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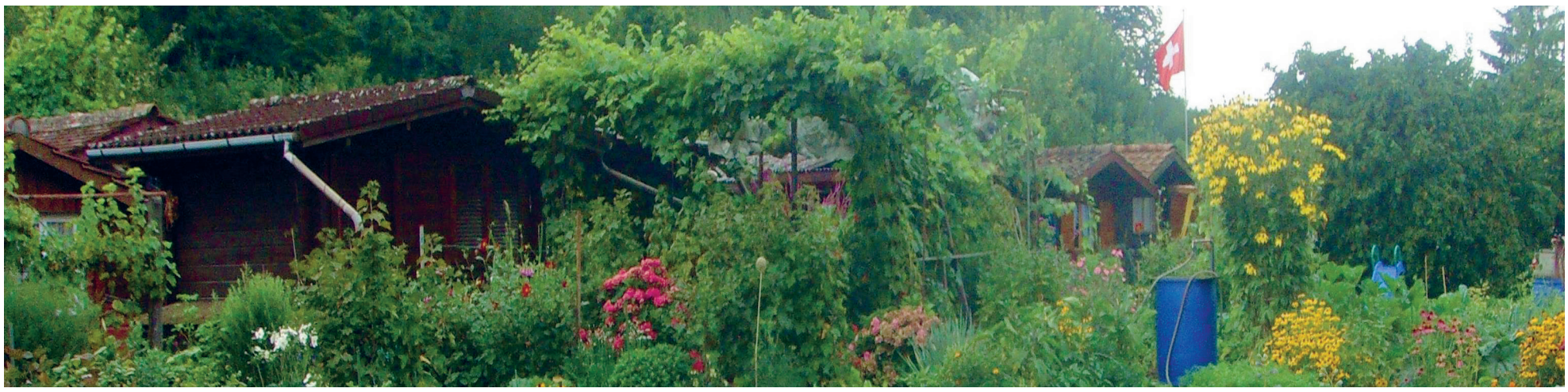
Meaning of organic gardening in Swiss allotment gardens



What perception do gardeners have of organic gardening in Swiss allotment gardens?
What motivates (or prevents) gardeners to adopt organic gardening practices?

These questions were elaborated by qualitative interviews, focus group workshops and a face-to-face quantitative survey (n=574) with gardeners in the cities of Basel, Lausanne, Lucerne and St. Gallen.

Selected results

Perceptions and definitions of "organic" vary greatly

- Some gardeners see organic gardening as "neglectful" garden management. Others see it as the only possible way of gardening.
- Gardeners define "organic" as the absence of synthetic fertilisers and pesticides. Practices, such as composting, crop rotation and mulching, are often not considered to be part of organic gardening.
- Some gardeners describe themselves as organic gardeners but use synthetic pesticides and fertilisers. Others use synthetic inputs only on flowers but not on vegetables or fruits.

Importance of neighbours and gardening associations on gardening practices

- Gardening neighbours are the most important source of horticultural information and positive reinforcement.
- Some rules, such as building codes, are strictly obeyed but rules regarding organic gardening are often neither followed nor policed. Rules do not motivate organic gardening.
- Traditional perceptions of "good gardening", in terms of tidy gardens and a large harvest, still exist within gardening associations. This puts pressure on organic gardeners and potentially hinders natural garden design and other practices that foster biodiversity.

Conclusions

- The degree of knowledge about organic gardening influences management practices, with synthetic fertilisers and pesticides more likely to be used when knowledge of alternatives is lacking.
- Gardeners often already apply some principles of organic gardening but misinformation exists about the concept. Incremental change might be fostered through targeted communication strategies. The effectiveness and purposefulness of organic gardening need to be demonstrated to gardeners and their representatives, through e.g. diversifying the supply of information and education, creating opportunities for networking, and offering more tools for support.
- The decision of whether to garden organically is a combination of the attitude held by the gardener and the culture among neighbours and within the gardening association; with city regulations playing a less important role. Through demonstrating the advantages and practical applications of organic gardening management, there is potential for creating a culture of organic gardening in Swiss allotment gardens.

What do gardeners enjoy about gardening?

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