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Food4Thought Focus Groups report

This report compiles the information of 6 focus group discussions held in Romania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Italy, Croatia and Portugal. The information is based on real answers given by our experts from the countries mentioned above, highlighting the main ideas of each question.

The focus groups had as main topic urban agriculture, the relationship of youth with agriculture, and insights of experts over this topic. The events took place between October and November 2023 and were lead by the following organizations: GEO CLUB (Romania), CEFAS Europe (Italy), Mundus Bulgaria (Bulgaria), ConnectingDots (Cyprus), Zamah Regional Foundation (Croatia) and Associação de Jovens Empreendedores Agrícolas (Portugal).

1. What are the obstacles to urban food production and its development? What is the impact of climate change?

Romania: The biggest problem with cultivating food in cities is the **space**. There's not a lot of space where you can grow stuff. If you have a balcony it's better or if you have a communal garden, but for that you need approval from the neighbors and usually the communication is lacking.

Bulgaria: The main obstacle is **lack of governmental support** and recognition for the practice of urban agriculture. The main reason for initiative among citizens is connected to leisure and community development as well as gentrification and beautification of urban areas. Food production exists but the predominant benefit of UA is understood as a type of hobby. Scientists and academics recognise that UA is also beneficial when it comes to climate change because it counteracts the urban "heat island" effect, aids water permeation into the soil during heavy rainfalls and thereby reduces the risk of urban flooding.

Cyprus: Yes, there are obstacles, like the **existence of land**, as the biggest part of the city is apartment buildings, the neighborhood (whimsical neighbors), **not finding plant material** or seeds. There is a seed bank at the agricultural research institute, which is not accessible to





everyone. Poles do not have the knowledge and there are also weather conditions that stress the plants. **Air quality** is also a problem because there is pollution, especially if the plants have a long life cycle. This has the effect of not fighting climate change on a big scale because urban food production is minimal. There is also the issue of **the quality of what you produce**, how safe it is to consume the food you produce, because there is no expert to advise you. For example, the manure you buy may not be the right one and it can cause diseases such as gastroenteritis etc. The higher the temperature, the more difficult it is to keep something on your balcony.

Italy: One of the main obstacles is the presence of **a stable political line** over the years. To plan in urban gardens you need to have a medium-long term vision, which goes beyond the single legislature. Even climate changes in an urban area are identifiable as **heat areas**, therefore they have an impact on how crops must be conducted in the climatic area - plants change physiology like microbes.

The lack of vision of **political decision-makers** and citizens as well as the absence of training and information from schools of all levels. Certainly the biggest problem lies in the **culture and promotion of healthy lifestyles** as well as the Mediterranean Diet.

Croatia: One significant obstacle is the **limited availability of land** in urban areas. Urban environments are often characterized by high population density and limited open spaces, making it difficult to find suitable land for agriculture. Lack of access to resources such as **water** and **sunlight**. Urban areas have limited access to clean water sources, and buildings and infrastructure can create shading, reducing the amount of sunlight available for plant growth.

In addition, urban agriculture faces challenges related to **soil quality** and **contamination**. Urban soils can be contaminated with pollutants, heavy metals or chemicals, which can affect crop health and productivity.

Furthermore, the **high cost of land** and limited financial resources can prevent the development of urban food production. Urban agriculture requires investment in infrastructure, equipment and resources, which may not be financially feasible for individuals or communities with limited resources. The attitude of those present is that more or less everyone who is interested today does not have enough financial resources.

Portugal: Obstacles to urban food production in Portugal include **limited space**, **water resources**, and the impact of **climate change**. To mitigate these challenges, sustainable water management and climate-resilient farming techniques are crucial.





In Portugal, climate change impacts urban agriculture by altering rainfall patterns and temperatures. Practices like rainwater harvesting and urban heat island mitigation can be useful.

In most countries, the lack of space that could be used for UA seems to be one of the biggest problems, followed by the lack of governmental support, climate change (heat areas, air pollution) and a poor understanding of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. Also, the challenge of taking care of what you cultivate and making sure it's safe could be a problem to be taken into consideration.

