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On the Cover: *Heidi, an Appenzeller Spitzhauben pullet. Photograph by Matthew Benson*

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MITCH MANDEL, JOHN GRANEN, ARTHUR MORRIS/CORBIS. OPPOSITE: ROBYN LEHR

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In my gardening life, I have grown many odd things—it's part of the reason I garden—but the 'Christmas Drumhead' cabbage I'm holding in the 1989 photo shown here weighed in at 11 pounds and was beyond question the largest thing I've ever produced. Even my son was only 9 pounds at birth.

That soccer-ball-sized cabbage quite surprised my neighbor, Frank, who thought my raised-bed kitchen garden looked more like a cemetery; he was of true English yeoman stock and knew what he liked, which didn't include unfamiliar American veggies like acorn squash and 'Big Boy' tomatoes. My father-in-law sent me the squash and tomato seed, as well as seed for Indian corn and the monster cabbage, from Kenosha, Wisconsin. But of course it wasn't the seed that made the brassica so huge. That was thanks to the über-compost I used, an ambrosial mix enriched by manure from my flock of fancy chickens. Their eggs were delicious and the girls (as I called them) cute as buttons, but, hoo-AH! That compost was memorable.

So, naturally, I've longed to do a chicken story, an urge compounded by one I wrote a few years ago about a garden in a select corner of Southern California that belonged to a quite snazzy interior designer. Her garden was part wild bird refuge, part duck pond, but she also had some wonderfully chic chickens. She loved her clucks, so when the next-door neighbor complained about the rooster crowing, she invited her over, served up some new-laid eggs, then gave her a tour of the hens' tastefully decorated coop. It worked like a charm, the chooks were reprieved, and I wonder to this day if the neighbor now has some of her own.

Time flies when you're having fun, and now chickens are all that and more for gardeners, urban, suburban, and exurban. There are coop tours, cluck-keeping classes, and a steady stream of how-to-hen books available. The personal poultry phenomenon, fueled by locavores and organiculturists, has reached a fever pitch. Even homeowner associations—not known for accommodating change—are, along with bans on hanging laundry out to air-dry, having to revisit their rules about keeping backyard chickens. Several decades ago, air-drying clothes and keeping a hen or three were not uncommon, and even considered de rigueur for thrifty housewives. That changed in the '70s (along with so many other things!), but the pendulum has swung back, as it always does.

Farmatographer Matthew Benson's stunning photos, which illustrate our article, will surely whet your appetite for keeping these feathery little delights. Matthew keeps a bevy of birds himself and is clearly enchanted by their runway vogueing, never mind profiting from the side benefits of having superstrength compost and daily fresh eggs. And it's got me wondering if, once again, a few Barbu d'Uccle hens might be found scratching around my garden. They make short work of slugs and snails, and those feathered feet are just too much fun! Now, where did I put that copy of the city ordinances…?

Ethne Clarke
Editor in Chief

COURTESY OF ETHNE CLARKE

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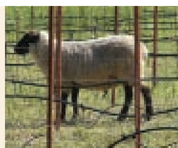

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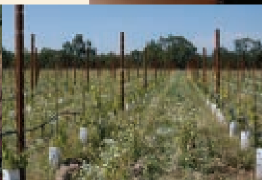

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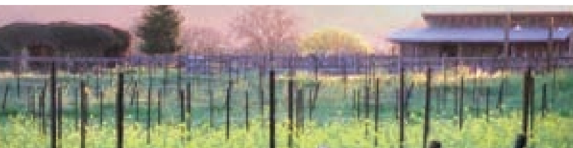

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jeff cox

Organic Gardening happily welcomes back one of our own; Cox is a former editor who first got his hands in the compost at Rodale. Now based in the California wine country, he'll be sharing news and views on the organic good life. Watch for his upcoming *Big Summer Cookbook*.

andrea jones

From her base in western Scotland, Jones, one of the U.K.'s leading garden photographers, covers the world, capturing the best gardens, the finest plants, and stories that inspire and delight, like "Strawberry Fields," about the healing joys of small-farm living.

colleen miko

A certified horticulturist, Miko learned the art and craft of garden design literally from the ground up, beginning as a nursery hand and soon becoming one of the Pacific Northwest's top designers. Her insights about ways to make a children's garden grow provide a cheerful lesson for us all.

robyn lehr

She may live in Brooklyn, but Lehr never misses a chance to skip out to the countryside with her camera to shoot delectable gardens and food. In the meantime, and until she has a plot of her own, Lehr vows to continue tending her own herb and tomato garden on a second-story fire escape.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF JEFF COX, ANDREA JONES, ROBYN LEHR, AND COLLEEN MIKO

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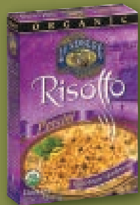

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On Roses

I was delighted to see 'Old Blush' mentioned in Mike Shoup's story about carefree roses ["Roses Come Clean," April/May]. We live in central California, and 'Old Blush' blooms for us nearly year-round. My great-grandmother planted the first bush; I have since started several from cuttings. Our roses grow along the road and stop traffic on a regular basis. The roses get no care at all except occasionally a little water in July and August. They are growing in adobe clay. Wonderful plants.

Karen Fishback
Los Gatos, California

Gardening on the Cheap

I really enjoyed "Less Is More," by Sharon Tregaskis [April/May]. I hope you are planning to publish the results of her second year. I also harvest huge amounts of food for the least amount of money. I can't wait to see if she can do it on $25. This year I spent about $40 on a 60-by-60-foot garden. I subscribe to the "intensive planting" method and grow about 40 different veggies, herbs, and fruits in that space. Thanks for the article!

Brenda Butler
Via email

Compost Question

"Less Is More" was enjoyable and informative. I was in awe of the author's resourcefulness and creativity. I have one concern, that the horse manure pictured on page 40 looked very fresh. I hope that it didn't go directly into the garden. Most fresh manures need to be composted for several months before use.

Elise Gignac
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

The author responds: The horse manure in the photo was relatively fresh, and used only to illustrate the text. The manure I actually put in my garden was almost a year old and already well composted. You are correct: It is necessary to compost fresh manure. Not only does its chemistry change over time, but also, in the case of horse manure—an egregious source of weed seeds—the composting process is vital to ensure that the seeds don't germinate in the garden.

Where's Watchdog?

What happened to the Watchdog column? It helped me make informed decisions about the products I would purchase based on the practices of the companies. I learned about genetically modified foods and irradiation of meat from this column. We need these kinds of topics at the forefront so companies will have to answer to their own bad practices. Or to help us be more educated on topics some companies don't think we should know about!

C.T.
Huntington, New York

Watchdog hasn't gone away; it's gotten larger. The current events, action items, and product recommendations we once covered in Watchdog can now be found in the departments Common Ground, Earth Matters, and We Like This!

More Pay Dirt

The feed-the-soil mantra is at the core of organic gardening. The Pay Dirt article "The Garden's Home-Grown Ally" [April/May] deserved to be front and center of the issue. More, please, of this sort of article. This is what it is all about.

Peter Garnham
Amagansett, New York

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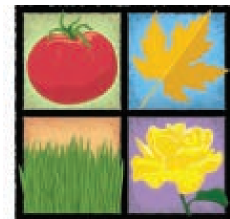

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TIPS FROM OUR READERS

Seed Starter

we love this tip!

Here's a tip for those growers who use soil blocks to start seeds and want to avoid using a peat-based blocking mix, which is a nonrenewable resource. Mix peat-free potting soil with just enough flour to lighten the color of the soil. The soil will set up well enough, but be sure to let it sit for a couple of hours. The forming process is complete once the gluten in the flour activates; after that, the blocks are easy to pick up and plant. Too much flour makes the blocks rock hard.

Misty Shore
Reno, Nevada

Coffee Scrub

Before you compost those coffee grounds, use them for cleaning your cast-iron skillet. Grounds make a wonderful organic cleaning agent. Add a few drops of oil and rub. I use the old coffee filter like a paper towel to scrub the skillet. After it is all clean, I gather up the grounds, add water, and dump it all in the compost pail. Dry the skillet a few seconds on the stove. Looks like new!

Lynn Spitznagel
Brookhaven, New York

Free Organic Mulch

In the spring, after I've enjoyed the winter beauty of my ornamental grasses, I cut off the seedheads and compost them. The remaining grass is cut and stored in clean, dry trash cans for use as organic mulch on my vegetable garden. I use only organic fertilizers, so I'm assured my mulch is organic, and I don't have to pay for it.

Carrie McIntyre
Norton Shores, Michigan

Chopstick Markers

Each time I eat in an Asian restaurant or get takeout, I keep the chopsticks. When it comes time to measure where to place transplants in my raised beds, I mark the spot with a chopstick. This method is especially helpful for locating onions, leeks, garlic, and any closely spaced multiples. Any visitors to my garden at this time are told that I am growing chopsticks.

Arnold Projansky
New Paltz, New York

Lavender for Bites

If you garden in the South, you'll eventually get a fire-ant bite. These tiny ants leave quite a sting. The next time you are bitten, put some lavender essential oil on the area. It quickly relieves the pain. The next day, you'll barely be able to see where the bite is. It works on mosquito bites, too.

Krissie Thomson
Kendalia, Texas

Mini Greenhouse

To direct-sow tomato and basil seed when the soil is cool, take a clear plastic bottle, remove the label and cap, and cut off the bottom. Insert it bottom-end-down into a furrow and leave it there until the soil has warmed. Then sow the seed, and replace the bottle until the seeds have sprouted.

Bruce Iacono
Brewster, New York

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Child's Play

Designer: Colleen Miko

For children, gardens offer unlimited opportunities for discovery, learning, and play. Landscape designer Colleen Miko believes that children's gardens should unleash creative energy and provide an environment of fun and freedom. That philosophy is visible in the backyard landscape Miko designed for Mike and Linda Rackner of Seattle and their daughters, Gabrielle and Marissa, who were ages 5 and 3 when the garden was built in 2006.

Although designed with children's activities in mind, the garden has become a gathering place for the whole Rackner family. "It used to be the part of the yard they never used," Miko says. "Now that they have the garden, they're in it all the time." Miko offers the following tips for designing a children's garden.

Let the children choose. "An important feature of a children's garden is to have a personalized, dedicated space for each child," Miko says. "In this case, I thought it would be fun to do the raised beds." Built with landscape timbers to the size of twin beds, and with vintage headboards, the raised beds are where Gabrielle and Marissa experiment with plants. Each selects the flowers for her bed and adds mosaic art, signs, and other individual touches. The girls reinvent their garden spaces with new plants and artwork whenever the mood strikes.

Include surfaces for play. "People think if you have kids, you have to have a lawn," Miko says. Not so. In this turf-free space, hydro-pressed architectural slabs

THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE: JOHN GRANEN

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Left to right: *Two raised beds are the creative domain of Gabrielle and Marissa Rackner. Marissa (kneeling) and Gabrielle (standing) pose in their pink playhouse, whose Dutch door serves as a stage for the girls' puppet shows. A pergola frames one end of the backyard garden. Fragrant lavender and petunias bloom in the girls' favorite colors: purple and pink. Dry-laid concrete slabs form a durable surface for footraces.*

form an all-weather play surface, good for hopscotch, jump rope, and drawing with chalk. Unlike less-substantial concrete pavers, hydro-pressed concrete is dense and smooth, and the 24-inch squares butt together tightly. Because the slabs are laid over sand without mortar, rainwater soaks in instead of running off.

Add whimsy and intrigue. Miko filled the yard with plants that provide a springboard for fun and learning: scented geraniums, insect-digesting pitcher plants, a Dalmatian iris (*Iris pallida*) whose flowers smell of grape soda, and plenty of daisies for "he loves me, he loves me not." The low boughs of a magnolia shield a secret hideaway for the girls and their friends.

Expect rough treatment. "Kids need a place to play where they don't have to worry about stepping on the wrong thing," Miko says. Soccer balls and remote-control cars will ricochet through the garden at times; select and place plants accordingly.

Consider adults, too. The elder Rackners can watch the girls play from the comfort of a nearby pergola. Miko included plants with gray and burgundy foliage in the landscape as a sophisticated counterpoint to the pink, orange, and magenta flowers in the girls' beds.

Anticipate change. Kids grow, and their garden should evolve to mirror their changing interests. The raised beds will be just as useful for growing vegetables or strawberries someday as they are for the current crop of annual flowers. The dry-laid concrete slabs can be lifted and reconfigured as a patio, and the purple fence can be repainted in a more neutral hue. Even the playhouse was constructed with the idea that it will be moved elsewhere when the girls no longer wish to squeeze through its tiny door. *—Doug Hall*

For more information, see Find It Here, page 78.

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Bang for your buck

Japanese forest grass (*Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola')

- Long season of interest
- Tidy growth habit
- Deer-resistant
- Part to full shade
- Zones 5 to 9
- Good for containers

Save your cents

Ribbon grass (*Phalaris arundinacea* var. *picta*)

- Rampant, invasive growth habit
- Scruffy appearance in summer
- Subject to rust and other leaf spots
- Full sun to part shade
- Zones 4 to 9

A well-behaved waterfall of glowing color, **Japanese forest grass** provides an elegant edge to a border and cascades stunningly over the rim of a container. This tidy, deer-resistant plant performs best in dappled light, where its fine texture contrasts beautifully with hostas, pulmonarias, and other shade-loving perennials. Gold leaves striped with green glow brightest with indirect light; under more shady conditions, the plant fades to lime. Too much sun causes the foliage of Japanese forest grass to scorch in warm climates, or bleach to creamy white where summers are cooler. Cool fall temperatures bring on mahogany and bronze tones. A deciduous grass, the plant turns tawny with first frost and goes winter dormant. Provide an evenly moist, humus-rich soil and watch as Japanese forest grass politely forms a more impressive clump with each passing season, growing 12 to 18 inches tall by 18 to 24 inches wide; larger when conditions are optimal.

Also called reed canary grass or gardener's garters, **ribbon grass** gives gardeners a real "run" for their money—although it's the rare individual who has to actually purchase this classic pass-along plant. Aggressive, spreading roots travel quickly, insinuating themselves into neighboring perennial crowns, tree and shrub roots, and cracks in the sidewalk. Tolerant of sun and shade, moist or dry conditions, this upright green-and-white-striped grass will grow almost anywhere—it just won't stay there. That's why ribbon grass is considered a noxious weed in some states. The white variegation turns crispy brown in midsummer, presenting a bedraggled and tired appearance. There is also a pink-tinged variety called 'Strawberries and Cream'. Any nonvariegated green growth that appears must be dug out immediately to prevent the reverting—and even more vigorous—plant from completely taking over. Ribbon grass flowers, but the stems are floppy and unimpressive. It grows 3 feet high, but it spreads indefinitely. *—Lorene Edwards Forkner*

JAPANESE FOREST GRASS: JOYCE CHENEY GARDEN/MARK TURNER/TURNER PHOTOGRAPHICS; RIBBON GRASS: MARK TURNER/TURNER PHOTOGRAPHICS

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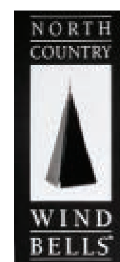

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> "I plunged into organic gardening with fervor. Every act in the garden revealed a valuable lesson."

