10,000 Gardens in Africa

Handbook
Slow Food
Slow Food

Slow Food is an international association active in over 160 countries around the world, with around 100,000 Slow Food members, over 2,400 Terra Madre food communities and millions of activists.

Slow Food believes that food must be good, born out of the wisdom of the producer. It must be clean, produced in a way that is mindful of the environment and the health of the producer and the consumer. It must be fair, made in a way that respects social justice and recognizes the value of tradition and the wealth of diversity.

This is why Slow Food promotes agriculture based on an understanding of the land and respect for the environment, biodiversity and local cultures.

Slow Food is…

Convivia

Slow Food convivia are groups of people (farmers, herders, fishers, cooks, teachers, students, journalists, doctors, etc.) who promote the association’s philosophy at a local level.

www.slowfood.com

10,000 Gardens in Africa

The 10,000 school and community food gardens are concrete models of sustainable agriculture, adapted to different contexts and easily replicable.

www.slowfoodfoundation.com
Presidia

The Presidia support small-scale traditional food products at risk of extinction, promote local areas and work to save native breeds and fruit and vegetable varieties from disappearing.

www.slowfoodfoundation.com

Ark of Taste

The Ark of Taste is a catalog of traditional foods at risk of extinction: vegetables, legumes, grains, fruits, livestock breeds, but also food products like bread, couscous and spices.

www.slowfoodfoundation.com

Slow Food Chefs’ Alliance

The Slow Food Alliance is a network of chefs who undertake to promote local foods. The first African Alliance was started in Morocco in 2013.

www.slowfoodfoundation.com

Earth Markets

These are farmers’ markets with only local, seasonal foods, sold by the producers themselves. The first African Earth Market was started in Maputo, Mozambique.

www.earthmarkets.net
Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity

The Slow Food Foundation has the task of coordinating Slow Food’s projects for protecting food and agricultural biodiversity: the food gardens in Africa, the Ark of Taste, the Presidia, the Earth Markets and the Slow Food Chefs’ Alliance.

www.slowfoodfoundation.com

Terra Madre

Terra Madre is an international network of food communities which promotes the production of good, clean and fair food. Every two years, the network’s members meet in Italy at the Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre to exchange ideas and information, recount the projects they have been working on and present their products.

www.terramadre.info/en

University of Gastronomic Sciences

The University of Gastronomic Sciences is based in Italy and is inspired by the Slow Food philosophy. Many African students attend the university, then return to their own countries to promote good, clean and fair agriculture. The 10,000 Gardens in Africa project helps to fund scholarships for young Africans.

www.unisg.it/en
Slow Food has been working in Africa since 2003 and currently involves over 100,000 people on the continent: farmers, herders, fishers, cooks, students, teachers, journalists…

Africa is an immense continent, with 54 countries and more than 1 billion inhabitants who speak over 2,000 languages. The variety of peoples and cultures is mirrored by an extraordinary wealth of biodiversity.

Desert covers a third of the continent, but along the 6,000 kilometers of the Rift Valley fault, running from Syria to Mozambique, lie some of the world’s most interesting ecosystems, like Lake Victoria – the largest in Africa – or Kilimanjaro and its surrounding mountains.

Slow Food is working to raise awareness about the value of African biodiversity and to promote the right to food sovereignty, reviving traditional products and returning local food to markets, home kitchens and schools.
Why 10,000 Gardens in Africa?
Creating 10,000 good, clean and fair food gardens in African schools and villages means guaranteeing communities have a supply of fresh, healthy food, but also training a network of leaders aware of the value of their land and culture, who can serve as protagonists for change and guide the continent’s future. The 10,000 gardens in Africa are concrete models of sustainable agriculture, adapted to different environmental, social and cultural contexts and easily replicable.

Together, the 10,000 gardens show the way towards a different future, and represent hope for thousands of young people.

**Food gardens according to Slow Food**

The Slow Food gardens are designed, created and run by the African communities.