2. What is your opinion about potential obstacles for urban farmers regarding the changes in atmospheric and climate conditions in cities compared to rural areas. What possibilities are there to still produce healthy food with little effort?

Romania: There are lots of obstacles when it comes to climate change. It's a lot harder to cultivate something in the urban area considering that **the greenhouse effect** is much stronger in cities compared to the rural area where there's lots of vegetation. Another problem would be **the water**. In the countryside people benefit from spring water while in cities, most of the time you depend on the tap water which is treated with **chlorine and fluoride** and it's not good for the plants.

Bulgaria: Urban farmers have to account for **air pollution** primarily and **urban pests** (squirrels, rodents, insects specific to the climate).

Cyprus: More **training** is needed especially for fighting climate change.

There are rules that we must follow such as the rule of **agricultural practice**, the rule of **pesticide products**, the **requirements of each crop**. For example, in a yard in Nicosia, you want to grow some plants, you need to know what **water** you will use (the water that comes to your house is drinkable and it is the most expensive water). There is the possibility of agricultural water, which is cheap. Before people start to plant, they need to know what they can grow in their yard or balconies and what quantities they can grow. There should be proper instructions from the Ministry of Agriculture for crops that do not need a lot of water and can withstand the heat we have in Cyprus. We need to focus on the production of permanent crops such as lemons, olives, oranges and reduce the portion of the vegetables that need more care, water, fertilizing, mainly in the portion of the enemies of insect pathogens. In general, it is very





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difficult to grow anything on the balcony. Only in the yard I consider it stronger... on the balcony mainly it is possible to grow some aromatic plants. Such as lavender etc. thyme, spatzia, rosemary, easily resistant plants lettuce, peppers, etc.

Italy: Certainly one of the biggest obstacles that urban farmers face is **adapting to the microclimatic conditions** that are created, especially due to the deterioration of the aquifer. In fact, one of the aspects that must be taken into consideration in the Salento area is represented by the **water needs** of the land as well as the **salinisation** of the wells due to the lack of rain and therefore of fresh water supply. This excessive salinization of wells leads to risks in soil fertilization, water quality and quality create substantial problems.

Today in agriculture the mechanization process continues, but in the urban garden we do not have the production of very large quantities, instead we prefer to produce quality products with less economic and mechanical effort. Let's think, for example, of the sustainable mulch obtained from wood processing waste when pruning centuries-old olive trees takes place here in Salento. This also helps to limit the evaporation of irrigation water and therefore avoids further waste of water which is an increasingly precious commodity. It therefore becomes important to work better and work with greater adaptability.

Another element which in the Salento Area helps to retain water, to protect plantations from the wind and to preserve biodiversity, is represented by the **dry stone walls** (Muretti a secco) which represent an invaluable resource in Salento and which however are difficult to reproduce on a large scale, especially in urban areas.

One of the main obstacles that farmers face in Salento is represented by the **lack of water** and the **lack of infrastructure** that conveys water to the land. On the positive side, however, there are often artesian wells in Salento which are very useful for water supply but often empty due to drought.

Croatia: We face several potential obstacles due to **changes in atmospheric and climatic conditions** in cities compared to rural areas. Urban environments often have **higher temperatures**, **reduced air quality**, **limited space** and **increased levels of pollution**, which can affect food production.

Portugal: Urban farmers in Portugal may face issues related to **limited space**, **soil quality**, and **access to resources**. Potential solutions include rooftop and balcony gardening, container gardening, and soil-less systems like hydroponics.





Even though the respondents referred to their countries/regions and each answer was adapted to their specific needs, the most recurrent challenge of UA was water needs (either water pollution or lack of water). Another important aspect to mention is that there is a lack of training, education and information regarding this topic, that could help the people who are interested to educate themselves in this matter.

3. Which political decisions are necessary to establish new concepts for urban agriculture?

Romania: The authorities need to establish these **communal gardens** if the citizens want them. But it becomes a problem when it comes to the land needed for this. It's a very hard and long process to find some land in cities where you can implement a communal garden.

