



## How can communities get started with urban agriculture?

There are many ways in which Canberra and other communities can foster urban agriculture. These actions help to create a healthy environment for healthy people and also prepare us for an uncertain future.

### The challenge for Canberra

When it was chosen as the site for a national capital, Canberra was a 'clapped out sheep paddock': cold, dry, overgrazed, degraded and windy. At its centenary, it is a green forested urban oasis – a world-leading showcase of a garden city.

But there is more to do. Marion Mahoney, Walter Burley Griffin, Charles Weston and others took into account the need for community gardens and integrated them into their design of Canberra's urban landscape, but their visions have not been realized.

Moreover, our garden city is now at risk of acute stress as climate change brings increasing aridification and extreme weather over the next decades.

It is now imperative for Canberra to realize those early visions of autonomy and regional integration to source its food needs. By embracing urban agriculture, Canberra can continue to be a showcase of urban and environmental design, and ensure its viability as the effects of climate change intensify.

### How can urban agriculture begin?

Urban agriculture is not just about growing food. Rather it is about appreciating and demanding food integrity<sup>1</sup>.

Urban agriculture has many entry points that are relevant to all of us:

- **Community awareness** of why food integrity matters for our health and future, and how these values can be secured through a wide range of regional, social and policy improvements.
- **Community demand** for food integrity – by voting with your food dollars. We vote when we shop and with what we eat. Your votes – spending and eating – matter fundamentally to the viability of our current food industry and the standards it works to. When you buy food from local gardens, farmers markets and regional suppliers, you support their viability and make a statement of your food values. Not spending – because you are growing or exchanging safe local food – is also voting.

- **Efficiency and recycling.** Cities are a mass 'sink' for the critical mineral nutrients harvested from our farmland. How well we recycle these nutrients in urban agriculture to grow more healthy green food and/or return them back to sustain these farmlands is critically important.
- **Supporting community gardens.** These grow food for local use but also provide the focus for wider community awareness, education and adoption of food integrity values. Putting these values into practice helps to 'green' the wider urban and regional environments and make them more resilient under climatic extremes.
- **Encouraging home gardens** – be they in backyards, courtyards, balconies or window boxes. Not everyone has the time, resources or interest to do this – which by no means excludes them from urban agriculture. However, experience in the Depression and World War 2 shows how important such home gardens can be in meeting our food and health needs.
- **Influencing policy settings.** Much of our current industrial food system is only profitable, and thus survives, because of the vast public protection it gets via subsidies, regulations and externalization of its real costs. Conversely, the viability of local farmers is often impeded by these measures. Urban agriculture can only provide food more competitively from local sources in an open fair market, not with the protections and perversions that still exist.
- **Creating market opportunities** – enabling the community to buy food produced by local gardeners and farmers via outlets like farmers markets, food box schemes, share farming, and community cafes and institutions.
- **Fostering education** at school and community levels about the importance of food integrity values and the role of food in governing our health. Why the production of healthy food relies on healthy soils, and how industrial agriculture may compromise this.

### Where do I start?

If you eat, you are involved in urban agriculture. You can make a difference by:

- Raising your own awareness of urban agriculture and its benefits, e.g. by visiting Floriade.
- Progressively changing your shopping habits to vote for good food and health.
- Extending community discussions about food integrity.
- Supporting local gardens in schools, communities, retirement homes and institutions.
- Getting your hands dirty by growing food at home.
- Supporting local food distribution systems.
- Advocating for the removal of protection from our current industrial food system.
- Reinforcing the crucial message that healthy people depend on healthy food from healthy soils.

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## Suggestions for further reading and viewing

### UAA Fact Sheet

'What is food integrity, and how can urban agriculture contribute?'

### Canberra's Design

[www.griffinsociety.org](http://www.griffinsociety.org)

### Soils for Life

[www.soilsforlife.org.au](http://www.soilsforlife.org.au)

### Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network

[www.communitygarden.org.au](http://www.communitygarden.org.au)

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