

Let them



eat greens



From herbs and flowers to bees and even a flock of sheep, Paris has become a global leader in urban cultivation. As the world's largest city farm gets ready to open there, we went to find out how *la Ville Lumière* became *la Ville Légume*



Words/Delle Chan → Photography/Laura Stevens



Opening page ✓
 Caroline Robin and Julie
 Decléty of Aéroamate
 This page ✓
 The garden on top of
 Le Cordon Bleu, where
 apiarist Gaël Cartron
 keeps bees; Aéroamate
 general manager Julie
 Decléty tends her crops

The RATP Health Centre on Paris's Place Lachambeaudie may look like a nondescript government building but it's home to a little green secret. Venture up onto the roof and you'll be greeted by the delicious fragrance of fresh herbs – mint, basil, rosemary and thyme. More than five tonnes of greens are grown here hydroponically each year, most ending up at bistros and groceries across the city.

It may come as a bit of a surprise – given that Paris is one of the world's most sprawling metropolises and not a particularly green city – but farming is flourishing here in a big way. Aéroamate, the start-up behind this hidden roof garden, is just one of dozens of new agricultural enterprises that supply fresh veggies, blushing blooms and jars of honey to the capital. It's part of a wider movement that's hoping to solve one of the world's most pressing problems: how to feed burgeoning urban populations.

In the past five years, Paris has seen a massive, two-fold increase in food production within city limits. This is largely thanks to Parisculteurs, a city-backed initiative devised by mayor Anne Hidalgo and her team. Back in 2016, the scheme launched with the aim to develop 100 hectares – approximately 120 football fields – of green space by March 2020. With one month to go, the tally is up to 115 hectares – with more than 20 of those dedicated to farming. »





14,000m²

Size of the world's largest urban farm – opening next month in Paris



115

Number of hectares of farm developed by the Parisculteurs project



20,000

Number of fruit trees that could be planted in place of the city's car parks



“Paris produces 935 tonnes of fruits and vegetables per year”

“Already, Paris produces 935 tonnes of fruits, vegetables, mushrooms and herbs, as well as 566,000 cut flowers and plants, per year,” says deputy mayor Pénélope Komitès, who’s currently in charge of the scheme. The plan is to push this up further to 1,650 tonnes of edible produce, and double the amount of cut flowers in the next five years.

It’s a dream that Komitès wants all of the city to get behind, so anyone, from would-be industrial farmers to amateurs with a green-fingered dream, are invited to submit proposals for their own farms. Shortlisted candidates are then granted cultivation sites, both state-owned and private. Almost 90 have come to fruition so far, bringing vineyards to local parks and vertical farms to disused subway tunnels; turning rooftops, car parks and public buildings green.

This spring, an independent 14,000m² organic farm is set to open on the rooftop of the Paris Expo Porte de Versailles exhibition complex in the 15th. Dreamt up by urban agriculture firm Agripolis and landscape designers Cultures en Ville, it will be the largest urban farm in the world, producing up to a tonne of fruits and vegetables daily during high season.

Agripolis founder Pascal Hardy says the farm will supply restaurants and residents in southern Paris with pesticide-free, »



From top: The garden at Le Cordon Bleu; herding sheep through the suburbs

The city’s very own flock

Herding dozens of sheep along the streets of Paris is no easy feat – but it’s something that Guillaume Leterrier and Julie Lou Dubreuilh (*right*) are accustomed to. After all, they’re the co-founders of Les Bergers Urbains, an agricultural cooperative that promotes the age-old practice of transhumance – seasonal moving of livestock.

While in rural areas this means herding animals between pastures, Leterrier and Dubreuilh shift their flock from their farm in La Courneuve into Paris through the suburbs. Several times a month, their animals make a 13km round trip, nibbling at flowers, chomping on shrubs and even drinking at fountains along the way.

According to the duo, transhumance has various ecological benefits, especially in promoting biodiversity, as the sheep’s manure enriches the soil.

The expeditions are also attractions in their own right. Passers-by stop and stare at the sheep, and drivers whip out their phones to photograph the scene.