Bulgaria: Political initiative is needed for **recognising the practice of UA with legislative bills** that acknowledge the practice and the desire for different communities to develop the initiative. This is primarily connected to the land status which often means a long and cumbersome process for seeking consensus at an institutional level between government/municipality/ private interests like building developers etc.

Italy: Politics and political decision makers in general could go on to **define which urban areas are most suitable** for the planting of urban gardens which also have a **social function** as well as **sustainability**. It would therefore be appropriate as well as interesting to map the areas already infrastructured for water transport so as to avoid burdening municipal or regional aquifer supply costs. We should also not forget the landscape function that these gardens have. Therefore it would be appropriate to encourage **funding** that goes in this direction and therefore give a strong visual identity in terms of the beauty of abandoned landscapes.

Another important aspect is represented by the **certification** of the origin of the product. If we commit ourselves to mapping the various production areas and reclaiming them if necessary, it is possible to give great visibility to the production area and to the products themselves as well as to the idea of urban gardens as a successful **Good Practice**. It is important to include paths for schools in **Community Policies**.

Croatia: In order to establish new concepts for urban agriculture, it is necessary to make **political decisions**. These decisions may vary depending on the specific context and country. Everyone agrees that local politics is not very favorable to the development of urban agriculture, nor to encouraging young people to engage in it. National and local policies can designate





zones for urban agriculture, pass laws on incentives and how land is used: This can include designating specific areas or zones where urban agriculture is allowed and ensuring that **regulations** are in place to support its development.

Portugal: To establish new concepts for urban agriculture, political decisions should support **zoning laws** that allow for agricultural use in urban areas, **provide incentives**, and **promote community gardens**.

Portugal needs policies that support urban agriculture, including **tax incentives** for vacant lot cultivation and **support for community gardening initiatives**.

The common ground of the respondents was that there is a need for political involvement in terms of regulations, policies and acknowledgement of UA. The political decision makers should consider this topic more, promote it and recognize this practice. In general, each country found its own local needs and possible solutions: incentives, funding, mapping of areas, legislative bills, establishing communal gardens etc.

4. Are there any bureaucratic challenges that prevent the development of urban farming?

Romania: If you are growing something in your own apartment, then there shouldn't be any bureaucratic challenges. On the other hand, if you want to establish a communal garden or some greenhouses on a larger scale, you might need some **approvals from the authorities**. Even more if you want to sell what you grow.

Bulgaria: Yes. Connected to the process of **getting permissions** from the municipality to have a garden plot.

Italy: The sensitivity of the political party is certainly lacking but it is undeniable that it is necessary to have Administrations that are truly interested in the issue.

Bureaucratic obstacles exist in every procedure but even more so there is a **lack of interest** in what is beautiful, useful for citizenship and the well-being of families and future generations.

Croatia: In Croatia, problems often arise due to **fragmented decision-making** in different government departments. Encouraging interdepartmental cooperation and coordination can help streamline processes and ensure holistic support for urban agriculture initiatives. Educating the public about the benefits of urban agriculture can build support and pressure bureaucratic systems to adapt. Public awareness campaigns, workshops and community involvement





initiatives can help dispel misconceptions and build a wider understanding of the importance of urban agriculture.

Portugal: Bureaucratic challenges can hinder urban farming development. Streamlining regulations and providing support for urban farmers, such as **permits for community gardens** and **reduced red tape**, are essential.

Mostly, bureaucratic challenges consist in getting approvals/permissions for cultivating and/or selling the products. Another issue found was the lack of interest in the topic, which makes the procedures slower.

5. In your opinion, is urban agriculture a part of a broader horticultural approach to urban greening that encompasses more than fruits and vegetables? If so, why?

Romania: Horticulture in general means more than just fruits and vegetables. Urban agriculture isn't only about growing your own food in order to stop buying from supermarkets, but it also helps with **urban greening**. More communal gardens means more green, peaceful spaces and **cleaner air**. It creates a more **pleasant environment** where we all would love to live in.

Bulgaria: Definitely yes, UA appears to be more about **feeling closer to nature**, **community feel** and care for the urban environment rather than for food security. Growing your own food is more about **the process** rather than the end result/product/consumption.

