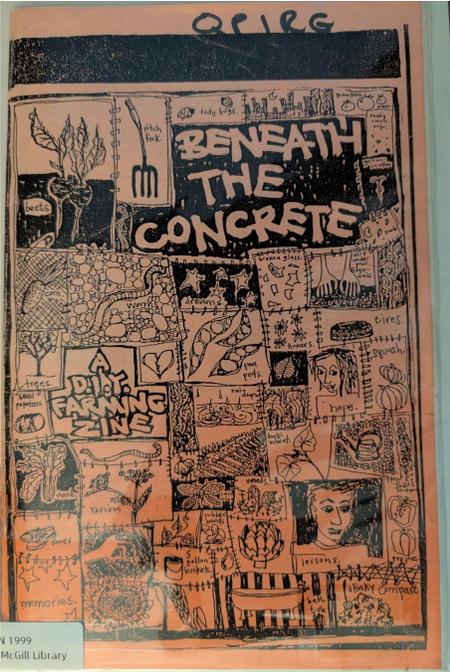
- **Campus Crops:** Two of the zines chosen were by Campus Crops, a project began in 2007 and funded by McGill’s Sustainability Project Fund. It transformed otherwise unused campus spaces into student-maintained food gardens and provided education through events and media about sustainable practices in food production and food politics (Willard-Stepan 2021). The zines were edited and managed by their media coordinator—a position advertised online (Campuscrops 2012)—and paid a small stipend. Their zines fit into their

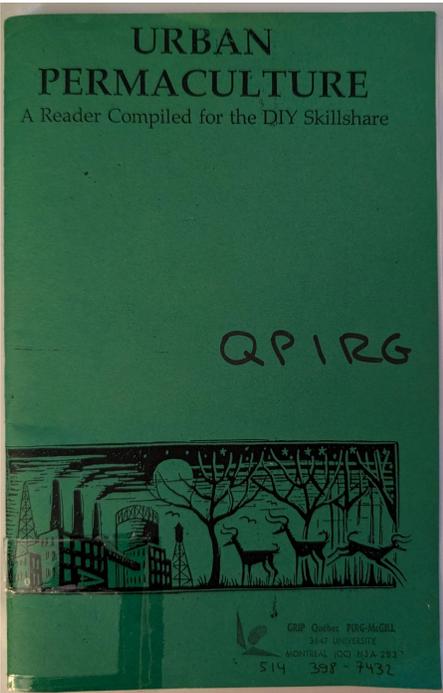
mandate to “empower people of all-skill levels” by “decentralizing and de-institutionalizing skills that have been monopolized by the capitalist food system” (“Campus Crops: Mandate” 2011). Distributed at tabling events (Guerlain 2010) and Frosh weeks (Rad Frosh Scavenger Hunt and Zine Distro, Campus Crops 2012), the zines served both a pedagogical role and as a “promotional reach-out” (Campus Crops 2012). In 2012, they suggested asking other collectives to write short articles for the zine, or reaching out.