Full Circle

An organic garden offers lessons in living.

It truly was my lucky day in February 1970, when I joined *Organic Gardening* magazine as an associate editor. Little did I know that the simple concept of gardening as nature intended would plant a seed in my mind—and that seed would grow through the years to encompass every aspect of my life.

It began slowly, with my first compost pile. Through the compost pile, one year's food and flowers became the nutrients for the following year's food and flowers. The recycling of garden debris mimicked what nature does in the woods: Leaves fall in autumn to mulch the forest floor and feed the trees and understory plants. Of course! How simple. How elegant.

I plunged into organic gardening with fervor. Every act in the garden revealed a valuable lesson. For example, I learned not to kill insects indiscriminately, but to welcome more of them into the garden until the sheer diversity of bugs set up an equilibrium that kept plant-eating pests in balance with insect-eating beneficials. Organic gardening represented a way to embrace life, not death.

My organic garden produced a bounty of luscious food in a relatively small space. I was learning how life works from simple creatures like nitrogen-fixing bacteria, tomato hornworms, and flowers that found a million colorful ways to sex themselves silly and shower the world with their seeds.

And then, one day when I was digging a raised bed and having a reverie about how the soil is a record of the past, how the soil surface is a snapshot of the present, and how the future arrives from above, a thought hit me. It occurred to me that organic gardening is just the horticultural aspect of a bigger concept: that all living things are interconnected, and our actions at home have consequences far beyond the garden fence. To quote the English poet Francis Thompson:

All things by immortal power,
Near or far,
Hiddenly
To each other linked are,
That thou canst not stir a flower
Without troubling of a star.

Since then, I've learned to nurture this circle of life, starting with microorganisms in the soil. Working with nature instead of trying to thwart it produces a confluence of benefits, many of them unforeseen. This philosophy also can be applied outside the garden. Take a positive mental attitude, for instance. It doesn't come from excluding or fighting with people whose ideas differ from yours, but rather from welcoming them—like the myriad bugs in the garden—into the debate, learning from them, and discovering how their ideas—distasteful or indifferent though they may be—can enhance your own.

Organic gardening—bless its worms under my feet—was the portal through which nature's interconnected world, with all its positive energies and beneficial laws, became real to me. It colors my world to this day. I feel that I'm an organic human being, connected to Mother Earth, seeing my path ahead clearly, and in love with life itself. *—Jeff Cox*

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'Ruby Queen' is a sugar-enhanced sweet corn and one of the few "tinted" veggies to hold its color when cooked.

Presprouting

In cool soil, corn may rot rather than germinate. Once seeds have broken dormancy, however, they will continue to grow in less-than-optimal soil temperatures. Presprouting turns this tendency to the gardener's advantage, adding several weeks to the start of the growing season. To presprout, spread corn seed in a single layer between wet paper towels. Roll up and place in an unsealed plastic bag. Keep warm (70° to 80°F). Check daily and do not allow the toweling to dry out. Plant seed at the first sign of a root, which should appear beneath the seed coat in 2 to 4 days. Be careful when handling germinated corn: The longer the root, the more easily it can be damaged.

Cooking Suggestions

'Ruby Queen' holds its blush even in boiling water; many cooks, however, prefer to steam, microwave, or grill it, husks removed or not, to retain the full depth of color. Do not overcook—garden-fresh corn takes only 3 minutes in unsalted, boiling water. To freeze, cut kernels from cooked ears. Or, for an out-of-season, on-the-cob treat, freeze uncooked ears in the husks—silks removed—sealed in plastic bags. In season, the ruby-hued morsels complement a bounty of sun-ripened fare including cucumbers, tomatoes, onions, peppers, zucchini, garlic, cilantro, and basil. Mix and match, and finish by tossing with olive oil and fresh lemon juice.

The Red Queen

When home gardeners first invite 'Ruby Queen' sweet corn into the vegetable patch, it's almost certainly for the novelty of its claret-colored kernels. And why not? Red table corn isn't exactly a grocery-store staple. But gardeners from Maine to California have discovered that this striking sugar-enhanced (SE) hybrid is a keeper: tender, tasty, productive, and vigorous. 'Ruby Queen' holds its color when cooked, staging a *coup de rouge* in a corn relish or black-bean salad. Corn provides thiamin (vitamin B_1), pantothenic acid (vitamin B_5), folate, dietary fiber, phosphorus, and manganese. A large (8-inch) ear of corn has approximately 123 calories.

Corn has simple needs: It wants only the best. Given ample warmth, sun, water, fertilizer, and room to grow, corn is a surprisingly reliable crop. 'Ruby Queen', like all SE hybrids, possesses a naturally occurring gene that produces sweeter, more tender ears with a longer peak of condition than old-fashioned varieties. To maintain quality, SE hybrids should be grown at least 300 feet from field corn, popcorn, ornamental corn, and supersweet hybrids.

Full sun and rich, compost-amended soil are key to corn cultivation. Protection from prevailing winds will prevent these shallow-rooted plants from being blown over in summer storms.

Sow seed at least 2 weeks after the average last-frost date at a soil temperature of

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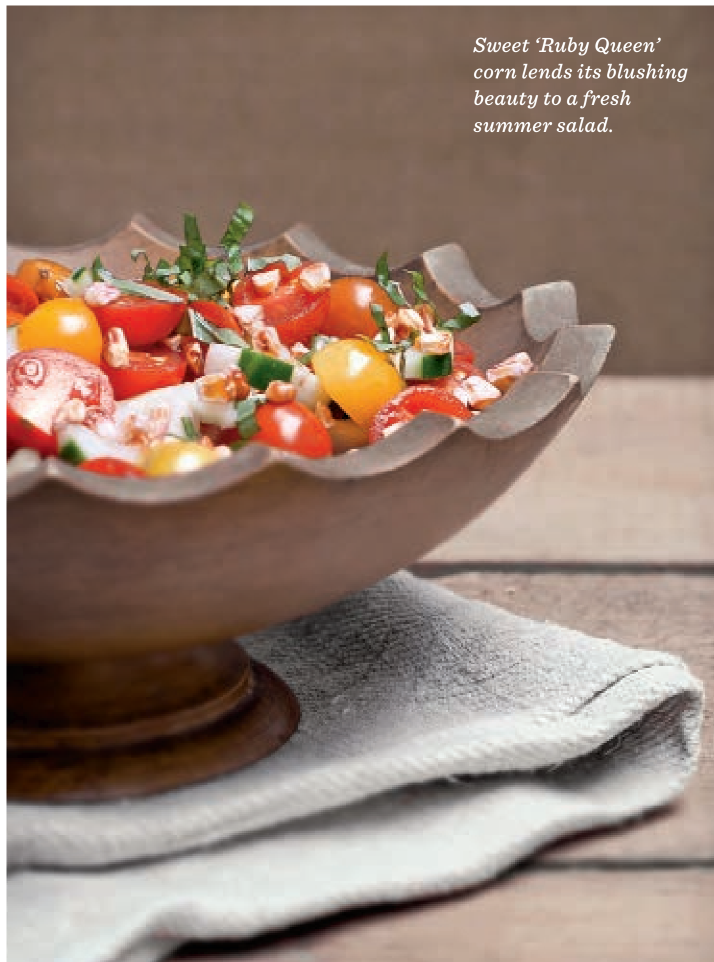
Sweet 'Ruby Queen' corn lends its blushing beauty to a fresh summer salad.

55°F or higher. Sowings may be made up to 3 weeks earlier if the soil has been warmed with a clear plastic or infrared-transmitting (IRT) plastic mulch for at least a week. Because corn is wind pollinated, it should be grown in four or more side-by-side rows or in blocks, rather than one long row. Work 6 pounds of complete organic fertilizer beneath each 100 linear feet of row. In traditional beds, place rows 2 feet apart, with three or four seeds clustered every 8 inches and sown 2 inches deep. Thin to the strongest seedling per cluster. For more-intensive block culture, set plants 15 inches apart in all directions in deep, fertile raised beds.

Beds may be covered in floating row cover to retain heat and protect emerging shoots from crows and voles; remove cover when seedlings are 4 inches tall. To extend the harvest, make additional sowings at 2-week intervals, or plant an early and a late variety to round out midseason 'Ruby Queen'. Pre-sprouting is helpful in cool-spring areas. Corn does not transplant well unless started in biodegradable pots that can be placed directly into the soil.

Keep corn well watered at the roots (watering overhead when the pollen is flying can reduce ear-fill). Fertilize every 2 to 3 weeks with fish emulsion until plants begin to tassel, or side-dress twice with a high-nitrogen fertilizer, once when plants are a foot tall and again before silk appears. Weed frequently. A mulch of grass clippings or compost will retain moisture and reduce weeds.

The 8-inch ears of 'Ruby Queen' ripen about 3 weeks after silk appears. Although prime eating quality persists over a 5-day period, flavor is best just as the color approaches full ruby ripeness. Pick ears immediately before cooking or in the very early morning and refrigerate (34°F) in the husk until needed. Don't forget to save the ornamental, 7-foot crimson stalks for autumn decor.

In the home garden, controlling corn earworm (*Helicoverpa zea*) can be as simple as placing a clothespin where the silk enters the ear as soon as silk emerges. Or, once the silk wilts and turns brown, suffocate the worms by applying five drops of corn or soybean oil into the tip of each ear. If the caterpillars do appear at ear tips, hand-crush or remove the pests and reseal husks with a twist tie. —*Wendy Tweten*

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Serene Green

Plant an emerald carpet of moss in a pot.

Moss imparts cool tranquility to shade gardens. Usually, you don't need to plant it; moss simply appears where growing conditions favor it: in deep or partial shade, on soil that is moist, acidic, and nutrient-depleted. You can fight moss—and many gardeners do, in a misguided battle to replace any natural groundcover with turfgrass—but it makes more sense to accept moss as a beautiful, low-maintenance gift from nature.

It turns out that moss grows well in containers, too. Inspired by luxuriant mosses that carpet nearby woodlands, designer Mark Kintzel of Allentown, Pennsylvania, planted a concrete urn with moss, then placed it in a shady location outdoors, where it thrived through spring, summer, and fall. The cushion moss (*Leucobryum*) Kintzel chose has a bubbly form and soft texture. —*Doug Hall*

For more information, see Find It Here on page 78.

1. Gather the materials: a container with a drainage hole, growing medium, and moss. Pots made of porous terra-cotta or concrete will help keep the soil cool, although those made of other materials also work. Harvest moss from your backyard, or call friends until you find someone who has a patch of moss you can harvest from. Because moss has no roots, it peels easily from the ground and re-establishes just as effortlessly in its new home. It's not necessary to transfer any soil with the sheet of moss, and it doesn't matter if the moss tears into fragments.

2. Fill the container with the growing medium. Designer Mark Kintzel used compost; commercial potting mix (one without slow-release fertilizer) would work, too. If the medium is dry, moisten it slightly. Press firmly to compact it, and mound it into a dome.

3. Press small patches of moss onto the medium, arranging them to completely cover the surface.

Follow-up care. Water as needed to keep the moss green and lush. Kintzel watered his moss urn about twice a week—more often during hot weather. Even if the moss dries out while you're on vacation, it will quickly revive once you resume watering.

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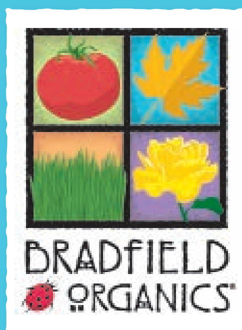

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There are almost 15 million unemployed people in this country, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. When I found myself among them, I began digging deeply—into my emergency fund, into my soul, and into the soil. That's right: I expanded my backyard garden, big time. I went from your basic salsa-and-salad garden (greens, herbs, tomatoes, jalapeño peppers) to sustenance planting. I shopped at the Des Moines farmers' market. I made jam (strawberry-basil, among others), which became holiday gifts.

For many, this grow-your-own-and/or-buy-local concept is not news; it's a lifestyle. Yet it's beyond the reach of some Americans who struggle just to feed their families. According to U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics, millions of people don't have access to grocery stores, green markets, or local farmers, let alone a garden of their own. A recent report showed that 49 million people in this country, including nearly 17 million children, struggle with hunger. Yet obesity rates have soared, tripling in 30 years. And more than 12 million children are considered obese.

Above: The People's Garden plan includes references to Native American food garden traditions as well as contemporary organiculture methods. **Top right:** *The USDA is encouraging communities across the United States to establish organic gardens.*

USDA

Much of the problem is linked to the fact that empty calories, fast food, and food that is filling but lacking nutrients is cheap, easy, and accessible. Fast-food restaurants typically outnumber grocery stores by the dozens or even, in some communities, by the hundreds.

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack is attempting to tackle the paradox of hunger existing alongside obesity. Yes, Vilsack has critics who are concerned about the former Iowa governor's record as a booster of biotechnology and the USDA's reputation for treating industrial agriculture with a business-as-usual attitude.

Yet, when focusing on the food/hunger/nutrition/obesity issue, Vilsack and his team are taking encouraging steps. The USDA is joining forces with other agencies, including the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education, in a comprehensive approach to a complicated issue.

This new galaxy of food resources begins with the People's Garden. Last year, Vilsack turned over soil at USDA headquarters on the National Mall, in Washington, D.C., to start the People's Garden. Vilsack hopes that the garden will stand as an example to educate and encourage other USDA facilities, organizations, community members, and individuals to get growing. In its first season, the garden produced more than 300 pounds of vegetables.

The garden is made up of an organic vegetable plot, a potager pollinator section (kitchen garden plus native plants), and a Three Sisters garden (a Native American concept of interplanted corn, squash, and pole beans). On the grounds are rainwater captures and a bat house. To learn more, check out the USDA garden news at *twitter.com/peoplesgarden* or the USDA Facebook page, *facebook.com/USDA*. *(continued)*

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The People's Garden is complemented by the Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food initiative. Under the guidance of Kathleen Merrigan, deputy secretary of agriculture and an ag and nutrition pro who helped develop the Organic Foods Production Act, the USDA launched a website (*usda.gov/knowyourfarmer*) that promotes local and sustainable farming and is a tool to help consumers find area producers. As the site states: "This is the start of a national dialogue between the USDA and you—farmers, ranchers, businesses, community organizations, governments, schools, consumers. Government doesn't have all the answers—the issues that we're addressing require local solutions and local resolve." There's a spot for profiles of local farmers, plus information on protecting natural resources and strengthening rural communities.

