



# UGAIN

Urban **G**Ardens for the social  
**I**Ntegration of migrants

**Garden:**

**Internationale Gärten e. V. Göttingen  
(International Gardens of Göttingen)**



# Internet links

✓ <http://internationale-gaerten.de/>

## 1. Introduction

The International Gardens of Goettingen are places where refugees, migrants and German families meet, and build up friendships and close relationships. The three gardens, which make up the project, are positive examples of international understanding and integration. The garden projects with their wide variety of activities, encourage social inclusion. The concept of intercultural gardening was born in Goettingen in the early 1990s and spread from there globally. In the 1990s the project was born by a group of refugees and an agricultural engineer, who were missing their home countries and gardening activities.



*"I think that if you have the skills, and if you know something, your knowledge must be open to others. That they also get on their feet in the garden, and then they join and participate. It is very important also that it is a mixed group. We do not want only specialists, but people who have gardening experience. This is very important for the group."*

**Chairperson of the association**

*"It is very important to me that when you start a garden group, you do not ask the people what you have studied, or what their professional background is. All people are at the same level. Every person has his pride and is treated like that. Do not tell another member, that it does not understand! This would be a big burden for a person, no matter where he comes, no matter what he has or not. Yes, you have to take everyone on-board and this takes a little time. Try to use all the methods and ways available."*

**Volunteer and former refugee (currently consultant for intercultural garden projects)**

## 2. Garden data



### Location - coordinates:

- Friedensgarten Grone (Garden of Peace in Grone), Siekweg 65, 37081 Goettingen, Germany.
- Gemeinschaftsgarten Geismar (Community Garden in Geismar), Schulweg 99, 37083, Goettingen, Germany.
- Willkommensgarten auf den Zietenterrassen (Garden of Welcome), Hannah Vogt Straße 10, 37081 Goettingen, Germany.

**Garden description:** The Garden of Peace in Grone is one of three international gardens in Göttingen. It is located at the southern end of the Siekweg in the district of Grone. The garden currently covers 3.000 m<sup>2</sup> run by 15 garden members. There are privately and publicly owned beds, as well as thematic beds. The spacious garden is hosting a shed for equipment, a garden cottage where gardeners like to rest after work, as well as a compost toilet and three beehives. Three beekeepers take care of the hives. The honey is prepared and then sold. Profits from the sale are dedicated to the association. The gardeners frequently welcome visitors. In the garden, fruits, vegetables, herbs and mushrooms are cultivated.

The Community Garden in the Geismar district is located between a school and a kindergarten. The land is provided by a church. Currently, approximately 20 members are active in the garden. These members cultivate their produce on jointly owned plots as well as thematic beds. In addition to the gardeners, several school and kindergarten groups and a "Transition Town" group cultivate the beds. The garden includes a modern composting toilet and an herbal spiral, which was built by the gardeners themselves. Schoolchildren from the neighbouring school planted the herbs into the spiral. The garden is the first piece of land received, when the project was found in the 1990s.

The Garden of Welcome is the latest garden project of the association. Members of the association started to build a garden in the spring of 2016 directly on the grounds of a temporary home where refugees are hosted. At present, primarily children who live in the accommodation are involved in the garden. Adults and neighbours are welcome for help. The Welcome Garden is funded by the German Children's Fund and the support of "Ertomis". The gardens are approximately 1500-2000m<sup>2</sup>

Apart from the Garden of Welcome that belongs directly to temporary refugee home, the association needs to pay a lease to the landowner (the church, City of Goettingen). Maintenance cost for the gardens are 4000-5000 Euro. The association receives donations, small project funds and membership fees to cover their costs. The people working in the gardens and the association is made up of 60% (refugees and migrants): 40 (local people from Goettingen).

# 3. Social integration and empowerment of migrants

The gardens facilitate interacting and establishing dialogue within international community. The garden members in Göttingen adhere to 10 working principles which are:

1. The importance of experiences, learning and growing in community
2. Conscious diversity
3. Supporting self-esteem and confidence
4. Participation supports individuals and the community
5. Offering practical help
6. Establishing respectful relationships
7. Sharing and contributing
8. Crisis management
9. Building bridges between local people and refugees and migrants
10. A Holistic approach: Being a role model

The International Garden of Göttingen is in exchange with other intercultural gardening groups, the network organisation "anstiftung", local and national non-profit organizations in Germany. As the organisation was the first international Garden in Germany, the project serves as a role model and inspiration for other projects. The project is frequently part of research projects and in the media.

The garden projects provide several learning opportunities: horticultural and environmental knowledge, constructing and crafting, language courses and intercultural exchange. Volunteers and the chairperson of the association explicitly state that within the garden project, each person in the association and in the garden is equal. They consider it important to be a learner and a teacher at the same time, as each person has skills and is resourceful. They further stress the importance of cultural exchanges and dignity. The meaning of the language is ambivalent. On the one hand, fluency in understanding is essential for social integration, but in garden language, this is not an obstacle. Members communicate with gestures, hands and feet, and some people act as translators. Gardening is a common language of the people.



Closeness, trust, conversation, community, and quick interpersonal help are important in the garden. People help each other during the gardening activities, but also support each other in personal stressful situations, such as losing a family member, struggles with children or any stressful life situation. In addition, the garden is seen as place for recreation and therapy, as well as an escape from the circumstances in the temporary home (constricted conditions, little privacy). This was and is of importance in the basic set up of the gardens, as well as for the garden of Welcome. In many cases, people deal with trauma and homesickness.

Besides of all the positive experiences and benefits, the members of the association face some challenges, for instance getting used to German bureaucracy, and administration. In addition, being open to each other and respecting diversity is not always easy in practice. Group decisions can take a long time and can be gruelling. However, they are essential to their work.

In general, the working principles shape the interaction, therefore, interpersonal problems and how to approach things are not seen as obstacles. Volunteers and chair people have a healthy, proactive attitude to challenges as well as to change. They acknowledge that as people change, the project and their activities change according to people's needs.

Volunteer (former refugee, currently consultant for intercultural garden projects) considers their project as successful as their approach spreads first nationwide and then around the globe. As the key to success, she points out: "As I said before, patience and interest. I know several projects that have given up after a week because they haven't had patience." They thought: today they will meet the group, they plan everything and the group will do it all. That will not be successful. From the beginning, everybody needs to be involved. You need to listen to other opinions even if you do not share that opinion. We need to explain the reasons that this does not suit us, we do not have the money, and we have to wait, because this is more important to us, what is your opinion? Planning, and co-decision making, that is very important."

In reflection the garden manager outlines that the strength of the group comes from inside the group. This reflects the personal level as well the work in the garden. During the years of work people may change, but the community remains. An example of the closeness and strength, is that when former or current members pass away, the bereaved receive social and emotional support from members of the association.

Due to their twenty years of experience and their personal background of refugees, the people in Goettingen, were aware of the various needs of refugees arriving in 2015. They were respectively able to respond to these needs.

The managers explained that only over time can a project with several gardens such as in Goettingen grow.

The growth takes place from inside the group. The people in Goettingen have a top to down approach that is not helpful in intercultural gardens.

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## Project Website

[www.ugain.online](http://www.ugain.online)



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