

# GREENING REFUGEE AND IDP CAMPS, ONE GARDEN AT A TIME



LEMON TREE TRUST  
**IMPACT 2023**



## A NOTE FROM OUR FOUNDER

### STEPHANIE HUNT

*Many of the families that we work with who have been displaced by war have had the possibility of growing ripped from them. We see the negative impact this has had on their mental health, diets and hope for the future. We are humbled though to see the incredible resilience of the people we work with when confronted with the myriad of challenges that being displaced can bring.*

**I am really pleased to say that in 2023 we have helped more people than ever before to grow.** For me, this was clearly demonstrated by the photo of Salwa touching the soil of her family's new growing bed for the first time in the extension to our Azadi garden in the Domiz camp. It gave me a sense of immense pride in Aven and her team in the camp for creating this new wonderful space. It also gave me hope that we can change people's lives not just for one growing season but for

years to come. Salwa's family is just one of 50 who are now able to access this new space. We wouldn't have been able to do this and start work on our new community garden in Gawilan without the generosity of people like you.

Adding to our community gardens is a crucial part of our work. We have also increased the number of garden and cooking competitions taking place this year and encouraged people to create and improve

their own gardens. As you will see as you read this report, the renewed sense of belonging and sense of community this gives people is undoubtable.

Thank you so much to all those who have supported Lemon Tree Trust in 2023. Whether you share our posts on social media, give a regular gift or you are part of an organisation who has given in the last year, you are helping us increase our services to people displaced by war and, in-turn, helping them grow again.

## OUR STRATEGY

*Our 2024-2027 strategy is centred around the following key areas of our work:*

1. CREATE ENVIRONMENTS WHERE PEOPLE, GARDENING AND NATURE CAN THRIVE
2. INSPIRE AND SUPPORT PEOPLE IN TO GARDENING
3. COLLABORATE WITH PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONS TO DELIVER THE BEST POSSIBLE OUTCOMES
4. GROW THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WE HELP





# THE THERAPEUTIC POWER OF GARDENING

*For displaced people globally, the simple act of gardening is a powerful therapeutic tool, addressing issues of isolation and mental health, producing beauty, belonging, food security, and promising economic stimulation.*

Since 2015, Lemon Tree Trust has supported gardening initiatives in refugee and other forced migration communities to empower people from the ground up. We predominantly

work in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), which has provided refuge for an estimated 2 million people who have been forced to flee their home towns and countries since 2011.

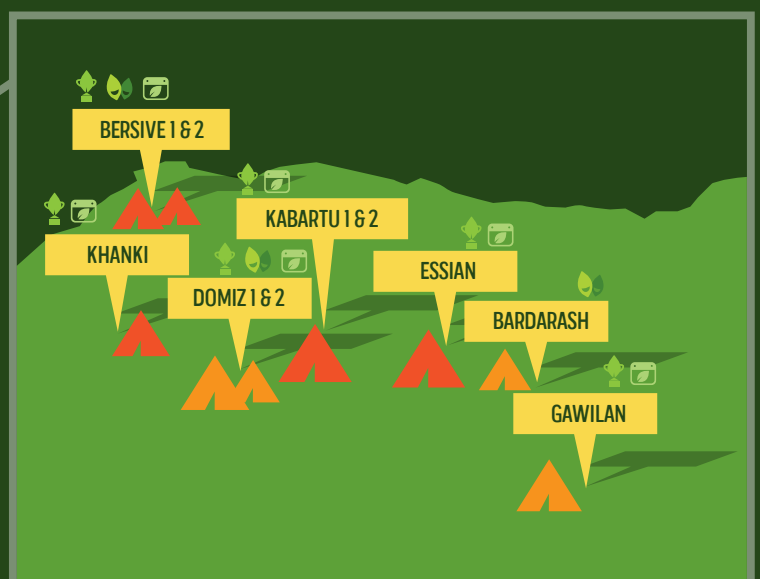
Our focus is on bringing people together by providing seeds and plants, supporting home and community gardens and running garden competitions and education projects.

## WHERE WE WORK

Since 2015, most of our work has focused on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, but we also run a community garden in the United States and collaborate with organisations in the United Kingdom and beyond.

### The Kurdistan Region of Iraq

-  ANNUAL GARDEN COMPETITION
-  GARDEN OF THE MONTH
-  COMMUNITY GARDEN
-  REFUGEE CAMP
-  IDP CAMP



# 1 CREATE ENVIRONMENTS WHERE PEOPLE, GARDENING AND NATURE CAN THRIVE

## AZADI COMMUNITY GARDEN EXTENSION

In April we expanded our flagship community garden in Domiz I camp, Azadi, to cover an additional 864 square metres. This has enabled us to double the number of raised beds from 50 to 100, ensuring that many more vulnerable families living in Domiz I have access to fresh food.