The department is shining a light on small farms and local food systems.

Some are still concerned that deep-pocketed industrial agriculture holds the attention of the USDA. Michael Pollan, author of *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and *Food Rules,* is one of them, calling the USDA "schizoid." There is a feeling of both promise and pessimism, says Pollan. "The department is shining a light on small farms and local food systems, but doesn't dare challenge industrial agriculture." Or perhaps, as Pollan points out with more optimism, the agriculture department is thinking long-term and taking baby steps away from agribusiness.

"We'll see what happens with the next farm bill," Pollan says. "History shows that the USDA gives the agriculture industry what it has always gotten, while throwing crumbs to local, sustainable agriculture."

Let's hope Vilsack keeps in mind the words he spoke during a news conference after his first week in office: "The USDA has an incredible opportunity to promote a sustainable, safe, sufficient, and nutritious food supply for all Americans and for people around the world. This department has an opportunity to combat childhood obesity and to enhance health and nutrition. And I believe the department should play a key role in the public health debate, and that our nutrition program should be seen as an opportunity to alleviate hunger and prevent health care problems."

In my own small way, I've joined the local, sustainable movement. It's not been easy, but it should be, and it will become easier as more of us join up. In that way, it will also become stronger, and that is what moves mountains. —*Jeanne Ambrose*

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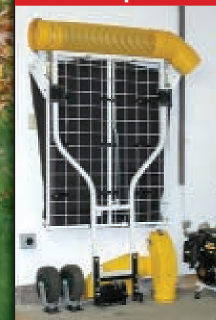

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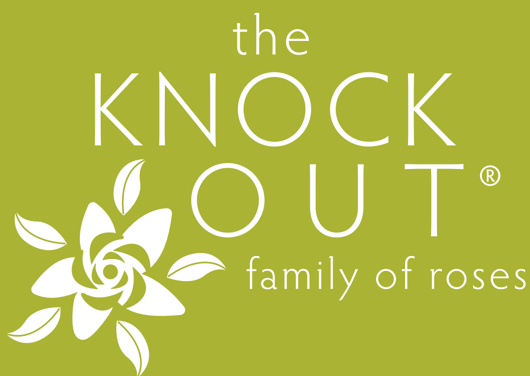

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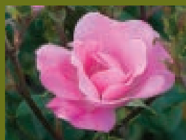
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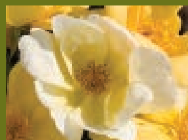
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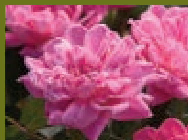
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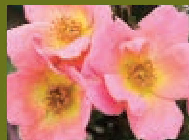
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tomato trifecta

Three chefs share recipes for their top tomato picks.

By Dan Sullivan

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SUMMER'S DAYS CAN BE COUNTED BY THEIR NUMEROUS PLEASURES: soft grass, warm breezes, and of course, homegrown tomatoes. At this wonderful time of year, cherry tomatoes dangle like tiny suns from their vines. Pretty heirlooms fill harvest baskets, and heavy beefsteaks ripen from green to deep red, signaling that it's time to stop and enjoy the greatest reward of vegetable gardening: cooking with food you've grown yourself. To celebrate this delicious season, we called upon three gardeners—who also happen to be brilliant chefs—to dish on why they love to grow and cook with tomatoes.

Deborah Madison: Cooking with the Seasons

"I am never tempted to buy a tomato at the store," says cookbook writer and *Organic Gardening* contributing food editor Deborah Madison. "I don't even see them." Madison, who began her career at the famed Chez Panisse and was the founding chef of the iconic Greens Restaurant in San Francisco, lives at around 7,000 feet in Galisteo, New Mexico, where she admits that growing heat-loving tomatoes, and just about anything else, can be difficult.

To meet the challenges of gardening in dry, clay soils and at a high altitude, Madison commissioned a local carpenter to build raised beds of sustainably harvested cedar, each equipped with hoops and a cover that helps protect crops from weather and pests. Come spring, she plants a variety of heirloom tomato seedlings, procured from local nurseries and farmers. "I have better luck with the smaller-sized tomatoes, because my garden is on the shady side and they seem to mature more quickly and more reliably," explains Madison.

She also likes growing varieties she sees at the farmers' market and always includes a few larger tomatoes, even though they often produce few fruits. "There are so many amazing varieties of tomatoes. I am really fond of the big old beefsteak tomatoes, like 'German Striped'. I also like the peach-type tomatoes for salads. Peach tomatoes have a matte skin and seem to do quite well for me here in New Mexico. I love the pleated tomatoes like Italian 'Costoluto Genovese' that look like little silk evening purses."

Other favorites include 'Oxheart', 'Nebraska Wedding Tomato' (once ceremoniously hung in Midwest churches as a harbinger of a prosperous and fruitful marriage), and 'Golden Jubilee'. "I don't care for most yellow tomatoes because they are so low in acid," Madison says. "But 'Golden Jubilee' is more acidic than most, and

deborah madison

THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE: DOUGLAS MERRIAM

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its tartness makes it good to pair with cheeses." For dressing, she prefers sweet marjoram, red-wine vinegar, and olive oil to the old standard of basil, balsamic vinegar, and olive oil for bringing out the flavors of different tomatoes. "Marjoram's high aromatic notes can be a nice change," Madison explains.

While flavor and color are certainly important considerations when choosing varieties, Madison finds that picking ones that do well where you live is the secret to successfully growing tomatoes. And the best way to discover those varieties, she says, is to visit local farmers' markets and see what the farmers are growing. After all, says Madison, "There is no substitute for a locally grown tomato, picked right at its peak."

***Above:** Madison often samples tomato varieties from the farmers' market before growing them herself. **Right:** Always toss tomatoes with a high-quality olive oil.*

Hot Pasta with Fresh Tomatoes

From *Vegetarian Suppers from Deborah Madison's Kitchen*

3 cups cherry tomatoes, halved or quartered
1 shallot, finely diced
1 garlic clove, minced
3 tablespoons best olive oil, or more to taste
2 tablespoons salted capers, soaked in water and drained, or brined capers, rinsed
⅓ cup pitted Niçoise olives
6 basil leaves, torn or slivered
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
½ pound small shell-shaped pasta
A few drops of balsamic vinegar (optional)

1. Bring a pot of water to a boil for the pasta. Meanwhile, mix the tomatoes in a large bowl with the shallot, garlic, olive oil, capers, olives, and basil. Season with a little salt and pepper.

2. When the water is boiling, add salt and cook the pasta. Drain the pasta, shake off the excess water, add the hot pasta to the tomatoes, and toss. Taste for salt, add pepper and a few drops of vinegar if you like, and serve (the finished recipe is pictured on page 30).

Makes 4 servings

THIS PAGE: DOUGLAS MERRIAM. OPPOSITE: JOHN GRANEN

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Jerry Traunfeld:
An Herbal Kitchen

James Beard Award–winning chef and cookbook author Jerry Traunfeld's fascination with both gardening and cooking developed at an early age. "Ever since I was a little kid, I've been fascinated with gardens and growing things—houseplants and outdoor plants," Traunfeld recalls. "I started cooking when I was a teenager, and that's how the connection started."

At his Seattle restaurant, Poppy, Traunfeld tends a small but intensively planted garden. The waist-high raised beds house herbs, salad greens, edible flowers, and a few of Traunfeld's most-loved tomato varieties. To keep his tomatoes happy in Seattle's notoriously damp, chilly climate, he plants them in the sunniest, warmest spot in the garden and meticulously removes any foliage that looks diseased. "One cherry tomato variety that always stands out and never disappoints is 'Sungold'," says Traunfeld. "It consistently produces and it is so delicious." Other favorite varieties include 'Persimmon' (a yellow heirloom grown by Thomas Jefferson), 'Brandywine', and 'Champion'.

For a simple summertime meal, Traunfeld heats halved cherry tomatoes mixed with a clove of minced garlic and a couple of tablespoons of olive oil until just warm, and then adds basil, sweet marjoram, tarragon, or thyme to taste. "It's in between a sauce and a salad," says Traunfeld, who recommends serving the tomatoes over grilled fish or tossing with pasta.

Cherry Tomato, Melon, and Mint Salad

Adapted from *The Herbal Kitchen: Cooking with Fragrance and Flavor*, by Jerry Traunfeld

- 4 cups melon balls, scooped from a ripe, sweet watermelon at room temperature
- 3 cups ripe 'Sungold' cherry tomato halves, at room temperature
- 4 teaspoons freshly squeezed lime juice
- ½ cup coarsely chopped fresh spearmint
- ¾ teaspoon kosher salt

Toss all ingredients together in a mixing bowl. Serve immediately or refrigerate for up to 24 hours.

Makes 8 servings

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alex lee

Lee says successfully growing tomatoes begins with a "classic compost pile" made with the right mix of dry "brown" matter—such as dead leaves—and wet "green" matter.

Alex Lee:
Global Flavors, Local Food

"I've grown a garden since I was 12," says Alex Lee, a chef who has worked alongside the likes of Daniel Boulud and Alain Ducasse. "I love to see seeds germinating under grow lights. In my profession, I get to travel all around the world. The first place I visit in whatever country I go to is the local farmers' market."

Creativity in the kitchen is tied to the availability of fresh ingredients, says Lee, and summer allows creativity to truly shine. "Through my cooking, I really enjoy the rhythms of the seasons, and one of my favorite times is tomato season," says Lee, who is the executive chef at Glen Oaks Country Club in Old Westbury, New York. Lee's passion is to bring rich peasant tastes and traditions, what he calls the "soul" of food, to fine dining.

This globe-trotting chef has a world of favorite tomato varieties, and it includes 'Cherokee Purple' (United States), 'Momotaro' (Japan), 'Zapotec' (Mexico), 'Coeur de Boeuf' (France), and 'Canestrino' (Italy). "'Canestrino' tomatoes have a very high sugar content," explains Lee. "They are meaty, with few seeds and an almost fruity flavor."

Lee says successfully growing tomatoes begins with a "classic compost pile" made with the right mix of dry "brown" matter—such as dead leaves and straw—and wet "green" matter, including vegetable scraps from the kitchen. "I put everything in: eggshells, mushroom stems, coffee grounds." Pest problems such as tomato hornworms are dealt with by hand-picking the insects and tossing them in the waste bin. Lee also recommends soaking the soil at the base of the plants with diluted fish emulsion just as they begin to flower. "And I always work in lots of organic matter before the plants go into the ground," he says. •

THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE: ROBYN LEHR

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Right: *Lee finely chops ripe green tomatoes for the gazpacho.* ***Far right:*** *Purple and orange, red and green; complementary colors from basil and tomatoes add to the beauty of this dish.*

Alex Lee's Green Tomato Gazpacho

This chilled soup is made with tomatoes such as 'Green Zebra', 'Evergreen', 'Green Grape', and 'German Green', all of which remain green when ripe.

1½ cups pulp from ripe green tomatoes
2 tablespoons celery, finely chopped
2 tablespoons cucumber, finely chopped
2 tablespoons avocado, finely chopped
2 tablespoons Vidalia onion, finely chopped
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 teaspoon white balsamic vinegar
2 tablespoons fresh cilantro leaves, finely chopped
⅛ teaspoon minced serrano chile pepper
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
Small cherry tomatoes or tiny currant tomatoes, halved, and tiny purple basil leaves (optional garnish)

Prepare an ice-water bath in a large bowl and set aside. In a medium bowl, combine the green tomato pulp, celery, cucumber, avocado, onion, olive oil, vinegar, cilantro, and chile pepper. Season with salt and pepper. Place the bowl filled with gazpacho into the ice-water bath, making sure not to submerge it. Chill until cold. Garnish with purple basil leaves and red and orange cherry tomato halves for a vibrant and colorful contrast.

Makes 2 servings

Jeff Cox's Wine Pairing Notes

Homegrown tomatoes often develop a lot of acid—their pH can go below 4.6—making them a bit puckery. These wines will pair well with fresh and grilled tomatoes, as well as tomato-based pasta sauces.

Fresh tomatoes. With sliced fresh tomatoes in a Caprese salad, choose a sunny white, such as a 2007 Fiano di Avellino from Feudi di San Gregorio, in Campania, Italy ($19).

Grilled tomatoes. Pair the slightly smoky, rich flavor of grilled tomatoes with a 2007 Russian River Pinot Noir from DeLoach Vineyards ($24), or a soft and fruity 2008 Garnacha from Tapeña, in Spain ($10).

Tomato sauce. Pasta with a hearty tomato sauce needs a full, rustic red, such as a 2007 Heritage Zinfandel from Dry Creek Vineyard, in Sonoma County ($19), or a 2007 Côtes du Rhône Villages from Féraud-Brunel, in the Rhone Valley, France ($16).

For more information, see Find It Here on page 78.

world

Coming home to roost

By Denise Foley ~ Photographs by Matthew Benson

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***Opposite:** Baby chicks arrive by priority mail and in time will grow to become productive garden ornaments, particularly fancy chickens like Tyler, a Modern Game bantam rooster (**shown here**).*

Keeping a flock of backyard hens has gone from being homey to being oh-so-stylishly vogue.

Gathering fresh eggs, with their exquisite pale blue, creamy white, and even chocolate brown shells, is just one of the many charms that comes with keeping chickens. As the recent chicken renaissance continues to gather momentum, coops are becoming an increasingly common sight in urban and suburban back yards around the country. The recession and an unabated interest in local and organic foods have certainly contributed to the enthusiasm for chickens, but many people who keep a small flock do so for a simple reason: Chickens make fantastic pets.

__Below:__ Hatcheries such as McMurray will ship 6-day-old chicks, 25 to a box, via the U.S. Postal Service. *__Opposite:__ Photographer Matthew Benson's coop is thoughtfully decorated, centrally heated (with a heat lamp), and aptly named La Cage aux Fowl.*

Getting Started

Before purchasing birds or planning for a coop, it is important to check local regulations and homeowner association rules. Many municipalities ban roosters (don't worry, hens lay eggs without them) and limit the number of hens a household can keep. Some communities require signed agreements from neighbors, permits, or an appearance before the zoning board, while others have ordinances that restrict the size and placement of outbuildings.

Sometimes the rules are surprising—pleasantly. New York City, for example, has never banned hens, says Owen Taylor, the training and livestock coordinator for Just Food, a nonprofit that works to improve access to fresh, healthy, locally grown food in the city. "They're considered pets, like cats and dogs, so zoning laws do not apply," Taylor says.

