

VICTORY

GARDENS FOR PEACE BROADCASTER

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2019 was a year of inspiring travels, fun in the classroom and community celebration. I was fortunate to travel to biointensive projects in Peru and we said farewell to some amazing students and apprentices. Graduating apprentices Brooke Eichenlaub and Gabriella Cobb, Chilean interns Camila and Ariel and former Assistant Garden Manager Kimberley Fisher- it's been a joy working with you and we wish you the best of luck in your new endeavours! We are excited to welcome our new staff members Sydney Grange, Elise De Cuba and Carol Bebb- it is going to be an exciting year to come with more stories, more fun and more work to be done!

Matt Drewno, Victory Gardens for Peace

The Victory Gardens for Peace Seed Bank



Seeds at the market in Urubamba, Peru (left). Our former intern from Oaxaca Diego Hernandez and sharing seeds near Cuzco, Peru (right).

VGFP SEED BANK TOPS 650 VARIETIES AND INCREASES CAPACITY

By Matt Drewno, Manager VGFP Seed Bank

In 2019 we were fortunate to expand both our seed production and our capacity to store our seeds safely. We increased our seed collection thanks to generous contributions from local seed stewards Anna Garza, Robert Kuhn, Erica Harrold, Jaime Jensen, Molly Bee, Maggie Barlett, Morgan Dashko, Sakina Bush, and Ron Ortman. We have new varieties of fava beans, carrots, quinoa, barley, oats, lettuce, sprouting broccoli, beets, squash, celery and corn. We will again be present at the first and last farmers markets in Mendocino in 2020 and are available anytime for you to access our seeds- just send us an email and schedule an appointment. You can choose the seeds you like and we will mail them to you- all free of charge (donations gladly accepted!)

Some highlights from this past year:

- 100+ New varieties acquired at seed swaps, travels to Peru and thanks to wonderful local seed savers!
- Participation in National Seed Library Summit held in Santa Rosa
- Seed cleaning workshops in January
- New catalogue and mailing system set up
- Moved collection into a safer and more organized location at the Inn

Looking forward into 2020:

- Seeds exchanges at the first and last farmers market in Mendocino, our garden tour and at our seed cleaning workshops
- Sustainable gardening and seed saving classes at our 9-part Saturday Summer Course starting last weekend in May
- Trialing and saving of new varieties
- Expansion of seed growing capacity and increase in community participation

Let us know if you would like to contribute any of your seeds to the community seed bank, we will take care of them, propagate them and make them available to others free of charge. If you would like to make a financial donation to this great effort to preserve local seeds and make them accessible to our community, email Info@Victorygardensforpeace or call (847)404-2586. Thanks!

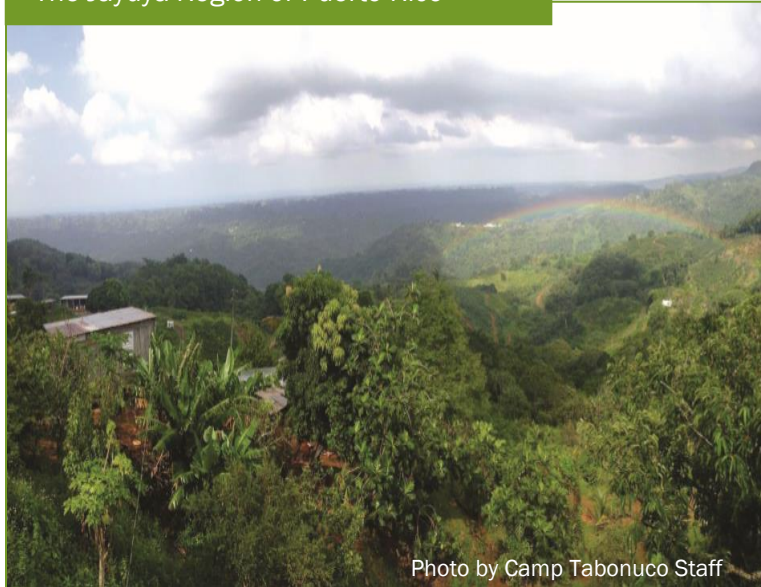


Photo by Camp Tabonuco Staff

“I, like many of my peers, was frustrated by the exorbitant amount of imported food making it into Puerto Rican supermarkets and onto dinner tables, most of which could be grown in the rich, diverse soils of the island during its year-round growing season.”



