

Allotment (gardening)

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Allotment gardens are characterised by a concentration in one place of a few or up to several hundreds of land parcels that are assigned to individuals or families. In allotment gardens, the parcels are cultivated individually, contrary to other community garden types where the entire area is tended collectively by a group of people.^[1] The individual size of a parcel ranges between 200 and 400 square meters, and often the plots include a shed for tools and shelter. The individual gardeners are organised in an allotment association which leases the land from the owner who may be a public, private or ecclesiastical entity, provided that it is only used for gardening (i.e. growing vegetables, fruits and flowers), but not for residential purposes. The gardeners have to pay a small membership fee to the association, and have to abide by the corresponding constitution and by-laws. However, the membership entitles them to certain democratic rights.^{[2][3]}



Allotment plot, Prague, Czech Republic



A typical allotment plot, Essex, England

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Socio-cultural and economic functions of

allotment gardens

The *Office International du Coin de Terre et des Jardins Familiaux* (<http://www.jardins-familiaux.org/>) , a Luxembourg-based organization representing three million European allotment gardeners since 1926, describes the socio-cultural and economic functions of allotment gardens as follows:

- for the *community* a better quality of urban life through the reduction of noise, the binding of dust, the establishment of open green spaces in densely populated areas;
- for the *environment* the conservation of biotopes and the creation of linked biotopes;
- for *families* a meaningful leisure activity and the personal experience of sowing, growing, cultivating and harvesting healthy vegetables amidst high-rise buildings and the concrete jungle;
- for *children and adolescents* a place to play, communicate and to discover nature and its wonders;
- for *working people* relaxation from the stress of work;
- for the *unemployed* the feeling of being useful and not excluded as well as a supply of fresh vegetables at minimum cost;
- for *immigrant families* a possibility of communication and better integration in their host country;
- for *disabled persons* a place enabling them to participate in social life, to establish contacts and overcome loneliness;
- for *senior citizens* a place of communication with persons having the same interests as well as an opportunity of self-fulfillment during the period of retirement.

Allotment gardens in different countries

Czechoslovakia

Allotment gardening used to be widely popular in Czechoslovakia under the communist regime. It gave people from suburban prefab apartment blocks "paneláky" a chance to escape from a city chaos, pollution and concrete architecture.

Denmark

In 1778 land was laid out outside the fortifications of Fredericia for allotment gardens and according to a 1828 circular from the royal chancellery allotment gardens were established in several towns.

Private initiative formed the first Danish allotment association in Aalborg in 1884 and in Copenhagen an association named "Arbejdernes Værn" (lit. "The Worker's Protection") founded the first allotment gardens of the Danish Capital in 1891. Since then allotment gardens has spread to most Danish towns.

In 1904 there were about 20.000 allotment gardens in Denmark. 6.000 of them were in Copenhagen. During the interwar years the number of allotment gardens grew rapidly. In 2001 the number of allotment gardens was estimated to about 62.120.

In 1908 twenty allotment associations in Copenhagen formed the Allotment Garden Union which in 1914 was expanded to cover all of Denmark. The Allotment Garden Federation was founded to negotiate more favourable deals with the state and the municipalities from which the allotments associations rented the land. Today the federation represent roughly 400 allotment associations in 75 municipalities.

The Danish tradition for allotment gardens later spread to the other Scandinavian countries; first Sweden, then Norway and Finland.^[4]

Today most allotment gardens are on land owned by the municipality which rents the land to an allotment association. The association in turn gives each member a plot of land. To preserve allotment gardens as something that is available for all kinds of people the membership charge is set significantly below what a market price would be. Since allotments are often placed on attractive plots of land, this has led to huge waiting lists for membership in many allotment associations.

Although the main purpose of the allotment is gardening, most allotment gardens has a pavilion built in them. These pavilions can range in size from an old rebuilt railway car to a small summer house. Many people grow so fond of their allotment gardens that they live there the entire summer. In most cases it is however not allowed to live there the entire year.

