

Kitchen Gardens: Overview

What are kitchen gardens and why are they important?

Kitchen gardens are small garden plots near the home to provide a secure, affordable source of fresh fruits and vegetables. These gardens diversify family diets and improve household food security and nutrition. Kitchen gardens are typically managed by women and children.

As gardens become more productive, extra produce can be sold to supplement the family income.

What can you grow in kitchen gardens?

Potential crops include: tomatoes, peppers, potatoes, carrots, eggplant, okra, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, leeks, onions, garlic, green onions, sweet corn, squashes, cucumbers, melons, leafy greens (spinach, kale, chard), and herbs (cilantro, dill, parsley). **Note:** Kitchen gardens can also incorporate chickens and other small livestock.

Considerations for kitchen gardens in Afghanistan



Figure 2. Almost anything with a few small holes in the bottom can be used for planting. (Photo: C. Hughes)

Home focus. Some families may see a kitchen garden as an opportunity to grow more of a commercial crop, such as potatoes. However, to improve family nutrition, it is important to emphasize multiple crops and home consumption. A range of crops can also improve yields and reduce pests and diseases (see “Companion Plants FS” for more information).

Start small. Start with a small “container garden” (Figure 2), especially if the family has little experience growing vegetables. Containers have the advantage that they can be easily moved to find the best location and layout for a future garden plot. As gardeners become more confident, they can establish larger gardens with more crops (Figure 3).

Audience & Approach. Kitchen gardening is one of the few agricultural activities directed at women and children. However, working across gender barriers is generally not socially acceptable in Afghanistan. Work through local individuals or groups that have already established trust with the women in the community. Almost certainly, women should be the ones working with the household women and children.

Clear instructions. The knowledge needed for kitchen gardening can be different from that needed for growing field crops. For example, some garden crops can be planted later than crops in the field and can be more intensively grown. Thus, provide clear step-by-step instructions and continually stress key concepts during follow-up with families.

Postharvest. Women may be unsure how to cook and use new vegetables, or families might resist unfamiliar foods. Thus, support kitchen garden projects with classes on cooking, nutrition, and value-added processing (preserving, fermenting). Help dispel myths about new foods, such as “fruits are unhealthy because they are sweet.”

Reference: Berti, P. R., Krasevec, J., & Fitzgerald, S. (2004). A review of the effectiveness of agriculture interventions in improving nutrition outcomes. *Appropriate Technology*, 7 (November 2001), 599–609.



Figure 1. With a little effort, many Afghan yards can become productive gardens. (Photo: C. Hughes)



Figure 3. This garden supplements the family diet with fresh vegetables and fruit. (Photo: C. Hughes)