GB IN THE AFTERMATH OF HURRICANE MARÍA

By Elena Vanasse Torres, 8-Month Intern EA/VGFP

(This article was originally printed in Ecology Action's Garden Companion Spring 2019 Edition. It has been reprinted here with permission)

Somewhere, 102 km from the urban center of San Juan, past the cerulean waters of Puerto Rico's northern coast, beyond the vast furrow of the central karst mountains, four months after the passing of Hurricane María, a yautia [*Xanthosoma*] plant emerges from dense red clay subsoil. This is the land where my great grandparents planted roughly five cuerdas (a cuerda is approximately 0.97 of an acre) of coffee trees, sugar cane, plantain, and countless fruiting trees, and where, decades later, an old yautia seed would be reborn in an unexpected path.

I have the great privilege of being able to live and work on these five cuerdas of land that have been in my family for three generations, land that prior to notions of private property and ownership was tended by my ancestors, Taino peoples of Borikén (Puerto Rico). Growing up witnessing the abundance of delicious tropical foods that the land can offer, I, like many of my peers, was frustrated by the exorbitant amount of imported food making it into Puerto Rican supermarkets and onto dinner tables, most of which could be grown in the rich, diverse soils of the island during its year-round growing season. When Hurricane María swept over Puerto Rico, amidst countless, seemingly uncountable deaths, catastrophic flooding and landslides, and an overall apocalyptic veil over the so-called Free Associated State, the vast majority of Puerto Ricans lost reliable access to food. Because of massive crop failure, and the fact that, on average, ninety-five percent of food in Puerto Rican markets is imported, the people were at a loss. Puerto Rico's agricultural potential remains largely untapped. A comprehensive publication explores the fact that

potential working lands, meaning lands well-suited for both mechanized and non-mechanized agriculture encompass 42 percent of Puerto Rico's land area. Yet, only 22 percent of total land area, or 1977 square kilometers, is actively being farmed or pastured. According to an NPR article, every acre of arable land on the island has the potential to be as much as three times more productive than any corresponding acre in the United States, making it curious that you are more likely to find eggs imported from Vermont, corn from the American Midwest, and batata from Costa Rica than anything homegrown at the local supermarket. In part, this can be traced to the Jones Act, American farming subsidies, as well as cheap labor in developing countries. Moreover, only three percent of employed people in Puerto Rico are working in the agricultural sector, and not even half a percent of total female employment is in farming.

The fact that such a small number of the Puerto Rican populace is dedicated to farming could be connected to a wide-scale social project taking place in the 1940s, Operation Bootstrap, designed by the US government to move Puerto Ricans out of the countryside, shifting them into the urban, industrial sector to produce material goods, especially textile and garment production. A consequence of Operation Bootstrap caused fertile agricultural land, much of it previously dedicated to sugar cane cultivation, to lie fallow, while farming and the Jibaro (traditional Puerto Rican farmers) identity were rendered obsolete and "low-class". In fact, even before the hurricane, 83 percent of the island's farms were smaller than 50 cuerdas (48 acres), and abandoned family farms were all too common. For a time, it felt as if my family's farm was on the brink of contributing to that statistic.

After my great grandparents passed, more than half of the growing area they established was lost to a thicket of wild grasses. The river at its basin became clogged by the spread of Climbing Dayflower (*Commelina diffusa*), greatly affecting the rest of the watershed. Their son, my grandfather, a physician in the San Juan metro area, was spread thin commuting every weekend just to keep things afloat. Next in line is my mother's generation, who overwhelmingly made new lives in the United States—among the 5.1 million Puerto Ricans living in the US, the median age of island-born Puerto Ricans is 47 years.

