







Gardens in Africa

Handbook

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Printed on recycled paper - November 2019

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Slow Food

Slow Food is a global network of local communities made up of food producers, fishers, breeders, chefs, educators, youth, experts, and academics. It is an international movement that involves millions of people in over 160 countries and has three strategic goals: 1) Defend biological and cultural diversity, 2) Educate the wider world, and 3) Sustain Slow Food efforts and influence the public and private sectors in regards to sustainable policies linked to food.

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.

Slow Food promotes agriculture that is based on an understanding of the land and respect for the environment, biodiversity, and local cultures. It does so through projects carried out by the Slow Food Foundation (Gardens in Africa, Slow Food Presidia, Ark of Taste, Slow Food Cooks' Alliance, Earth Markets, Narrative Label, Slow Food Travel) and at international and national events such as Terra Madre Salone del Gusto, which is held every two years.



Slow Food is Food Gardens and...

Communities

Slow Food communities are open, inclusive groups of activists, rooted in local areas but with internationally shared objectives such as combatting waste, overcoming inequalities, protecting biodiversity, and fighting climate change, to name just a few.

Convivia

Slow Food is a grassroots organization whose members (farmers, herders, fishers, cooks, teachers, students, journalists, doctors, etc.) are invited to play a direct and active role, bringing the Slow Food philosophy to life locally and helping to change the global food system by becoming part of an international network of like-minded people.

Ark of Taste

The Ark of Taste is a catalogue of traditional foods at risk of disappearing within a few generations. It protects an extraordinary heritage of fruits, vegetables, animal breeds, cheeses, breads, sweets, and cured meats... Search for products in your country!

Slow Food Presidia

The Presidia sustain quality production at risk of extinction, protect unique regions and ecosystems, recover traditional processing methods, and safeguard local breeds and plant varieties.

Slow Food Cooks' Alliance

A network of cooks from restaurants, bistros, and street kitchens who promote local foods and support small-scale producers every day by using products from the Presidia, Ark of Taste, local gardening, etc. in their kitchens.

Earth Markets

These are farmers' markets with only local, seasonal foods, sold by the producers themselves. Nowadays, African Earth Markets are running in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Mauritius.

Narrative Label

A counter-label for food products that provides precise information on the producers, their companies, the plant varieties or animal breeds used, cultivation techniques, breeding and processing, animal welfare, and areas of origin.

Slow Food Travel

It offers a new model for tourism based on meetings and exchanges with farmers, cheesemakers, herders, butchers, bakers, and winegrowers, as well as cooks and hoteliers collaborating with producers, who are the narrators of their local areas and unique guides to the local traditions.

www.slowfood.com www.slowfoodfoundation.com

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 and food production. The Gardens in Africa project helps to fund scholarships for young Africans.

www.unisg.it/en



Slow Food in Africa

Slow Food is working to raise awareness about the value of African food biodiversity and to promote the right to food sovereignty, reviving traditional products and returning local food to markets, restaurants, home kitchens, and schools.

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.



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Why Gardens in Africa?

Creating **good**, **clean and fair** food gardens in African schools and villages means guaranteeing that communities have a supply of fresh, healthy food, and also training a network of leaders, aware of the value of their land and culture, who can create change and guide the continent's future.

The Gardens in Africa are **concrete models of sustainable agriculture**, adapted to different environmental, social, and cultural contexts, and easily replicable. The aim is not to teach the African communities, but to accompany them and share a path towards sustainable agriculture that respects the environment and local cultures.

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 schools and universities abroad. To create food gardens, it is essential to construct and train a network

of African leaders. Slow Food is committed to supporting the work of the local coordinators, expanding the network of African experts (agronomists and veterinarians), organizing learning journeys, and funding scholarships for young Africans to study at the University of Gastronomic Sciences.

A food garden is a drop in the ocean but if the number of gardens grows, and they dialogue together and support each other, their impact grows. Together, they can transform into a single voice, speaking out against land grabbing, GMOs, and intensive agriculture, and in favor of traditional knowledge, sustainability, and food sovereignty. And they can represent hope for thousands of young people.

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.



Created by the community for the community

- Gardens bring together community members, uniting different generations and social groups and valuing each person's capacities;
- Products from the gardens supply families and school canteens, creating access to fresh, natural, local foods;
- Members organize themselves and work voluntarily in the garden.

Open-air classrooms

- Food gardens offer an excellent opportunity to raise awareness on the importance of native fruits and vegetables, as well as to promote a healthy and varied diet, explaining how to avoid using chemicals;
- Every garden is a unique reflection of its specific territory;
- Gardeners are trained on the principles of sustainable agriculture.

A network within the Slow Food movement

- The gardens represent an opportunity to gather and reflect together on activities related to the conservation of local biodiversity, such as the exchange of seeds, ideas, information, meals, etc.;
- They are a tool for better understanding how Slow Food operates at local, national, and international levels and inspiring community members to take action in their own territory;
- For the local Slow Food group, they are an instrument to stimulate the community, as well as to propagate the Slow Food philosophy and integrate more people into the movement.

They preserve local biodiversity

• The gardens are built on the contribution of each participant and on the resources available within the territory;

- They represent practical models of sustainable agriculture that is small-scale, easily replicable, and based on the observation of the surrounding space and available resources and experiences;
- A limited surface is enough to start a food garden and produce fresh fruits and vegetables daily;
- The crops are selected from local varieties and constitute the ingredients in traditional dishes;
- Through the gardens, plant varieties at risk of extinction are identified and safeguarded.