Italy: If the body that manages the vegetable garden goes to implement the planting of the edible parts (aromatic/fruit) there may also be a question of street furniture, therefore having a closer approach with nature than with nowadays children have lost. Therefore it is necessary to create usable areas in order to **bring citizens closer to nature** with an eye to the future as well as to well-being.

In the educational field, nursery, elementary and middle schools are those that most of all affect the education of the new citizens of tomorrow, so what is missing in schools is why we need to bring political decision-makers' attention to school education.

Croatia: Yes, urban agriculture is indeed a part of a broader horticultural approach to urban greening that encompasses more than just fruits and vegetables. While urban agriculture primarily focuses on the cultivation of food crops in urban areas, it is not limited to fruits and vegetables alone. It also includes the cultivation of herbs, spices, medicinal plants, and even ornamental plants.



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Urban greening aims to enhance the green spaces and vegetation within urban environments, providing numerous benefits such as **improved air quality**, **reduced urban heat island effect**, and **increased biodiversity**. Urban agriculture contributes to these goals by incorporating various types of plants, not only for food production but also for their aesthetic, ecological, and health-related benefits.

Portugal: Yes, urban agriculture is part of a broader horticultural approach to urban greening. It encompasses **landscaping**, **green roofs**, and **community gardens**, contributing to the **aesthetics** and **environmental quality of cities**.

The overall answer to this question was yes. In everyone's opinion, urban agriculture is a way of enriching people's lives through community sense, initiative spirit, and improving quality of life. It is important to mention that people need and feel happier when they are close to nature, surrounded by green spaces, in a pleasant environment. Many experts said that the process of cultivating is what brings joy and satisfaction, rather than the actual results of what you cultivated.

6. How are the new agricultural policies helping to mitigate climate change?

Romania: When it comes to agriculture on a large scale, there are some policies implemented by the European Union in order to help with climate change. Some of these are the fact that you can use **only a certain amount of nitrogen based fertilizers**, **many pesticides are being banned** every year considering that the European Union wants to reduce the quantity of pesticides used today to 50% by 2030. You receive an amount of money from the government as a farmer depending on what you grow and if you follow some rules like cultivating cover crops, cultivating plants that fixate nitrogen, reducing the quantity of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, practicing ecological agriculture, etc. Also there are many opportunities for young people in order to motivate them to practice agriculture. Another thing is that **supermarkets are forced to sell a percentage of food that doesn't come from import** so it helps with the pollution created by transporting imported food, also it promotes local farmers.

Bulgaria: New agriculture policies are always a part of the larger EU agenda for reaching **carbon neutrality in 2050**, yet as a country, Bulgaria has a tendency to lag behind on innovative policies and changes are driven by business and economic processes.

Italy: A newly introduced policy is expected in 2024 with a proposal for **Carbon Removals**, i.e. all those solutions implemented to remove carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the environment. Among





the various Carbon removals techniques, we find Carbon farming, the main tool to be adopted as a sustainable practice of carbon sequestration in the agricultural sector, a new opportunity for income support for agricultural companies thanks also to the future indications of the European CAP (Agricultural Policy Common).

The “Farm to Fork” and Biodiversity 2030 strategies represent the first real attempt at an integrated **agri-food policy**. It is certainly a positive fact that is placed at the center of the Green Deal, embracing the principle that food, environment, health and agriculture are closely connected subjects. Within these strategies, the **50% reduction in the use of pesticides** in the agricultural field and the increase in the surface area used for agriculture with the commitment to reaching 25% of the European agricultural surface area (UAA) organic are well placed.

Intervening in the educational sector also through **annual courses** within the schools themselves with concrete activities such as oil tasting or the manipulation of fresh products involving experts and teachers but also local production companies. In this way we try to bring students but also their teachers closer to the world of agriculture, environmental sustainability and well-being also through walks in the open air. The curricular educational paths should include approximately 30 minutes in which to take the raw product that arrives in the classroom or that is harvested directly from the garden, the product (such as olives) is handled and during the manipulation phase the seasonality is explained to the learners, the concept of environmental sustainability and so in addition to practical physical activity, socialization activity also takes place.