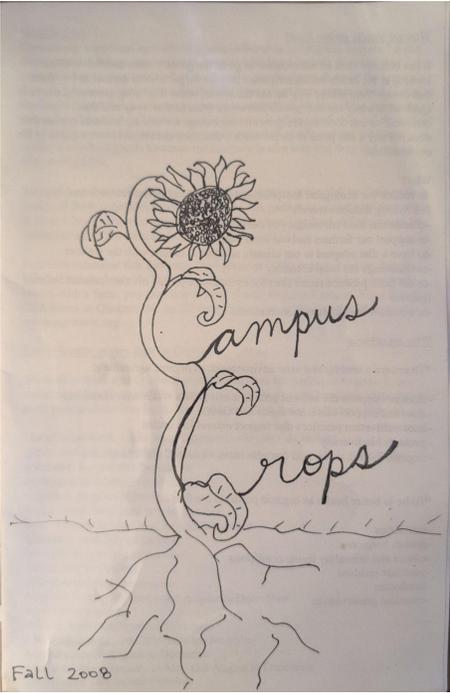
- **Colonizing the Seed:** What we know of this zine is that it was published in 1995 by Friends of the Earth, which is an organization that has been active for many decades. It is known for its mission to fight “for a more healthy and just world[, by] protecting pristine rainforests and stopping reckless fossil fuel projects”, etc. (Friends of the Earth, n.d.). The zine was printed by Black Rainbow, which was founded in 1987 in Australia, the first sustainable printing company in the country (Black Rainbow Printing, n.d.). The author is Gyorgy Scrinis. Today, Scrinis is an associate professor of Food and Nutrition Politics and Policy at Melbourne University. He has written extensively on the “politics, policy and philosophy of food and nutrition, [...]” and other related topics in academic and peer reviewed publications since the 2010’s (A/Prof Gyorgy Scrinis, n.d.). It is possible that Scrinis authored *Colonizing the Seed* while still a student at Melbourne University. This zine offers a mid-1990’s Australian perspective on genetic engineering, environmentalism, sustainability, farming, etc.
- **Beneath the Concrete:** We do not know who Abby Turtle is, who is credited for the art of the zine. We know however who Sascha Scatter - also known as Sacha DuBrul - is, the editor (and possibly the author) of *Beneath the Concrete*. Scatter is known for his environmental and mental health activism, as well as for being a musician and writer. He “became obsessed with riding freight trains [and t]he details of his wanderings [...] end up in one of his zines, which combine adventure-travel tales with thoughtful observations about the global economy” (Todaro, 2000). In 2000, he created an urban seed library in the San Francisco Bay Area, which has become a model for similar initiatives in other cities (Carolan, 2018). *Beneath the Concrete* places itself, seemingly, as work and thoughts precursing this achievement.

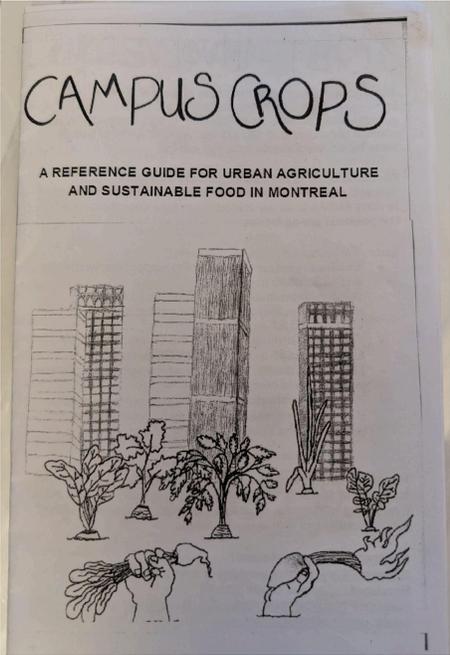
Title	Common Sense Gardening A Guide to Alternatives to Pesticides	
Date	Post-1993	
Author/s	Metro Public Affairs Department (written, edited, and designed); illustrated by Antonia Manda	
Publisher	Metro Public Affairs Department	
Language	English	
Call No		
Subjects	plants, gardening, DIY, insects	
Description	A practical guide to choosing the least harmful methods for managing pests, weeds, and diseases in Pacific Northwest gardens as an alternative to using pesticides. Contains illustrations, names and descriptions of common pests, weeds and diseases, providing prevention and control guidance for each.	
Pages	46	
Dimensions	5.5 x 8.5 in	
Number of Copies	1	

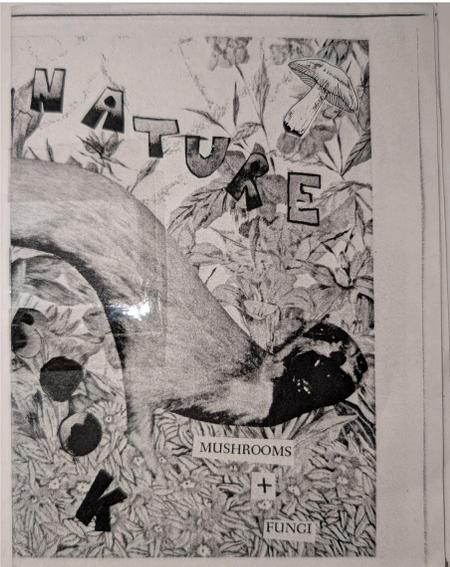
Title	Colonizing the Seed	
Date	1995	
Author/s	Gyorgy Scrinis	
Publisher	Friends of the Earth / printed by Black Rainbow	
Language	English	
Call No	420 SCR 1995	
Subjects	genetic engineering, environmentalism, sustainability, seeds, farming	
Description	A zine regarding how genetic-industrial agriculture will aggravate environmental crises and social inequalities. Includes information on organic and traditional forms of farming, chemical-industrial agriculture and the Green Revolution, and tips on how to oppose genetic-industrial agriculture. It provides actionable steps to take in order to create sustainable agricultural systems.	
Pages	44	
Dimensions	6.4" X 5.5" in	
Number of Copies	1	

