

# History and Pioneers

*Farming in cities is hardly new: its history stretches back millennia*



According to the UN, nearly 70 percent of the world's global population is projected to live in urban settings by 2050. While growing food in cities isn't new, the layers of significance associated with it have changed over time and across different countries. During the era of industrialization, urban gardening was a subsistence tool for the urban poor. That's still the case in many locations today, but it has also become popular among those who don't grow food exclusively for sustenance, but practice it as part of a healthy, environmentally friendly lifestyle. Growing fruit and vegetables in cities has also become a way for food justice activists across the world to fight for a more equal food system.

Recent trends are only the latest in a long history of significant examples of urban farming dating back to ancient times. Throughout the arid regions of what is now modern-day Iran, ancient Persians

invented the *qanat* system, an ingenious network of subterranean aqueducts that provided fresh water for purposes such as irrigation. Water was conducted from the hills to the towns through this underground system, protecting it from the scorching sun. Eleven *qanats*—the oldest dating back around 2,500 years—are now included on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

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With over 21 million citizens, Mexico City is one of the largest metropolises on Earth. It was built on an ancient lake bed, where pre-Hispanic civilizations developed highly sophisticated systems of food production,