

Home gardening: *A flourishing necessity in Karari*

🚩 Hassan Abdelmutallab



“These days, we are enjoying the fruits of our labour, sweet melons and ankoleeb (sorghum stems). In a few days, we will harvest watermelons. The okra is thriving, as are the leafy greens. As for eggplants, we made an incredible salad yesterday, and they are yielding abundantly. Next, we plan to plant purslane and arugula. The tomatoes and green chili peppers are thriving in their designated spots. Oh, and I nearly forgot, the hibiscus and tibish are also flourishing.”

This message, reminiscent of an old-fashioned letter, was sent by Babiker Al-Waseela to a friend who had stayed with him in Gedaref while on his way back to Omdurman’s Karari district. He inquired not only about his friend’s family but also about his home garden. Al-Waseela reflected that during wartime, his vegetable beds, brimming with okra, arugula, and leafy greens, became a vital source of sustenance.

In recent months, home gardening has surged in popularity amid soaring vegetable prices, transportation challenges, and security concerns.

In northern Omdurman’s Karari district, almost every home garden now hosts okra, arugula, and creeping vegetables like squash and cucumbers.

For many returnees in Karari, the shift from consumers to producers was inevitable. The sharp rise in food prices prompted a newfound awareness of

self-sufficiency. Just as they had to devise new ways to survive, they also needed to witness something tangible bearing fruit.

Tijani Abdulrahman returned to his home in Wad Al-Bakhit after a prolonged period of displacement, determined to settle regardless of the circumstances. He began planting okra, cucumbers, squash, peppers, arugula, and leafy greens, immersed in an experience akin to the isolation of Gregor Mendel in his monastery, where he discovered the laws of heredity. The neighbourhood was almost deserted, save for a handful of residents who shared meals, tea, and coffee while exchanging ideas.

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Speaking to *Atar*, Tijani explained that most returnees relied on dwindling savings and remittances from relatives abroad. Faced with empty spaces in their homes, they sought ways to make them productive. His brother sent him seeds from Atbara, which he promptly planted and nurtured. His squash harvest exceeded his household’s needs, and while some neighbours suggested selling the surplus to vegetable traders, he chose to distribute it among them instead.

Meanwhile, a nearby supermarket

owner found a different approach.

With dwindling sales, he turned to selling homegrown vegetables as an alternative business.

Sami Youssef remained in his Wad Al-Bakhit home throughout the 20 months of war. As most of his neighbours fled, many goods became luxury items, and demand plummeted.

Initially, he adapted by producing and selling homemade yogurt. Then he took up home gardening for personal consumption, only to be surprised by the abundant yield of squash, okra, and eggplants. Eventually, he began marketing his crops, while his wife sold the remaining produce from their home. Speaking to *Atar*, Sami shared that he relied entirely on vegetable sales for nine months, from March 2024 until the end of the year.

Home gardening has now become a cornerstone of household economies, a practice that spread from one person to another until it evolved into a way of life in these challenging times.

Take Fathi Ali, for example.

He ventured into home gardening at the insistence of his neighbour, Sami. During a casual visit, Sami ripped up a tile from Fathi's courtyard and planted two okra seeds in its place, an act Fathi initially saw as sabotage. However, just days later, he removed all the tiles and replaced them with okra, squash, cucumbers, and eggplants.

Inspired by the lush greenery in his neighbour's yard, he followed suit. Now, he not only cultivates vegetables but also sells seeds and advises other returnees on soil preparation, planting schedules, and essential gardening techniques.

Omar Abdelhadi, on the other hand, never left Omdurman. He moved between his family's home in Al-Thawra's Eighth District and his own residence in Wad Al-Bakhit. A man of refined taste, he had a passion for gardening and livestock but lacked space at home. Instead, he sought permission from a neighbour to use an empty section of his courtyard.

He transported fertile silt from the

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nearby Nile bank, prepared the soil, built planting beds, and sowed his seeds with meticulous care.

Speaking to *Atar*, Omar explained that his initial motivation for home gardening was recreational, something to fill his time with a productive activity and indulge his love for greenery. But soon, self-sufficiency became a driving force.

Omar emphasized the need for media efforts to raise awareness of home gardening's benefits, suggesting the formation of neighbourhood-based gardening associations and youth-led initiatives. He also proposed community-wide efforts to

plant fruit trees; mango, lemon, and date palms, along residential streets.

Reflecting on his journey, Omar said the experience taught him valuable insights about planting cycles and vegetable cultivation. He exchanged knowledge with fellow home gardeners, who generously shared expertise he previously lacked. He sourced seeds from local markets and online vendors on Facebook.

Omar also noted that different vegetables have optimal planting seasons: summer is best for okra, leafy greens, and purslane, while winter is ideal for tomatoes, radishes, cucumbers, fennel, bell peppers, chili peppers, arugula, zucchini, carrots, and other vegetables.

Among those who remained in their homes, Abdelaziz Mubarak stood out.

Living near the Nile, his house was adorned with date palms. When shelling knocked out the main water supply by

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damaging Al-Manara station in Al-Hatana, he resorted to hauling water with a handcart to keep his trees alive.

In addition to his palm trees, Abdelaziz planted squash, chili peppers, radishes, and okra, the staple crops in most home gardening ventures. However, his approach was unique: he used organic fertilizers, pre-treating them with water before drying to reduce their alkalinity, making them more effective. The results were astounding, yielding exceptionally flavourful vegetables.



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