In Africa, each garden has its own coordinator and each country has one or more project coordinators, responsible for organization at a national or regional level.

The coordinators include many agronomists as well as young people who have returned to their home country after attending the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Italy or other schools and universities in the United States, France and other countries.

An international office, based in Italy at the Slow Food International headquarters, is made up of a group of people of different nationalities who work closely in contact with the African country coordinators.

Information, ideas and solutions are constantly exchanged between the local, national and international levels.

The aim is not to teach the African communities, but to accompany them and share a path towards sustainable agriculture, respectful of the environment and local cultures.

This approach takes on different forms in the different countries. There is no one replicable formula for creating a food garden: based on the local climate, traditions and gastronomic traditions, each community decides what to cultivate, how and when.

**What distinguishes a Slow Food garden?**

A Slow Food garden supports and regenerates itself.

It needs few external resources to get started: the decisive factor for its launch and success is the spirit of participation in the community involved. After a year or two, the garden will become autonomous, and start generating resources: It will produce seeds and compost which can be used to create other gardens, and part of the harvest and the resulting food products (jams, juices, other preserves) can be sold to supplement family income or to buy school materials.
What seeds are used?

A Slow Food garden is based on local, traditional seeds which can be sourced locally by talking to the community, and particularly the women. In rural African communities, the preservation of seeds was and generally still is a primarily female task.

Over the thousands of years since agriculture was invented, farming communities have always worked to improve the yield, taste, nutrition and other characteristics of their harvest, in harmony with the specific nature of their local area. But over time, industrial seeds have supplanted those selected by the farmers themselves.

Industrial seeds must be bought every year, while traditional seeds cost little or nothing: They can be acquired from other farmers, community seed banks and local markets, and then year after year they can be selected and reproduced.

During its first year, a Slow Food garden will primarily use locally obtained seeds, then from the second year on, it can use seeds selected from the previous harvest.

It is therefore necessary to create a seedbed and/or a nursery where the plants needed in the garden can be germinated.

What varieties are cultivated?

Traditional, local varieties are preferred for Slow Food gardens. These are the result of centuries of selection by humans, and thanks to this process they are the best adapted to the local climate and terrain. They are more resilient to external attacks and require fewer inputs (fertilizers and pesticides). They are therefore more sustainable from both an environmental and an economic point of view.
Choosing traditional varieties means safeguarding biodiversity, which offers the best insurance for our future. Diversity allows plants to react to unexpected events, to adapt to climate change and to resist parasites and disease. A biologically diversified system contains the antibodies for reacting to harmful organisms and maintaining its equilibrium. A system based on a limited number of varieties, on the other hand, is very fragile.

As a result, the Slow Food gardens are not planted with just one crop (no fields of cabbages or onions) but contain a mix of many species and varieties: for eating (vegetables, legumes, tubers, fruit trees) and other uses (medicinal herbs, dye-producing plants, ornamental plants, plants that help restore soil fertility or repel parasites, trees for the production of wood or to fix nitrogen in the soil). And for every product, traditional varieties are preferred.

Cultivating many different products (and differentiating them based on the seasons) means saving local biodiversity (food sovereignty), guaranteeing a nutritionally varied and rich diet (food security) and constructing a more resilient agro-ecological system (agro-environmental sustainability). Additionally, it makes it easy to manage the sale of products on the market, as the supply is differentiated. Agricultural activities are well integrated with animal husbandry. The vegetable scraps are used to feed the animals, while manure or faeces nourish the soil.

Food Security and Food Sovereignty

The Slow Food gardens want to guarantee food security (the condition that exists when “all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life,” FAO, 1996) but also food sovereignty, which is the right of people to choose their own food and their own type of agriculture and to have access to healthy food that also reflects their culture, produced in an ecological and sustainable way. Everyone involved in food production should be sovereign again, i.e. be able to decide what to sow in their fields, which animals to farm, which techniques to use. Only by guaranteeing food sovereignty can we start to move towards the goal of food security.
How is the soil managed?