In communities that outlaw poultry, chicken activists are joining together to challenge the laws. Tracy Halward formed the Longmont Urban Chicken Coalition after her family was cited for illegally keeping chickens in their Longmont, Colorado, back yard. The coalition scored a victory when the city council voted to allow a pilot backyard-chicken program, and in March 2009 issued permits to 50 residents, including Halward. Similar grassroots movements have overturned chicken bans in Madison, Wisconsin; Ann Arbor, Michigan; and Bozeman, Montana. So backyard flocks may become common once again.

Choosing Breeds

A decided benefit of keeping chickens is the opportunity to raise birds that have beautiful plumage and lay unusually colored eggs. Many breeds come in two sizes: standard, also known as large breed, and bantam, which are typically one-quarter the size of standard birds. Both do fine in back yards, though standard chickens lay much larger eggs than bantams and, because they weigh more, tend to be less flighty.

For dependable egg production, choose layers—lightweight breeds, such as Black Australorps, that were bred to lay reliably. Dual-purpose breeds (eggs and meat), such as Buff Orpingtons and Silver Laced Wyandottes, are heavier than layers but have better egg production than broilers, breeds used primarily for

Best Backyard Breeds

Chickens are social creatures. It is wise to keep at least three hens, but they do not need to be of the same breed. The four listed here were chosen for their superior qualities as pets. All come in both bantam and standard sizes, do well in mixed flocks, and have lovely plumage.

Buff Orpington. Bred in England, these large, gentle birds have beautiful orange feathers and a docile disposition. They lay large, light brown eggs and handle cold weather with aplomb.

Black Australorp. Originally from Australia, they have red combs offset by glossy black feathers that shimmer in the sunshine with a hint of green. Australorps are known for their curious nature and sweet personalities. They mature early and reliably lay large brown eggs.

Cochin. Introduced to the United States from China in the early 1800s, Cochins look like balls of feathers. They aren't known for heavy egg production, but the hens make an excellent addition to a flock, both for their calm personality and their fun feathered feet.

Barred Plymouth Rock. A heritage American breed with striking black-and-white "barred" feathers, they lay large brown eggs that can sometimes have a pinkish hue. Very easy to handle and friendly.

For more about breeds, check out Storey's Illustrated Guide to Poultry Breeds *(Storey, 2007).*

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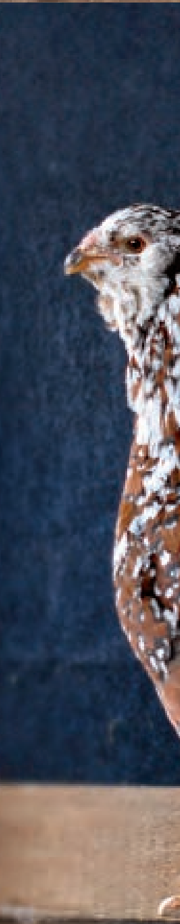

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meat. Many layer, broiler, and dual-purpose breeds are available as standards or bantams.

Most breeds lay either white or brown eggs, though the tint can vary. Welsummers, a rare dual-purpose breed, lay dark brown eggs. And both Araucanas and Ameraucanas lay blue-green eggs, though many of the chickens sold as these breeds are actually "Easter Eggers"—hybrid birds that may lay blue-green, olive, or other tinted eggs.

When building a flock, consider the behavioral and physical characteristics and climate suitability of each breed. Rhode Island Reds are a popular dual-purpose breed that lay large, light brown eggs, but they can be aggressive toward calmer birds such as Brahmas. Breeds with thicker plumage do best in cold climates, while those without a lot of extra insulation, such as Silkies, a fabulously ornamental breed with feathers that look more like fur, live comfortably in warmer climates.

Coop Criteria

A coop provides shelter for chickens, but it will also be a part of the landscape, so consider aesthetics as well as the chickens' needs when planning for one. Debbie Hoffmann, who keeps chickens in her suburban-Philadelphia back yard, paid a carpenter to build a stylish gray-and-white coop with a leaded stained-glass window installed over the nesting boxes. "I had to go before the zoning board to get permission to have the hens," says Hoffmann. "They were really dazzled by the decorative window and I had no trouble." A quick search online will turn up loads of inspiration for do-it-yourself coops. Several companies, including Wine Country Coops and Henspa, sell premade henhouses.

At its most basic, a coop must protect chickens from drafts and predators and keep them dry, warm in the winter, and cool in the summer. The coop itself should have wooden boxes filled with straw in which the hens can lay their eggs (one box for every two hens, because they will share), a place to roost off the ground, and at least 2 to 4 square feet of floor space per bird. "Crowding is one thing they don't like," says Louisiana State University AgCenter poultry expert Theresia Lavergne, Ph.D. "If they get stressed, they will peck each other." Cover the floor of the coop with 2 to 3 inches of pine shavings and dust the shavings with diatomaceous earth to help prevent infestations of lice and mites. Replace the shavings every month or two. Attach an enclosed outdoor run (8 to 10 square feet per bird) to the coop to give the hens a place to exercise while keeping them contained.

Even in a fenced back yard, it's not wise to allow chickens to range free without supervision, both for their security and the safety of your garden. Chickens love to scratch the ground looking for worms and seeds, without regard for what plants might be in their way. And in urban and suburban areas, predators come in all shapes and sizes, from coyotes to raccoons to hawks. Danger can come from above and below, so cover the run and bury its fencing at least 1 foot deep. Use ¼-inch hardware cloth for enclosures instead of chicken wire, which raccoons can easily pull apart and small rodents can squeeze through.

Clockwise from top left: *For a flock with panache, include breeds with striking plumage, such as a Golden Polish hen, a Blue Jersey Giant hen, a Silver Spangled Hamburg bantam hen, a Spangled Russian Orloff pullet, a Blue Mille Fleur d'Uccle rooster, and a White Silkie bantam rooster.*

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Starting a Flock

Deciding what should come first, a chicken or an egg, is not just a philosophical question. Choosing to start a flock with fertilized eggs, chicks, or pullets (hens under 1 year old) is an important decision. Each option has pros and cons:

EGGS

Pros: Incubating fertilized eggs and watching chicks hatch is a fascinating experience, especially for children.

Cons: It costs $40 or more to order 10 fertilized eggs from a hatchery. The eggs need to be kept in an incubator at a specific temperature and turned three times a day until they hatch. Expect a mix of roosters and hens.

CHICKS

Pros: Hand-raised chicks are often very gentle, social, and bonded with their owners. Chicks are readily available from hatcheries and at feed stores in spring. The cost is typically around $2 per chick.

Cons: Hatcheries usually sell day-old chicks only in lots of 25, which is more birds than most backyard chicken keepers want or can legally have. The live birds are shipped via the U.S. Postal Service, and you must pick them up the moment they arrive. You can pay extra for a female-only batch, but roosters often find their way into the mix anyway. The chicks must be kept in a brooder for 5 weeks before they can move out to their coop, so there is some upfront expense.

PULLETS

Pros: At this age, it is easier to tell male and female chickens apart, which nearly eliminates the risk of coming home with a rooster. Young hens, called pullets, can live outside in a coop immediately and will begin laying eggs within a few weeks, if they aren't already.

Cons: Pullets can be hard to find (local farmers and 4-H clubs are a good bet, and some hatcheries offer them), and there is often a limited selection of breeds. Pullets are also more expensive to purchase and typically cost between $5 and $10 per bird.

Care and Feeding

Chickens will dig up part of their diet—insects, slugs and snails, sand, and seeds—but you must also provide them with chicken feed. "Chickens need a quality balanced diet that's 16 to 18 percent protein and made specifically for their needs," says Phillip J. Clauer, a Penn State poultry expert, who notes that there are special diets for young chicks, growing birds, and layers. As a treat, scatter scratch—a mixture of grains and seeds—into the run, as well as organic grass clippings and vegetable scraps.

Plenty of water is especially important for consistent laying, says Clauer. "If a laying chicken goes without water for more than 12 hours, it can go out of production for weeks." Special poultry waterers ensure that chickens always have access to fresh water.

Chickens also appreciate human interaction. "This is going to sound weird, but they become your friends," says Debbie Edwards-Anderson, who, with her husband, tends a flock of hens in Brooklyn. "When I get to my garden gate, I yell out, 'Hey, ladies,' and one will run back and get all the others and they crowd at the gate with all their 'awk, awk' greeting noises. They are really affectionate in their own strange way."

Although hens can lay as long as they live (8 to 10 years isn't uncommon), they start producing fewer eggs after 3 to 5 years. When egg production drops to one or two a week, chicken owners are forced to decide whether to keep the older hens as pets or use them for meat. Edwards-Anderson's husband, Greg, who grew up with hens in his hometown of Selma, Alabama, is not squeamish about turning their hens, Hattie, Onyx, and Mildred, into stew when the time comes. But he suspects his wife will have a problem. "This is her first farm-animal experience," he explains. "They're like my babies and I love them," she concurs. ●

For more information, see Find It Here on page 78.

CHICKENS PHOTOGRAPHED AT FEATHERSIDE, THE FARM OF BARRY KOFFLER IN HUDSON VALLEY, NEW YORK (FEATHERSITE.COM)

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Like teenagers, chicks, such as this bantam Partridge Cochin, go through a gawky stage as they mature and need careful attention. To earn their love, hold the young birds often and feed them such treats as worms. ***Opposite:*** *A Barbu d'Uccle warms herself on a heat lamp. The 200-watt bulb keeps hens laying during winter.*

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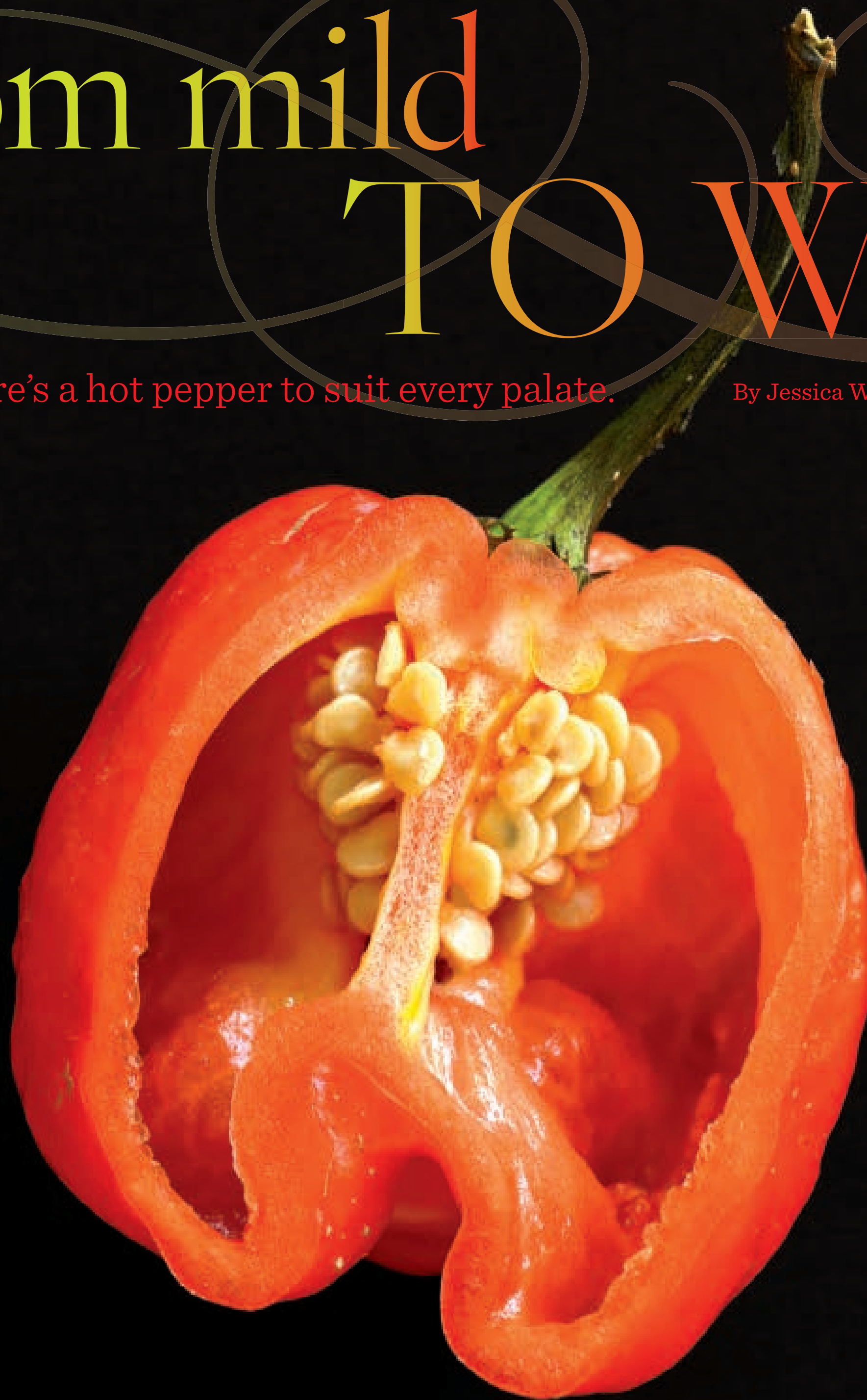
from mild TO WILD

There's a hot pepper to suit every palate.

By Jessica Walliser ~ Photographs by Mitch Mandel



Some chiles nearly set your mouth ablaze, while others deliver more flavor than fire. Hot peppers (also called chile peppers) are easy to grow, largely pest-resistant, and in most parts of the United States, quite prolific.

The burn comes from capsaicin, a compound that is found in all parts of a chile pepper's fruit, but is particularly concentrated in the seeds and ribs. The more capsaicin, the hotter the pepper. What distinguishes mild heat from maniacal is the variety's relative position on the Scoville Heat Unit (SHU) scale. The SHU rating for each variety is determined by professional testers who sample a pepper and record its heat level. The sample is then diluted with sugars until heat is no longer perceptible to the testers. The amount of dilution determines the pepper's SHU level. A sweet bell pepper, with no capsaicin, is the baseline at zero SHU. Although the scale is an excellent guide, it is subjective, because an individual pepper's heat is influenced by climate, weather, and growing conditions, as well as the taster's sensitivity.

Discover your inner fire-eater by growing the hot pepper varieties that fit your culinary tastes *and* pique your gardening interest. Here are some of our favorites. Give them a try.

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Mild Heat

'Señorita'
There are many different jalapeño varieties, but hybrid 'Señorita' is special because it has all the flavor of a jalapeño with just a hint of the heat. Most jalapeños hit 5,500 on the SHU scale, but 'Señorita' is a mere 300 to 400 SHU. Ben Maniscalco, founder of Benito's Hot Sauce in Hyde Park, Vermont, says all jalapeños are terrific choices for northern growers. "They do just fine in New England," says Maniscalco, "because they typically have an early to midlength growing season." 'Señorita' matures in about 60 days.

