

Parking lot cucumbers

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The garden is what I had to water when I was little. Every evening I watered the cucumbers planted between the rows of vines near our house in the village. When they got ripe, I began to eat them. For two months of the summer I ate cucumbers watered and grown by myself. Later we started to also plant zucchini among the rows of vines. I had more responsibilities, but also a more varied menu. I liked tomatoes the most. My mother took care of the tomatoes, it's like we made a separation based on gender :))

When I went to college, in another country, I started living in a dormitory, and no longer had a garden. Eighteen years of training to water cucumbers remained only on my resume of a gardener's assistant. Cluj didn't have as much greenery on the street, it didn't have as many parks as Chisinau has, and it didn't have my cucumber garden.

The green spaces were few and arranged in dashes. I started looking for parks that are less laid out and unpaved. The local authorities started to pave even the gravel alleys, which were scarce anyway. After a few months, I discovered the botanical garden, it had no asphalt. The garden was gorgeous, I always felt like taking a hoe and some buckets in my hand to water the plants there :)) Good thing they had irrigation systems, I really would have done it. I couldn't go to the botanical garden every day. I don't know why, as if I wasn't allowed, it wasn't mine.

Nine years later, the Covid-19 pandemic brought me back to Moldova. Staying at home in the first months, I started watering cucumbers again. After that I moved to Chisinau and the watering was over. I walked around the center of the city a lot and I liked passing by the Guguță cafe, where cherry tomatoes were growing (three years later I would meet Lilia, who had planted them). I also liked to walk on Bucharest Street, by Elli-Pilli, where the pumpkins and sunflowers planted by Ghena grew (I knew Ghena for over ten years).

"The sunflower's place is in the center of the city!" - Ghena told me in an interview. "We have enough cars and car parks that are suffocating us." The flowers planted by Ghena gave me space. Space to breathe in a context full of asphalt and concrete. Every time I passed by, I looked at how they were doing. I never watered them, I never brought a hoe to the

little garden, I just admired the flowers and the pumpkins, until, "some pumpkin lovers picked and took them home".

I would have liked not to be afraid to intervene in the small gardens planted by Lilia or Ghena. I didn't know I was allowed. That was the boundary in my head that I couldn't cross. I grew up in a society where I always had to ask permission to do something. I ate a little tomato from the Guguță cafe and I was thinking that I stole it, that what I did was wrong, because I didn't ask for permission.

After talking with Ghena, with Lilia and researching about urban gardening, I know I can provide help. I can grow plants in the city, even if I don't have a title deed to that land. There is a small community of people who take care of the less and less green Chisinau they live in.

The next time I leave the house by car (now I live in the village again), I will put some water cans in the trunk, thinking that I will have a few stops to make, a few gardens to water, before I return home.

At home, we no longer have a vineyard and no cucumbers to grow among the vine rows. I need to plant them in the city in place of the parking lots. I'm a driver, but I don't mind the lack of them in Chișinău. I'd rather park an intersection, or two, or three, or four away, in order not to park cars where sunflowers grow in the summer. Or tomatoes. Or cucumbers.