Despite the lack of tending, and later, a category-five hurricane, the fruiting trees and bushes planted and tended by my great grandfather recovered somewhat after four months, more so after a year: papaya, acerola cherry, grapefruit, pomarosa, and the kind of mango that, picked ripe, is seemingly more delicious devoured—never neatly sliced. Eventually, there was just enough substrate for the yautia to come around, roots finding a safe haven in the deep soil; so did the yuca (*Manihot esculenta*) and malanga (*Colocasia sp.*). My grandfather hired locals to replant banana and plantain, among other staples my family brings from the countryside to their home in San Juan.

Two things become apparent: For one, the land has the miraculous ability to heal itself. Second, it is in the hands of the millennial generation [aged between 22 and 36 as of 2018] to not only salvage abandoned land and become stewards of family lands, but also, to mediate the effects of Hurricane María and learn to flourish in a world where tropical storms are projected to only increase in occurrence and intensity.

The effects of Hurricane María brought to light the long-standing food security and food sovereignty crisis in Puerto Rico. Agroecología, meaning an ecological way of managing agricultural and forest systems, had already explored this vulnerability and spread its teachings throughout the organic farming enclaves on the island. The work of Boricuá, El Josco Bravo, Plenitud, Siembra Tres Vidas, and many others has been integral in both rooting and refreshing the movement. Before the hurricane, brigadas, a contextually relevant model of bringing multiple farmers together for collaborative projects, were already taking place since the 1970s. But when the hurricane decimated so many farms' seed stock, Boricuá mobilized to put quality heirloom seeds from their collection directly in the hands of farmers across Puerto Rico. Siembra Tres Vidas made a distinguished effort to organize in their community of Aibonito, rebuilding people's homes, and helping establish the community food hub that provided food and dinners for people in need. The University of Puerto Rico, Utuado horticulture and farming

program is promising, too. Every year, a handful of young farmers emerge equipped to hit the land. If anything, the crisis brought many more people together to rethink how to feed themselves and their communities.

The GB method has great potential in the Caribbean, encouraging a much needed closedloop system in designing a garden on limited land area. Double- and triple-digging while incorporating quality, home-grown compost has already been shown to radically improve soil structure. This practice, combined with intensive and companion planting, will eventually capture carbon from the atmosphere and increase crop yields, as has been demonstrated at a Biointensive site in Veracruz, Mexico, Bosque de Niebla, whose climate is similar to that of mountainous Puerto Rico. While the teachings of Agroecología are spreading throughout the island, GB would complement the movement by offering a data-driven approach to growing a nutritionally complete diet as well as offering opportunities for collaboration through a worldwide network of farmers and gardeners, including ECOPOL, the Latin-American stronghold for Biointensive agriculture. Ecology Action's tight methodology and global presence particularly resonated with me, and after completing the Three-Day GROW BIOINTENSIVE Workshop in Willits, CA, in 2018, I decided to pursue the 8-Month Internship on the more humid Mendocino coast.

Within the scope of five years, as a caretaker of my ancestral land, I hope to have taken the skills and connections gained from an 8-Month Internship to ultimately rehabilitate the land and watershed; build rich, resilient soil; become mostly self-sustainable in reducing all imported soil inputs; grow a nutritionally complete diet for my family, community, and self; create an extensive seed library, and connect with a larger network of Biointensive, agroecological farmers and gardeners in the Caribbean and beyond, especially through seed exchange.

I dream of creating a network of farmers that form a collective seed bank and support network through work parties and community dinners. One of our aims should be to integrate youth participation, and ultimately, feed central Puerto Rico, thereby increasing the sovereignty of the region. I share, along with my peers, the dream of a food-sovereign rural Puerto Rico.