Poblano/Ancho
Poblano peppers are relatively mild (about 1,000 to 2,000 SHU) and measure 3 to 5 inches long. They are often harvested when green, but mature to a beautiful, deep red. Known as anchos when dried, these popular Mexican chiles are a common ingredient in mole sauce and *chiles rellenos*, peppers stuffed with cheese and fried in batter. Joe Arditi, president of Pepper Joe's Seeds in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, favors poblano peppers for their superior taste and form. "They're really the ideal shape for stuffing, although they're also great to eat raw in salads or with dip because they are so mild."

Chilaca/Pasilla
With the same SHU rating as the poblano, the chilaca is sometimes called *chile negro* because of its dark brown or purple coloration when mature. It is one of the pasilla chile peppers, another type that is commonly used in Mexican mole sauces. "*Pasilla* means 'little raisin' in Spanish," says Lee James, grower and owner of Tierra Vegetables in Windsor, California. "Pasilla dries blackish and is wrinkled like a raisin." The fragrance is much like that of a raisin, and the smoky flavor has hints of grape. Common in Mexico, they are more difficult to find north of the border.

Growing Information

All hot peppers need well-drained soil high in organic matter—and the warmer the soil, the better. Be sure the soil is at least 60°F (typically 7 to 10 days after the last-frost date in many areas of the country) before planting. Gardeners in the extreme South and parts of the Southwest can grow peppers year-round. Maintain a soil pH between 6.2 and 6.5 for maximum nutrient absorption. And give them room: Crowding decreases air circulation and increases the chance of disease. Mulch peppers with untreated grass clippings, straw, or finished compost to reduce weeding and keep the soil moist. Dryness can result in blossom-end rot; though chile peppers thrive in hot temperatures, consistent soil moisture is key. Fruit set is best when temperatures are between 70° and 85°F. If they top 80°F at night or 90°F during the day, the flowers may abort. Bud or flower drop can also be caused by stressors like drought or wind, but the problem usually goes away when the stressors are no longer present.

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Medium Heat

'Anaheim'
'Anaheim' is the best known of the New Mexico chile peppers, the fruits of which grow 6 to 8 inches long and can be used either green or red—the redder, the hotter. 'Anaheim' peppers have heavy skin and thick flesh that is particularly suited to roasting and grilling. Because their maturation rate ranges from 70 to 90 days, these peppers perform best where the growing season is a bit longer. The ripe, red fruits are often strung up to dry in a long chain called a *ristra*. New Mexico peppers range from 500 to 7,000 SHU.

'Bulgarian Carrot'
It's easy to see where this heirloom pepper got its name. With long, tapered orange fruits, 'Bulgarian Carrot' might fool one into thinking it's sweet, but at 5,000 SHU, that is not the case. The highly productive plants mature in 75 days, and since they reach only 20 inches tall, they're perfect for container growing. The bright orange color lends itself nicely to fresh salsas and chutneys. Called *shipkas* in Bulgaria, where the variety originated, these peppers are both beautiful and mouth-warming.

'Big Bomb'
This hybrid cherry pepper matures green in a mere 65 days (80 days to red), making it a great choice for northern and southern gardeners alike. The seeds of 'Big Bomb' are easy to remove, and its small, rounded shape and thick walls make it ideal for stuffing. It looks and tastes great in a pickle jar. About 5,000 SHU.

'Hungarian Hot Wax'
A reliable hot pepper even for northern climes, 'Hungarian Hot Wax' is a prolific producer of elongated, tapered pods about 5 to 6 inches in length. Popular for pickling and frying, and with SHU ratings ranging between 5,000 and 10,000, this pepper has slight sweet notes right along with the heat. It's also called a hot banana pepper because of its yellow to orange coloration that eventually ripens to a full red.

Serrano
"Serranos are one of my favorite varieties for making salsa," says Craig Andersen, Ph.D., horticulture extension specialist with the University of Arkansas. "They have heat along with a unique floral fragrance that smells like violets to me." Plus, they have thin skin, so there's no need to peel before use. Serranos weigh in at about 25,000 SHU; expect a kick, but also a unique flavor. Thin and pointy, they mature from green to yellow, orange or red. Their thick flesh doesn't dry well; use these fireballs while fresh and crisp.

'Big Red' (not shown)
A hybrid with increased disease resistance, 'Big Red' cayenne peppers can grow to a whopping 10 to 12 inches in length. Maturing to deep red, cayenne peppers are often dried and pulverized, then sold as hot pepper flakes and cayenne powder. Used in chili and other spicy dishes, cayennes boast a punch (30,000 to 50,000 SHU). "These peppers are fantastic for drying. I also roast them in the oven and use them on pizza and sandwiches," says Arditi. Another plus: 'Big Red' is more resistant to fruit rot than other cayenne varieties.

CHILACO, PABLANO, AND 'ANAHEIM' PEPPERS COURTESY MELISSA'S.COM; ALL OTHERS COURTESY JAMES WEAVER/MEADOW VIEW FARMS

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High Heat

'Indian Finger Hot' (India Jwala)
This 4-inch-long, very slender fruit with wrinkled skin is the most popular hot pepper in India, where it flavors an array of spicy dishes. It is a superhot (50,000 to 100,000 SHU), taste-bud-searing pepper that may floor even those who claim asbestos palates. As with all hot peppers, wise cooks wear rubber gloves when handling.

'Thai Dragon'
An heirloom variety, 'Thai Dragon' is a 3-inch-long pepper that's used in Asian cuisines. Exuding incredible heat (50,000 to 100,000 SHU), this pepper has excellent flavor if you can make it past the burn. One plant can produce as many as 200 peppers. Because the fruits ripen all at once, they are easily dried by pulling up the entire plant and hanging it upside down in a warm, dry place. The dried pods can then be harvested as needed.

Chiltepin (not shown)
"Chiltepins (also known as wild bird peppers) are the original wild chile pepper from which we've derived thousands of different chile varieties," says Danise Coon, program director of the Chile Pepper Institute at New Mexico State University. Chiltepins still grow wild in Arizona and Texas. These beadlike peppers have a lingering, super-intense heat (75,000 SHU).

Bird's Eye (not shown)
This tiny, fiery pepper's Thai name is translated into English as "mouse dropping pepper," and it's among the hottest chiles (100,000 to 250,000 SHU). Found commonly in Thai and Cambodian cuisine, bird's eye chile peppers lend a powerful heat and a unique flavor. Anecdotally, one should be able to eat a Thai dish made with the same number of bird's eye peppers as one's age in years.

Scotch Bonnet
Scotch bonnets belong to the same species as habaneros (*Capsicum chinense*) and pack an equally mouth-scorching punch. "They don't have as long a growing season as habaneros, though, which need it to be hot all the time, so we have better luck with them during our frequent foggy nights," notes Lee James from California. Scotch bonnets are among the hottest peppers in the world, ranging between 100,000 and 300,000 SHU, and feature in Jamaican cooking and hot sauce.

'Bhut Jolokia'
The hottest pepper on the planet, 'Bhut Jolokia' measures a breath-robbing 1,001,304 SHU! Hailing from India, the "ghost chile" is tough to grow. "'Bhut Jolokia' peppers are stubborn and not for the novice grower," says Coon. "They are an interspecific hybrid—meaning they are a cross between two different species, which doesn't happen very often. That's what makes this one unique and probably contributes to its crazy hotness." Joe Arditi says, "This is the pepper than can send you to the emergency room." •

For more information, see Find It Here, page 78.

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strawberry fields

A rural garden in England gives one family reasons to celebrate.

By Ethne Clarke ~ Photographs by Andrea Jones ~ Produced by Barbara Segall

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If anyone tells you that life is not a rehearsal or that there are no do-overs, it might be an idea to refer them to Freddie Honnor. He and his wife, Maria, and their daughters Talia (12) and Inca (14) reside in a small village snug in the gentle Lincolnshire fens, or lowlands, of East Anglia, England's easternmost region. For the past 13 years, the family has led a typical English country life, complete with a mellow brick Victorian cottage. Perfectly named Strawberry Cottage, the house had roses at the door and a meticulously kept potager garden that was Maria's pride and joy. The formally patterned kitchen garden was an extra dimension—an outside room that could be decorated and arranged as lovingly as the interior of their home. In it, Maria and Freddie raised flowers, herbs, and a few vegetables for fun, but it was a viewing garden rather than a useful one. "I was out there titivating it all the time," Maria offers, recollecting it as a bitter-sweet memory—an emblem of a period when their daughters were growing—it was, she says, "a cuddly, inward-looking, homebound time of our lives." But the idyll changed suddenly and dramatically when in 2004 Freddie was diagnosed with thyroid cancer.

With their father, Freddie Honnor, at the wheel of his beloved "heritage" tractor, daughters Inca and Talia hitch a lift across the fields at Strawberry Cottage in England's rural heartland, East Anglia.

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Above: *Talia and Inca enjoy farm life with father Freddie.* ***Top left:*** *Blackberries gathered from the hedgerows around the farm.* ***Top right:*** *The Victorian cottage and outbuildings that make up Strawberry Cottage.* ***Opposite:*** *There's room for flowers in the farm garden, as well as eggs and produce to sell from the farm shop.*

After three surgeries and the ups and downs of recovery, Freddie and Maria decided it was time to step back and consider priorities. Always a rugged and robust man, Freddie necessarily scaled down his construction and restoration business, while Maria considered the value of the labor-intensive potager garden. The couple determined that, charming though it was, an outside space where they could all relax was called for—a place for taking "holidays at home." Freddie's condition meant that the usual trips to foreign destinations were no longer an option.

With staycations the chosen lifestyle agenda, in 2008 the potager disappeared into an excavation that became a swimming pool worthy of any spa. For the girls, seeing Freddie at work dulled some of the bad memories of having seen their Dad "so poorly." For him, the demolition of the potager and construction of the pool was the physical and mental therapy he needed to overcome his own demons. With this change of direction, the Honnors had hit the reset button. Soon, they began looking for ways to extend the change into other realms of their lives.

Reassessing the sort of gardening they now wanted to pursue and the sort of life they wanted to lead, the couple looked at the fields around their cottage. Says Freddie, "I find farming actually more natural than gardening. I've spent all of my life on or around other people's farms. I used to ride on the neighbor's tractor before going to playschool and started driving the tractor in my early teens; I spent every minute I could on that farm."

East Anglia has some of the best agricultural land in England, but just as has happened here, industrial farming methods have driven many small family farms out of business. In Europe, it's reckoned that since 1950 more than 10 million farmers have left the land; in the United States, a 2006 survey by the nonprofit Farm Aid calculated that more than 300 farmers were leaving their land every week, and that of the 2-million-some farms remaining, only slightly less than 600,000 were family-run operations. Essayist and farmer

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Wendell Berry termed this decimation of rural life "the unsettling of America."

Here and abroad, the impact on rural communities has been the same: Without the stability and employment small farm operations support, the population dwindles, local businesses fold, and as the community fades, villages and towns disappear. On both sides of the Atlantic, it's the tight-knit rural communities that put the "here" in there; that make one place distinct from another and are the essence of regional character. Recognizing this, a value shift is beginning: People young and old, seeking alternatives to the bland ubiquity of urban life, or a way to connect in a more health-giving and life-validating manner, turn to the land. This is the redemptive power of gardening, whether that means raising a row of beets or a bed of roses.

Freddie and Maria found a new direction and purpose for themselves and their garden by reconfiguring their land into a "mini farm." Beginning with 3 acres of land around their cottage, the couple have gradually increased their holding to 20 acres by renting adjacent fields. Now they raise wheat and beets for fodder, and corn

Above: *Freddie and Maria Honnor in a field of sunflowers grown for cutting. The flowers supplement sales of fruit from their new orchard.* ***Right:*** *The swimming pool replaced the fussy potager garden with a place for family fun.*

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and potatoes. Six acres are devoted to various vegetable crops augmented by seasonal crops like pumpkins for Halloween.

Describing how the process of his farming life fits in with his passion for wildlife and conservation, Freddie explains, "I'm a shooting man [meaning that he enjoys hunting], so I do what I can to maintain the health of the countryside, like planting nearly 3,000 trees and bushes on our land. We sell veg from friends' farms, so it would never be possible to say that our produce is 100 percent organic. But we follow organic methods as much as possible." So, in these ways, Freddie and Maria have added variety and vigor to their lives by establishing a mixed farming operation on a small, traditional scale. Remembering his early love of tractors, Freddie's collection of period farm machinery gives visitors to Strawberry Cottage farm a chance to experience what a small mixed farm was like during the 1950s.

But the Honnors aren't locked into a "good old days" experience, and are always seeking new ways to diversify—the lifeblood of any smallholding, be it three acres or three hundred. Describing their farm animal operations, Freddie says, "We have 40 free-range hens, and the eggs sell out always. There are four Tamworth pigs, two boys, two girls. They're fab! We opened a shop last year and may start selling free-range, rare-breed pork in addition to the cakes and bread Maria bakes daily."

And then there are the recently added red deer—one stag and four hinds. "Not sure what we are doing with these yet… just looking at them at the moment as they are truly beautiful. We may do venison in the shop or just sell on the young deer as and when we get some. We'll just have to wait and see what happens."

When asked if he has advice to share with others considering a change of course by returning to the land, Freddie exclaims: "Just do it! Buy a bit of land, a small tractor, and a few animals. It's wonderful!" It's also, he would probably agree, a life-affirming course of action. •

For more information, see Find It Here, page 78.

Planned for the Future

The layout of Strawberry Cottage's gardens and farm fields grew gradually as Freddie and Maria added land by renting and purchasing acres around their original holding. This plan shows most of their property—the only things missing are the fields where wheat is grown for straw bales and the root-crop plot. Otherwise, Strawberry Cottage is now a small integrated farm that is embracing organic practices as the Honnor family embraces all that rural life has to offer.

***Right:** The original garden at Strawberry Cottage was a brick-pathed traditional potager, or kitchen garden, that Maria spent hours working on just to keep it looking picture perfect. But all that changed when her husband faced a life-threatening illness, and the couple reassessed what was truly important to their happiness.*

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Planting in ways that mimic the complexity of nature encourages resilience—the ability of an ecosystem to remain productive despite disturbance.

Natural Design Brings Resilience

Resilience is a quality of elasticity, buoyancy, or flexibility. For ecologists, who study how living systems work together, it's the ability of a system to remain productive despite external change or disturbance. Ecological resilience is based on the interplay of many living parts and is an underrecognized hallmark of well-functioning organic gardens and farms. They show us that planting in ways that mimic the complexity of nature is our best hope for long-term success—with our land and in our communities.

Biologically, resilience is the difference between an acre of genetically modified (GM) corn and an acre of traditionally tended *milpa*, the Mayan mix of beans, corn, squash, and other crops, akin to the Native American concept of the Three Sisters.