Title	Beneath the Concrete	
Date	October 1999	
Author/s	Editor: Sascha Scatter /Art: Abby Turtle	
Publisher		
Language	English	
Call No	Z 400 BEN 1999	
Subjects	DIY, farming, urban farming, vegetables	
Description	<p>DIY farming zine, talks about the art of drawing as a lifelong journey. Describes living on a farm. NOTE: Most pages with information about how-to gardening are missing. First published in 1999, the copy in the collection is a reprinting including new illustrations. Originally 198 pages long (not including bibliography), only 12 pages (covers not included) of the zine remain.</p>	
Pages	12	
Dimensions	5.5 x 8.5 in	
Number of Copies	1	

Title	Urban Permaculture	
Date		
Author/s	Clea & Sasha	
Publisher		
Language	English	
Call No	Z 400 Urb	
Subjects	DIY, plants, dumpster diving, trees, permaculture,	
Description	A reader compiled for the DIY skillshare. Includes informational figures and images on how to do things like mulching, plant stacking, garden layout, dumpster diving, water catchment, trees and their energy transactions, thinking green in city spaces, descriptions of edible plants in urban areas and drawings.	
Pages	56	
Dimensions	5.5 x 8.5 in	
Number of Copies	1	

Title	Campus Crops [1]	
Date	2008	
Author/s	Campus Crops	
Publisher	Campus Crops	
Language	English	
Call No		
Subjects	urban farming, agriculture, local food, seasonal food, dumpster diving	
Description	A practical guide explaining why and how to eat locally grown food, including a list of locally grown food in Quebec and a definition of community-supported agriculture. The zine also includes a list of seasonal food organized by month, recipes, tips for canning, a guide on how to compost, and several other practical how-to guides related to sustainable food.	
Pages	12	
Dimensions	8.5 x 5.5 in	
Number of Copies	1	

Title	Campus Crops [2]	
Date	August 2013	
Author/s	Campus Crops	
Publisher	Campus Crops	
Language	English	
Call No		
Subjects	urban farming, agriculture, local food, seasonal food	
Description	<p>Illustrated and descriptive guide of food crops and kitchens as well as seasonal fruits and veggies, where to get seedlings, and information on urban agriculture. It is a reference guide for urban agriculture and sustainable food in Montreal. While no date was listed on the zine, we believe it was developed for Rad Frosh 2013. The guide was designed as a resource for college students, with CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture), community gardens, help starting a garden, and local markets.</p> <p>Also available online: https://campuscropsmcgill.blogspot.com/2013/09/guide-to-urban-agriculture-and.html</p>	
Pages	12	
Dimensions	5.5 x 8.5 in	
Number of Copies	1	

Title	Mushrooms + Fungi	
Date		
Author/s		
Publisher		
Language	English	
Call No	Z 400 NAT	
Subjects	mushrooms, plant identification, plants, collage	
Description	Black and white collage guides for identifying mushrooms. The collages are playful and absurd, including images such as a dinosaur, and placing the pictures of mushrooms over faces replacing their noses.	
Pages	7	
Dimensions	8.5 x 5.5 in	
Number of Copies	1	

References:

