

# BEST PRACTICE ESSGARTEN

Submitted by : ITKAM



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## SECTION 1: BASIC INFORMATION

- Title of the Best Practice: Essgarten
- Website of the Practice: <https://essgarten.de/>
- Social Media links: <https://www.facebook.com/EssgartenWinkelsett>
- Location: Barjenbruch 3, Harpstedt, Germany

## SECTION 2: PRACTICE OVERVIEW

- Short Description of the Practice

The Essgarten is Germany's oldest and most biodiverse forest garden, featuring around 1.200 edible plant species across 2,4 hectares. It functions as a centre for ecological education and nutrition. Activities include guided forest garden tours, wild herb walks, foraging workshops, cooking classes (e.g., fermentation, wild garden cuisine), and thematic events like wild cooking or making herbal salves. The site also hosts intimate culinary evenings featuring four-course menus derived from the forest garden. Visitors can also explore an on-site mini forest garden and purchase books and speciality products in an info-shop.

- Implementation Period: from 30 years ago until now

- Status:

☐ Planned ☐ Pilot phase ☐ Fully implemented ☒ Ongoing and evolving

- **Thematic Areas Addressed:**

☒ Farm to Fork / Sustainable Food Systems

☒ Waste Management

☐ Resource Efficiency

☒ Other: Ecotourism, experiential education

- **Describe how the practice aligns with the selected Thematic Areas.**

The Essgarten lies at the intersection of education, gastronomy, and ecotourism. As a forest garden open for guided tours, it connects visitors with sustainable food systems in a living laboratory. Culinary experiences, such as wild culinary classes, fermentation workshops, and themed culinary evenings, demonstrate farm-to-table concepts in immersive ways. The participants learn about self-sufficiency, foraging, and plant-based nutrition. Moreover, the site fosters experiential tourism, blending restaurant-like culinary events with educational experiences, making it suitable for both guests and school groups. By inviting visitors into this biodiverse environment, the centre promotes ecological awareness and food literacy.

- **Explain how this activity fits within the tourism sector**

This activity is ideally suited to the farm and culinary segments of the tourism sector. The Essgarten functions simultaneously as a living forest garden, an educational centre, and a gastronomic experience hub. Visitors are invited to take part in guided tours, wild herb walks, foraging sessions, and hands-on cooking workshops, which immerse them in the principles of sustainable food systems. Next, the seasonal culinary evenings add a strong restaurant and experiential dining dimension, due to the multi-course menus prepared with ingredients harvested directly from the forest garden.

At the same time, the site also serves as a platform for educational tourism by offering workshops on fermentation, wild cuisine, or natural remedies, appealing to both local and international travellers interested in learning about ecological living.

- **What learning value for VET training, curriculum development or capacity-building of professionals does the practice offer?**

The practice of the Essgarten provides valuable learning opportunities across education, vocational training, and professional development. For schools, it offers a replicable model of creating edible gardens with the active involvement of students, fostering hands-on knowledge of biodiversity, food production, and sustainability from an early age. For SMEs in the tourism and hospitality sector, the model demonstrates how hotels or restaurants can establish their own edible gardens to supply fresh ingredients, develop themed culinary evenings, and attract tourists interested in ecological gastronomy. Lastly, for VET curricula, this practice strengthens skills in sustainable food systems, permaculture design, gastronomy, and experiential tourism management. It shows future professionals how ecological practices can become integrated into hospitality offers, diversifying services and generating new revenue streams while enhancing sustainability.

### **SECTION 3: CHALLENGES AND ALIGNMENT WITH CIRCULAR ECONOMY PRINCIPLES**

- **What challenges or barriers were addressed (based on the report findings)?**

- ☒ Waste management and disposal
- ☐ Energy/resource use
- ☐ Infrastructure limitations
- ☒ Seasonality
- ☒ Skills and capacity gaps
- ☒ Low awareness of CE
- ☐ Behavioural resistance
- ☒ Financial or funding constraints
- ☐ Other : \_\_\_\_\_

- **How were these challenges overcome?**

The Essgarten addresses low ecological awareness and capacity gaps through immersive education: guided tours, workshops, and hands-on culinary sessions. These allow participants to directly engage with sustainable food production and biodiversity. By combining gastronomy with learning in a natural setting, the centre builds both knowledge and appreciation for circular food systems. They also consist of a resilient mini-ecosystem that thrives without fertilisers, pesticides, or irrigation, reducing waste and resource outputs. Furthermore, thanks to their workshops, such as “Wilde Fermente”, they help preserve seasonal produce by fermenting vegetables, extending their shelf life and reducing potential food waste. The garden is also focused on the high season, tackling seasonality by running most activities from May to September, when the ecosystem is most productive. Lastly, they have multiple revenue channels (events, products, vouchers) through which they can tackle any financial constraints. They also make use of low-cost labor with volunteers and employ energy-efficient, low-maintenance designs.

