

PROJECT PORTRAIT

Investigating the determinants of successful urban agriculture
#140 (2014)

What is this project about?

This was a study conducted by two UCT economics students, with the aim of identifying productive gardening techniques amongst urban farmers in Mitchell's Plain, Cape Town. The study sought to identify the characteristics that secure a healthy, flourishing garden able to withstand the challenging climate and soil conditions, as well as those resulting from personal and group conflicts.

This project was undertaken in collaboration with SEED, a non-profit NGO that advocates sustainable urban agriculture.

The research

SEED provided the researchers with a platform to conduct face-to-face oral interviews with 8 homestead gardeners. These informants had been trained by SEED to grow vegetables, were provided with seedlings and compost as well as ongoing support.

The interviews provided the researchers with insight to the different gardening techniques used in various households. Further information was obtained via the assessment of literature.



What you need to know:

This study found that the success of urban vegetable farming in semi-arid, poor communities can be improved by enriching one's own soil, expanding one's network of food growers, growing the most suitable crops and conservation of water.

The research findings

Upon analysis of the data, the following elements characterized superior agricultural techniques in a semi-arid region such as Mitchell's Plain: 1.) Improving your own soil; 2.) Building a network; 3.) Growing the right crops; 4.) Grey water recycling.

Since Mitchell's Plain is characterized by infertile soil, enriching one's own soil is essential. This was done by composting yard and kitchen waste and starting an earthworm farm from the compost heap.

In terms of networking, many found it useful to befriend other farmers and exchange successful farming techniques. This would also allow for farmers to discuss the most suitable crops to grow, given the limited space

available for gardening.

Water conservation techniques were also found to be useful. This is because low-income households characterize the area, where water shortage was a common issue.

Using the research

This project aimed to shed light on the various factors that contribute toward successful urban farming. The findings could prove useful to support similar initiatives in similar contexts to increase their food security, while protecting the environment for future generations.

This study was completed in April 2014

Want to know more?

The full study report is "Investigating the determinants of successful urban agriculture in the semi-arid region of Mitchells Plain, Cape Town" by Kim Cottle and Caroline Rono under supervision by Dr Beatrice Conradie. It was done in collaboration with SEED.

The research report is available on the Knowledge Co-op website

To **reference** this Project Portrait, cite UCT Knowledge Co-op as the author.

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The Knowledge Co-Op at the University of Cape Town

The UCT Knowledge Co-op aims to make it easier for community partners to access UCT's skills, resources and professional expertise. It helps initiate joint projects that benefit both the community partner and the university. The Co-op links community groups with appropriately qualified staff and students at UCT, and supports both partners throughout the project – from initial planning to final product.

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