In Danish culture the allotment garden has become a symbol of blue-collar culture. Both as a positive image of a more simple life closer to nature, with time to spend with the family and friendly neighbours to have a chat and a beer with, but also as a negative image of intolerant flag-waving whites keeping to themselves inside their small hedged kingdoms. However despite these negative stereotypes the garden idyll of the allotment still attracts people living in the city, regardless of class.

Finland

The first allotment garden was established 1916 in Tampere. Nowadays there are about 50 allotment gardens all around Finland. Those gardens have 5000 allotmenters. Allotment gardens are very desired and prices are quite high.

Germany

The history of the allotment gardens in Germany is closely connected with the period of industrialization and urbanization in Europe during the 19th century when a large number of people migrated from the rural areas to the cities to find employment and a better life. Very often, these families were living under extremely poor conditions suffering from inappropriate housing, malnutrition and other forms of social neglect. To improve their overall situation and to allow them to grow their own food, the city administrations, the churches or their employers provided open spaces for garden purposes. These were initially called the “gardens of the poor” and



Allotments in Germany

were later termed as “allotment gardens”.

The idea of organised allotment gardening reached a first peak after 1864, when the so-called “Schreber Movement” started in the city of Leipzig in Saxony. A public initiative decided to lease areas within the city, with the purpose to make it possible for children to play in a healthy environment, and in harmony with nature. Later on, these areas included actual gardens for children, but soon adults tended towards taking over and cultivating these gardens. This kind of gardening type rapidly gained popularity not only in Germany, but also in other European countries, such as Austria and Switzerland.^{[5][6][7][8][9]}

The aspect of food security provided by allotment gardens became particularly evident during World Wars I and II. The socio-economic situation was very miserable, particularly as regards the nutritional status of urban residents. Many cities were isolated from their rural hinterlands and agricultural products did not reach the city markets anymore or were sold at very high prices at the black markets. Consequently, food production within the city, especially fruit and vegetable production in home gardens and allotment gardens, became essential for survival (*Berliners cultivate vegetables by the ruins of the Reichstag* (<http://homepage.mac.com/cityfarmer/Pictures/Corbis%20Photos/39Berliners.jpg>) in June 1946). The importance of allotment gardens for food security was so obvious that in 1919, one year after the end of World War I, the first legislation for allotment gardening in Germany was passed. The so-called “Small Garden and Small-Rent Land Law”, provided security in land tenure and fixed leasing fees. In 1983, this law was amended by the “Federal Allotment Gardens Act” (*Bundeskleingartengesetz*) (<http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bkleingg/index.html>) . Today, there are still about 1.4 million allotment gardens in Germany covering an area of 470 km².^[10]

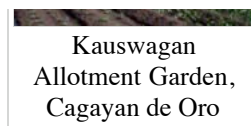
Nevertheless, the importance of allotment gardening in Germany has shifted over the years. While in times of crisis and widespread poverty (from 1850 to 1950), allotment gardening was a part time job, and its main importance was to enhance food security and improve food supply, its present functions have to be seen under a different point of view. In times of busy working days and the hectic urban atmosphere, allotment gardens have turned into recreational areas and locations for social gatherings. As green oases within oceans of asphalt and cement, they are substantially contributing to the conservation of nature within cities. What was previously a part time job is nowadays considered as a hobby where the hectic schedule of the day becomes a distant memory, while digging the flowerbeds and getting a little soil under the fingernails. It appears young families are also rediscovering gardens as a place where children can grow up within a more natural environment^[11].