Months after limited connectivity, from spotty cell service to the widespread lack of electricity on the island, I was able to reach my grandparents in San Juan. We talked about my new life in Northern California, about their waiting in line all day to get diesel to power their generator, and finally the conversation came to the farm. Reluctantly, I asked my grandfather how things were growing back. "The farm has seen better days," he said, "but it's doing alright." Like a yautia plant, the land finds its way.





5 BIOINTENSIVE FARMERS REUNITE TO TRAVEL PERU

By Matt Drewno, VGFP Mini-Farm and Seed Bank Manager

In January of 2019, Ecology Action Farmer-Teachers took a 2-week trip to Peru to explore the countryside in search of seed, soil and culture. I was joined by former Golden Rule Mini-Farm Field Coordinator Lucas Howerter (2012), former Jeavons Center Mini-Farm Managers Ryan Batjiaka (2011) and Eric Buteyn (2013), videographer, Matt Anderson, and Diego Fragoso Hernandez, former Ecology Action Intern (2013) and Biointensive Farmer-Teacher from the Chinampas, Mexico City. We hiked ancient trade routes and ruins and met with fellow seed savers and biointensive leaders growing the biointensive movement in South America.

Biointensive Farmers and Teachers in Peru



Ryan, Matt, Diego, Yessica, Matt, Eric and Lucas at Eco-Huella. Photo by Int

Our base camp was the Sacred Valley surrounding Cuzco, Peru- the cradle of the Incan civilization and others more ancient. We visited our friends and former Ecology Action interns Julio (2007) and Yessica Cuyusumpanqui (2005), their partners, the Andean Alliance for Sustainable Development, and community organizer Alain Dlugosz Salas. They guided us through the terraces, temples and campesino culture in the area. Our trip was full of good luck, warm laughter and big dreams for the future of biointensive work in North, Central and South America.

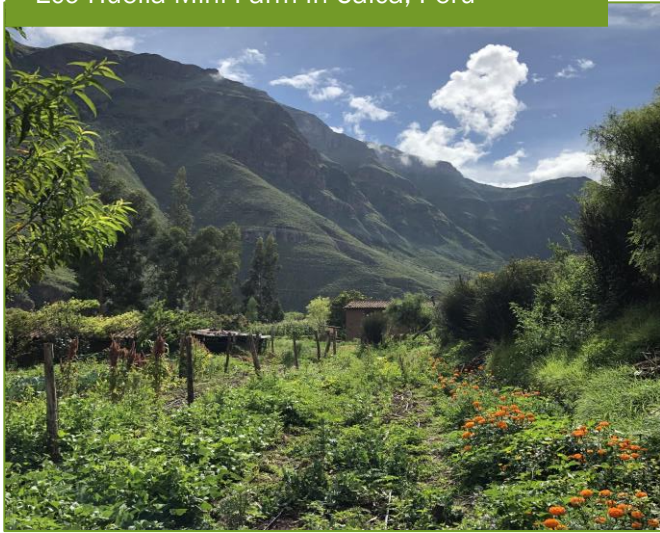
Julio and Yessica's Mini-Farm, *Eco-Huella* is located in the small town of Calca. They work in partnership with the Andean Alliance to help set up greenhouses and teach the Biointensive method to *Quechuan* farmers. The Quechuan people are indigenous to the high Andes and are known for their work with llamas and alpaca and their cultivation of quinoa, potatoes, fava beans and maize. Julio and Yessica are themselves Quechuan and work directly with these farmers to integrate traditional and biointensive techniques to help campesinos adapt and farm more sustainably during these rapidly changing times.

"Ultimately", Julio shared with us late into the night, "the goal is to help the campesinos and rural villages restore a sense of dignity and integrity to their culture."

Our evenings were full of laughter and delicious homegrown meals straight from the garden. Maize was served at every meal- sometimes toasted, steamed on the cob, or roasted. Sweet potatoes, potatoes and ulluco were commonly served root vegetables. Delicious, nutritious meals were accompanied by hours discussing the challenges and the work that needs to be done. It was agreed that the challenges faced by the Quechuan Campesino culture is not an isolated situation, that it is in fact common globally and that all of our work together, and around the world, is interconnected and equally important to preserve the precious cultures which steward and honor the Earth.

