

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

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- Imagine that you had to grow half of your own food. What would you grow and why?
- What can cities do to encourage people to grow their own food? What problems might they have?
- Think about where you live. How could growing food in cities make your community better?

2 Key words

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

be responsible for
challenges
climate

design
experiment
greenhouses

ingredients
opportunities
produce

recycled
rule
successful

1. the things you need to make a meal _____
2. fresh food and vegetables that people grow to eat _____
3. buildings that are made of glass where plants can grow _____
4. to have the duty or job to do something _____
5. a plan that shows how something will look or work _____
6. the chances that you get to try something new _____
7. a test to see if a new idea or way of doing something will work _____
8. the usual weather in a place _____
9. achieving a good result or getting the result you hoped for _____
10. a law that tells people what they must or must not do _____
11. difficulties or problems that need to be solved _____
12. used before (e.g. plastic bottles) and made into something new _____

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b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity.

1. The _____ in Greece is usually hot and sunny in the summer months.
2. A team of architects is working on a(n) _____ for the new shopping centre.
3. One of the _____ of learning a language is remembering all the vocabulary.
4. We grow our tomatoes in _____ to protect them from the cold weather.
5. Mrs. Harris _____ organising the end-of-year party for school leavers.
6. We did a(n) _____ in biology class to see how plants grow in different places and conditions.
7. To make pancakes, you need simple _____, such as flour, eggs and milk.
8. My aunt is a(n) _____ businessperson and runs her own music school.
9. The local market has some amazing, fresh _____ at really cheap prices.
10. One school _____ is that you must switch off your mobile phone before classes start.
11. This coffee table is made from _____ wood and glass.
12. Studying abroad gives students _____ to learn about new cultures and people.

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Hannah Docter-Loeb
28 November, 2024

- 1 When Marco de Kat plans his meals, he doesn't have to go far for fresh ingredients. Just outside his home is an 800-square-metre garden planted with apples, pears, peppers, basil, beets and cauliflower. In the winter, he and his wife use frozen produce from their garden. "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 De Kat lives in Oosterwold, an urban experiment located east of Amsterdam, in the city of Almere. This large area was created about ten years ago by the local government to change how cities are planned. Oosterwold gives its 5,000 residents freedom to design their homes and community. However, they must also be responsible for things like naming streets, managing rubbish and building roads and schools. One unusual rule is that people must also grow food on 50 per cent of their land.
- 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. He helped include urban farming in Oosterwold's plan. Rositsa T Ilieva, from the City University of New York, agrees. "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," she says.
- 4 Residents grow food in many ways. Some, like de Kat, grow enough food for their families, while others plant a few fruit trees or hire farmers to manage their land. Oosterwold now has about 1,000 homes surrounded by gardens. "Nobody is doing it in the same way," says de Kat. "You have to find your own recipe."
- 5 For some people, Oosterwold has created new opportunities. Jalil Bekkour moved to the area with no experience in gardening but learned quickly. Now, he owns a restaurant, Atelier Feddan, where 80 per cent of the food he cooks comes from Oosterwold. Bekkour calls his garden a "field lab" where he tries ideas for new dishes.
- 6 The changing climate has brought challenges and benefits to Oosterwold. Bekkour explains that the area now has the same climate France had 40 years ago. This means plants such as avocados and citrus trees can grow outside instead of in greenhouses. However, gardening takes time and effort. "You fail, and you try again," he says.
- 7 The project has had some problems. At the start, residents didn't receive enough help, and many found it hard to make their gardens successful. "If you want to develop such a new area in such an innovative way and at such a scale, you have to share responsibilities," Jansma admits. "Some people do it very well but others don't. We decided we have to stimulate more," says Yolanda Sikking, Oosterwold's manager. The long-term goal is for the area to produce 10 per cent of Almere's food. While this is still far away, many believe it can happen with time and teamwork.
- 8 Resident Jan-Albert Blaauw thinks the Oosterwold project could be used worldwide. "There are a lot of examples around the world where planners think about urban agriculture, but in fact still separate agriculture and urbanisation," he says. Ilieva agrees, saying cities can use this model to create spaces that are good for the environment, the economy and for people.
- 9 Urban farming isn't perfect, though. Jason Hawes, a researcher, found that growing food in cities can sometimes create more pollution than traditional farming. He suggests using recycled materials to reduce such problems.

For those interested in urban farming, Bekkour has a simple advice: "The first thing I tell people is to start small. Start with the things you love to eat and the easy stuff."

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3 Comprehension check

a. Choose the correct option (a, b or c) to complete the sentences.

- The text describes an urban experiment east of _____ in the city of Almere.
a. Amsterdam b. Almere c. Oosterwold
- In Oosterwold, people must use at least _____ of their land to grow food.
a. 80 per cent b. 50 per cent c. 10 per cent
- There are now approximately _____ homes in Oosterwold.
a. 5,000 b. 1,000 c. 50
- Marco de Kat grows _____ on his land.
a. fruit only b. a mix of fruit and vegetables c. plants and flowers
- The climate in the Netherlands has _____ in the last 40 years.
a. got colder b. remained the same c. got warmer
- Research shows that urban farming may not be as good for the _____ as traditional farming.
a. farmers b. environment c. residents

4 Key language

a. Choose the correct option to complete the sentences.

- For some people, Oosterwold has **created** / **create** new opportunities.
- The changing climate has **brought** / **bring** challenges and benefits to Oosterwold.
- The project **has had** / **has have** some problems in the beginning.
- The climate **has not remained** / **is not remained** cold in the last 40 years.
- Many people **has started** / **have started** moving into the new community.

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b. Write the three more sentences about how Oosterwold has developed over the years.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- In Oosterwold, residents are responsible for managing their own gardens. What are some skills or knowledge people might need to successfully grow their own food?
- Do you think it's important for people to grow their own food? What problems could they have if they try to do this?
- Oosterwold mixes living in houses with growing food. Do you think this could work in your town or city? 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 between them. Key words to help you search include: *urban agriculture*, *vertical farming* and *community gardens*.
- b. Share any relevant or interesting information you find with your class.