



SeniORGarden

Enhancing Active Ageing through Organic Gardening: Organic Gardening for seniors in Europe

About SeniORGarden

Faced with the challenges of ageing and social isolation, **five European organisations** have chosen to pool their knowledge and strengths to offer an innovative solution to this problem. To help and encourage senior people to remain socially and physically active as they age, RISC (as coordinator of the project) and Forest BioFarm in Cyprus, Framework in Italy, OTI in Slovakia and M3Cube in France are implementing the **EU-funded SeniORGarden project** to help them create organic gardens using environmentally friendly practices and smart technologies. With the aim of offering an innovative approach combining ecological practices, new technologies and intergenerational transmission, **senior citizens will create and maintain organic gardens using environmentally friendly methods and appropriate digital tools**. Finally, by actively involving younger generations and encouraging a participatory and collaborative approach, the project aims to foster knowledge exchange, promote well-being within society and strengthen social ties between older people and younger generations.

As part of SeniORGarden, a series of four articles will be published, covering all topics related to organic gardening for seniors, as well as the actions and results of activities carried out by the SeniORGarden community. To this end, we offer an initial reflection on the current place of organic gardening in Europe.

What is organic gardening?

Organic gardening is an approach to growing plants that works with natural systems rather than relying on synthetic chemicals. It avoids artificial fertilisers, pesticides, and herbicides, and focuses instead **on long-term environmental balance, ecosystem**



Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

protection, and sustainable use of resources. The aim is not just immediate productivity, but the creation of a healthy garden that supports nature and conserves resources for the future.

A core principle of organic gardening is **soil health**. Living soil, rich in microorganisms, worms, and fungi, supports strong plant growth and natural fertility. By adding compost, manure, and other organic matter, gardeners “feed the soil” rather than the plants directly. Alongside this, **biodiversity** is encouraged through varied planting and support for wildlife, which helps control pests naturally, improves pollination, and creates a more resilient garden system.

Organic gardening also promotes **responsible resource use** and **avoidance of harmful chemicals**. Gardeners are encouraged to reduce waste, reuse materials, conserve water, and choose local or renewable resources where possible. Chemical controls are replaced with tolerance and understanding of natural roles, recognising that many insects and weeds contribute positively to the ecosystem rather than needing elimination. The ultimate goal of all these actions is to maintain the overall health of the garden rather than simply reacting to problems.

Beyond environmental benefits, organic gardening supports **mental health, social connection, and accessibility**. Gardening can reduce stress and improve wellbeing, especially through sensory and community gardens. Inclusive practices, such as **urban gardening** and the use of native plants, allow people of all abilities and spaces to participate. Overall, organic gardening aims to build **sustainable and inclusive communities** through shared engagement with nature.

Seniors and gardening in Europe in figures

At the outset of our SeniORGarden project, we conducted a **survey with 120 European seniors from Cyprus, France, Italy and Slovakia** to learn more about their gardening practices, particularly organic gardening. The main findings of the survey indicated that there is a strong passion for gardening among the elderly population in the surveyed countries with **43,3%** of respondents reporting that they **garden regularly**, **36,4%** reporting that they **garden occasionally**, and only **20,3%** reporting **not gardening at all**.

Among these respondents, there is a marked difference between certain countries: Slovakia has the highest percentage of seniors who garden regularly, at 66.7%, while Italy and France show a balance, with slightly more occasional gardeners than regular ones. Finally, in Cyprus, occasional gardening is most common (46.7%), followed by regular engagement (33.3%).

When it comes specifically to organic gardening, knowledge and practices are less common, but nevertheless already exist in all countries. In fact, **only 25.9% of senior citizens are familiar with organic gardening practices**, with a wide gap appearing among France and the rest of the surveyed countries, where 31.3% of senior citizens in France said they are familiar with organic gardening, whereas in Cyprus, Slovakia and



Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Italy this number dropped down to 16.7%. However, this knowledge does not always translate into everyday practice, as **the number of seniors reporting they are actually practising organic gardening is only 14.7%**, highlighting the need for the development of an appropriate training to increase that number.

For more detailed information on the survey and its results, please visit the project's website at <https://www.senior-garden.eu/>.

Website and resources:

<https://www.senior-garden.eu/>

Runrid Fox-Kämper, 'The Role of Urban Gardening for European's Ageing Societies', REAL CORP 2015 Tagungsband (2015).

- https://www.corp.at/archive/CORP2015_31.pdf

Janie Corley, Alison Pattie, Ian J. Deary, Simon R. Cox, 'Gardening and cognitive ageing: Longitudinal findings from the Lothian Birth Cohort of 1921', Journal of Environmental Psychology, Volume 97, August 2024, 102361.

- <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0272494424001348>

European Environment Agency, 'Who benefits from nature in cities? Social inequalities in access to urban green and blue spaces across Europe', 01 Feb 2022.

- <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/publications/who-benefits-from-nature-in-cities-social-inequalities-in-access-to-urban-green-and-blue-spaces-across-europe>

Martina Artmann, Xianwen Chen, Cristian Iojă, Angela Hof, Diana Onose, Lidia Poniży, Alma Zavodnik Lamovšek, Jürgen Breuste, 'The role of urban green spaces in care facilities for elderly people across European cities', Urban Forestry & Urban Greening Volume 27, October 2017, Pages 203-213.

- <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1618866717301577>

T. L Scott, B. M Masser, N. A Pachana, 'Positive aging benefits of home and community gardening activities: Older adults report enhanced self-esteem, productive endeavours, social engagement and exercise', SAGE Open Med. 2020 Jan 22.

- <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6977207/>



Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.