

The pandemic has confirmed it: Allotment gardens are more important than ever

Convince yourself: THE GARDENS OF RIS ORANGIS ARE BEAUTIFUL (France)!

A real “urban park and green lung” for all.



I take you to the outskirts of Paris in order to discover the allotments of Ris Orangis, a “real garden park” in.



The allotment association of Ris Orangis is situated, as its name indicates it, in the town of Ris Orangis in the Essonne department. Numerous buildings are situated around the allotment gardens; they are the “green lungs” of this urban district.

An historical overview

The allotment site was created in 1998. At the beginning the allotments had 87 plots and one collective building. Following their great success and the increasing demand of the townspeople, the site grew bigger to town habitants.



Over the years, 170 new plots have been created as well as two new shelters. One technical shelter, where you can deposit the collective tools, as for example, tractors, shredders, lawn-movers, tillers and small shovels.....There is also a collective shelter where you find the kitchen and a big meeting room. This room allows the executive members to meet for their board meetings and to take meals. This shelter is of course open to all.





Four main paths form islands of gardens, divided into 8 triangular plots. Why triangular? In order not to repeat the rectangular scheme of the towers surrounding the allotment site.



The islands all have the names of flowers as you can see from the pictures.



The alleys got the name of public people and above all of one person you all know: Mr Jules-Auguste Lemire. A great honour for this person, founder of the French allotment gardens and of the Office International du Coin de Terre et des Jardins Familiaux, the seat of which has been in Luxembourg since its foundation in 1926.

Reduction of the carbon footprint

At the exterior of the sheds you find piled up wood. This wood comes from the tree cutting. It is used to feed the stove, keeping the sheds warm. It is also sold and the profits serve the association.

In the Ris-Orangis allotment gardens (as in most of the gardens) each gardener makes his own compost.

Compost, an organic material, helps to reduce everyone's carbon footprint. It enables carbon to be stored in the soil and contributes to the absorption of

carbon by plants, i.e. formation of humus.

What is compost made of? Green waste! Bark, dead wood, rotten fruit or vegetables, peelings, leaves, grass, straw, eggshells....

The gardeners respect an environmental charter and encourage natural gardening. The practice of natural gardening avoids the use of chemical or artificial fertilisers. This practice limits soil pollution, but also limits dependence on products, the manufacture of which generates a significant quantity of greenhouse gases.

Natural gardening also means reducing tillage and the use of agricultural machinery.

A real mixture of cultures, a social diversity, mutual help and the exchange of good practices.....Gardening is a real pleasure!

These gardens of 6.8 hectares unify 257 plots! As you can imagine the families and the gardeners are extremely diverse. There is a real mixture of cultures, a social diversity, mutual help and the exchange of good practices which rhythm the life in the gardens.



Duran and his wife are two young gardeners of the allotment site of Ris Orangis.



Tomatoes, parsley, courgettes and peppers are cultivated on their plot. Duran explains that his wife mainly does the gardening on the plot, while he sometimes helps and looks after the garden when she is not present or if she needs help.

They also come with the whole family to the plot to get fresh air, to have a walk and to breathe the good smell of the kitchen gardens.

Having this plot also contributes a pleasure enabling them to discuss with other gardeners and to exchange ideas. It is also an opportunity to stay outside with the family.

Both his wife and himself often have breakfast in the garden, when the day is rising.

It is so nice to stay in the fresh air and to hear the nature awake. What they like in this garden: community, the other gardeners and being together. Gardening is a real pleasure!

A real microcosm of biodiversity





Each plot shows a real microcosm of biodiversity. The president Gil Melin counted not less than 28 species of birds in the gardens, namely heron, carrion crow, magpie, jay, starling, blackbird, wood pigeon, rock dove, nuthatch, short-toed tree creeper, chiffchaff, chaffinch, robin, great tit, blue tit, long-tailed tit, goldfinch, wren, blackcap, black redstart, swift, green woodpecker, great spotted woodpecker, house sparrow, song thrush, mistle thrush and sparrow hawk.

Eating healthy products, cultivated by himself.



Luis has been a gardener in the allotment gardens of Ris Orangis for 19 years. He is also a member of the association's executive board.

Before working on this allotment plot, he had another smaller plot situated not far away. Two years later he wished to get a bigger one, as he wanted to work more. Meanwhile the plot is starting to become too big. Gardening is hard, but it is an occupation. The plot allows him to be in the fresh air, to stay in nature. It is a pleasure for him. He would never for any reasons abandon his plot. As long as he can deal with it, he will cultivate it.

Having the chance to cultivate a kitchen garden, is a chance to eat healthy products, which one has cultivated oneself. It is a chance to benefit of some privileged moments with nature and with oneself.

Gardening is a possibility to both get strength and to escape.

Allotment gardens are good for the moral and health



Philippe, one of the executive board members of this site and his wife are two old gardeners in the allotment site of Ris Orangis.

They look carefully after their plot. For them it is a space of sharing and advising, and a space full of life. Here they get new strength. What a great thing to be able to stay outside!

Working the soil and harvesting vegetables, are good for the person! This garden plot also allows them to meet with friends and gardeners. They are always ready to help if work has to be done in gardens, and above all, when work has to be done to lay out common spaces. Philippe is the king of manual work.

Working the soil, innovating and learning from the elderly, especially about natural gardening, gardening brings a certain tranquillity and peace. The garden is relaxing and tiring at the same time. Attention it is a good tiredness, gardening is a sport activity!

Gardening is good for our moral and health!

Place of relaxation and evasion



For the allotment gardeners in Ris-Orangis, their garden is a place of heaven. Here they get more strength, they meet friends, they relax and they can escape the stress of everyday life.

What does your garden and gardening bring you?

Sandra Bèle