

Exploring humankind's connection with nature

WHERE

THE

LEAVES

FALL

Mutualism / Interconnectedness / Pandemic

For the inhabitants of Domiz 1, the oldest and biggest refugee camp in Iraq, which hosts 32,000 Syrian refugees, their gardens are more than just a source of flowers and food: through the ravages of war and the difficulties of life during the Covid-19 pandemic, they have become a symbol of hope.

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my Kingdom



Who among us can deny that their life will change from birth to death? Change is simply the routine of life, or rather, it is life itself. However, the situation differs, and the shock is far greater, when we are forced to change our lives, leaving everything related to our past, our present and our future behind us: the change in our status from a Syrian citizen to a Syrian refugee. How do we forget the life we had? How do we forget our love for our homeland? How can we forget our efforts, and the pride we felt in building a life, and leave behind everything we stood for, everything we had created and strove for? We were engineers, doctors, farmers, lawyers, all manner of learned graduates who had enjoyed an education. We were Syria.

In the end, we have had to accept our fate and learn to live in harmony with what has changed. Life will go on for years ahead of us, and as long as we live in the past we cannot embrace the beauty that life can offer. But we have tried, as much as possible, to preserve small parts or memories of our past life, and here we are fortunate to be helped by humanitarian organisations that recognise our need to remember and adapt.

It started with a single plant, and now the camps here are full of gardens. The Lemon Tree Trust's intervention was a life-changing experience for people here, and has given them hope. Here in Domiz 1, people began to register for a raised bed in the community garden, which the trust established for growing food and flowers.



Gardening in this way is not something we are familiar with in Syria but it works perfectly in our new situation. Now, if you take the time to really look at it, it is incredible that such a small area of land can produce so much. It made people start their lives again, from the beginning. The power of plants cannot be underestimated.

Every inch of Kurdistan has known the stumble of refugees' feet. We were welcomed with open arms, working alongside people from the region in every profession, until the virus came. Nothing could have prepared us for this pandemic. Doors were closed and everything stopped. People who relied on work outside the camp suddenly found they had nothing, and their income stopped overnight. Very few people kept their

jobs and the rest of us are struggling to survive.

But the crisis made me take advantage of every inch of the community garden bed to grow and plant the most delicious vegetables and flowers. The people who visit the community garden, and the families that reap the benefits of their efforts, have been saved from hunger and despair during these recent difficult and bleak months. The trust has continued to provide support when many other relief organisations were forced to stop. For me, the garden started with a simple plant and has ended up helping us through a disaster. It has taught us to stay hopeful, and this is a gift.

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For more information about the Domiz 1 gardens, visit: www.lemontreetrust.org