- **Which circular economy strategies does this practice address?**

- ☒ Waste reduction / reuse / recycling
- ☐ Renewable energy / energy efficiency
- ☐ Water conservation
- ☒ Circular product/service design
- ☒ Sustainable food systems / short food chains
- ☐ Eco-certifications or green standards
- ☐ Repair, refurbishment, or reuse of infrastructure/furnishings
- ☐ Digital tools for circularity or sustainability

- **Describe why this practice can be considered as a 'best practice' and how it contributes to one or more circular economy principles:**

The Essgarten exemplifies circularity through the integration of educational, gastronomic, and ecological functions. Its forest garden produces edible plants locally, supporting sustainable food loops, while workshops like fermentation or herbal salve-making show product lifecycle and upcycling concepts. The educational model fosters circular economy literacy, given that participants learn through different practices how edible landscapes can provide food, medicine, and biodiversity services when managed holistically. The place embodies the principle of resource regeneration, showing how human actions can align with ecological cycles without exceeding natural limits. This practice also contributes to sustainable tourism by creating low-impact, high-value experiences, by connecting visitors to place, biodiversity, and seasonal food systems.

- **Describe why this practice can be considered as innovative. What new, creative or underused approach brings added value to circular tourism development?**

The Essgarten's innovative aspect lies in its holistic integration of biodiversity, gastronomy, and education within a tourism experience. Unlike conventional community gardens or farm visits, Essgarten has curated a collection of around 1.200 edible plants from across the world, all of which are adapted to the local climate of Northern Germany. This approach introduces visitors to a wide variety of plants that are rarely found in home gardens, many of which are not commonly recognised as edible. By presenting unfamiliar species and showing how they can be incorporated into sustainable diets and culinary practices, Essgarten broadens both ecological knowledge and gastronomic creativity. This makes the garden not just a place for recreation or food production, but a living laboratory of plant diversity and culinary innovation, offering visitors novel sensory and educational experiences.

## **SECTION 4: COLLABORATION**

- **Describe any collaboration that were involved in the development of this practice? Did this practice involve local authorities or other groups?**

The Essgarten works with educators, workshop facilitators, and local artisans (cooking instructors, herbalists, permaculture trainers). It collaborates with the public via open access programmes and with publishers or local producers, offering a community-driven platform and supporting volunteer opportunities.

## SECTION 5: RESULTS AND REPLICABILITY

- **What measurable results or outcomes were achieved?**

- Preservation and cultivation of 1.200 edible plant species over 2,4 ha
- Development of a mini-forest garden in 2022, showcasing 50 edible plants
- Regular workshops, culinary evenings, and guided tours are scheduled across seasons
- Raised awareness of participants on composting, enhancing biodiversity, etc.

- **Why is this practice relevant to the Albanian tourism context?**

This practice is relevant to the Albanian tourism context, as Albania is rich in biodiversity and rural landscapes, making it ideal for similar forest garden educational centres. Essgarten's model could inspire agro-ecological tourism or community-based learning hubs focused on edible landscapes, wild cuisine, and eco-wellness.

- **What is the practice's potential for further expansion? How can it be applied or adapted to other Albanian tourism destinations or businesses?**

The concept can be adapted to rural tourism sites or eco-farms across Albania, providing on-site experiences in forest gardening, wild cooking, and sustainability education. Partnerships with local schools and tourism businesses could enrich the offer and strengthen the place-based tourism identity.

- **What advice would you give others looking to implement a similar initiative?**

Develop a living garden with edible biodiversity as a basis for experiences and integrate hands-on workshops with culinary events to engage diverse audiences. Also, try to combine education, wellness, and gastronomy into coherent programming, while using modest infrastructure (like pop-up kitchens or guided paths) and focusing on community-based operation.



## Project Partners



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**Project N°101182855**





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