

IMPROVING NUTRITION THROUGH HOME GARDENING

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Home gardens are found in many humid and sub-humid parts of the world. They are sometimes called backyard or kitchen gardens. These gardens have an established tradition and offer great potential for improving household food security and alleviating micronutrient deficiencies. Gardening can enhance food security in several ways, most importantly through:

- 1) Direct access to a diversity of nutritionally-rich foods
- 2) Increased purchasing power from savings on food bills and income from sales of garden products, and
- 3) Fall-back food provision during seasonal lean periods.

One of the easiest ways of ensuring access to a healthy diet (see Nutrition Education and Training) that contains adequate macro and micronutrients is to produce many different kinds of foods in the home garden. This is especially important in rural areas where people have limited income-earning opportunities and poor access to markets. Home gardens are also becoming an increasingly important source of food and income for poor households in peri-urban and urban areas (Urban Agriculture and Food for the Cities).

A well-developed home garden has the potential, when access to land and water is not a major limitation, to supply most of the non-staple foods that a family needs every day of the year, including roots and tubers, vegetables and fruits, legumes, herbs and spices, animals and fish. Roots and tubers are rich in energy and legumes are important sources of protein, fat, iron and vitamins. Green leafy vegetables and yellow- or orange-coloured fruits provide essential vitamins and minerals, particularly folate, and vitamins A, E and C. Vegetables and fruits are a vital component of a healthy diet and should be eaten as a part of every meal. Meat, chicken and fish are good sources of protein, fat and micronutrients, particularly iron and zinc. They are especially important in small children's diets to ensure normal growth and intellectual development.

Strategies and technologies for successful home gardening and nutrition education are contained in FAO's popular training material Improving Nutrition through Home Gardening. Separate training packages, specially designed to take account of regional food production and eating patterns and respond to the needs of diverse population groups, have been prepared for Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America and are widely disseminated.

FAO's Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division in conjunction with the Plant Production and Protection Division, actively collaborate with national agricultural extension, research, and training institutes, as well as with NGOs to train field staff, farmer's and women's groups, and schools teachers in gardening techniques and practical nutrition. Successful field projects have been implemented in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Indonesia, Niger, Somalia and Vietnam (FNA) and training activities are implemented in Ghana and Kenya in Africa; Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Peru in Latin and Central America; and in Grenada in the Caribbean.