"Ultimately", Julio shared with us late into the night, "the goal is to help the campesinos and rural villages restore a sense of dignity and integrity to their culture."

Eco-Huella Mini-Farm in Calca, Peru



One of the great challenges for *campesinos* is mirrored in many other indigenous cultures around the world. Decades of policies favoring resource extraction over conservation and human rights have made the livelihood of the *campesino* more difficult. The youth migrate to the cities leaving an aging population to work the land and carry on the culture. These cultures are as precious as any—rich in tradition, bright in color, and intimately tied to the land. We were humbled to share time with several wonderful *campesinos* who graciously shared their seeds and stories. We learned climate change is having a major effect in these sensitive mountain regions. Despite the challenges, you can see the strength and joy in their faces. They truly are a humble and resilient people with a precious culture.

After a few days of settling in at *Eco-Huella*, we visited the ruins of Moray, where terraces that follow the valley contours served as agricultural research stations for developing and adapting the many unique crops to this region. It is said that as the sun moves across the horizon these terraces store heat and cold, and the convection of air and moisture create microclimates which mimic a broad array of the microclimates found throughout the region.

Staple crops such as maize and quinoa, luscious root crops like potatoes, *ulluco*, *yacon*, *oca*, *mashua* (edible nasturtium root) and *tarwi* (an edible lupine bean) were grown on terraces and adapted to the conditions. As unique varieties became genetically stable and suited to the different microclimates within the terraces, they were taken to specific growing regions throughout the Incan Empire. Sadly, the terraces are no longer used today. However, it isn't hard to imagine people working the Earth, tending to the crops and the celebrating the great harvest that must have been had at this special place.

Agricultural Ruins at Moray, Peru



Photo by Matt Drewno

Most of the Sacred Valley is well above sea level, starting at 5,000'–8,000' with peaks above 10,000'–15,000'. It took several days to acclimate to the altitude- just walking the streets in town required careful breathing. We visited Machu Picchu (see picture on the cover of this issue), a mysterious and sacred site for the Incas. It is so beautiful that you can hardly believe what you're looking at. The architecture and elaborate system of drains and aqueducts baffle the mind and the way the ruins are so perfectly perched on this peak leaves you speechless. Situated at the confluence of rivers, surrounded by rings of lush and dramatic steep mountains the place radiates serene, awe-inspiring beauty.

We also squeezed in a hike to Lares over the mountain pass; an ancient and beautiful trek through lush valleys and highland villages. As we passed one such village, a mother and daughter came running to greet us and seize the opportunity to share their crafts.

After a night's rest in Calca, we hiked a mountain peak and met an old *campesino* who lived alongside a canal winding from the source of a spring hand dug some 500 years ago by the Incans. He was quiet, and observant. These people worship the sun. They live within its cycles and work the Earth in tune with the cosmic rhythms. Their faces reflect the golden light unobscured by the thin atmosphere high in the Andes.

It was a full moon that night, and the sunset which proceeded it cast a golden glow that lit the moss beneath us. It was as if we were surrounded by gold. We had each gone off on our own for some quiet solitude for those few remaining hours of light that day. It was a magical evening. Later that night it rained hard and the wind blew. We camped somewhere between 14,000 and 15,000 feet elevation. We only slept about an hour or two but when we climbed out of our tents that morning we stood with gratitude in front of a full panoramic view of the spectacular peaks, lakes, waterfalls and valleys around us.

The Sacred Mountain outside Calca, Peru



Photo by Matt Drewno

Our next stop was to visit a fellow biointensive farmer and seed saver in Tippon named Alain Dlugosz Salas. Alain is a friend of Diego's and a leader in the Latin American seed-saving network *Red Semillas* (red means network in Spanish). After an hour bus ride and wonderfully warm greeting by Alain and his family we were served warm cacao and fresh baked bread and a delicious soup of roots and vegetables from the farm. There were bright and beautiful flowers everywhere.