Croatia: Financial incentives: Governments can provide financial support to farmers through grants, subsidies or tax incentives. These incentives can help farmers invest in climate-smart technologies, such as precision agriculture, renewable energy systems or efficient irrigation methods. Everyone agrees that incentives can be a great tool for young people who want to engage in agriculture. Urban agriculture and incentives for it can be the first step for young people to try their hand at this vocation. The members of the focus group are of the opinion that very few people dare to embark on these ventures without government incentives.

Portugal: Portugal’s agricultural policies should evolve to **promote sustainability, reforestation,** and **reduce carbon emissions** to mitigate climate change.

The European Union is trying to establish different policies in order to help climate change and also motivate young farmers to practice a cleaner and more helpful agriculture to the environment. The regulations include reducing the quantity of pesticides used today to 50% by 2030 and reaching carbon neutrality. Besides these,





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there are other types of activities implemented, such as forcing supermarkets to sell local products and introduce annual courses in schools.

7. What are the possible advantages of urban gardening compared to rural areas?

Romania: An advantage might be the fact that in the urban area you have easier access to resources. In the rural area it's harder to transport stuff to/from cities.

Bulgaria: The advantages are related to the urban environment itself (gentrification, greener spaces, mitigating the heat island effect) and the wellbeing of the gardeners (closer to nature, community building, beautification of the surrounding environment). Growing food in rural areas is more connected to food security and mass production for the agriculture industry.

Italy: One of the strong points is certainly socialization and integration.

For example, the integration of local production activity within catering. The playful aspect is important and therefore it would be nice to integrate activities such as tree climbing or manual and mechanical pruning. Urban gardening would lead to the maintenance of the public area through maintenance activities and would therefore benefit the panorama and the territory itself.

Croatia: Accessibility: Urban gardening brings food production closer to where people live, making fresh and healthy produce more accessible to community members. Urban gardening maximizes the use of limited space in cities. By using rooftops, balconies, vertical structures and community gardens, urban growers can produce a significant amount of food in a small area, making efficient use of urban land. Urban gardening reduces the need to transport food long distances from rural areas to cities. In addition to financial savings, this can help reduce transport-related carbon emissions and contribute to a more sustainable food system. Community gardens are thought to provide a great space for people to gather, share knowledge and build relationships, creating a sense of belonging and community cohesion. Urban gardening can contribute to environmental sustainability. Green spaces in cities help mitigate the urban heat island effect, improve air quality and provide habitats for biodiversity. In addition, urban growers can adopt sustainable practices such as composting, rainwater harvesting and organic farming techniques.

Representatives from the Green Clique emphasized that urban gardening offers educational opportunities for individuals, schools and communities, which they regularly do. It provides





hands-on learning experiences about food production, nutrition and environmental protection. Urban gardens can serve as outdoor classrooms and promote awareness of sustainable food systems. All agreed that urban gardening promotes physical activity, reduces stress and improves psychological well-being. Access to fresh, locally grown produce can also contribute to healthier diets and overall health outcomes.

Portugal: Urban gardening in Portugal offers advantages such as **accessibility**, year-round cultivation, and **reduced transportation costs**, making it appealing to youth.

There are many advantages and benefits to urban gardening, as it improves life in a few areas, such as: environmental sustainability (reduced carbon transmissions, mitigating the heat island effect, gentrification, greener spaces, improved air quality), food security (better quality of food, fresh products closer to the people) and personal satisfaction (new hobbies, better mental health, more educational opportunities). The conclusion is that urban gardening indeed brings new benefits to the table on levels that traditional gardening could not.

8. What vegetables are most important and easier to grow in the city (house yards, terraces, balconies)?

Romania: The plants that are the easiest to grow would be the **aromatic** and **medicinal** plants like mint, basil, thyme, oregano, etc. It's easy to take care of them, just offer them water and a place with light and you're good. Other plants would be maybe **tomatoes** and **peppers**, but they need lots of light. Most fruits grow on trees though, so you need a bigger garden or yard if you want to plant some fruit trees and have the patience to do so.