“We like our job because everyone smiles when they see the sheep,” shares Dubreuilh. “They get curious, and often come up to us to ask about what we do. It brings people together.”

bergersurbains.com



PARADISE



Buried treasures

The first organic farm in Paris lies not on a swathe of verdant land, but in a disused car park below a public housing block in Porte de la Chapelle. This unlikely setting is where the La Caverne team have been cultivating their produce ever since opening in 2017.

The 9,000m² space feels rather otherworldly, with mist emanating from humidifiers, and mushrooms sprouting haphazardly from blocks of straw like alien life forms. Endives are cultivated in trays of clear water, while microgreens are grown in a separate room fitted out with LED lamps. “We decided to focus on these crops as they don’t need a lot of sunlight and can adapt to an underground environment,” explains co-founder Jean-Noël Gertz (*pictured*).

The farm produces around 20-30 tonnes of mushrooms and 60 tonnes of endives annually, which are either delivered directly by bike to customers or sold in markets across the city. “Parisians are increasingly looking for fresh, organic and local produce, and it’s a need that urban farming can meet,” says Gertz. lacaverne.co

“Urban farming can provide fresh, organic and local produce”

biodynamic produce, grown and distributed with zero food miles. “The goal is to make the farm a globally recognised model for sustainable production. We’ll be using quality products, grown in rhythm with nature’s cycles, all in the heart of Paris.”

In a way, the city is returning to its roots. In the 19th century, *la culture maraîchère* (market gardening) provided locals with an abundance of seasonal produce, and cultivated land covered up to six per cent of the city, compared to less than one now. However, in the wake of World War II, agriculture was relegated to outside city limits and farmland covered with buildings.

Today, Parisians once again enjoy easy access to freshly grown food. *Aéromate*’s herbs retail in grocery stores; eateries like *Polichinelle* and *Frame* dish up greens from their own gardens; and *La Caverne* (*see right*) delivers mushrooms, endives and microgreens to customers’ doorsteps on the day of harvest.

Urban farming makes sense, considering the social and environmental problems that face society today, says Anne-Cécile Daniel, co-founder and national coordinator of the French Association of Urban Farming (AFAUP). »



Above
Mushrooms being grown
at La Caverne



Buzzing new rooftop scene

Parisian bees are a privileged lot – they get to call some of the city’s most famous institutions home. Thanks to a group of independent beekeepers including Gaël Cartron (*left*), hives can now be found in community gardens, hotel gardens and even on the rooftops of iconic buildings like the Musée d’Orsay and Les Invalides.

The apiarists work with venues to maintain over 250 hives across the city, and the honey they harvest is collectively sold under the label “Le Miel de Paris”. It’s used to make products such as nougats, sweets and even mead; the latter aged in oak barrels in the city’s catacombs.

According to Cartron, the flavour profiles of these products depend on the plants the bees collect nectar from, which varies according to locale. “We have around 780 types of plants in Paris, which makes for great botanical diversity. Honey from the north tastes of exotic fruit, while in the south it’s redolent of mint,” he explains. “It’s interesting for people to taste the unique honey of Paris.”

lemieldeparis.com

“It improves citizens’ well-being by reconnecting them to nature, creating social bonds and providing local produce,” she says. “It also helps cities combat climate change by recycling water, improving air quality and reusing neglected land.”

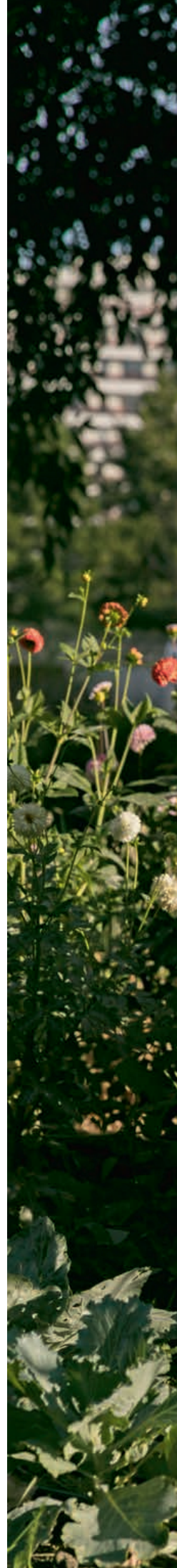
The city environment can even be a benefit, and farmers can use its unique conditions to cultivate new types of produce – “For example, exotic fruits like mangoes, thanks to the urban heat islands created during the summer months,” says Daniel. “There’s also a start-up trying to grow saffron, which typically thrives in a Mediterranean climate.”

