



## WHERE ELSE CAN YOU GROW IF YOU CANNOT FIND AN ALLOTMENT?

### Challenge

In many European cities allotments are difficult to find and waiting lists are long. Nevertheless, councils tend to privilege the use of land for development, rather than allotments, in order to meet housing demand.

**Challenge 1:** Where can you find alternative places to start community gardens at a time in which green land is scarce?

- Is it possible to grow plants in unconventional spaces?
- Can you use containers placed on hard paved open spaces?
- Are there other options available?

**Challenge 2:** Provided that some suitable spaces have been identified, how can consent be given for their use?

This factsheet is mainly addressed to groups who want to start a community garden but cannot find inner city land with soil appropriate for cultivation of edible crops. It is also addressed to policy makers, providing them with reasons to facilitate the implementation of community gardens located in unconventional spaces.



Image 2 - Skip Garden, London, UK. Photo: Silvio Caputo



Image 3 - Skip Garden, greenhouse, London, UK. Photo: Silvio Caputo

## Advice for Gardeners

### Alternatives to traditional allotments

Normally gardening is carried out on allotments, with land officially allocated for that purpose. However, alternative locations can be used. These include:

**Hard paved areas:** empty and abandoned yards or squares can become gardens. Any plastic or timber box can be filled with compost. Raised beds can be easily assembled with (recycled) timber and a damp-proof course. Alternatively, any other custom-made or ready-made containers such as skips can be used. These containers have the advantage that they can be assembled on site or transported everywhere, thus potentially making any place suitable for gardening.

**Rooftops:** in every city there are many flat roofs available. However, some issues must be addressed. The loadbearing capacity of the roof structure must be compatible with gardening (soil is heavy), (independent) access must be granted, and there must be compliance with health and safety requirements. If all these conditions are met, roofs can become ideal gardens.

**School and hospital gardens:** It is possible to propose to these organisations to cultivate their gardens for productive, educational

and therapeutic purposes. This partnership can save organisations maintenance costs and increase the quality of their outdoor environment.

**Vertical surfaces:** any vertical surface can be used. Suitable containers for vertical growing are on the market (see for example [www.woollypocket.co.uk](http://www.woollypocket.co.uk)). In his blog, Mark Risdill Smith documents his challenge to grow food vertically on the front wall of his home (<http://www.verticalveg.org.uk/my-growing-diary/>).

### Barriers

Potentially, every space with good sun can be used for gardening. Barriers that must be overcome, however, are many. These include:

**Planning consent:** A form of consent must be attained to occupy these spaces. A dialogue with planners or authorities must therefore be initiated. There are some mutual advantages that, if mentioned in the negotiation, can help gain consent. Firstly, places occupied are usually neglected; using them for gardening triggers a process of regeneration which does not require top-down investments. Secondly, the initiative is likely to attract local volunteers who would benefit from social activities (e.g. older people or people that are socially isolated) and this is in the interest of the local authorities. Finally, issues of ownership can be circumvented if the agreement is

## Learn More

### Useful links

#### Green roofs:

[www.thegreenroofcentre.co.uk/](http://www.thegreenroofcentre.co.uk/)

<http://livingroofs.org/>

[www.greenroofguide.co.uk/](http://www.greenroofguide.co.uk/)

#### Rooftop gardens:

<http://www.gardeningknowhow.com/special/urban/creating-your-own-rooftop-garden.htm>

[http://archives.rooftopgardens.ca/files/howto\\_EN\\_FINAL\\_lowres.pdf](http://archives.rooftopgardens.ca/files/howto_EN_FINAL_lowres.pdf)

<http://archives.rooftopgardens.ca/index.html%3Fq=en.html>

#### Raised beds:

[http://carryongardening.org.uk/files/documents/How%20to%20build%20raised%20beds%20final\\_Nov08.pdf](http://carryongardening.org.uk/files/documents/How%20to%20build%20raised%20beds%20final_Nov08.pdf)

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=428>

#### Handmade greenhouses:

<http://www.motherearthnews.com/diy/diy-greenhouse-zmaz09onzraw.aspx>

[http://garden.org/howto/videos/index.php?page=video004\\_007](http://garden.org/howto/videos/index.php?page=video004_007)



Image 4 - Prinzessinnengarten, Berlin, Germany. Photo: Silvio Caputo



Image 5 - Vertical garden, London. Source: <http://www.verticalveg.org.uk/my-growing-diary/>

## Advice for Gardeners

achieved on a temporary basis. With landowners' interest secured, consent should be easier to attain.

*Temporariness:* Although temporary arrangements may unlock possibilities to access land, they also imply that the project will come to an end in a few years from its start. It is therefore necessary that those individuals/groups that embark on a gardening project with a temporary lease of land use the time available to create strong bonds and plan for the future. The group and its project can survive after the lease is revoked, find other locations or transform the nature of the project. In other words, the process of implementation of a project matters as much as the project itself and can generate long-lived opportunities.



Image 6 - Makeshift greenhouse - Rooftop Community Garden, London, UK. Photo: Silvio Caputo

## Message to Policy Makers

Possibilities to allow the temporary occupation of spaces should be created. This has been done in some European cities like Bremen, Germany, with considerable impact on the regeneration of neglected areas.

In Bremen, local authorities have liaised with landowners and facilitated the process of temporary occupation of urban spaces.

Advantages of the temporary or permanent occupation of open spaces for gardening should be carefully considered within local authorities. For example, at a point in time in which budgets for the creation of, and management of existing, public services are shrinking, community groups occupying open spaces offer the advantage of maintaining such spaces with no public investment.

Local planning frameworks should speed up procedures for the change of use of, for example, rooftops.

Unused spaces could be mapped and their availability communicated to local communities.



## Learn More

### Useful links

[www.zzz-bremen.de](http://www.zzz-bremen.de)

### Vertical growing:

<http://www.verticalveg.org.uk/my-growing-diary/>

<http://www.livingwallart.com/category/do-it-yourself/>

### DIY Hydroponics:

<http://www.diynetwork.com/how-to/outdoors/gardening/how-to-assemble-a-homemade-hydroponic-system>

<http://www.instructables.com/id/DIY-Hydroponics/>



Image 7 - Community garden at Tempelhof airport, Berlin, Germany. Photo: Silvio Caputo

Image 8 (left) - Raised beds - Rooftop Community Garden, London, UK. Photo: Silvio Caputo

## AUTHORS

Silvio Caputo, University of Portsmouth  
silvio.caputo@port.ac.uk

INFO SERIES | ISSUE 1 V. ENGLISH | DATE OF ONLINE PUBLICATION: 20 JULY 2016

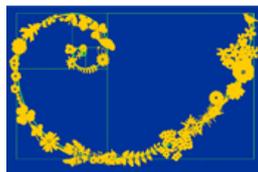


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COST is supported by the EU Framework Programme Horizon 2020



Acknowledgement

This factsheet is based upon work from COST Action TU1201 Urban Allotment Gardens in European Cities, supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology)

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