Philippines

In 2003, the first allotment garden of the Philippines was established in Cagayan de Oro City, Northern Mindanao as part of a European Union funded project.^[12] Meanwhile, with the assistance of the German Embassy in Manila and



several private donors from Germany, this number has grown to five self-sustaining gardens located in different urban areas of the city, enabling a total of 55 urban poor families the legal access to land for food production. Further four allotment gardens, two of them within the premises of public elementary schools are presently being set up for additional 36 families using the Asset Based Community Development approach. (*Health Promoting Schools, Ecological Sanitation and School Gardens in Mindanao*) (http://puvep.xu.edu.ph/snews/headlines/health_promoting_schools/) Some of the gardeners belong to the socially most disadvantaged group in the city, the garbage pickers of the city's landfill site ^[13]. Aside of different vegetables, the gardeners grow also herbs and tropical fruits. In some gardens, small animals are kept and fish ponds are maintained to avail the gardeners of additional protein sources for the daily dietary needs. Each allotment garden has a compost heap where biodegradable wastes from the garden as well as from the neighboring households are converted into organic fertilizer, thus contributing to the integrated solid waste management program of the city. Further, all gardens are equipped with so-called urine-diverting ecological sanitation toilets similar to practices in Danish allotment gardens described by Bregnhøj et al. ^[14]



Sweden

In 1895, the first allotment garden of Sweden was established in Malmö, followed by Stockholm in 1904. The local authorities were inspired by Anna Lindhagen, a social-democratic leader and a woman in the upper ranks of society, who visited allotment gardens in Copenhagen and was delighted by them. In her first book on the topic devoted to the usefulness of allotment gardens she wrote: "*For the family, the plot of land is a uniting bond, where all family members can meet in shared work and leisure. The family father, tired with the cramped space at home, may rejoice in taking care of his family in the open air, and feel responsible if the little plot of earth bestows a very special interest upon life.*" ^[15] Anna Lindhagen is said to have met Lenin when he passed through Stockholm from the exile in Switzerland on their return trip to Russia after the February Revolution in 1917 ^[16]. She invited him to the allotment gardens of "Barnangen" to show all its benefits. However, she did not win his approval. Lenin was totally unresponsive to this kind of activity. To poke in the soil was to prepare the ground for political laziness in the class struggle. The workers should not be occupied with gardening, they should rather devote themselves to the proletarian revolution ^[17].

The Swedish Federation of Leisure Gardening (<http://www.koloni.org/>) was founded in 1921 and represents today more than 26000 allotment and leisure gardeners. The members are organised in about 275 local societies all over Sweden. The land is usually rented from the local authorities.

United States

Several so called "community gardens" have been founded in the United States. Many of these began as "victory gardens" in World War II, and evolved into community gardens. Plots in these gardens are often rented

out by the city, starting at plots of just 5x5ft, (1.52m). Due to the green movement many new gardens are being erected.

United Kingdom

A 1732 engraving of Birmingham, England shows the town encircled by allotments, some of which still exist to this day. St Ann's Allotments (<http://www.staa-allotments.org.uk/>) in Nottingham, created in the 1830s, are currently regarded as the oldest allotments site in England, as well as the largest site of Victorian gardens in the world. Following the Inclosure Acts and the Commons Act 1876 the land available for personal cultivation by the poor was greatly diminished. To fulfil the need for land allotment legislation was included. The law was first fully codified in the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908, it was modified by the Allotments Act 1922 and subsequent Allotments Acts up until 1950.

Under the acts a local authority is required to maintain an "adequate provision" of land, usually a large allotment field which can then be subdivided into allotment gardens for individual residents at a low rent. The rent is set at what a person "may reasonably be expected to pay" (1950), in 1997 the average rent for a 10 square rods (250 m²) plot was £22 a year. Each plot cannot exceed 40 square rods (1000 m²) and must be used for the production of fruit or vegetables for consumption by the plot-holder and their family (1922), or of flowers for use by the plot-holder and their family. The exact size and quality of the plots is not defined. The council has a duty to provide sufficient allotments to meet demand. The total income from allotments was £2.61 million and total expenditure was £8.44 million in 1997.

