

## FOLK EXPERIENCE OF FARMING AND GARDENING IN THE KHOREZM OASIS

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**Abstract:** This study explores the rich folk traditions of farming and gardening in the Khorezm oasis, a historically fertile region in Central Asia. Based on centuries of local knowledge, Khorezmian agricultural practices reflect a deep understanding of irrigation, crop rotation, seed preservation, and sustainable land use. Passed down orally and practically through generations, these customs blend scientific observation with cultural rituals. The paper examines how folk farming systems adapted to ecological challenges and continue to influence modern agriculture, despite external influences and technological shifts.

**Keywords:** Khorezm, folk farming, traditional gardening, irrigation, oasis agriculture, ecological adaptation, agricultural heritage.

Today, the folk farming knowledge of the Khorezm oasis is increasingly seen as a valuable resource. NGOs and universities are documenting traditional irrigation techniques, seed varieties, and gardening rituals to preserve them for future generations. Initiatives promoting **agroecology** and **climate-smart agriculture** are beginning to reintroduce ancestral practices in a modern context. Young farmers are blending inherited techniques with data-driven farming, showing that the wisdom of the past still holds relevance in the 21st century. The folk farming experience of Khorezm is not only a cultural treasure—it is a toolkit for resilience, adaptability, and sustainable growth in the face of ecological and economic challenges.

At the core of Khorezmian agricultural tradition is its legendary irrigation system. Known historically as one of the most advanced hydraulic civilizations, the oasis has survived thanks to the construction and maintenance of canals (aryks), ditches, and water gates. Folk engineers—often without formal education—were adept in reading the land, using elevation, gravity, and soil composition to determine the best methods for water distribution. The calendar of canal maintenance, known as **ariq qazish fasli**, was a communal event involving entire mahallas (neighborhoods) and villages. Passed down from father to son, knowledge of how to regulate the flow of Amu Darya's waters was considered sacred. Older farmers often consulted the phases of the moon, migratory bird patterns, and wind direction before starting irrigation. This practical yet spiritual approach to water use ensured sustainability in a region where scarcity could mean famine.

Khorezmian farmers have also demonstrated remarkable adaptability in their methods of soil cultivation and crop rotation. Traditional wisdom dictated that land be rested after a few years of continuous cultivation, especially for nutrient-draining crops like cotton or wheat. Farmers used **“almashlab ekish”**—a rotational system where leguminous plants, such as mung beans or lentils, were alternated with cereals to rejuvenate soil fertility. Composting was another vital part of folk gardening. Dung from livestock was carefully collected, fermented, and mixed with straw to create organic fertilizer known locally as **“ko‘sar”**. Gardeners used this compost not just for productivity but to enrich soil quality across years and avoid the buildup of chemical residues. This pre-modern version of what we now call "organic farming" ensured the longevity of the land for future generations and contributed to the taste and nutritional quality of the produce.

Seed saving was another pillar of the Khorezmian agricultural tradition. Farmers took immense pride in the seeds they cultivated, referring to them as **“ota urug‘i”** (ancestral seeds). These were carefully selected from the healthiest, most productive plants each season, sun-dried, and stored in handwoven cotton sacks or clay vessels to protect them from moisture. Many households had seed chests that were guarded like family treasures. These heirloom seeds were considered a symbol of lineage and identity, with each family often preferring their own strain of melon, wheat, or chili. In times of drought or plague, these carefully preserved seeds served as the basis for recovery, showcasing the community’s resilience.

Khorezm’s gardening practices, especially in household courtyards, reflect a more intimate, sustainable relationship with the land. Traditional home gardens, or **“bog”**, were microcosms of biodiversity. Unlike monoculture farms, these spaces contained a variety of crops—fig trees, pomegranate bushes, grapevines, herbs like basil and dill, and even medicinal plants such as black cumin and mint. Women primarily tended to these gardens, using generational knowledge to balance sunlight, shade, water, and soil. Their understanding of companion planting—growing certain crops together to ward off pests or enhance growth—was refined over centuries. For instance, marigolds were planted near tomatoes to deter harmful insects, while garlic was believed to protect grapevines from fungal infections. These gardens provided not only food but spiritual fulfillment and healing, reinforcing the bond between humans and the natural world.

Spiritual and ritualistic aspects also shaped the farming calendar. The beginning of the sowing season was marked with ceremonies such as **“navro‘zda urug‘ sochish”**, in which elders prayed for a fertile year and scattered symbolic handfuls of seeds. Watermelons were planted after **“chilla boshi,”** the peak of

summer, based on folk meteorological forecasts passed down through poetry and proverbs. Lunar cycles, the chirping of insects, and even animal behavior were all consulted before major agricultural decisions. Farmers often used oral calendars called “**taqvimlar**”, which blended astronomy, astrology, and religious observances to guide activities. This blend of empirical observation and spiritual interpretation created a unique worldview that saw nature not just as a resource to exploit, but as a sacred system to respect.

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