As well as boosting food security, the simple act of growing food and flowers for family and friends together as a community is a powerful way to overcome trauma and start to believe in a brighter future. Gardening and working with the land can radically transform our health, wellbeing and confidence.



## RIDGECREST COMMUNITY GARDEN

Since 2016, we have supported the Ridgecrest Community Garden in Vickery Meadow, Dallas, USA – an under-resourced neighbourhood home to many resettled refugees.

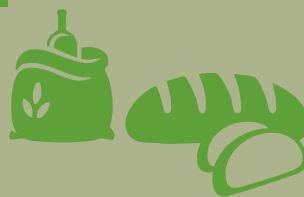
Established in 2010, the garden is tended by former refugees from Bhutan, Burma, South Sudan and beyond, who grow both native plants and local favourites. Most use their

harvest at home, while some sell surplus locally. More than a food source, the garden fosters connection, helping gardeners put down new roots in their community.

## OUR IMPACT IN 2023

Provided access to raised gardening beds for over **100 people** at the Azadi Community Garden, empowering them to grow their own food

Produced over **3,000 kg** of vegetables for families through our Azadi garden



Distributed over 1,300 kg of flour to beneficiaries in Domiz I camp, enabling the production of more than **7,600 loaves** of bread

Gifted **100's** of packs of our Sidra Blend herbal tea, grown and produced in the Azadi garden



Began groundworks for the new 'Hevi' community garden in Gawilan camp which will have **more than 100** growing beds







## SALWA'S STORY

*Gardening has always held a special place in Salwa's heart, tracing back to her childhood in Aleppo, Syria, where she witnessed the beauty of home gardens and developed a passion for cultivating roses and gardenias.*

At her family home in Al Hasakah, Syria, Salwa and her husband, nurtured their own small garden, adorned with flowers, a lemon tree, an apricot tree, aloe vera and beloved gardenias and roses. Not only did Salwa appreciate the aesthetic appeal of flowers, but she also incorporated their essence into her culinary creations. Lemon balm became a staple in her cooking, infusing dishes with its refreshing flavour and aroma.

In 2001, Salwa's husband sadly passed away after a long battle with cancer. This meant that Salwa became the sole caregiver for their five children, leaving little time for social activities or hobbies, like gardening.

A few years later Salwa fled war-torn Syria with her son, his wife and their children, arriving in Domiz I camp in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Staying in the camp and trying to earn enough money to live and provide food for herself and for her family has been tough.

Fortunately, Salwa learned about Lemon Tree Trust through one of our facilitators. Along with being able to access the rest of the community garden, she will soon have her own raised bed in the newly extended Azadi Community Garden. It feels like a lifeline – to meet her daily food requirements where she

can cultivate crops such as radish, parsley and onion, and connect with other like-minded women.

Despite the hardships she has faced, Salwa has embraced opportunities in her new home in Domiz. Her unfaltering green thumb has given her confidence and serves as a reminder of her resilience.

Salwa sees her regular visits to the Azadi Community Garden as a catalyst for positive change in her daily life. Engaging in gardening – the activity she loves most – brings her inner peace and fulfilment and the community bread oven provides her family with an extra source of sustenance.

Salwa is looking forward to her grandchildren helping her in her new space in the garden. They already enjoy watching the menagerie of rabbits, ducks and chickens, and reading picture books in the library lounge. Salwa wants to pass on all her knowledge so they too can successfully grow food and flowers and enjoy gardening like she does.

Salwa's journey is testament to the transformative power of cultivating hope and finding beauty even in the most challenging circumstances.

## 2 INSPIRE AND SUPPORT PEOPLE IN TO GARDENING

### ANNUAL GARDEN COMPETITIONS ACROSS THE KRI

162 winning home gardens across nine camps were awarded in our annual garden competitions – 63 more prizes than last year. To take part in the competitions, held in May, residents simply needed to have a love of gardening and to want to share their love of plants with others.

This year we wanted to celebrate everyone's beautiful gardens and dedication to greening their neighbourhoods in a bigger way than usual. We increased the number of prizes being awarded and threw a garden party in each camp. Each winner was formally presented with a certificate and prize, and everyone was able to meet and chat with other gardeners over a slice of celebration cake.



“We are all living in challenging circumstances and growing with limited resources. But the competitions help us to forget those difficulties for a moment and bring us together to share new stories about our future.”

**AVEEN IBRAHEM, LTT'S OPERATIONS MANAGER AND DOMIZ I RESIDENT**

### COOKING COMPETITIONS

In November our cooking competitions returned with 450 talented cooks whipping up mouth-watering meals in their home kitchens. The competitions showcased all the delicious produce being grown in home and community gardens and the many nutritious dishes that can be made when combined with ingredients sourced locally. Despite limited resources, amazing food was created which was not only enjoyed by all those involved but also helped bring communities together.