If the soil is healthy and fertile, the garden will produce more food, and of better quality. This is why tending the soil is important in Slow Food gardens. There are many natural methods for solving the problems of nutrient loss, erosion and salinization without having to buy chemical fertilizers like urea.

These are the main ones.

**Crop rotation:** It is essential to avoid cultivating the same species for multiple years in the same section of the garden (for example, tomatoes followed by tomatoes). Rotation alternates plants that impoverish the soil with plants that enrich it, improving the soil structure and interrupting the life cycle of parasites linked to a single crop.

**Compost and/or manure:** In order to get nitrogen and other necessary nutrients into the soil without using chemical fertilizers, it is possible to create a composter, which turns plant waste into compost, or to use simple preparations based on manure or chicken droppings. These two types of natural fertilizer can be used in liquid or solid form, directly on the soil or as a foliar fertilizer (applied to the leaves).

**Green manuring:** Some crops can be dug back into the soil, where they decompose with different effects: they can enrich the soil, improve its structure, interrupt the life cycle of insects and fungi and so on. Plants suitable for green manuring include legumes, crucifers (radish, mustard), grasses and brassicas (cabbages, etc.).

**Mulching:** The soil can be covered with straw, shrubs and leaves. This coverage serves to control weeds, maintain soil moisture, protect against erosion and fertilize the soil when it decomposes.
How is water managed?

The Slow Food gardens follow the seasons. They do not produce for 12 months out of every year, and they do not produce the same products throughout the year. That requires expensive irrigation systems, which need constant maintenance, which means more costs.

However, by managing the crops intelligently, it is possible to extend the productive season. Firstly it is necessary to concentrate on the hardest varieties, those best suited to the climate and most resistant to a lack of water, cultivating them in the most suitable seasons. Some hybrids are more productive than traditional varieties, but they require lots of water (and other inputs).

Next, it is fundamental to manage the available water as best as possible, avoiding all types of waste.

It is necessary to collect rainwater (perhaps using simple gutter systems) and to create reserves (with tanks or cisterns) which can provide water for irrigation during dry periods. It is important to used localized irrigation systems, like drip irrigation (which can also be made using salvaged materials, like perforated plastic bottles hung from a line) and to choose the right moment to irrigate, avoiding the hottest hours of the day.

The preparation and management of the soil also has an important function: Trees should be planted in a hole surrounded by a small ditch, which can hold water in the area where the roots are. Beds planted with vegetables (particularly leafy vegetables) should be slightly raised, so that water does not stagnate and rot the roots. Water can also be retained by using shade trees and good agricultural practices, like mulching. Evergreen enclosures can be very useful, as they cast shade and hold water in their roots. If made with vetiver or similar plants, for example, they also have a useful insecticide function.
How are crops protected?

If the garden is agronomically well organized, attacks from fungi and parasites can be significantly reduced. This, in turn, reduces the need to use synthetic chemical products to protect against them.

For this reason, Slow Food gardens aim to prevent insects and diseases in various ways: maintaining healthy soil, choosing the crops best suited to the local area (and therefore more resistant), using crop rotation and intercropping (rotation interrupts the life cycle of insects and fungi, while intercropping two or more crops, if done properly, reduces their competition and encourages mutual support), proper soil fertilization and correctly managing irrigation, sowing times and sowing spaces.

Prevention can resolve many problems, but is not enough on its own. Constant monitoring is necessary to identify any pest and disease problems and intervene promptly.

When necessary, mineral substances (copper and sulfur) can be used, or macerations and other preparations made from certain plants, from the garden or sourced locally.
What is the garden produce used for?

Slow Food gardens help to **diversify and improve the daily diet.** The foods that are cultivated and harvested are first and foremost for eating (by the family or for school meals). In seasons where there are surpluses, these can be turned into sauces, jams, juices, flours or dried fruits and vegetables; sold (fresh or processed) at local markets or to nearby restaurants; or they can be cooked and sold at the small eateries that are sometimes started next to the gardens. The harvest from school gardens can also sometimes be sold at the local market, and the proceeds used, for example, to buy materials for lessons, or other equipment for the garden.

