



STADSTUIN FOOD FOR GOOD

Therapeutic urban garden combining rehabilitation, community volunteering and small-scale food production

Overview

Stadstuin Food for Good is a therapeutic city garden in Utrecht-Zuid (Kanaleneiland), part of the Utrecht Natuurlijk network, that combines mental-health rehabilitation with open community volunteering and ecological food growing. Located inside Park Transwijk, it welcomes ~75 volunteers (5–10 per half-day session) of whom a significant share come via funded day-occupation programmes for people recovering from burnout, psychological issues or social isolation. The garden is professionally guided four days a week by trained staff (“begeleiders”) who support both rehabilitation participants and regular community volunteers. Small-scale production includes 10 weekly vegetable boxes (May–September), honey, herbal teas, seasonal fruit and products sold in an on-site shop (candles, jams, sewn tool belts, etc.). Everything follows a strongly circular logic: city green waste is turned into compost, old windows become greenhouses, and corporate volunteer days build infrastructure. Open to everyone, the garden functions as a green oasis for social contact, meaningful activity and gentle re-integration into working life.

History and Inspiration

The garden exists for approximately 13 years (since ~2012) as a local neighbourhood initiative and joined Utrecht Natuurlijk about eight years ago. It gradually developed a double identity: an open community garden and a recognised care/rehabilitation location (“dagbesteding”) funded through the Dutch social support system (Wmo). The therapeutic focus grew organically as many early volunteers came for social reasons or recovery. By 2025 it is one of only two Utrecht Natuurlijk gardens (together with Koppelstede in Lunetten) that receive structural funding for professional guidance, making skilled support available four days a week.

Key milestones

- ~2012 – Founding as local initiative
- ~2017 – Formal joining of Utrecht Natuurlijk network
- 2020–2022 – Strengthening of rehabilitation role during/after Covid
- 2024 – New large greenhouse built; corporate volunteer actions (e.g., biotech company built drying house and steps)

- 2025 – Ongoing despite national budget cuts that threatened closure of some Natuurlijk locations

The garden successfully defended its funding in recent national-level cuts, preserving professional guidance that many participants depend on.

How It Operates

Volunteers work in two half-day shifts (morning and afternoon), 4–5 days a week. Tasks range from weeding, planting, harvesting, composting, building infrastructure (drainage, paths, raised beds), beekeeping and product-making (herbal teas, candles, sewn items). Professional begeleiders ensure a safe, structured and supportive atmosphere. Community volunteers and rehabilitation participants work side-by-side; no distinction is made in daily practice. Produce is used for 10 weekly vegetable boxes (€160 per season), on-site shop sales, staff/volunteer lunches (e.g., daily pumpkin soup in winter) and Christmas packages for participants. All infrastructure is built or scavenged by volunteers (greenhouses from old windows, drainage systems, barefoot path, drying house). Corporate volunteer days (paid day off from companies) accelerate larger projects.

Costs

Main costs are the salaries of the 2–3 professional begeleiders (covered by Wmo/rehabilitation funding) and basic materials (seeds, tools, occasional replacement after theft). The garden operates with low cash needs thanks to:

- Free municipal land inside Park Transwijk
- Free city green waste for compost and firewood
- Volunteer/corporate labour for all construction
- Sales from shop and vegetable boxes

Annual cash expenses outside staff costs are estimated well below €5,000.

Funding Sources

The largest and most stable funding comes from the Municipality of Utrecht through the Wmo (Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning) framework that finances professional therapeutic guidance (“dagbesteding”) four days a week, covering the salaries of the two to three trained begeleiders who are present on site. As part of the Utrecht Natuurlijk network, the garden also receives core municipal support that keeps the land free and provides basic coordination. Cash income is generated by the sale of seasonal vegetable boxes (approximately €1,600 per year in total), shop sales of honey, herbal teas, jams, candles and handmade items, and occasional contributions from companies that send their employees for a paid volunteer day (usually €50–€200 per group). All

materials such as city green waste, old windows and scavenged wood are obtained free of charge. There are no large external grants; the model is deliberately low-cost, circular and structurally supported by care-related public funding.

Revenue Generation

No major revenue focus; surplus reinvested into operations. Community donations and partnerships provide indirect support, with self-sustaining elements via volunteer labor.

Revenue remains modest because the primary goal is rehabilitation and community building rather than commercial production. Income from produce sales of boxes (affordable pricing, e.g., €5–€10/box), event fees (workshops/lectures), plus variable but steady income from the on-site shop (honey, dried herbal teas, handmade candles, sewn tool belts, jams and preserves). Corporate volunteer days occasionally bring in small cash contributions, and private workshops or product-making sessions add minor amounts. All money is immediately reinvested into seeds, replacement tools (especially after thefts), maintenance of beekeeping equipment or new small projects. The non-profit and care-oriented character means that financial surplus is neither expected nor pursued; every euro supports the continuation of the therapeutic and open community space.

Cost categories

| Assets | Operational costs | Personnel costs | Administration and management |
|---|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| Municipal land (free inside Park Transwijk) | Seeds, small tools, occasional replacements | 2–3 professional begeleiders (Wmo-funded) | Coordination with Utrecht Natuurlijk |
| Greenhouses, drying house, barefoot path (built by volunteers/corporates) | Electricity/gas for indoor spaces | No salaries for volunteers | Planning & volunteer scheduling |
| Beekeeping equipment | Maintenance after thefts | | Wmo reporting & participant plans |
| Shop infrastructure | Workshop materials (candles, fabrics) | | Shop & box administration |