## GARDEN OF THE MONTH COMPETITIONS

Our 'Garden of the Month' prize continued in nine camps, celebrating the creativity and ingenuity of home gardens all year round.

The Garden of the Month award is an extension to our annual gardening competitions where

every month our team visits home gardens and selects a winner. We look for creative flair, a passion for gardening, innovative planting ideas and a commitment to filling the available space with plants.

A special plaque to display at the winner's home shelter, a selection

of seeds and a lemon tree, are gifted to each winning gardener. In addition, a sign is displayed in each winning garden for anyone passing to see – the sign is temporary and will be moved on to the next Garden of the Month winner within each camp.

## REFUGEE-LED GARDENING PROJECTS SUPPORTED WITH DONATED SEED PACKETS AND ACTIVITY SHEETS

Throughout 2023 we continued to redistribute vegetable, herb, fruit and flower seed packets to UK and USA based refugee gardening projects.

Thank you to all of the incredibly kind and generous gardeners that sent us their spare seed or purchased packets specifically to donate to the initiative.

## OUR IMPACT IN 2023

**9 refugee and IDP camps** held monthly garden competitions with trees and plaques as prizes

**More than 1,000** people received flowering plants, trees and seedlings to enhance their surroundings

**22 garden team members**, all displaced residents of the camps, were employed by LTT across nine camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, ensuring our projects are run by and for displaced communities

Distributed **100's of seed packets** to refugee projects in the UK and Kurdistan Region of Iraq, helping communities grow their own food and flowers

**Provided support** to resettled refugees through our Ridgecrest Community Garden in Dallas, USA, fostering connection and self-sufficiency through gardening



# 3 COLLABORATE WITH PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONS TO DELIVER THE BEST POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

Collaboration is central to everything we do. In 2023, our partnerships and community-led approach made us stronger.

We employed 22 displaced residents as garden team members across nine camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Their leadership ensures our gardens are shaped by the communities they serve, providing meaningful work and fostering locally led spaces of growth and healing.



## GROWING TOGETHER WITH PARTNERS

In March, we welcomed a team from Tutapona to the Azadi Community Garden. They ran a short course for our gardeners and brought thoughtful gifts. Thank you, Tutapona!

We're also incredibly grateful to Caritas Iraq, who arranged for trainee bricklayers to support the Azadi garden extension. The apprentices cleared ground and built 50 raised beds, expanding the garden and sharing practical skills in the process.

## FUELLED BY YOUR SUPPORT

Thank you to everyone who gave to our summer appeal. Your support helps bring fresh food and flowers to hundreds of displaced people. Our gardens depend on your generosity to keep growing.

In 2023, we were also granted charity status in the United States, an exciting step that opens new opportunities for support and impact. We look forward to building relationships with supporters and organisations across the US to help grow our work.

## SHARING OUR GREENPRINT

This year, we connected with like-minded organisations to explore how LTT's 'greenprint' – our approach to community gardening in displacement settings – can be shared more widely. These conversations are laying the groundwork for future collaboration and impact.

Together, we're showing what's possible when communities and partners unite to grow hope, health and belonging.



# 4

## GROW THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WE HELP

In 2023, we reached more people than ever through our gardening projects, creating spaces of growth and connection in displaced communities. But demand continues to grow. With more funding, we can help even more families experience the healing power of gardening.

### A THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

Your support makes this work possible. Thanks to our donors and funders, we've expanded our projects, supplied seeds and plants, and supported local facilitators across the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Thank you for helping us grow.

### GAWILAN: A NEW PROJECT IN 2023

A highlight of the year was the start of a new community garden in Gawilan refugee camp, home to over 10,000 displaced people. In December, we broke ground and began working with the community to create a space where families can grow food, connect with nature and feel at home.

### HELP US GROW OUR IMPACT

With your support, we can reach even more displaced families with nourishing gardens. Every donation, partnership, or share of our work helps us grow our reach. Together, we can plant seeds of change in more communities in 2024 and beyond.