- A/Prof Gyorgy Scrinis. (n.d.). Find an Expert : The University of Melbourne. Retrieved February 11, 2025, from <https://findanexpert.unimelb.edu.au/profile/1628-gyorgy-scrinis>
- Black Rainbow Printing. (n.d.). Sustainable Printing in Australia · Black Rainbow Printing. Black Rainbow Printing. Retrieved February 11, 2025, from <https://blackrainbow.com.au/>
- Blue, Gwendolyn. 2010. "Food, Publics, Science." *Public Understanding of Science* 19 (2): 147–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662508098575>.
- Campus Crops. 2012. "Campus Crops 3 Exit Report 2012." McGill University. SPF Project Archives. <https://www.mcgill.ca/sustainability/engage/spf/spf-projects/spf-project-archhive>.
- "Campus Crops: Mandate." 2011. *Campus Crops* (blog). March 8, 2011. <https://campuscropsmcgill.blogspot.com/p/mandate.html>.
- Campuscrops. 2012. "Campus Crops: Campus Crops Has a Zine!!" *Campus Crops* (blog). September 12, 2012. <https://campuscropsmcgill.blogspot.com/2012/09/campus-crops-has-zine.html>.
- Campuscrops. 2013. "Campus Crops: Winter 2013 Zine!" *Campus Crops* (blog). February 6, 2013. <https://campuscropsmcgill.blogspot.com/2013/02/winter-2013-zine.html>.
- Carolan, M. (2018, November 20). Despite Hurdles, the Seed Library Movement Is Growing. *Undark Magazine*. <https://undark.org/2018/11/20/seed-library-movement-growing/>
- Certomà, Chiara. 2015. "Critical Urban Gardening." *RCC Perspectives*, no. 1, 13–18.
- Certomà, Chiara, and Chiara Tornaghi. 2015. "Political Gardening. Transforming Cities and Political Agency." *Local Environment* 20 (10): 1123–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2015.1053724>.
- Duff, Wendy M., and Verne Harris. 2002. "Stories and Names: Archival Description as Narrating Records and Constructing Meanings." *Archival Science* 2 (3–4): 263–85. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435625>.

- Elliott, Lorraine. 2024. "Environmentalism." Encyclopedia Britannica, December 10, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/environmentalism>.
- Federici, Silvia and Max Haiven. 2009. "Silvia Federici, On Capitalism, Colonialism, Women and Food Politics: An Interview with Silvia Federici." *Politics and Culture*, no. 2.
- Friends of the Earth. (n.d.). About Us. Friends of the Earth. Retrieved February 11, 2025, from <https://foe.org/about-us/>
- Guerlain, Maddie. 2010. "Campus Crops 1 Exit Report." McGill University. 2010-2011. SPF Project Archives. <https://www.mcgill.ca/sustainability/engage/spf/spf-projects/spf-project-archhive>.
- Gunderloy, Mike. 1990. "Zines: Where the Action Is: The Very Small Press in America." *Whole Earth Review*, Fall 1990. https://zinewiki.com/wiki/Zines:_Where_the_Action_Is:_The_Very_Small_Press_in_America.
- Janovicek, Nancy. 2016. "Seeds of Knowledge: From Back-to-the-Land to Urban Gardening." *RCC Perspectives*, no. 4, 33-40.
- McKay, George. 2011. *Radical Gardening: Politics, Idealism & Rebellion in the Garden*. London: Lincoln.
- Radway, Janice. 2011. "Zines, Half-Lives, and Afterlives: On the Temporalities of Social and Political Change." *PMLA* 126 (1): 140-50.
- "Sustainability." 2025. Cambridge Dictionary. February 5, 2025. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/sustainability>.
- Todaro, L. (2000, April 18). Portrait of a Protest. *The Village Voice*. <https://www.villagevoice.com/portrait-of-a-protest/>
- Tornaghi, Chiara. n.d. "About." *Urban Food Justice*. Accessed February 11, 2025. <https://www.urbanfoodjustice.org/about>.
- Tornaghi, Chiara, and Chiara Certomà, eds. 2018. *Urban Gardening as Politics*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315210889>.
- Weissman, Evan. 2012. "No Buts about It...The Value of Urban Food Production." *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* 3 (2): 23-24.

- Willard-Stepan, Maya. 2021. "Growing Food and Community with Campus Crops."
McGill Reporter, August 9, 2021.
<https://reporter.mcgill.ca/growing-food-and-community-with-campus-crops/>.
- Yakel, E. (2003). Archival representation. *Archival Science : International Journal on Recorded Information - Incorporating 'Archives and Museum Informatics'*, 3(1), 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02438926>