She does acknowledge there are limitations to the amount and type of food that can be produced within city limits, and that “urban agriculture alone cannot produce the quantities needed to feed the inhabitants of big cities”.

Staple crops like wheat, potatoes and corn require enormous tracts of land, making them unsuitable for urban cultivation. Animal husbandry, too, is land-intensive – around 8,000m² of farmland are required to raise a single cow and her calf for a year. »



From top: Gaël Cartron; honey produced by Paris’s bees is sold across the city



A woman with long brown hair, wearing a grey quilted jacket and a grey dress, stands on a wooden ladder in a field of flowers. She is holding a red dahlia flower in her left hand. The background shows a cityscape with buildings and trees under a clear sky.

“It’s all
about
respecting
the plants,
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A blooming fantastic farm

Flowers are in abundance at Belleville Cemetery – and not just because of the bouquets that have been lovingly laid on gravestones. It’s also home to Plein Air, a 1,200m² flower farm helmed by Masami Charlotte Lavault – the first of its kind in the city when it opened in October 2017 as part of the first season of Parisculteurs.

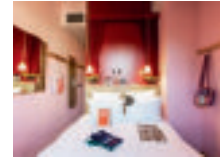
The petite Lavault toils here almost daily, cultivating over 100 species of blooms – from neon-pink hibiscus to spiky dahlias and velvety trails of amaranth. These flowers are mostly sold to independent florists, but members of the public can visit the farm on an appointment-only basis.

“I used to be an industrial designer, and the nature of my work now is so different,” shares Lavault, who apprenticed on farms as far afield as Wales and Morocco before starting Plein Air.

“In a desk job, you interact with inanimate objects like computers – things our bodies were never made to work with. But with floriculture, it’s all about respecting the plants, the soil, the earth.” pleinair.paris

“Paris is not the greenest city today, but I hope it will be tomorrow...”

While you're in... Paris



Stay MOB Hôtel

Yes, it's got a quirky aesthetic and communal vibe, but what really sets this hotel apart is its MOB Cares programme, with initiatives that include a vegetable garden and beehives run by Gaël Cartron.

mobhotel.com



Eat Mijo T

This French restaurant switches up its menu depending what's market fresh. Top dishes include lentil salad with carrot cream and herb mousse, and cod with aioli and fennel foam. mijot.fr



Do La REcyclerie

A restaurant, bar and urban farm all in one. The green-fingered will enjoy occasional gardening workshops – you can also help out with the farm, henhouses and beehives – in exchange for coffee or tea.

larecyclerie.com

But as Paris's efforts have proved so far, urban farming can supplement traditional rural agriculture, contributing to food security and economic resilience. Parisculteurs has reduced the city's average food miles, created 272 jobs to date and looks set to continue – it's a movement that just about everyone in Paris seems to have got on board with.

Back at the RATP Health Centre, Aéromate general manager Julie Decléty certainly feels positive about the direction her city is going. “Paris is not the greenest city today, but I hope it will be tomorrow,” she says. “People are becoming more interested about their food and where it comes from, and there's a desire to eat local.” With her tucked-away herb garden, she and her team hope to demonstrate the growing possibilities of urban agriculture. “And perhaps even encourage consumers to try it themselves at home.”

Other cities around the world are cottoning on, too. “There's a demand for urban farming in places like London and Berlin, and similar schemes have already been created in Brussels, New York and Detroit,” says Daniel. “I think at some point, all cities will ask themselves: how can we launch an initiative of our own?” parisculteurs.paris, afaup.org
Norwegian flies to Paris from eight destinations. Book flights, a hotel and a rental car at Norwegian.com



From top:
Aéromate's farm above the RATP Health Centre in Paris's 12th