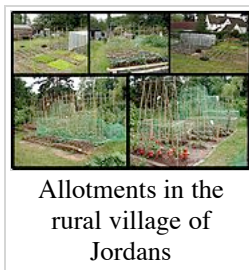


Allotments in the East End of London on the banks of the Prescott Channel

The total number of plots has varied greatly over time. In the 19th and early 20th century, the allotment system supplied much of the fresh vegetables eaten by the poor. In 1873 there were 244,268 plots and by 1918 there were around

1,500,000 plots. While numbers fell in the 1920s and 1930s, following an increase to 1,400,000

during World War II there were still around 1,117,000 plots in 1948. This number has been in decline since then, falling to 600,000 by the late 1960s. The Thorpe Inquiry of 1969 investigated the decline and put the causes as the decline in available land, increasing prosperity and the growth of other leisure activities.



Allotments in the rural village of Jordans

Increased interest in "green" issues from the 1970s revived interest in allotment gardening, whilst the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG), and the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society (SAGS) in Scotland, continued to campaign on the behalf of allotment users. However, the rate of decline was only slowed, falling from 530,000 plots in 1970 to 497,000 in 1977, although there was a substantial waiting list. By 1980 the surge in interest was over, and by 1997 the number of plots had fallen to around 265,000, with waiting lists of 13,000 and 44,000

vacant plots. In 2008 The Guardian reported that 330 000 people held an allotment, whilst 100,000 were on waiting lists.^[18] The keeping of an allotment is colloquially referred to as allotmenting. This term has not yet been officially recognised, but is widely used among tenants of allotments, including Gardeners World presenter, Joe Swift.

In 2006, a report commissioned by the London Assembly^[19] identified that whilst demand was at an all time high across the capital, the pressures caused by high density building was further decreasing the amount of allotment land. The issue was given further publicity when The Guardian newspaper reported on the community campaign against the potential impact of the development for the 2012 Summer Olympics on the future of the century-old Manor Garden Allotments.^[20] In March, 2008, Geoff Stokes, secretary of the National Society for Allotments, claimed that Councils are failing in their duty to provide allotments. "[T]hey sold off land when demand was not so high. This will go on because developers are now building houses with much smaller gardens."^[18] The Local Government Association has issued guidance asking councils to consider requiring developers to set land aside to make up for the shortfalls in allotment plots.^[21]

Against the falling trend of land set aside for allotments is an increasing awareness of the need for cities to counter issues of food security and climate change through greater self-sufficiency. This drive to expand allotmenting is also a response to food price inflation and surplus provision of land in post-industrial towns and cities in the developed world. It finds some inspiration in the urban agriculture response of Cuba to the United States embargo against Cuba in 1962. Some of these themes were taken up in a recent urban agriculture project in Middlesbrough in the Tees Valley.^[22]

Translation of "allotment gardens" into other languages

- Czech: "Zahrádkářské kolonie"
- Danish: "Kolonihave"
- Dutch: "Volkstuin"
- Finnish: "Siirtolapuutarha"
- French: "Jardins familiaux", "Jardin communautaire"
- German: "Kleingärten", "Schrebergärten" or "Kolonie" for the group and "Parzelle" for the single, in former times also "Armengärten", "Sozialgärten", "Arbeitergärten", "Rotkreuzgärten", "Eisenbahnergärten" according to the concept of granting
- Italian: "Orti Sociali"
- Japanese: "クラインガルテン"
- Norwegian: "Kolonihage" or "Parselhager"
- Polish: "Ogródki działkowe" or colloquially "działki"
- Portuguese: "Hortas comunitárias"
- Russian: "Дача" ("dacha")
- Spanish: "Huertas comunitarias"
- Swedish: "Koloniträdgård" or "Kolonilott"
- Swiss: "Familiengärten", "Jardins familiaux"
- Welsh: "Rhandir" (plural rhandiroedd, rhandiredd or rhandirau)