# LOOKING FORWARD

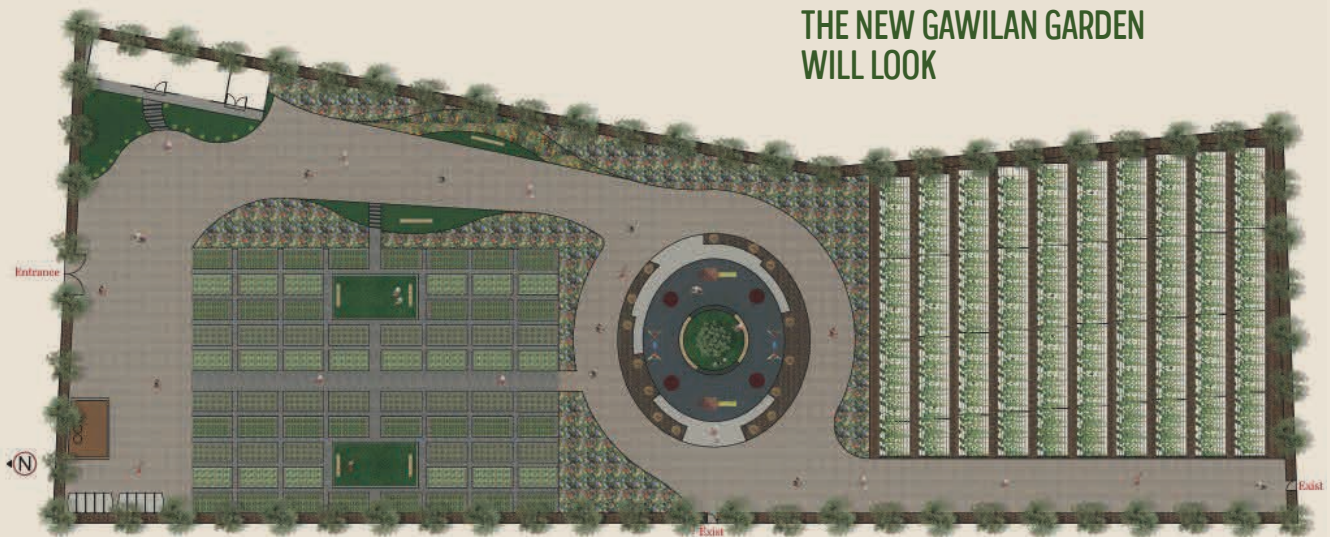
## In 2024, we're focused on growth – in every sense.

A major priority is building and activating the new community garden in Gawilan refugee camp, home to 2,400 families. Most residents are Kurdish, displaced from Syrian cities like Al Hasakah and Aleppo. Together with the community, we're transforming an empty plot into a thriving green space where families can grow food, reconnect with nature and support one another.

We'll also continue nurturing partnerships, expanding our programmes and sharing LTT's greenprint with others working in displacement settings. And with our new US charity status, we're excited to connect with more supporters around the world to fuel this growth.

With your help, 2024 can be our most impactful year yet.

## GARDEN DRAWING OF HOW THE NEW GAWILAN GARDEN WILL LOOK



## SPECIAL THANKS

Our sincere thanks go to everyone who supported us in 2023 and continues to champion our work.

There are a few wonderful people and organisations we would like to extend a special thanks to:

- |                                       |   |  |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| • David Bitterling                    | Landscape Associates Ltd                | Refugee Aid Team   |
| • Bloom magazine                      | • The Floralistas                       | • Prism the Gift Fund  |
| • Bristol Refugee Festival            | • FLORXLzine                            | • Royal Horticultural Society  |
| • Caritas Iraq                        | • Emily Garthwaite                      | • Tutapona   |
| • The Communities Foundation of Texas | • Grace Alexander Flowers               | • VIP Reading  |
| • Linda Combi                         | • Karin Bain and John Kukral Foundation | • Britt Willoughby   |
| • Becky Crowley                       | • Tom Massey                            | Huge thanks to everyone else who has supported Lemon Tree Trust in some way. |
| • Richard Curle at                    | • Onjali Rauf & O's                     |  |





## OUR VISION

A world in which every person who has been forced from their home has access to a garden either at their home or in their community and has the means and knowledge to grow.

## MISSION

To inspire, create, support and collaborate with people and communities who have been forced from their homes to deliver change through gardening.

## MAKE A DONATION

With your support we are bringing beauty, dignity and opportunity to communities left ravaged by the effects of war. Every donation we receive directly supports gardening projects and initiatives in refugee and IDP communities.

[lemontreetrust.org/donate](https://lemontreetrust.org/donate)

Thank you.

TO FIND OUT MORE AND TO SUPPORT OUR WORK:

[INFO@LEMONTREETRUST.ORG](mailto:INFO@LEMONTREETRUST.ORG) • +1 (214) 978 6559

[WWW.LEMONTREETRUST.ORG](https://WWW.LEMONTREETRUST.ORG)



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In the UK, the Lemon Tree Trust is a restricted fund under the auspices of Prism the Gift Fund, registered charity 1099682. In the USA, all contributions to the Lemon Tree Trust Fund will be received, receipted and under control of Communities Foundation of Texas (CFT), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organisation.

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