The productivity of that biologically barren monoculture of GM corn is a mirage, relying on manufactured inputs of fertilizer, chemicals, and unnatural seeds for survival. A break in the supply chain or a dry season cripples the crop, which must mature all at once or be a loss for the year. Once harvested, the proprietary seeds are illegal to replant and are of diminished eating value, victims of the push for high volume rather than food quality.

By contrast, a *milpa*'s crops provide different kinds of nutrients that complement one another for great benefit, just as they help each other grow in the field. Corn, the trellis, elevates bean, the nitrogen-maker, and expands its exposure to the sun. Both crops benefit from the dense and weed-suppressing foliage of squash. Besides three kinds of human food borne over a period of months, the synergetic trio provides habitat for amphibians, birds, and insects. The broad leaves form a canopy to protect soil microbial

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life from baking sun and compacting rain. Healthy soil is the foundation and the result of this sustaining system, which, each season, yields seeds one year better adapted to the place where they grow.

Well-balanced plant combinations protect against typical stressors:

Dry times. The water-holding capacity of soil rich in organic matter sustains crop yields even when rainfall is short. Long-term soil building deepens the soil's aerobically active layer and improves its physical structure, which favors root development. More roots, pushing deeper, with more fine root hairs, vastly increase each plant's ability to absorb moisture and nutrients.

Pests. The Rodale Institute's experience in Senegal illustrates how a wisely developed crop mixture works as a powerful polyculture. Mixing plots of corn, peanuts, and millet (a grain) with tall hibiscus-family crops builds in safeguards: It reduces plant stress through shading and wind-buffering, provides more flowering periods to feed beneficial insects, and introduces new plants to serve as nonhost species to thwart the spread of insects. Each crop contributes something to stabilize the whole system against environmental shocks and flux.

Left and above: *Corn, beans, and squash form the Mayan crop mix* milpa. *When grown together, these plants benefit the soil, the surrounding ecosystem, and each other.*

COURTESY OF MILPAPROJECT.COM

High heat. Eliminating spaces between crops where leaf canopy is sparse shelters soil from the sun (and keeps weed seeds from germinating). Buckwheat quickly covers soil between early and late crops, while cucumbers grown between sunflowers keep their shallow roots shaded. By creating a moist microclimate at soil level, the leafy cover benefits all roots and allows them to better sustain their plants.

Climatic extremes. Hotter one year, wetter the next, drier and colder the next: From Bangladesh to Texas, extreme years are becoming more routine. Native and naturalized species opportunistically exploit available resources in hard times. They may yield less than imported crops under ideal conditions, but prove their worth in years of weather extremes—the ones that are becoming more common.

Be on the alert for new plant combinations that thrive through the extremes. Plan for "overyielding," where two or more crops grown together each produce at a higher level than if they were planted alone. Add a flour corn to your squash patch, geometrically interplant head lettuce and onions, or create wide beds of okra or popcorn with edamame soybeans.

Resilience is also the human ability to recover from misfortune without being overwhelmed or acting in dysfunctional or harmful ways. Learn from your garden: Diversify, put down roots, associate with those who fill in your places of need. Be resilient. *—Greg Bowman, Communications Manager, Rodale Institute*

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Increase Tomato Yields

Q. For the past 2 years, my tomatoes have grown giant vines but almost no fruit. What am I doing wrong?

Steve Howell
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

A. Extreme temperatures, insufficient water, and inadequate sunlight (less than 6 hours a day) can all cause tomatoes to reduce fruiting, but poor fruit set coupled with vigorous foliage growth is a classic sign of excess soil nitrogen. “If there is excessive nitrogen available in the soil, the plant can, and will, use that to grow a great big plant that can support a lot of fruit,” explains Jeanine M. Davis, Ph.D., an extension specialist for North Carolina State University. That would be fine, except that the plant often spends so much time and energy growing lush foliage that fruit set is delayed or reduced.

Providing tomatoes with enough nitrogen to encourage steady, but not overly vigorous, growth is a matter of good soil management. “In my own garden, I incorporate aged manure in the fall and sow a cover crop of crimson clover and rye, sometimes with some Austrian winter peas,” explains Davis. “In spring, I till in the cover crop and plant my tomatoes.” To supplement the nutrients the soil already provides, pour a cup of diluted fish emulsion around the base of each plant when it flowers and again when small fruits appear.

Ask* Organic Gardening *is edited by Willi Evans Galloway. Have a question for our experts? See “How to Reach Us” on page 10.

Too much soil nitrogen encourages tomato plants to produce lush foliage, but little fruit.

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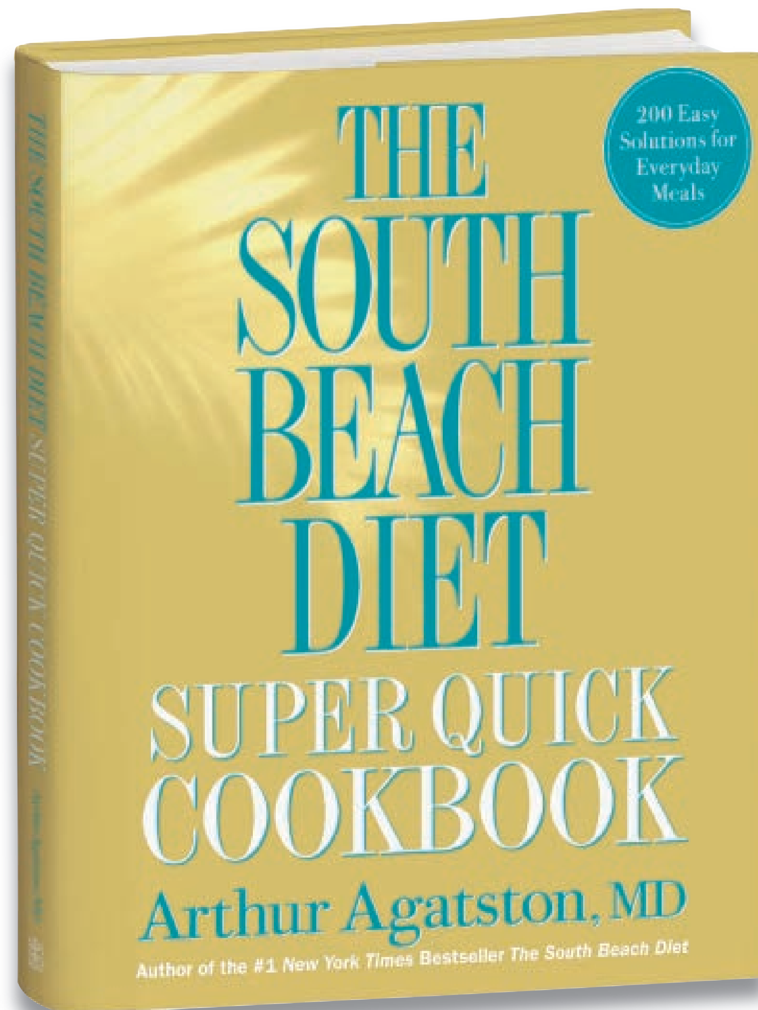

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Keep zinnias healthy and blooming with a few commonsense garden practices.

Zinnia Problem Solved

Q. I grow zinnias from seed every year, but the plants' leaves always turn brown. I water almost daily. What is wrong?

Vicki Parker
Outer Banks, North Carolina

A. Bacterial leaf spot (*Xanthomonas campestris* subsp. *zinniae*) and alternaria leaf spot (*Alternaria zinniae*) are two common zinnia diseases that cause leaf browning and reduced plant vigor. Warm, humid weather, overhead watering, excessively moist soil, and plants crowded too close together encourage the development of both diseases. Leaf-spot bacteria and alternaria fungi overwinter in crop debris left in the soil, but contaminated seed is another common source of infection.

All varieties of the common zinnia (*Zinnia elegans*) are susceptible to both diseases, while *Z. haageana* 'Persian Carpet' and *Z. pumila* 'Cut and Come Again' are susceptible primarily to bacterial leaf spot. To prevent problems with either disease, start by ordering seed from companies that offer a 100 percent guarantee on their seeds, such as Territorial Seed Company and Johnny's Selected Seeds. Avoid sowing seed in a spot where zinnias have grown in the past 3 years, and choose varieties that are immune or highly resistant to bacterial and alternaria leaf spots, including zinnias from the Profusion series (*Z. elegans* × *Z. angustifolia*) as well as Crystal and Star series zinnias (*Z. angustifolia*). Reduce hospitable disease conditions by growing zinnias in a spot that gets at least 6 hours of direct sunlight each day. Space the plants 12 inches apart, water them at their base, and irrigate deeply rather than frequently (soaker hoses or drip irrigation are ideal).

ROB CARDILLO/ROB CARDILLO PHOTOGRAPHY

Hot or Not

Q. Does it matter if I put my compost pile in a sunny or shady location?

Brian Campbell
Denver, Colorado

A. "A lot of people think that the sun plays a role in the composting process because compost piles heat up," says Sejal Lanterman, coordinator for the Rhode Island Master Composter & Recycler Program. "But the heat is actually produced by microorganisms that are decomposing the waste in the pile." Compost materials break down most efficiently when the pile stays about as moist as a damp, wrung-out sponge. Piles placed in sunny sites can be harder to manage, because they tend to dry out faster than those in shady locations. "A perfect happy medium would be a spot with filtered sunlight," says Lanterman. "But it is most important to put your compost pile in a place that's easy to get to, so that taking material out there becomes routine."

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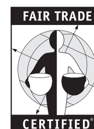

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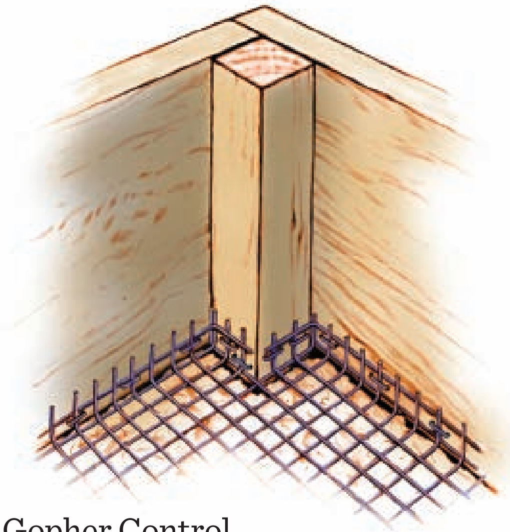

MICHAEL GELLATLY

Gopher Control

Q. Gophers destroyed our vegetable garden last year. We tried electronic repellents, traps, and smoke bombs—nothing worked. What do you suggest?

Nancy Hilty
San Anselmo, California

A. Gophers (*Thomomys* spp.) are found throughout the western two-thirds of the United States. These rodents create a system of burrows that run 6 to 12 inches below the ground. Gophers feed mainly on roots that they find as they excavate, but sometimes tug whole plants into their tunnels from below. They also eat plants above ground, staying within a body-length's radius of a hole. "Next to trapping, exclusion is the most effective way to deal with gophers in a vegetable garden," says Roger Baldwin, wildlife advisor for the University of California Cooperative Extension. There is no evidence that other deterrents are effective. To protect edible crops, build wooden raised beds and line the bottoms with ¾-inch galvanized-wire hardware cloth or special "gopher wire," available at farm-supply stores. Staple the wire to the underside of the raised-bed frame at 2-inch intervals. Attach it firmly to the corners. Make the beds at least 12 inches tall to prevent gophers from sneaking over the sides.

For more information, see Find It Here, page 78.

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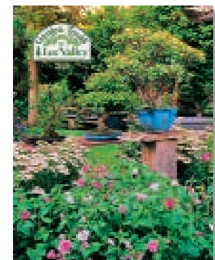

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Strawberry Root Weevil *Otiorhynchus ovatus*

Strawberry root weevils destroy more than strawberries; mint, raspberries, and rhododendrons, among other plants, suffer their invasions throughout most of the United States and Canada. In late spring, and doing most of their work at night, the brownish-black ⅓-inch insects chew ragged edges in young leaves. Even though the leaf damage is mostly cosmetic, it's wise to take control of the situation before midsummer, when the adult weevils lay eggs in the soil around plants. The resulting larvae—white, legless, and C-shaped—feed on plant roots and crowns, stunting growth, depressing yield, and potentially killing the plants.

At the first sign of leaf damage, an after-dark stroll through the garden with flashlight in hand will help gauge the extent of the invasion.

The leaf damage caused by adults is mostly cosmetic, but feeding larvae can kill plants.

"There can be just a few insects, or seething hordes," says Sharon Collman, an extension agent at Washington State University who has studied root weevils for decades. She places open pizza boxes under infested plants early in the evening. An hour later, she shakes the plants, causing weevils to fall into the boxes, after which she scoops them into a disposable, lidded cup. A night in the freezer is a sure way to kill insect pests, she says—but be sure to label containers. Collman favors "Do Not Open. You Don't Want to Know."

For infested strawberry beds, autumn is a good time to strike back. Collman advises mowing the plants down like grass, exposing the crowns to sun.

A better solution for serious infestations is to remove and destroy strawberry plants in the affected area, till the soil to disturb overwintering larvae, and plant a cover crop. Locate new strawberry beds as far away as possible, and replant the old bed with a crop that is not susceptible to strawberry root weevils, such as sweet corn or pumpkins. Crop rotation, as usual, prevents a multitude of sins.

Two hopeful, if less proven, strategies for coping with root weevils:

- Apply parasitic nematodes in spring.
- Erect 2-foot fabric barriers around new beds. Adult root weevils can't fly, and as the theory goes, they can't climb that high either. —*Robin Chotzinoff*

Ragged leaf edges are a telltale sign of root weevils, even when you don't catch the culprits in the act.

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Enter your favorite recipe in the ORGANIC Gardening Holiday Recipe Contest

Holiday celebrations bring families and friends together to create memorable moments of fun and warmth, and are also occasions to share good food, lovingly prepared. At *Organic Gardening* we share your pleasure in serving up healthy meals prepared with fresh, wholesome ingredients and invite you to enter our 2010 Holiday Recipe Contest by sending us your favorite holiday recipes.

Call for Recipes

We invite you to submit your recipes for entrees, side dishes and desserts that incorporate fresh food from your garden or farmers market and have become an integral part of your family's holiday meal traditions. We will select three winning recipes to be profiled in our December 2010/ January 2011 issue.

TO ENTER

To enter, please email your recipe and a .jpg photo to holidayrecipecontest@rodale.com. Recipes must be original and previously unpublished. Limit 1 entry per person. Winning recipes will be judged on originality, taste, ease of preparation, presentation, and use of at least one of the following sponsor products:

GRAND PRIZE

An all-expenses paid trip to the fabulous Rancho La Puerta resort, profiled in our February/March issue. This trip for two will include airfare, accommodations, meals, access to fitness classes and facilities, unlimited spa services, and a cooking class for two.

