



HOW TO DEVELOP URBAN GARDENS AS LEARNING SPACES?

Challenge

Urban gardens are important learning spaces, different types of skills and knowledge are created, both at an individual and communal level. This applies to both allotment gardens and newer forms of gardening projects, such as community gardens.

On a communal level, gardens are spaces where people learn how to interact with other people, how to deal with internal conflicts and integrate newcomers, how to react to dislocation threats and how to become politically involved. Gardeners gain knowledge about sustainable and environmental issues and learn how to cultivate plants. In addition, gardens are great places to interact with different social groups and build friendships.

However, despite the potential for these various learning processes in urban gardens, the learning potential is not always fully realized. Skills and knowledge are not developed and disseminated as much as they could be.

This factsheet provides information for allotment and community gardeners about how to support learning processes and facilitate the dissemination of skills and knowledge between gardeners.



Image 2 - Watering the garden during a communal meeting at the Mustikkamaa Edible park, Helsinki, Finland. Photo: Krista Willman.



Image 3 - Learning harvesting together in Tampere, Finland. Photo: Krista Willman.

Message to Gardeners and gardening groups

Communal Learning

- Community is an important part of learning in both allotment and community gardens.
- Communal action makes it possible to share knowledge and learn while practicing gardening tasks.
- Asking a neighbouring gardener for advice on a specific cultivation problem or setting times for collective gardening, events and meetings for exchanging experiences and gardening tips means you can learn from each other.
- Ideally, communal learning should aim to reach the neighbouring surroundings outside the garden.
- Cooperation with nearby residents and actors such as associations, small enterprises and institutions strengthen the knowledge exchange and communal learning.

Learning Processes

- Learning does not only include acquiring new knowledge and skills it is also a creative process to overcome problems to which the gardener or gardening group has no defined solution. For example, not knowing how to deal with weeds or vermin in a sustainable biological way, or how to integrate newcomers into the garden

community.

- Putting the acquired new skills and knowledge into practice can help gardeners solve challenges or problems.

Different learning forms

- Newer community gardens are often good in creating opportunities such as collective harvesting sessions as well as providing space to communally learn new skills and acquire knowledge.
- New forms of gardening are typically characterised by younger user groups, a more informal membership and locally defined rules.
- Communal learning also takes place in allotment gardens. Allotment associations usually have a more formal membership and rules that are often clearly set out in official documents. Here learning and skill exchange usually occurs between individual gardeners.
- Both garden types, however, can support learning in various ways, as is illustrated on the following page.

Learn More

Case Studies

Kalevanharju Community Garden in Tampere, Finland was established in 2013 on a brownfield site of former greenhouses owned by the church. There is a group of approximately 15 active citizens gardening vegetables in 50 sacks and boxes and sharing gardening tasks and crops. The gardeners arrange educational events every summer in cooperation with local associations on how to plant seedlings, rotate nutrients or how to compost.

The Landhof Community Garden in Basel, Switzerland was set up in 2011. It is run by a group of volunteers active in the local urban agriculture network, and supported by the local gardening department. The garden is publicly accessible and open to all citizens wanting to participate and learn more about ecological gardening and sustainable living. Collective gardening sessions are organized twice a week, as well as cultural events such as small concerts taking place regularly.



Image 4 - Planning the crop rotation for the next season together with a horticulturist. Kalevanharju community garden, Tampere, Finland. Photo: Krista Willman.



Image 5 - Child learning about potatoes, in Tampere, Finland. Photo: Meri Lampinen.

Advice Notes to Gardeners and gardening groups

Observation

- Observing growth during different seasons and conducting growth experiments are excellent ways of learning.

Diversity

- Include people from different backgrounds to encourage new forms of learning: different age groups, nationalities, genders, people from different social backgrounds and different professions.
- Gardeners from diverse backgrounds can introduce new plants and different gardening experiences.
- Professionals from different fields can provide the gardening group with horticulturist knowledge, technical solutions or practical knowledge of social encounters.

Mentoring

- More experienced gardeners can offer help to beginners.
- The associations can suggest experienced gardeners to act as mentors for newcomers.

Communal Meetings

- Arrange weekly or monthly meetings.
- Arrange weekends for planting, weeding and harvesting.
- Use local communication channels (such as local papers, local facebook pages) to inform the neighbourhood about events.

Communal Spaces

- Provide a communal space, where gardeners can meet and relax.

Knowledge Platforms

- Establish platforms for sharing knowledge and gardening tips through social media or a message board (for example a booklet on a wall of the tool storage).

School Events

- Urban gardens are great learning spaces for children, giving them direct contact with nature.
- Contact your local schools and playgrounds to enquire about potential interest in communal activity workshops, such as jam or pesto making.
- Give a plot to a group of school children to take care of and prepare to mentor them and their teacher.

Open Garden University

- Share knowledge by organizing monthly lectures delivered by experts or gardeners (e.g. about a specific project, a type of plant or special planting technique).
- Arrange a lecture where the rural meets the urban: invite a farmer to discuss farming practices from a rural viewpoint.
- The lectures should be open to anyone interested.
- Regular lectures will bring together different people while teaching gardeners how to pass on knowledge.

Learn More

Useful links

Local network connecting green movements in Basel: <http://urbanagriculturebasel.ch>

Community food growing movement in Bristol: <http://ediblebristol.org.uk/>

Explorative urban gardening in Finland: <http://kaupunkiviljely.fi/brief-in-english/>

The Kitchen community. Kids learning gardening skills and community building through urban gardening in the US: <https://thekitchencommunity.org/about-us/>

Useful advice on how to establish a successful urban garden: <http://urbangardenguide.com>

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