

## KUMPULA SCHOOL GARDEN – PAST AND PRESENT

The culturally and historically valuable Kumpula School Garden (4,3 hectares) is the only garden in Finland offering garden activities for children and young people. The garden was founded in 1928 as an educational garden for city children. Year after year, decade after decade, hundreds of children and young people have practised gardening skills in its grounds. During the Second World War as many as 800 children participated in the activities provided by the garden. Today, some 200 children are involved in its activities during the summer months. Moreover, the **Gardening Association for Children and Youth** offers summer activities for dozens of young people in workshops (Vihreän Oksan Werstas), in voluntary participation and in summer jobs.

The school garden activity draws its origins from a will left by brick-mason Ärt in 1906. He bequeathed 100,000 gold marks for the benefit of working-class children, and the estate specifically requested that the money be used for school garden activities. The aim was to provide city children with an opportunity to learn gardening skills and wholesome outdoor recreational activities. Emphasis was also given to food produced in the garden. The City of Helsinki ran the school garden activities for decades and in its heyday, there were several active gardens. Today, only the Kumpula School Garden remains active. Since 2006, it has been run by The Garden Association for Children and Youth.

Cultural value is reflected not only in the unique environment but also in the long tradition and development of uninterrupted activities started in the 1920's. Kumpula School Garden is owned by the City of Helsinki and managed by the Garden Association for Children and Youth since 2006: initially together with the Education Department and later, with Youth Services. The Association continues to develop its activities to better respond to current needs.

Kumpula School Garden is designed (4,3 ha) by the renowned garden architect Elisabeth Koch, and the buildings were drawn by city architect Gunnar Taucher.

The extensive grounds enable versatile practical garden education and environmental education. In addition to the actual farming sections, there are berry bushes, shrubs, apple trees, lawns, trees and flower beds. Children's all-time favourite is the small woodland area with its blueberries and hut building sites. Production of seedlings is possible thanks to the polytunnel provided by Vihreän Oksan Werstas.

The School Garden is cultivated by organic farming methods. Soil management is based on cultivation aspects and sustainable use, taking children and youth (farmers) into account. Through rotational farming the humus content, structure and nutritional balance of the soil is maintained and improved. All work is based on manual labour and requires a workforce. Ploughing is carried out with horses.

## GARDEN ASSOCIATION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The principle underlying the activities is not only to promote gardening skills and knowledge but also to build a closer relationship with nature among children and young people. Through garden activities we can support and enhance the well-being of children, youth and families.

The flagship of the Association's youth work, **Vihreän Oksan Werstas**, is a workshop aimed at young people aged 17-29, who are currently either unemployed or without a study place. At the workshop, young people are familiarized with garden work by teaching them how to maintain the Kumpula School Garden allotments and by assigning them to work in other garden sites. This activity is based on the educational plan of the horticultural sector.

The workshop is all about a down-to-earth approach to various tasks within the horticultural sector: plant production and propagation, open land vegetable farming, management of green spaces, landscaping, further processing of garden products and floristry. The activities offered by the workshop improve everyday management skills and support the development of personal growth, inclusion and skills.

During school vacations, camp activities are organized with the overall goal of creating interest in gardening skills, reinforcing relationship with nature and offering recreational pleasures in this green city oasis. These day camps include guidance, materials and lunch. Children practise both cultivating and harvesting and, during the process, they learn how food arrives from field to table. The Kumpula School Garden was nominated the Food Educator of the Year in 2020.

Camp activities are also organized at the Vesala School where children can participate in care of its animal tenants in the so-called animal greenhouse (guinea pigs, gerbils, rabbits, birds).

School classes are welcome to join free guided visits in spring and autumn.

The youngest children have access to activities through the Garden Family Club. Attending families learn about gardening under the guidance of experienced gardeners once or twice a week in the evenings. Families tend the plots together and share the harvest. This type of activity has been extremely popular, and families have really taken to the place.

Garden events are organized annually, and project-funding provides various garden activities to children and young people.

Funding for the Association's activities comes from both city purchasing services of the Kumpula School Garden's activities (camps, site maintenance, events, school visits) and from funds for workshop activities received from the Regional State Administrative Agency for Southern Finland. In addition, minor allowances are received for running the family club, other camps and projects. Participation fees for camps and fund-raising by the Vihreän Oksan Werstas (plant sales, harvest sales, sales of processed products, yard maintenance) also contribute to funding the garden activities.

More information

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