Agroecological spaces reflecting local agro-biodiversity

- Agroecology is a practice based on balanced systems that consider the environment as a whole. These systems have a reduced dependency on external inputs and thus can achieve autonomy and sustainability;
- Soil fertility is improved through the integration of compost and organic fertilizers, as well as applying practices such as crop rotation and intercropping;
- Natural (traditional, non-petroleum-based) remedies (e.g. herbal blends, ashes) are used to combat pests and diseases;
- Water use is rationalized, mulching and shade trees are very important to prevent water loss;
- The production and exchange of seeds within the community allows increased autonomy in regard to the agro-industry, market volatility, and the selection of plants better adapted to the local agroecological conditions.

The mobilization of local human and material resources and the commitment of members of the Slow Food network are key to the sustainability of food gardens.



What seeds are used?

A Slow Food garden is based on **local**, **traditional** seeds that can be sourced locally by talking to the community, and particularly the women.

Over thousands of years since the birth of agriculture, farming communities have always worked to improve the yield, taste, nutrition, and other characteristics of their harvest, in response to 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; 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 diseases. 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. By **growing products at risk of disappearance** (Ark of Taste), gardeners are protecting their food traditions, and are helping Slow Food in **boosting important campaigns against land grabbing, monocultures, and GMOs** which are happening all over Africa devastating small communities and dismantling their capacity to produce food for themselves.

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 faces nourish the soil.

Food Security and Food Sovereignty

The Slow Food gardens want to quarantee 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 SOVEREIGN-TY, 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 quaranteeing 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 of better quality. 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.

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, brassicas (radish, mustard, cabbages, etc.), and grasses.

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 all 12 months of the year, and they do not produce the same products throughout the year—that would requires expensive irrigation systems, which need constant maintenance and are therefore costly.

However, by managing the crops intelligently, it is possible to extend the productive season. Firstly it is necessary to concentrate on the hardiest 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) that 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, but take care not to disperse and leave polluting materials, like perforated plastic bottles hung from a line, in the garden), 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, they can also help to deter insect pests.



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 cycles of insects and fungi, while intercropping two or more crops can increase the biodiversity of predators), fertilizing the soil properly, 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 community or for school meals). In seasons where there are surpluses, these can be used for integrating the school curriculum with Food Education (cooking classes, workshops on food processing, arts and crafts, organizing events for sensitization purpose, etc.) and 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.





A platform for learning and exchange

Gardens are perfect places to hold educational activities and awareness raising events. Whether it's just a moment to share food and enjoy the moment, or a public meeting to revive indigenous foods and promote local products among younger generations and consumers in general, there is no limit to creativity. Schools often focus on food and taste education workshops (tasting sessions, preparation methods, and preservation techniques); arts exhibitions and performances; environmental clean-up; fruit tree planting and discussions around good gardening skills; or guidance and counseling for orphans and vulnerable children. Communities raise awareness among neighbors, visitors, and their own members by holding cooking competitions for the preparation of traditional foods, hosting debates on rethinking farming practices and food choices, sharing seeds and showing or selling their products, standing together for campaigns against land grabbing and GMOs, and always promoting peaceful coexistence among different communities.

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). The garden is also an important educational space for the whole community, where people learn to value local products, reproduce seeds, respect the land, and 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, working and playing in a group, important themes like climate change and agroecological food systems, and so on. A 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 openair classroom that 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!

The main objective of the project is to connect and strengthen the network of African people aware of the value of their land and their culture. This network and these people actively defend the continent's extraordinary biodiversity and its traditional knowledge and crops, all of which are threatened by policies that promote cash crops and agricultural systems based on the massive use of chemical fertilizers, and that are pushed by foreign investors who are taking over the land.

A precondition must be met before starting a garden: The community must get involved! At the local level, there must be a group interested in deepening the issues related to Slow Food and in developing activities to preserve the local food biodiversity. And the place where the group lives and grows the garden should be easily reachable by the Slow Food coordinators, who are volunteers,

to guarantee that the local network will be able to accompany the birth of the new group.

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 knowledge 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 look carefully at the land to work out how best to arrange the garden and what 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 it is 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 and sells 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: What if nobody knows how to make compost? Is there no one who knows where to find seeds? Are there problems with parasites? Part of the plan for the garden could 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 simple system 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).

Small signs can be added with the names of the individual varieties being cultivated.

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. The fence can also help support climbing plants like squash and beans.





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Communication: a sign for every garden!

The Slow Food garden should become a replicable model, a tool for spreading the Slow Food philosophy, and a node within the international network. For this reason, it must be easily identifiable.

Every garden must have a clearly visible sign that includes the name of the garden, the Slow Food logo, and the name of the sponsor who covered the garden's expenses. It is also possible to add details about the project's philosophy, explaining how the garden is cultivated. Signs can be made creatively using salvaged materials, with writing and drawings done by children and young people. Slow Food can also provide a model (or it can be downloaded from the website).

Slow Food International must be provided with the exact location of the garden, using longitude and latitude data or a paper map.

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 about the gardens is very important and involves describing the people involved, their stories, and their communities. It is essential to update the Slow Food International office about any interesting news and 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 thanks to the solidarity of many members of the Slow Food movement around the world: communities and convivia, individuals, companies, schools, associations, and so on. Many of them raise funds by organizing events and describing Slow Food's work and activities in Africa.

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 to 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 "MULTIMEDIA -Publications", 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, "Slow Food 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, support from 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 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 monitoring and communication

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

... and, for more in-depth thematic Information, you can download publications like:

- the booklet "Seeds According to Slow Food" and the video "Seeds"
- the comic book "Let's expose Land Grabbing", with case studies from Uganda
- manuals on Beekeeping
- "From Earth to Table" recipe books
- Position Paper on Agroecology



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