

Exploring the sustainability potentials of the private garden

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The private garden is one of the most important sites for people's everyday interactions with nature. Although sometimes just consisting of a lawn, a few shrubs and maybe a flower bed, it provides a number of situations where the owner has to reflect on and handle biodiversity and sustainability issues in relation to modern lifestyle. This paper will discuss different aspects of sustainability in these kinds of garden environments in Sweden. With a specific focus on work and tools in the garden, the complex interactions between people, plants and other actors in contemporary private gardens have been examined. In our field work in people's gardens we have got insight into a number of practices that we find interesting in relation to ecological, social and economical sustainability. This includes cultivation of edible plants, collecting of materials from the garden, circulation of nutrients through composting and informal economies, with reuse, recycling and exchange of plant material. Even the sharing of knowledge and knowhow could be looked upon as representing aspects of sustainability promoting performances.

Everyday actions and practices in private gardens can often be interpreted as both positive and negative in relation to sustainability, and such ambiguities will be exemplified in our presentation. In our discussion we specifically wish to shed light on the private garden as a potentially important site for the development of sustainable nature/culture interactions. By acknowledging the sustainability potential of vernacular practices that are in fact carried out by numerous gardeners in ordinary private gardens, this research shows that inspiration for sustainability goals can be found also in everyday garden culture.

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