Famous people who run an allotment

- Alan Titchmarsh
- Albert Einstein spent the summers of the early 1920s in his allotment garden in the "Kolonie Bocksfelde" in Berlin-Spandau, which he used to call his "Spandau Castle". According to contemporaries, Einstein was fully integrated in the community and a frequent guest in the garden restaurant of the Feuerherd brothers. However, he did not fully comply with the expectations of the allotment garden association as regards proper weeding as a note from the local authority (Bezirksamt Spandau) dated September 12, 1922 addressed to "Herrn Professor Einstein" shows: *"You are presently leasing allotment 2 at the Burgunderweg in Boxfelde. Said allotment has not been managed since a long time, weeds have spread all over the whole parcel and have soared. The fence is not in order, and the whole allotment makes an unaesthetic impression. We have to assume that you are no longer interested in leasing the parcel, and we will give it away to someone else, unless you object prior to the 25th of this month, and the allotment is put in order until that date. Please take care of the removal of this nuisance, and give us further notice."* Einstein stated in his reply that he is willing to comply with the demands in the coming spring, "since we are very interested to keep the parcel". It is not known how many more years Einstein stayed in Bocksfelde before he transferred his summer residence to Caputh near Potsdam in 1929. [23] [24]
- Charles Dance

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Further reading

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- *The Allotment Handbook*, Sophie Andrews, "A guide to promoting and protecting your allotment site." Publisher Ecologic Books, [8] (http://www.eco-logicbooks.com/index.cfm?fa=book_details&book_id=2)

- *The Art of Allotments*, David Crouch, Publisher: Five Leaves Publications [9] (http://www.eco-logicbooks.com/index.cfm?fa=book_details&book_id=533)
- *The Allotment Chronicles: A Social History of Allotment Gardening*, Steve Poole, Publisher: Silver Link Publishing, ISBN 1 85794 268 X
- *Building Food Secure Neighbourhoods: the Role of Allotment Gardens*, Robert J. Holmer, Axel W. Drescher: Urban Agriculture Magazine (2005), No. 15, p. 19-20 [10] (<http://www.ruaf.org/node/783>)

See also

- Asset-Based Community Development
- Community gardening
- Dacha
- Ecological sanitation
- Food security
- Gardening
- Intercultural Garden
- Leisure
- Organic gardening
- P-Patch
- Self-sufficiency
- Simple living
- Urban agriculture
- Urban horticulture
- Victory garden

References

Notes

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External links

- A Brief History of Allotments in England and Wales (<http://www.sunningdaleallotments.org.uk/ShortHistoryOfAllotments.pdf>)
- A Permaculture Allotment? (<http://www.spiralseed.co.uk/allotment/>) - Discussion of allotments from a permaculture perspective
- Allotments4All (<http://www.allotments4all.co.uk/>) - Allotment related website with gallery, forum and wiki.
- Allotments UK (<http://www.allotments-uk.com/>) - general information site for allotments in the UK
- London Allotments (<http://www.london.gov.uk/allotments>)
- National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (<http://www.nsalg.org.uk>)
- Office International du Coin de Terre et des Jardins Familiaux (<http://www.jardins-familiaux.org/>) - A European non-profit making regroupment of national allotment and leisure garden federations.
- Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society (<http://www.sags.org.uk/>)
- St. Ann's Allotments in Nottingham (<http://www.staa-allotments.org.uk/>)
- volkstuin vereniging hoorn

(<http://www.volkstuindersvereniginghoornenomstreken.nl/Page11.html>)

- A Dutch allotment association.

- Irish Allotments (<http://www.irishallotments.net>) - An Irish website grouping locations and information about allotments.

(Dutch)

Retrieved from "[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allotment_\(gardening\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allotment_(gardening))"

Categories: Community development | Community organizing | Types of garden | Sustainability | Urban agriculture

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