There are some things you need to know about Alain. He carries a visionary spirit. Several years back he was guided to the town of Tippon by a dream. In this dream he was growing ancient plants out to seed in a ruin nestled within the hillside of the Sacred Valley. The ruins sat beneath a large peak and his seeds became the foundation of a new community. The dream was powerful for Alain and five months ago he and his family found the spot, purchased the land and began his great work.

The name of Alain's project is *Arariwakuna* which is Quechuan for 'Watchmen'. In Quechuan culture the *Arariwakunas* guarded the *chakras* (small plots of land which are biointensively farmed by the community) and the crops from animals and thieves. The *chakras* are still farmed today, though the tradition of the *Arariwakuna* has faded in the Sacred Valley. This tradition inspired Alain to name his project *Arariwakuna*. It was clear as we walked through the community and greeted neighbors, that Alain takes his role seriously and with great love for his community.

Arariwakuna Gardens in Tippon, Peru



Alain and his daughter are center, 2nd row

The project consists of a Biointensive demonstration mini-farm, a seed bank, which houses over 1,000 varieties of seeds and a restaurant which serves traditional Incan food including a breakfast fava bean soup-drink that is absolutely delicious!. The name of the seed bank is *Casa de Semillas* (House of Seeds). We were astonished to realize Alain and his family had accomplished so much in such a short time. They have converted an underground swimming pool into a greenhouse, established the restaurant with a cob-ramada for serving, created a community soccer field and built a beautiful stone and cob house.

Later that afternoon we sat with Alain as he shared how the model of traditional Incan society has an important role to play in organizing and empowering *campesinos* who are struggling to maintain their traditional ways. According to Alain, in this ancient model, those who work the land are most prized and respected. He went on to explain how the Incan grew *mani* (the peanut plant) and how this crop symbolized the structure of Incan society.

Alain giving a history lesson in his study



Photo by Matt Drewno

The peanut is the seed of the *mani*. As the *mani* plant matures, peanuts are formed underground in a radius off the main roots of the plant. The nuts are seeds which will go on to form plants of their own. This outwardly branching growth pattern forms networks which perpetuate the ecosystem around the plant. In the same manner, small Incan communities were connected to the larger centers of Incan culture and connections were maintained through networks of communication, irrigation and trade. Many of the priest class of Incan society were found buried with gold and silver peanuts or jewelry containing peanut symbolism.

When I asked Alain how he sees *campesino* culture returning to this resilient form of community, he responded with a smile, stating “This is the role of *Casa de Semillas*, the seeds and saving of seeds spreads just like *mani* and the basis of our culture is seeds, without which we do not have life, the sharing of food or the structure of community.”

The next day we visited Tippon, the site of an ancient agricultural station similar in function to Moray. This is the place Alain had seen in his dreams. We hiked a network of ancient ruins linked by small aqueducts reminding us of the conversation on *mani* we had the day before. These aqueducts ran in perfectly constructed channels from the ridges of the mountains to small communities perched on the cliffs. Often these channels then branched off into individual structures which seemed to be sites for communal use and ceremony. Again, the architecture was amazing—the stonework absolutely perfect.

After coming around a beautiful set of ruins, the view opened up to the valley of Tippon below. A massive construct of terraces flanked the surrounding hills. Canals run just as they had hundreds of years ago, streaming along the edges of the terraces and cascading from one down to another. As the rainy season saturates the earthen terraces, they become reservoirs. Throughout the dry season the canals which run along the borders of each terrace create a humid microclimate. This, combined with the underground reservoir means they had to irrigate less and most of the year, not at all. The engineering of the site resulted in a diversity of microclimates making this site suitable for an astonishing variety of crops. As we walked the ruins, Alain excitedly greeted each of the docents and they laughed together as Alain declared he was going to start growing food and seed here again. The docents were local community members who once farmed the terraces before the government expropriated the site and declared it no longer suitable for farming, only tourism. They gave the community members a choice—a job as a docent to oversee the care of the ruins, or to leave with nothing. Most chose to stay and be docents. The terraces, seeded with perennial grass, are maintained by mowing and the thousands of tourists each year are walking all over the ancient soils, desecrating and compacting the soil structure so carefully created and maintained over hundreds of years.