Some Examples

**Morocco**
Some of the products from the Bouregreg garden in Rabat are eaten by the families, while some are sold at the local market. They are also sold to some restaurants that use local, organic ingredients, like “Ch’hiwates du Terroir”, started by Nadia Benmoussa along with her friend Dounia Bennani. The restaurant belongs to the Slow Food Chefs’ Alliance in Morocco, a network of chefs who source ingredients from local producers, food communities and Presidia.

**Burkina Faso**
In Ouagadougou, a small shop has been opened next the La Saisonnière community garden, selling basics like fruit, soap and biscuits, and also a little restaurant, with or three simple tables, where customers can try stuffed tomatoes, sweet potatoes, mutton sausages and various kinds of cooked vegetables.

**Uganda**
The Kawuna community garden is a meeting point for young farmers from nearby villages and the young people from the Lake Victoria fishing community, who both participate in the garden activities. The harvest is distributed among them, while the surplus is sold to Mukono restaurants.
Watch the Fire!

Fire can only be used in certain cases, and must be managed extremely carefully: Dry leaves, brushwood and branches can be burned after clearing a field, or small shrubs can be burned to free a plot of land, but the fire must be contained and kept under control to ensure it does not spread. Avoid at all costs “slash and burn”, in other words the burning of large areas (including tall trees, not just brushwood) or, worse, sections of forest. Burning vegetation to some extent increases soil fertility, but only temporarily. Over the long term, it impoverishes the soil and can even lead to desertification, in both tropical and Mediterranean environments.
And Now... Let’s Get Started!
Before getting on with creating a food garden, it is necessary to distinguish between a community garden (created by a group of individuals or families) and a school garden, because they are very different.

**A community garden’s main priority is to provide sustenance to families**, and, to some extent, allow them to supplement their income by selling products (though this should never become the main objective). That being said, the garden is also an important school for the whole community, who learn to value the local products, to reproduce seeds, to respect the land and to better manage water.

**A school garden has a primarily educational function.** It is used to teach children and teenagers about local foods and recipes for vegetables and fruits, about working and playing in a group, and so on. The school garden’s products are also used for school meals, but it cannot provide a regular supply. The schools are often very large (with several hundred children) and a garden’s products can be used to accompany rice or millet for a few weeks or served at festive events. The school garden, then, cannot resolve the problem of how to feed the children, but serves as an open-air classroom which gives them the tools for improving the quality of life of their families (many parents replicate at home what their children have learned at school). Additionally, some children, after their experience with the garden, go on to proudly pursue a career in farming. This is the most important result a school garden can hope for!
No community, no garden!

A precondition must be met before starting a garden: The community must get involved! Before starting to prepare a food garden, it is necessary to **gather together all the people who can help out**. Gardens will be successful only if they make the most of the skills of every member of the community. It is important to bring together the wisdom of the elderly, the knowledge of women, the energy and creativity of young people, the know-how of experts (agronomists, veterinarians) and the skills of cooks.

In the case of a school garden, it is necessary to involve the teachers, the principal, the parents and the villages near the school. Only by involving all of these people is it possible to manage the garden even during holidays, to source seeds and manure for fertilizing, etc.

Observing the land

Once a team has come together, it is necessary to carefully look at the land in order to work out how best to arrange the garden and what is best to grow. Choices are made based on the climate, exposure, type of terrain and availability of water. Creating a garden does not take a huge amount of space, and by looking with a creative eye it can be possible to find a suitable plot in the most unlikely places: along a footpath, for example, or in a small flowerbed.

Deciding together

It is important to decide all together how to set up the garden.

