

'You have to find your own recipe': Dutch suburb where residents must grow food on at least half of their property

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- Imagine that you had to grow half of your own food. What would you plant and how do you think this would change your lifestyle?
- In your opinion, how could cities encourage people to grow their own food? What challenges do you think there might be?
- Think about the place where you live. How could urban agriculture improve your community and what would be the biggest benefit to you personally?

2 Key words

a. Find the words from the wordpool in the text. Read the definitions and match them to the words from the wordpool.

carbon emissions

gleaned

integrated

sprawl

moats

outsource

palpable

suburb

capitalise on

pastures

reclaimed

novelty

ample

stimulate

rigidity

brief

constraint

infrastructure

self-sufficient

councillor

1. inflexibility; an inability to change or adapt _____
2. an elected member of the local government in a town or city _____
3. to make the most of a situation to achieve something _____
4. able to provide everything that is needed without outside help _____
5. a limit; a restriction that controls what you can do _____
6. combined two or more things to be effective _____
7. the state of being new, original or unusual _____
8. the basic systems and structures (e.g. roads, electricity) needed for a community or organisation to function _____
9. so obvious that something can be easily seen or understood _____

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10. a residential area at the edge of a town or city _____
11. reused for another purpose (for items that have been thrown away or damaged)

12. a large area of land where different buildings have been added over a period of time

13. a set of instructions or information about how to carry out a task _____
14. a piece of land covered with grass where animals, such as cows or sheep, eat

15. a hole that is dug around a place and filled with water to protect it _____
16. to ask and pay for service from an outside supplier _____
17. enough or more than enough _____
18. collected / gathered from various sources _____
19. harmful chemicals that vehicles and factories produce _____
20. to encourage the development and increase of an activity _____

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity in the correct form.

1. The project manager decided to _____ more workers because there isn't anyone available anymore.
2. If we want to _____ the current economic climate, we should definitely invest in property.
3. We need to _____ our community members' interest to keep them involved in the urban garden project.
4. Seen from the air, the urban _____ of Mexico City is impressive.
5. We weren't able to expand the business this year due to a(n) _____ on our finances.
6. Using _____ wood gives the coffee table a fashionable, rustic look.

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7. It will be necessary for the city council to invest in basic _____ to support the growing population.
8. In order to become _____, you will need to learn to grow your own fruit and vegetables.
9. There was a(n) _____ sense of relief when the flight landed after a fifteen-hour delay.
10. There's are several _____ around our farm where we take our animals every morning to eat and get some sun.
11. The play successfully _____ the twin moral dilemmas of love and hate.
12. Please refer to the project's _____ before you carry out the rest of the tasks.
13. Our town _____ always proposes great projects that benefit our community.
14. Creative problem-solving is very difficult if you possess _____ in the way you think.
15. Urban gardening is still a(n) _____ to many people who have not seen produce farms in big cities.
16. After their retirement, the couple decided to move to the _____ area outside the busy city to live a more quiet life.
17. They built _____ around the farm to keep the forest animals from crossing and eating their chickens.
18. By developing sustainable energy sources, we can reduce _____ from vehicles.
19. We have _____ income to pay our bills and still save for our retirement fund.
20. She has a collection of her favorite designer's clothes _____ from various thrift and vintage stores.

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In the suburb of Oosterwold, a living experiment in urban agriculture, the 5,000 inhabitants find different creative ways to fulfil the unique stipulation