1ST PRIZE

A chef's package including a 10-piece Wusthof Classic Ikon Block set and a collection of Rodale cookbooks valued at $750.

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NO PURCHASE NECESSARY TO ENTER OR WIN. A PURCHASE WILL NOT IMPROVE YOUR CHANCES OF WINNING. Void Where Prohibited. Contest begins at 12:00 AM ET on 3/1/10 and ends at 11:59 PM ET on 7/3/10. Contest open to legal residents of 49 United States & DC (EXCLUDING RESIDENTS OF AZ), & Canada (EXCLUDING RESIDENTS OF PROVINCE OF QUEBEC) who are over 18. Winning recipes will be selected based on originality, taste, ease of preparation, presentation, most original recipe submission and use of at least one sponsor(s) product. Limit one (1) entry per person. At least one dinner, one side dish and one dessert recipe will be selected as winners. Rodale Inc., 33 East Minor Street, Emmaus, PA 18098-0099, is the operator of the Contest. Visit www.organicgardening.com/readerrecipecontest for a complete set of official rules.

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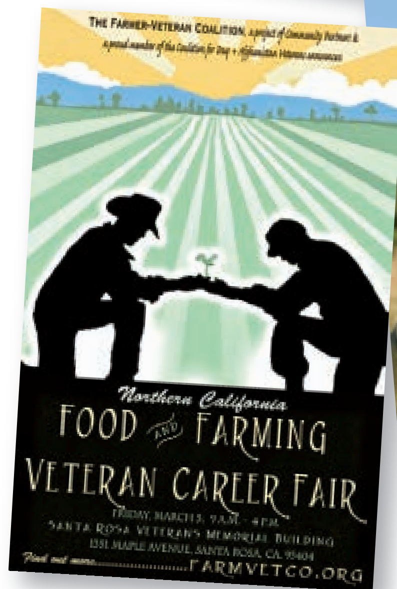
Veteran Soldiers Become Novice Farmers



Soldiers returning from overseas to the economic stalemate at home are finding solace and jobs on farms across the country, thanks to the nonprofit Farmer-Veteran Coalition (FVC).

FVC executive director and organic farmer Michael O'Gorman says there is an agricultural niche that returning veterans seem to be uniquely able to fill. On the one hand, there is a shortage of young farmers in rural America; on the other hand, the support system and demand for locally grown and organic food are burgeoning. "The incredible sense of hard work, self-sacrifice, and service developed in the military is perfectly suited and immediately transferable to farming. And there have never been so many opportunities for new farmers," O'Gorman explains.

More than 130 veterans and active-duty service members have contacted the coalition, and about 30 are already on farms or in the process of starting their own farms. Matt Mccue, an Iraq war veteran and co-owner of Shooting Star, a community-supported agriculture (CSA) farm in Fairfield, California, began collaborating with the coalition when he returned from doing agricultural Peace Corps work in West Africa. He says it was the thought of working with the nuts and bolts of society that inspired him to farm.

"All societies work from the soil, essentially. When the soil is degraded, that is when civilizations collapse," says Mccue. "The farmer-soldiers I've met have a lot of unique tools and skill sets. There is a huge potential for former military personnel to find solutions to some of the big-picture problems and food-security issues facing society."

O'Gorman says the connections being made through the coalition have been rewarding for everyone involved. "There are a lot of groups out there to help veterans. But in a way, the farming community needs them. And that is often what is most healing—they are heroes many times over." *—Amanda Kimble-Evans*

For more information, see Find It Here on page 78.

Clockwise from top left: *Marine Corps veteran Jeremy Lopez apprenticed in a California vineyard. Adam Burke, injured twice in Iraq, has started a blueberry farm with his wife, Michelle. Matt Mccue and Lily Schneider operate a CSA farm. A Farmer-Veteran Coalition poster.*

COURTESY OF FARMER-VETERAN COALITION

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"It's just the right thing to do..."

No More Subscription Cards!

It's official...***Organic Gardening*** subscribers will no longer have to fight with those pesky little subscription cards that fall out of their favorite gardening magazine. No longer will tons of unused gift and subscription cards end up in landfills. *(Though we're sure that most of our readers recycle or compost them!)* Now, the magazine that helped spark America's environmental consciousness is one of the first to pull those cards from subscriber issues—forgoing a historically profitable way to sign up new subscribers.

Founder J. I. Rodale would be proud

"My grandfather, J. I. Rodale, would be very happy that we are no longer using these cards," said Maria Rodale, CEO. "Now that it is so easy to go online, the decision to eliminate them from subscriber copies is just the right thing to do." It was J. I. Rodale who in 1942 started ***Organic Gardening*** to promote healthy, nutrient recycling–based gardening. It was J. I. Rodale in 1969 who started the *Environmental Action Bulletin,* a forum for activists to network. It was J. I. Rodale and later his son Robert who championed worldwide the causes of land preservation, energy efficiency, and recycling on many different levels.

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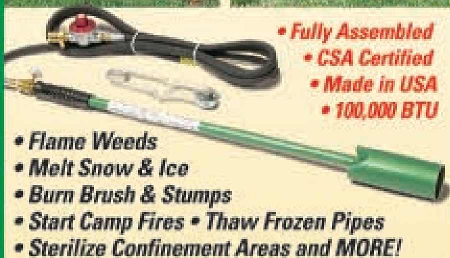

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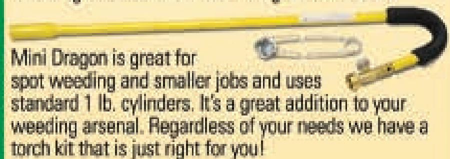

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Raccoons don't seem as cute after they've eaten all your sweet corn.

ANIMAL TRACKS

Raccoon

In the 1920s, Rebecca the Raccoon roamed the White House as a favored pet of President Calvin Coolidge and First Lady Grace Coolidge. More commonly, these omnivorous, ring-tailed mammals reside in cities, woodlands, marshes, and plains from southern Canada to northern South America and from coast to coast. *—Sharon Tregaskis*

THE FACTS

• Raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) owe their hunched walk to back legs that are longer than those in front. The animals' especially dexterous forepaws make speedy work as they gather food, including insects, fruit, nuts, frogs, fish, and a favorite delicacy, sweet corn.

• This bandit-masked relative to the weasel and bear has a sharp mind and makes a quick study, with a recall of up to 3 years and a knack for opening locks. Deterrents like scarecrows, streamers, and motion-activated floodlights lose their power as soon as these nocturnal marauders discover no corresponding danger. To protect vegetable gardens, install two electric wires (6 and 12 inches above the ground) and power them from dusk to dawn.

• Adult male raccoons range a mile or less in any direction in the city, but their country cousins can defend a territory covering more than 6 square miles. These wandering creatures rarely maintain a den for more than a few nights, though nesting females may remain a month or longer.

• Prevent nests in attics and chimney openings by stapling ½-inch-mesh hardware cloth over potential entrances—just make sure any visiting raccoons have departed first.

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Backyard Evolution

Backyard bird feeders appear to be responsible for splitting the central European blackcap warbler (*Sylvia atricapilla*) into two populations, which could feasibly become different species if they continue to breed separately. The warblers, which traditionally summered in Germany and wintered in the western Mediterranean, discovered easy winter pickings at bird feeders in the United Kingdom in the 1960s.

Over time, some birds began spending winters in the U.K., eating mainly seeds and suet provided by humans. These warblers have developed different beak and plumage color, narrower beaks, and rounder wings than those of birds that dine on warm-climate fruits in winter.

Because the trip from the U.K. back to Germany is a shorter flight than the traditional migratory route, warblers that wintered in the U.K. are paired up by the time their relatives return from the Mediterranean. Researchers say this head start on seasonal breeding creates reproductively isolated groups, which reinforces the birds' physical differences.

Backyard birders surprised to find that hanging out feeders full of seeds in the winter can affect the feathered populations so dramatically might consider creating a bird-friendly native garden that harmonizes with the seasonal fluctuations of the region instead. —*A.K.E.*

Could backyard bird feeders affect evolution?

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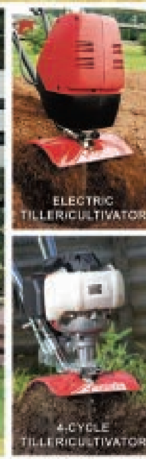

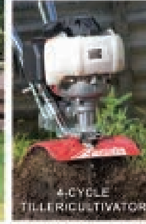

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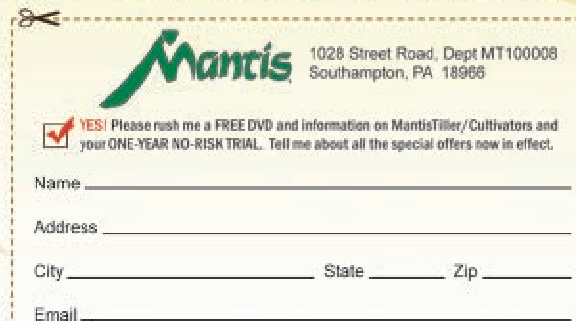

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Bamboo

Bamboo is renewable and durable, so it's become a popular alternative to wood floors, but walking on it is only one way to enjoy bamboo. We've discovered a variety of products that capture the beauty of this Asian native while retaining its organic origins. Also, bamboo's tensile strength is greater than steel, making bamboo products extremely durable. Sturdy, attractive, and renewable? Count us in. —*Katie Walker*

Eyeglass Frames

Amy Sacks designs these stunning unisex frames, with hand-carved, stained bamboo temples. Order as reading glasses or sunglasses, or add prescription lenses. The Bamboo Masa comes in many colors, including Moss, shown. *$155, amysacks.com*

For more information, see Find It Here, page 78.

Compost Crock

Stash this crock under the sink to handle scraps for the compost pile. It has a 3½-quart capacity and a removable plastic liner for easy cleaning. Its snug-fitting lid holds odors inside. *$40, gardeners.com*

Bamboo Goo

Clean and restore moisture to bamboo or wood items with this natural blend of beeswax, carnauba wax, and vegetable-derived ingredients, all of which are food safe. *$10 for 8 ounces, greenfeet.com*

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THOMAS MACDONALD

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YOU HAVE THE POWER TO PROTECT OUR SEED HERITAGE

Join the Sacred Seeds Challenge

with New Chapter and *Organic Gardening*

Global climate change, loss of habitat, aggressive agricultural practices, pollution, over-harvesting and the loss of generational medicinal wisdom are threatening our culturally and scientifically significant plant species, and the medicinal wisdom that surrounds them. Without intervention, we could be facing a dramatic global loss of biodiversity.

Semillas Sagradas

In response, New Chapter and the William L. Brown Center at the Missouri Botanical Garden have joined together to create the Sacred Seeds project, a world-wide network of seed sanctuaries devoted to preserving biodiversity and plant knowledge.

Fruta milagro, The Miracle Fruit

The first Sacred Seeds Project garden was established at Luna Nueva, New Chapter's organic and Biodynamic® rainforest education center and Ecolodge in Costa Rica. The garden contains over 250 traditionally important plant species, and serves to protect and celebrate the biological diversity and cultural knowledge of these plants in Costa Rica and worldwide. Dedicated to protecting endangered medicinal plants of the neotropics, this sanctuary is one of the world's largest and most comprehensive sanctuaries for endangered plant species.

Join the Challenge

The roots of Sacred Seeds have taken hold, and with the guidance of the William L. Brown Center at the Missouri Botanical Garden, Sacred Seeds Sanctuaries have been established all over the world, including Vietnam, Peru, and Madagascar. Because organic gardens and gardeners are a key part of the answer to protecting traditional medicinal seed heritage, Organic Gardening is pleased to offer our readers an exciting new opportunity to take part in the Sacred Seeds project to establish 10,000 Sacred Seeds gardens globally.

Participation is simple

- Study your region's herbal history—the herbs and foods that native people and your ancestors relied on to sustain health.
- Plant them and tell us about it.
- Visit **OrganicGardening.com/SacredSeedsChallenge** to register your garden, gain valuable regional plant information, read about other seed sanctuaries, and share knowledge with forum members.
- Share your Sacred Seeds story with us to be entered to win one of four trips for two to New Chapter's Luna Nueva organic farm in Costa Rica in July 2011.

Be part of the solution by joining the Sacred Seeds Challenge—and partner with citizens world-wide in the movement to save earth's biodiversity and the traditional medicinal knowledge that sustains us all.

Enter the Sacred Seeds CHALLENGE

Every family has their own Sacred Seeds story. Some families preserve seeds from their harvest and pass them from generation to generation to use in preparing a cherished family recipe. Other families grow herbs to be used in their family's own medicinal remedies. We want to hear your family's story.

Visit OrganicGardening.com/SacredSeedsChallenge and tell us your Sacred Seeds story in 250 words or less. Include photos related to your story, or tell us your story in a 3 minute video segment. Entries must be received by October 1, 2010, and will be judged on creativity, originality, relevance and clarity. The top 4 winners will win a trip for 2 to New Chapter's Luna Nueva organic farm in Costa Rica in July 2011. Winning stories will also be profiled in our February/March 2011 issue.

ENTER TO WIN

All expenses paid, 5 day/4 night, trip for 2 to Finca Luna Nueva Lodge, a certified organic and Biodynamic® spice estate in the heart of the Costa Rican rainforest. Spend 4 nights at the beautiful facilities located just miles from Arenal Volcano. While on the trip you will have the opportunity to experience first-hand how organic gardening can preserve critical biodiversity.

Rules

No purchase necessary to enter or win. A purchase will not improve your chances of winning. Void where prohibited. Contest begins at 12:01 a.m. ET on March 1, 2010 and ends at 11:59 p.m. ET on October 1, 2010. Contest open legal residents 49 United States & DC (excluding residents of AZ) and Canada (excluding residence of Province of Quebec) who are over 18. Visit www.organicgardening.com/sacredseeds for official rules. Rodale Inc., 33 East Minor Street, Emmaus, PA 18098-0099, is the operator of the Contest. The editors of *Organic Gardening* magazine, representatives of New Chapter, the Missouri Botanical Garden and the New York Botanical Garden shall select the winner of the Contest based on creativity of submission, relevance to the topic, and originality.

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What's the secret to a lush lawn? If you ask most lawn services, chemical insecticides, herbicides, and fertilizers are the only route to success.

But they're wrong. It's possible to have a lawn that's green and soft underfoot and that carries an added bonus: Unlike a chemically doctored lawn, it's not linked to cancer and birth defects. "Going organic doesn't mean going ugly," says Paul Tukey, executive director of SafeLawns.org, a nonprofit organization that promotes responsible lawn care. And, as Tukey points out, organic lawn maintenance means less work and expense. Here are his tips for going organic.

