

Gardening Association for Children and Youth

The Gardening Association for Children and Youth aims to increase gardening skills and know-how among kids and young people. We emphasize a child-centered and collaborative approach to education as well as closeness to nature.

We offer a host of activities from day camps to work shops and internships. Moreover, we produce informative and educative materials and work to promote gardening in urban environments.

Kumpula School Garden

The central location for our activities is Kumpula School Garden, situated in the middle of urban Helsinki. The garden has offered a place for kids to learn gardening skills since the 1920s.

Kumpula School Garden is owned by the City of Helsinki with the Gardening Association for Children and Youth in charge of operations. We aim to develop the garden further into a renowned center of gardening culture for children and youth.

Activities we offer:

For kids

Day camps

We organize summer day camps at the garden centering around one of three themes: gardening, drama and environmental art. Day camps are also offered for children with special needs. Each year the camps are attended by approximately 200 kids.

Equal access for all kids has always been a fundamental value at Kumpula School Garden. Thus, the camp fees are kept very affordable. The cost for day camp for the entire summer is only 80 euros, including four hours of supervised activities per day and a warm meal.

Working together in the fields teaches children valuable social skills as well as patience. Growing plants requires constant care, and carrots, onions and beans don't spring up overnight. Learning hands-on the process of seed-to-table increases the value we give to food. The campers learn to eat a great variety of vegetables and get to take them home throughout the summer.

For kids used to urban environments the camps offer a unique chance to get in touch with nature. Children who may be afraid of getting themselves dirty in the soil change their approach to nature as the summer goes by: they find their favorite spots in the garden and name little bugs as friends. Also, the children's immune system is strengthened.

The children's activities are financed mainly by the City of Helsinki with some additional income from participation fees.

For youth

Learning Program "Vihreän Oksan Werstas"

We run a 6-month gardening skills program for young adults who are neither working nor enrolled in studies. The program called Vihreän Oksan Werstas (“Workshop of the Green Branch”) is the first of its kind in Finland.

Program participants gain hands-on skills and know-how in gardening, cooking, food preservation and wood work. The cooperative and communal working methods strengthen the youth’s self-confidence. So does the individual career and life orienteering which is part of the program.

The program has provided promising results. In 2014, 75 per cent of the participants continued to studies directly after the program with most of them focusing on gardening. 25 per cent were linked with work or other opportunities relevant for their future goals.

Internships and seasonal jobs

Internships and seasonal jobs are offered at the garden mainly during the growing period from March to October. The work opportunities cover camp counselling, gardening, construction, and area maintenance. The association cooperates with the City of Helsinki Youth Department and Plan Finland, among others, to provide employment for teenagers and young adults.

For families

Gardening club

The gardening club offers a chance for families to grow their own vegetables in the city. Children and parents, beginners and experts alike take part in cultivating a common plot with the guidance of a professional gardener. Each year 20 to 25 families attend the club with the sessions taking place once or twice a week. The concept is being propagated to other parts of the country.

The gardening club receives financial support from the City of Helsinki Department of Social Services and Health Care. On certain years financing has also been provided by foundations (Alli Paasikivi Foundation, Rikala Foundation). An affordable participation fee is collected from the families.

For all

Volunteer work

During the growing season people of all ages are welcome to work as volunteers at Kumpula School Garden. The daily tasks vary from garden chores – such as planting, digging out weeds and harvesting – to activities including art work, cooking and playing with kids. No prior skills are required.

Volunteers can work from 2 to 4 hours a day for as many days as they like. A warm meal is included in a 4-hour day. Everyone volunteering for 10 days or more is provided with a certificate.

Events and garden café

We organize public events at Kumpula School Garden during which the garden is open for all.

In the summer of 2015 we opened an open-air café in the garden for the first time. Operating through the month of July, the café offered drinks and vegetarian food prepared at the garden using our own organic

crop and wild herbs. Daily events from yoga to a tent sauna took place at the café, most of them free of charge. The feedback received from customers was excellent.

In August every year, a fun and lively harvest feast is held at the garden. The evening features a variety of workshops for the whole family as well as live music and tasty vegetarian cooking.