Hannah Docter-Loeb

28 November, 2024

- 1 When Marco de Kat starts planning his meals, he doesn't need to travel far for fresh food. Right outside his house is an 800 square metre plot with all sorts of produce – apples, pears, peppers, basil, beets and cauliflower, to name a few. During the winter months, he and his wife can pretty much survive off the vegetables stored in their freezer. Even after living in Oosterwold for a number of years, it's something that still excites him. "Yesterday, I forgot to think about what to eat," he says. "You walk through your garden and you find something and that's what you eat."
- 2 Oosterwold is a 4,300 hectare (10,625 acre) urban experiment located east of Amsterdam, in a suburb of the city of Almere, where de Kat works as a municipal councillor. It was established by local government and Oosterwold planners as a way to challenge the rigidity of Dutch city planning, giving people more freedom – and responsibility – over the urban design process. The area, which has about 5,000 residents and a growing waiting list, is completely self-sufficient. Residents can build houses however they like, and must collaborate with others to figure out things such as street names, waste management, roads, and even schools. But the local government has included one extremely unusual requirement: about half of each plot must be devoted to urban agriculture.
- 3 "This rule – if you want to live in Oosterwold, you have to produce food on at least 50% of your property – is very unique thinking in the world, and makes it also an outstanding area in many ways," says Jan Eelco Jansma, a researcher at Wageningen University & Research. Rositsa Tllieva, the director of policy at the City University of New York's Urban Food Policy Institute, also highlighted its novelty. "While other cities have integrated urban agriculture into planning, few have implemented it as a non-negotiable land-use requirement or handed so much responsibility for development to residents."
- 4 Residents can be quite creative with the brief. Oosterwold, which has about 1,000 residential units, is a sprawl of all sorts of gardens, from greenhouses to pastures surrounded by moats. "Nobody is doing it in the same way," de Kat says. "You have to find your own recipe." Some have turned their gardens into an Eden of sorts to provide for their own household unit. Other residents just plant a few apple trees or outsource by owning plots of land on site that are tended to by professional farmers.
- 5 Others, such as Jalil Bekkour, have been able to capitalise on it. "I never had experience gardening my own food or anything like that," he said. But he taught himself how to garden, and three years ago he opened his own restaurant, Atelier Feddan, where 80% of the food is directly from Oosterwold. His newfound excitement for gardening and agriculture is palpable: he regards his garden as a "field lab" of sorts to help develop products for the restaurant.
- 6 While the climate crisis threatens the area, it can also provide ample opportunity. As Bekkour explains, Oosterwold now has the same climate France had 40 years ago. Because of this, food crops such as avocados and citrus trees can easily be grown outside rather than in a greenhouse. Time is a constraint, as perfecting a plot takes extra care. "You fail and you try again," Bekkour says.
- 7 Residents also worry about the fact there is no real guidance about how to make your plot successful. "In the planning, it was kind of a bit laissez-faire," says Jansma. "But if you want to develop such a new area in such an innovative way and at such a scale, you have to share responsibilities."
- 8 A new centre called the Food Hub has now opened, devoted to collecting and processing food as well as knowledge sharing. The centre is run by the Almere local authority as well as the Oosterwold food cooperative. Yolanda Sikking, the participation manager for Oosterwold, hopes it will help inspire residents to take more initiative. "Some people do it very well but others don't," she says. "We decided we have to stimulate more." The eventual goal is to provide 10% of Almere's food.
- 9 Residents and experts alike also emphasise the potential for replicability. "Some of the things that we do could be implemented in other places in the Netherlands and beyond," says Jan-Albert Blaauw, founder of the city's food cooperative. Lessons can be learned from other projects as well. Jason

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Hawes co-authored a 2024 study that found carbon emissions from urban agriculture can be higher than from conventional agriculture. While the study did not evaluate a community like Oosterwold, there were some relevant ideas to be gleaned from it.

- 10 Hawes says: "For example, we found that infrastructure installed early in the farm-garden setup was a particularly important contributor to the carbon footprint of fruits and vegetables grown there, so it can be useful to prioritise long-term use of infrastructure as well as finding reclaimed or reused materials to support the initial construction."

"The first thing I tell people is to start small," Bakkour says. "Start with the things you love to eat and the easy stuff." De Kat says: "You can do this with a strong vision and strong person."

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3 Comprehension check

a. Complete the sentences with information from the text.

1. Oosterwold is an urban experiment located east of _____ in the Netherlands.
2. The main feature of Oosterwold is that residents must dedicate at least _____ of their land to agriculture.
3. Oosterwold is designed to be _____, meaning that residents can produce their own food and manage local resources independently.
4. Marco de Kat finds it exciting to be able to pick fresh produce from his garden without having to _____ far for it.
5. Jalil Bekkour likens his garden to a _____ where he creates dishes for his restaurant
6. In Oosterwold, some residents choose to cultivate their own food, while others employ _____.

4 Key language

a. Read the example and change the quotes to reported speech.

Example: "Nobody is doing it the same way," de Kat says.

De Kat said nobody was doing it the same way.

1. "Yesterday, I forgot to think about what to eat," he says.

2. "Some people do it very well but others don't," she says

3. "The first thing I tell people is to start small," Bekkour says.

4. De Kat says: "You can do this with a strong vision and strong person."

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b. Find one more quoted sentence in the article and change it to reported speech.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- The text mentions that some residents of Oosterwold had problems with the lack of guidance in managing their plots. What strategies or support systems could be put in place to help future residents succeed?
- How important do you think it is for cities to focus on self-sufficiency and local food production and what challenges might they face in trying to implement it?
- Oosterwold integrates food production with residential living. Do you think this model could work in your city or town? Why or why not?

6 In Your Own Words

- a. Research online to find three different urban agriculture projects around the world. Compare these projects to Oosterwold and think about the similarities and differences in terms of sustainability, community involvement and food production. Key words to help you search include: *urban agriculture*, *vertical farming*, *community gardens* and *self-sufficiency*.
- b. Share any relevant or interesting information you find with your class.