Bulgaria: Easiest way to grow is to know the garden plot conditions - is it sunny/shady/ windy/ close to a busy road/ how often can it be irrigated/ and start from there. Easiest produce to grow would be tailored to the **specific conditions** of the designated garden area and depending on the season. An option is to also start with **seedlings** instead of planting seeds and wait for germination. Some veggies are also very susceptible to air pollution like tomatoes.

Italy: In selecting the plants to grow reference must be made to the local context. Climate variability brings suffering to local vegetables - if we are on the balcony, for example, we will prefer **aromatic plants** that do not have a large root system. Crop rotation will then be important.





In house yards, terraces and balconies typical of urban contexts, it is certainly necessary to select aromatic plants as well as salads for example but also **carrots**, **tomatoes**, **aubergines** and **courgettes**.

Croatia: In urban areas, it is important to prioritize the cultivation of certain foods that are **well adapted to the urban environment** and contribute to the resilience of urban food systems.

Some key foods that are important to grow in the city include:

Leafy greens: Leafy greens like lettuce, spinach, kale and Swiss chard are highly nutritious and can be grown in small spaces. They are harvested relatively quickly and ensure a continuous supply of fresh greens.

Herbs: Herbs such as basil, mint, parsley and cilantro are a popular choice for urban gardens, and are especially easy to maintain on balconies. They can be grown in containers or vertical gardens and add flavor to a variety of dishes.

Root vegetables: Some root vegetables such as radishes, carrots and beets can be grown in urban gardens. They require well-drained soil and can be grown in raised beds or containers.

Berries: Certain types of berries, such as strawberries and raspberries, can be grown in urban gardens. They can be grown in containers or vertical structures and produce a tasty and nutritious harvest. Several factors can help to increase the resilience of urban food systems.

Portugal: In Portugal, herbs like **basil** and **mint**, along with compact **tomato** and **pepper** varieties, are important and easy to grow in small urban spaces.

It really depends on the space and resources that are available, and it's very important to keep in mind that climate, season and soil are factors that will incredibly influence your chances of succeeding. The most basic and easiest things to plant are aromatic and medicinal plants, salads and some vegetables like tomatoes and carrots.

9. What helps urban food to become more resilient? What are the best tips you can give to a new grower for maintaining their urban vegetable garden?

Romania: The first thing the new growers need is **motivation**. It's not hard to grow plants as long as you are motivated. For starters you don't need a lot, get some **pots**, a place with **light**, **filtered water** and some **seeds** and **experiment**. It doesn't have to be perfect, try on a small surface at first, with some herbs that are easy to grow. If you discover that you like it, then try





bigger areas, with different plants. It's all about having fun, even if you cultivate plants on a small scale just for you.

Bulgaria: **Consistency** and **organization** at maintaining a garden plot.

Cyprus: For a beginner, the suggestion for them would be to start with **easy plants**, such as eggplants, peppers, aromatics, to make sure that the soil is of good quality, that there is sun, to buy a **thermometer for the soil**, some training is needed.

Italy: **Using local varieties**; implementing sustainable practices that favor **crop rotation**, thus preventing soil tiredness phenomena, but rather helping it to reconstitute essential elements such as nitrogen (N).

By limiting the supply of external fertilizer, **increasing composting** and **limiting the mineralization of organic substances** - the less we mineralize the more insects and microflora will be present such as fungi and bacteria which help the plant in various ways.

Portugal: Resilience in urban food production can be enhanced by using **organic practices**, **companion planting**, and **climate-resistant** crop varieties. New growers should also consider **composting** and proper watering techniques. Focus on **soil improvement**, **disease prevention**, and integrated pest management.

As advice for beginners, it's important to mention that not only resources and knowledge, educating yourself and staying informed has a big role in growing a garden. Motivation, consistency, organization and patience, especially for people that are just starting, are keys that help improvement and long-lasting objectives.

10. What is the best way for growing food in the city? The old fashioned way or vertical cultivation, aquaponics or other new trends?