Choose the right grass. Grass choices depend on the climate, sun exposure, and traffic patterns in your yard. A turf species that's suited to your growing conditions is more likely to stay healthy and fend off weeds. Your extension agent can help make the right pick.

Mow high. Set the mower to cut at 3 inches—the highest setting for many mowers. Taller leaf blades promote stronger roots, making the lawn less vulnerable to drought, insects, diseases, and invasive weeds. Taller grass also shades the soil surface, reducing water loss. Wait until grass blades top 4½ inches before mowing again.

Leave the clippings. Grass clippings act as natural fertilizer, returning nitrogen and phosphorus to the soil. Despite what you've heard, they don't contribute to thatch.

Water wisely. Water deeply (1 inch of water penetrates 4 to 6 inches into the soil) and less frequently to promote deep root growth. Water in the morning, when the air is still and when less water is lost through evaporation and transpiration.

Finally, consider eliminating turf entirely in favor of native vegetation. Depending on your location, that could mean a desert landscape of carefree cacti, a wildflower meadow, or a shady woodland. A lush lawn can add to a home's appeal, but so can a grass-free landscape that turns the neighbors green with envy. —*Denise Foley*

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Selective thinning of apples in spring results in larger fruits at harvest. Thinning also helps prevent the collapse of limbs that are overburdened by too much fruit and breaks the cycle of alternate-year bearing.

Thinning Apples

In late spring, just after their delicate petals fall to the ground, apple trees often drop unpollinated, pea-sized fruits from their branches. This is followed in June by a larger drop of fruits up to an inch in size. Many apple varieties produce more fruit than the tree can support, so the "June drop" allows the tree to shed excess fruit and devote its energy to the remaining apples on the tree.

Even with this natural thinning process, it is important to remove additional apples by hand to promote larger fruits and consistent fruit production, and to ensure the health of the tree.

A heavy crop of apples in one year can begin a pattern of biennial bearing, which occurs when fruit trees alternate between years of prolific and sparse production. When the tree expends energy on ripening an excessive quantity of fruit, it has less to expend on developing the following year's flower buds. Selective hand-thinning to remove some of the current crop encourages more buds for next season.

When to thin. Early thinning (before the June drop) promotes better flower-bud development, which typically occurs 6 to 8 weeks after full bloom—the period when the majority of the tree's blossoms are open and intact. In order to stimulate bud development, hand-thin apples when they are no larger than a dime. Later thinning improves the size and quality of the current crop but doesn't promote next year's buds.

How to thin. Apples set fruit in clusters. When thinning, first remove diseased or misshapen fruit. Then leave the largest fruit in the cluster and remove all others. Aim to keep one apple every 6 inches along the limb. To prevent damaging the spur—the stubby, modified branch where flowers and fruit form—use pruners to clip off the undesired apples.

Thinning other fruits. Apples are not the only fruits in the home orchard that benefit from hand-thinning. Space plums, peaches, and nectarines 4 to 6 inches apart; for apricots, leave 2 to 4 inches between fruits. —*Willi Evans Galloway*

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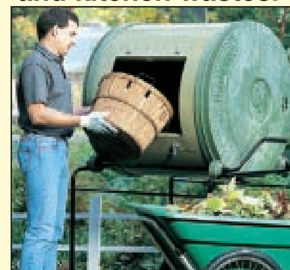

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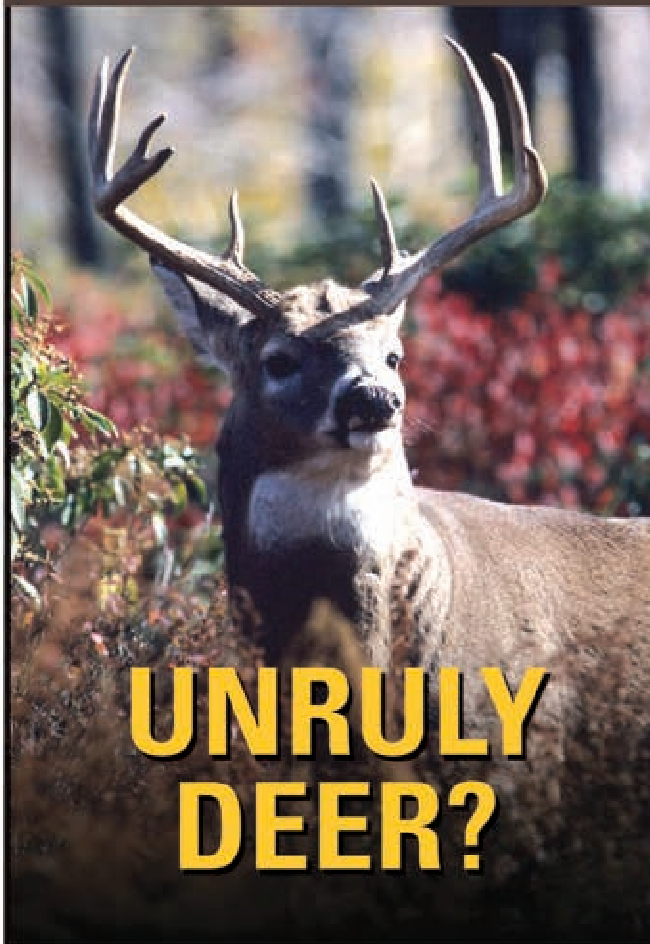

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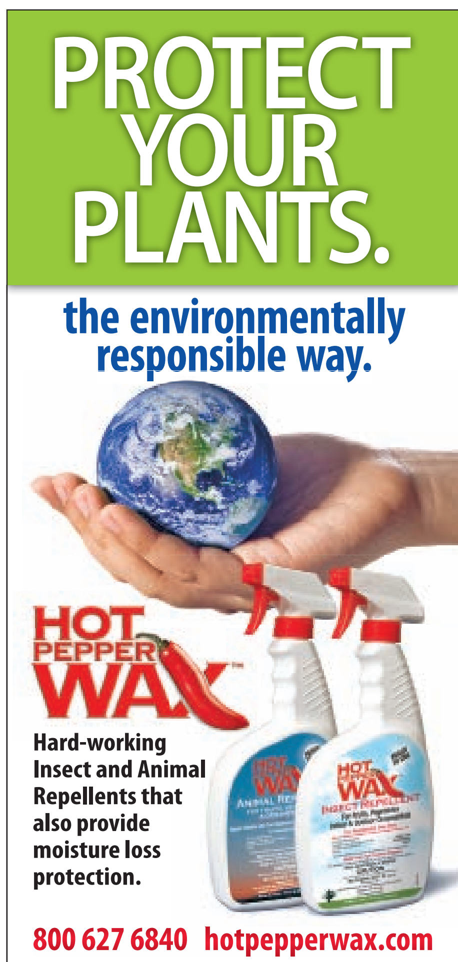

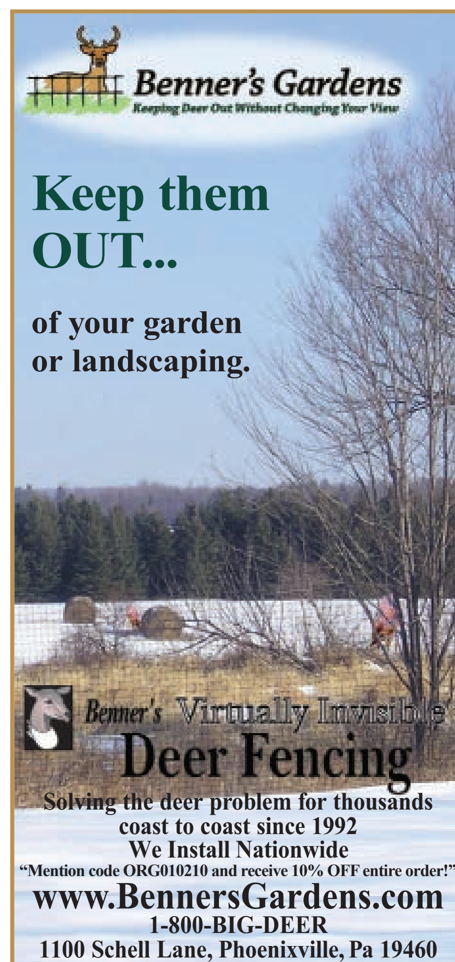

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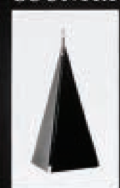

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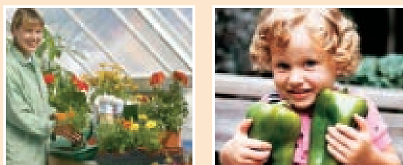

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Colleen Miko, Certified Professional Horticulturist: **Colleen's, A Landscape Design Company,** 253-906-6151, *colleenmiko.com*. Architectural slabs: **Mutual Materials,** 888-688-8250, *mutualmaterials.com*.

Simply Fresh: The Red Queen, p. 20
'Ruby Queen' corn: **The Cook's Garden,** 800-457-9703, *cooksgarden.com*; **Reimer Seeds,** *reimerseeds.com* (no phone orders).

Flower Power: Serene Green, p. 24
Cushion moss: **Moss Acres,** 866-438-6677, *mossacres.com*.

Tomato Trifecta, p. 30
Vegetarian Suppers from Deborah Madison's Kitchen (Broadway, 2007, $19.95): *deborah madison.com*. ***The Herbal Kitchen: Cooking with Fragrance and Flavor*** (William Morrow Cookbooks, 2005, $34.95): *amazon.com*. Tomato seed: **Baker Creek Heirloom Seed,** *rareseed.com*; **Local Harvest,** *localharvest.org*; **Marianna's Heirloom Seeds,** *mariseeds.com*, 615-446-9191; **Territorial Seed Co.,** 800-626-0866, *territorialseed.com*; **Tomato Growers Supply,** 888-478-7333, *tomatogrowers.com*.

Coming Home to Roost, p. 36
Coops: **Henspa,** Egganic Industries, 800-783-6344, *henspa.com*. **Wine Country Coops,** 707-829-8405, *winecountrycoops.com*. Chick sources: **Cackle Hatchery,** 417-532-4581, *cacklehatchery.com*; **Murray McMurray Hatchery,** 800-456-3280, *mcmurrayhatchery.com*; **My Pet Chicken,** 888-460-1529, *mypetchicken.com*; **Welp Hatchery,** 800-458-4473, *welphatchery.com*.

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Peppers: **Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds,** 417-924-8917, *rareseeds.com*, **W. Atlee Burpee & Co.,** 800-333-5808, *burpee.com*, **Reimer Seeds,** *reimerseeds.com*.

Strawberry Fields, p. 48
The Honnor family welcomes visitors by appointment. Mail: Strawberry Cottage, Millgate, Whaplode St. Catherine, Spalding Lincs PE12 6SF; email: princefrederick@btinternet.com. **Farm Aid** reports on issues affecting U.S. farmers at *farmaid.org*.

Ask Organic Gardening: Gopher Control, p. 58
Gopher wire (4-by-100-foot roll, $129): **Peaceful Valley Farm Supply,** 888-784-1722, *groworganic.com*.

Earth Matters: Veteran Soldiers Become Novice Farmers, p. 66
Farmer-Veteran Coalition, 530-756-1395, *farmvetco.org*.

Maria's Farm Country Kitchen: Make Mine Organic, p. 80
Organic Manifesto (Rodale, 2010, $23.99): *RodaleStore.com* and major book retailers.

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Make Mine Organic

An excerpt from Maria Rodale's latest book

Members of the Rodale family have never been short of good ideas, nor have they ever shied away from sharing their insight and inspiration with their followers. I use that term precisely to express that organic is a movement, and its principles and beliefs are what more and more people are adhering to each day. A manifesto has been defined as "a powerful, logical essay that assembles a set of existing ideas and creates a new one." This perfectly describes Maria Rodale's *Organic Manifesto,* excerpted here. Her aim in writing this book was, she says, to "arm us all with the most powerful tool of change, information." By setting out "a lifetime of thinking," Maria tackles head-on the deluge of disinformation about the state of the global food supply and clears the way for us all to understand how important it is for us to demand organic. *—The Editor*

We can feed the world with organic foods and farming. Despite the propaganda churned out by biotech and chemical companies, organic farming is the only way to feed the world. Transferring our toxic agricultural system to other countries is sure to bring about a global environmental collapse. The energy required, the toxicity of the chemicals, and the degradation to the soil will be fatal. Instead, we need to export the knowledge we have gained about successful modern organic farming and then help others adapt these practices to their climates, regions, and cultures.

Organic is more important than local, but local is also important. Numerous studies have shown that organic is much more critical when it comes to carbon than local. In one study commissioned by PepsiCo, an independent researcher determined that the most significant component of the carbon footprint for Tropicana orange juice (a PepsiCo product) wasn't transportation or manufacturing, but "the production and application of fertilizer" required to grow oranges.

The local food movement has been very important in revitalizing small farms and communities and bringing fresh, seasonal foods to many more people. However, as a means of saving the planet and improving our health, it only goes so far. Local chemical farming contaminates local communities and actually increases residents' carbon footprints and energy use. Local *organic* farming cleans up communities and decreases their carbon footprint and energy use....

Organic farming increases and protects the planet's biodiversity. If you are an animal lover of any kind, organic is for you. A recent report by the International Union for Conservation of Nature documents that "life on earth is under serious threat." The report found that one-third of amphibians, at least one in eight birds, and a quarter of mammals are on the verge of extinction. Half of all plant groups are threatened. Development and logging are responsible, but agriculture is as much, if not more, to blame. As I have explained, the toxic effects of chemicals have reduced all species' abilities to survive and reproduce.

Growing organic is not going backward. When I proposed to chemical farmers that they switch to organic methods, they frequently replied, "Do you mean going back to the old way?" No! I believe in applying the best of modern science, technology, and resources to constantly improve our understanding of nature and our ways of growing and producing food. I also believe we cannot let corporations profit from killing us. *—Maria Rodale*

For more information, see Find It Here, page 78.

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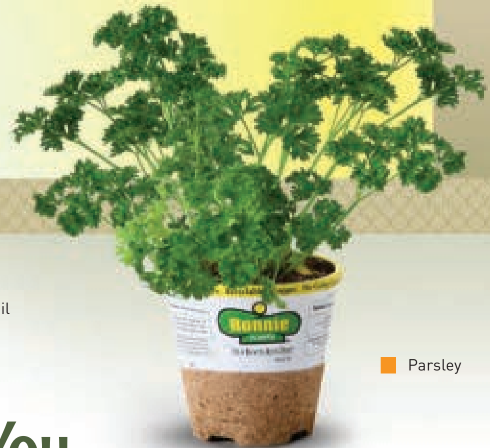

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