

Leave no waste behind: Sustainable Urban Farming Workshops in an all-round carefree package

About the Challenge Collaborator

Ackerpause is a program of AckerCompany GmbH and has been bringing vegetable plots to neighborhoods and businesses, as well as senior and care facilities, since 2019. Its roots lie in the non-profit Acker e. V. with its multiple award-winning educational programs on vegetable gardening for children and young people. Since then, Ackerpause has expanded its portfolio to include adult education and, under the Acker umbrella, shares a common vision of greater appreciation for nature and food Germany-wide.

Introduction

As a company for urban farming and office gardening projects that brings vegetable growing into the living and working environment, we stand for more appreciation of nature and food. We want to show how easy it can be to grow your own vegetables right outside your door and at the same time develop more togetherness and attention for the whole environment. While we do this and advocate for more sustainability in everyday life, we still produce far too much waste with our products and programs and leave an ecological footprint that could most likely be reduced enormously even in the small things.

Problem Definition

Our programs involve a lot of packaging materials that are generated by external service providers when they send raised beds, soil, garden sheds, water tanks, garden tools or similar to the customers. However, these are a prerequisite for the implementation of the programs.

In addition, the workshops themselves also generate a lot of waste through flyers, notices, posters for voting, photo permission forms, feedback cards, and so on. While the pure hardware for the programs would not allow digitization, many components of the workshops could be digitized and thus more environmentally friendly. However, the target group for the urban farming projects in particular is intergenerational, and in percentage terms young children or senior citizens predominate as participants, who have little or no access to digital media and are therefore forced to rely on analog information.

What is the waste challenge?

Our workshops are characterized by interactive games as well as tools and the learning through experience principle. The basis for this are the beds, plants and additional materials such as gardening tools, which are indispensable. At the same time, we depend on suppliers, who in turn have to make sure that their goods arrive undamaged and are suitable for onward transport.

- How can we reduce waste without sacrificing the experience and learning of growing our own vegetables
- Where is too much waste already being produced by external service providers and how can we influence this?
- Where do we produce waste in preparation for our workshops and how can we reduce it?
- How can our so called Ackercoaches (farmer experts) avoid waste on site?
- What can the clients and participants of the programs contribute to waste prevention?
- How could we bring unavoidable waste back into a sustainable cycle?

Desired Impact of Challenge

We want to find a way to make the organization and realization of our workshops as sustainable as our vision of a society that knows what it consumes and uses the available resources responsibly. Everyone who participates in a program of Ackerpause should not only be really carefree in terms of the framework conditions, but also have the good feeling that all processes have been thought and implemented sustainably.

Skills needed/recommended

No special skills are needed, because that's what our company and the programs are all about - truly everyone should be able to participate and grow in a fun way.

Relevant considerations for the challenge / theme

Where we are already sustainable:

- We do not buy any packaging material in addition, but reuse cardboard boxes and other material endlessly.
- We use only eco materials for all flyers, printer paper, printers, etc.
- We do not buy/use plastic unless it is sent to us to reuse.
- We use sustainable suppliers for our soil, raised beds, etc.
- We only buy climate neutral office supplies from memo.

Waste that we know is generated by our external service providers:

- Foiled raised beds for transport
- Soil in foil bags (40l each) - must be easy to transport to the project sites and fill into the raised beds
- Foil for covering the sides of the raised beds
- Lattice/rabbit wire as protection against voles and other animals
- Bagged tool shed, water tank, gardening tools

Trash that we know will be generated at our workshops:

- Notices, flyers/brochures, posters.
- Feedback cards and photo consent forms
- name labels
- Weekly schedule, workshop schedule
- Seed bags
- Shipping of all materials needed by the Ackercoaches for their workshops
- Workshop materials such as salt, oil, herbs, vegetables, cannot be stored with Ackercoaches or clients in large packages > must always be sent in small batches

Trash that we know will be generated at our Ackercoaches:

- Straw and cardboard from the young plant orders

Material we have to use because there is no alternative yet:

- Cultivation plans laminated by hand (are durable and easy to attach)

Obstacles and challenges that mean that there is still trash in too many places:

- Our target audience does not consistently have access to digital media
 - We are very limited in our budgetary resources and cannot, for example, equip all field coaches with tablets
 - Outdated or revised flyers/documents that are no longer usable
 - No arrangement for how to dispose of old soil or raised beds that are no longer usable
 - Seeds that have not been used up and become less germinable over time > no longer usable for programs
 - Our Ackercoaches are often only on the road by bike/public transport and can only transport limited things
- On customer location waste separation is often not possible or only poorly possible

Relevant links

Our Website with programs: <https://ackerpause.de/>

Some Websites from our suppliers:

Office Articles - <https://www.memo.de/>

Soil and raised beds - <https://www.floragard.de/de-de>