Romania: For beginners, it's good to start with a few pots or a small garden if you have a yard. The old fashioned way is the easiest for someone that is not very experienced. **Vertical cultivation** is also a nice way to grow plants if you have limited space. You just need to install some shelves where you can place the plants vertically, but usually it fits small pots with small plants, so this method is most useful for herbs. Aquaponics or hydroponics are usually used for intensive agriculture on a large scale. They need lots of investment and knowledge in order to be able to do it. If you don't plan on establishing a business out of this then it's not really worth it.





Bulgaria: The best way is to **start small** and match the level of skill of the growers. It's also important to know the conditions of the garden plot and to have a **system for maintenance** between gardening members.

Italy: First of all it is important to **know the space, the land**, in which you decide to plant: know its surface, water sources, soil quality and best sustainability practices.

You need to know the seasonality and size of the land to be cultivated. You should not plant species which would take months to come into production and that would keep the soil or pot busy for a long time. It is necessary to grow everything that is of daily use such as salads which, among other things, also tolerate transport very well, and carrots. Seasonal cultivation or aquaponics often tends to deseasonalize plant production and still requires controlled light and water conditions. From our experience, on a small scale it would be better to use **traditional agriculture** and aim for more innovative technologies when working on a larger scale.

Portugal: The choice between traditional and innovative growing methods in Portugal depends on available space and resources. Both approaches can be successful.

For this specific question, there were answers in both directions. The experts suggest taking into consideration the available resources and be mindful before starting a garden. However, growing herbs and a small amount of vegetables in your own balcony (vertical cultivation) can have results. It all depends on what you want to achieve and how much time, energy and money you have to invest, before setting your own goals.

11. How to start an urban vegetable garden? What are the basic assumptions that a potential grower should fulfill? What are the first steps for developing the garden?

Romania: If you want to start a garden in your own apartment or house, it's very easy to get some pots and seeds and experiment. There are not lots of investments that you have to do at first. You also don't need lots of knowledge and effort, it comes with time. As long as you have some **fertile soil, good water** and **light**, you're good to go. Even if it doesn't go well at first, **don't be afraid to start again**. You need lots of **patience** when it comes to plants.

Bulgaria: Starting a vegetable garden is a learning process especially for newbies. Basic assumptions include access to **sunlight; space availability; soil quality/raised beds; water access; local regulations**. The first steps are site selection, soil preparation, selecting veggies,





planting, watering, nutrient management (fertilization/composting), pest and disease control, support and pruning, harvesting, evaluation and adaptability.

Italy: An accurate analysis must be done, starting from the choice of the **available place** to the plants, to irrigation, to waste disposal. Always have a **business plan**.

Choose products all year round and **avoid allergenic species**. Know the positioning of the land and therefore the exposure. Know the **local reality**, rely on associations that operate in the social and agricultural context. Always keep in mind that **crop rotation** is important to always have rich and therefore productive soil and also create educational workshops to attract even the youngest.

Croatia: In a few steps, the most important elements to start with are: there is a need to identify a **suitable location**, secure land permission, form a core group, establish **goals and guidelines**, engage the community, plan the garden layout, establish **garden rules**, provide resources, foster **collaboration** and education, maintain communication.

Portugal: Starting an urban vegetable garden in Portugal requires assumptions like **sunlight availability**, **soil quality**, and **access to water**. The first steps involve planning, seed selection, and ongoing care.

As a general answer, the most important elements of a garden are the space, fertile soil, good water, and the presence of light. The rest comes with how committed you are when starting your own garden, and what are your goals related to it. The more you expect, the more time and energy you need to invest, for example in setting up garden rules, maybe involving a friend or a group of people to help you, start thinking about crop rotation, and inspect more the local reality.

As a general conclusion, urban agriculture seems to have a lot of benefits in different aspects of individual and communal life, with investing little to more resources, depending on the interest and objectives of this practice. Indeed it is important that local authorities help by implementing more regulations to UA, and motivate especially young people to start working on it, but it is a practice that could be done with motivation, patience and persistence.