With a community garden, sometimes everyone cultivates together and sells their products together. Other times everyone has their own little plot and sells their own produce. In the second case, certain activities are communally run (composting, the seedbed, irrigation, plant protection) and everyone decides together how to organize the garden (to avoid, for example, everyone cultivating the same product at the same time).
Dividing tasks and identifying weaknesses

Tasks and responsibilities must be divided up among the community members, taking into account abilities and availability.

Immediately identifying weaknesses is essential: Does nobody know how to make compost? Is there no one who knows where to find seeds? Are there problems with parasites? In this case, part of the plan for the garden must involve providing training, or an educational visit to already-existing gardens.

Necessary structures and tools

Only a few structures and tools are needed to start a food garden: a plot of land, a tank or cistern for collecting rainwater, an area for making compost, a space for the seedbed, fencing to keep animals away, a path for moving between the beds without stepping on plants and a few tools (wheelbarrow, buckets, hoes, watering cans).
It is important to **look around locally to find the necessary materials**. For example, fencing can be created from plants like vetiver or spiny cactus, or from wooden stakes, reed matting, bamboo canes, etc. If the fence is well built, it can also help support climbing plants like squash and beans. Naturally, not everything can be made at home: some tools (like wheelbarrows and watering cans) must be bought, if possible at the closest market.

▶ **Communication: a sign for every garden!**

The **Slow Food garden** should become a replicable model, a mouthpiece for the Slow Food philosophy and a node within the international network. For this reason it **must be identifiable**. Every garden must have a clearly visible sign, which serves as its identity card. Some information must be included on the sign: the **name of the garden**, the **Slow Food logo** and the **name of the sponsor who covered the garden’s expenses**. But it is also possible to add details about the project’s philosophy, explaining how the garden is cultivated. Small signs can also be added with the names of the individual varieties being cultivated. Signs can be made creatively, using salvaged materials and having children and young people do the writing and drawings. Slow Food can also provide a model (or it can be downloaded from the website).

Small events can be organized at the garden to promote the project, inviting the surrounding villages, presenting the products and explaining how to prepare and cook them. **Communicating the gardens** is very important: describing the people involved, their stories and their communities. It is essential to update the Slow Food international office about any interesting news, to send photos and drawings! The office will use the information in articles for the newsletter or the website, in Facebook posts and to send to journalists around the world.
Keeping donors informed

This project is made possible only by the solidarity of many members of the Slow Food network around the world: convivia, individuals, companies, schools, associations and so on. Many of them raise funds by organizing events and describing Slow Food’s work in Africa and its activities.

Their commitment is vital, and it is important to provide them with specific information about how the work is proceeding and how the individual gardens are developing.

It is very important to always include the name of the donor who has made the garden possible on the sign, and regularly send them photos and news (directly or through the Slow Food International office).

Materials available to everyone

On the website www.slowfoodfoundation.com, in the section “Projects – 10,000 Gardens in Africa”, you can find this handbook (in many different languages), technical documents on how to prepare and organize training events, videos and posters for communicating the project and a template for making a garden sign.

There is also a Facebook group, “10,000 Gardens in Africa”, where it is possible to contribute in any language, exchanging ideas, information and solutions. It is also possible to post photos of gardens and initiatives that have been organized.

It is essential to download these materials and circulate them as much as possible. If any additional communication materials or translations are required, the Slow Food International office is available.
Technical documents for trainers

This handbook gives an overview and some basic information on how to create a Slow Food garden. For those who want to learn more about certain aspects or those who wish to organize training initiatives, the technical guidelines are available online:

1. Garden design
2. Seedbeds
3. Composter
4. Soil management (rotation, intercropping)
5. Water management: crops adapted to the season, water collection (tanks, gutters), use of localized systems (drip irrigation), maintaining moisture (mulching), retaining water (shade)
6. Plant protection (examples of preparations, barriers, intercropping)
7. Examples of educational activities
8. Guidelines for preparing a garden description

You can download these guidelines from the website: www.fondazioneslowfood.com/en/publications

CONTACTS

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