

## Zeeheldentuin | The Hague (NL) | March 2015 | #353

The Zeeheldentuin is an oasis of green in the middle of a grey urban area. In this community garden you can find vegetable gardens, a fruit orchard, an ornamental flower garden with seating areas, and a nature playground for the children. The garden is created with natural elements and reused materials, and plantings are biologically nursed and attractive to all kinds of insects. The garden is located in the Zeehelden neighborhood, close to the center of The Hague, which is a quite stony area. As a result, a cool spot with refreshing water and green is now available in summer, and at the same time a place is provided where excessive water can be drained into the ground.

The community garden is an initiative of the inhabitants, who fought for more green in their neighborhood. They succeeded in receiving a plot of land, where a new housing block was planned initially. The design is developed in deliberation with the inhabitants, and the construction and maintenance is done on a voluntary basis. In this way, inhabitants created their own green oasis where they can participate in activities, and enjoy a piece of nature in the city.

### Biodiversity

Because the garden has a fruit orchard, vegetable gardens, and ornamental gardens with flowers and herbs, many different species can be found in and around the garden. The plants are biologically grown in a city nursery, which is established especially for this garden. The owners of the vegetable gardens can buy seeds and plants from the city nursery as well. The flowery grassland, which covers almost half of the garden, contains only native species. Many natural materials are used to construct the elements in the garden: wood, willow branches, stone, tiles, shells, etc. Next to the spots that are created for specific animals, small holes can be found everywhere in the garden. There are birdhouses for different types of birds, and hotels for various insects. Furthermore, insects can live between the stones, and butterflies and bees are attracted by certain plants.

### Climate Change Adaptation

The design area has four zones which are, next to the different functions, made of a few different kinds of permeable surfaces. These surfaces are made with grass, shells, sand and wooden planks. Because the surface is made permeable, water is allowed to sink into the ground after a rain shower. This would not have been the case when this was another grey and stony area, like its surroundings. Additional water can temporarily be stored in the branch of water that meanders through the garden. This helps to avoid water nuisance after heavy rainfall, and is at the same time used by children to play with or climb around. The permeable surfaces also help to avoid heat islands in warmer periods, together with the vegetation. The trees create shadow in which people can sit to cool down. Also, the air cools down because of the evapotranspiration of the leaves from the trees and other vegetation. In this way the local temperature can be lowered with a few degrees, which results in a pleasant environment to stay in during a hot summer day.

### Resource depletion

Most of the elements that are used to construct the garden are reused. Some things are even from somewhere or someone from the neighborhood, like the boat in the playground. The vegetable gardens are constructed with reused and waste materials, such as sawn planks from trees, willow branches, and tiles. Willow branches are used to create playing elements in the playground as well. The plants can be watered by use of a water pump, which directly pumps up ground water from the soil. Since this water is tested not to be polluted, it can be used instead of drinking water for the watering of the plants.

### Innovative approaches

The neighborhood garden is established in a very special way. It all started with an idea to make a green oasis in the middle of the city, which came from a few local residents. After years of persistence, they managed to get a piece of land from the municipality. Instead of another building block in a grey urban area, it was now possible to create the nature in the city they wanted. After the initiative, there was also neighborhood participation in the design, construction and maintenance of the garden. So the garden is not only created *for* the neighborhood, but also *by* the neighborhood. The vegetable gardens are divided between interested residents, so they can grow their own local vegetables or herbs. In addition, the art works in the garden are from an artist from the neighborhood. Together with a remain of the former school that was on the same location, this really makes the community garden part of the neighborhood.