The Agricultural Research Station at Tippon, Peru



Photo by Matt Drewno

After a long night of storytelling and music, the goodbyes the following morning were bittersweet. We had to return to Cusco to catch our flights and were sent off after a lovely meal. Alain had invited some friends who were chefs and representatives of the local Slow Food Movement. They had prepared a variety of traditional roots including ulluco and oca and we ate a cacao cake in honor of another guest's birthday. She had just finished writing a book with her partner on traditional campesino skills and culture. We sang together and laughed, giving big hugs and relishing in the goodbyes.

As I look back, I realize that throughout our travels in Peru the people we met and worked with shared a common vision—the *need to care* for soil and resources, save seeds, and return a sense of dignity to campesino culture which has for millennia subsisted on protecting the land. As changing times bring new generations to carry on these traditions, a great gap exists. There is a similar gap here in America, where the average age of our farmers is near 65. As a human race we must ask the question, who will care for our soil, water, and seeds? *We have to—you and I.* After all, we are all dependent on our Mother Earth and we all share the responsibility of honoring the great work ahead—a work more ancient than the Inca, full of color and joy and the celebration of life.

It was an honor to travel with my friends who I view as heroes in their own right. We have already decided to make this trip annually, and next year we are heading to Oaxaca to visit some of the Biointensive projects in that region, collect seeds and of course sample some of the locally distilled mezcal. My traveling companions want to extend endless gratitude to those who took care of us on our trip—Julio, Yessica, Alain and all of the campesinos who took a moment from their work to share stories of life and work. May we all travel well!

“As a human race we must ask the question, who will care for the soil, water and seeds? *We have to—you and I.* After all, we are all dependent on our Mother Earth and we all share the responsibility of honoring the great work ahead—a work more ancient than the Inca, full of color and joy and the celebration of life.”



THE GARDEN POST

Each newsletter we invite a local gardener to share their story, their garden.



THE GARDENER'S SHADOW

By Evan Mills, Mendocino gardener

It's somehow been 40 years since, as a freshman at UC Santa Cruz, I picked up my first copy of "How to Grow...." A sketch of vibrant beds on the cover gave me that "I can *DO* this...." kind of feeling. Wandering around one of Chadwick's early gardens on campus completed the spell.

I double-dug a garden for my mom that summer, and created others at rentals during college. But life soon interfered, and, for decades after that, I didn't do more than compost my kitchen waste and run a few containers of tomatoes here and there. My anaerobic career spent in airplanes and fluorescent-lit conference rooms didn't lend itself to having dirt under my fingernails. Now, at a saner stage of life, my favorite place to be is with my hands back in the garden.

At home in Mendocino I've carved out an area of about 800 square feet in the only sunny part of the property and established about 300 square feet of outdoor beds, plus food-bearing vines and trees. Next to the garden, I built a greenhouse sheltering 50 square feet of beds out of locally-milled "salvage lumber" (trees blown over in storms).

There was one plant, however, that presented complications. Vibrant redwoods, towering 150 feet to the East of my garden didn't throw much shade, but their insatiable roots were another matter. I've heard that redwood roots will grow up downspouts just to live in moist gutters and digest the fine organic debris that settles there.

An old barn was coming down in my area and the first-growth lumber got a second life in the form of 18-inch-deep raised beds. Given the root situation, I reluctantly laid weed cloth and gopher mesh under the beds, but the reality was that they would become completely inundated with fine roots very year or two. Much of my water and soil nutrients were being exported by those trees. I've now raised the beds above the ground with a sandwich of concrete board and cinderblocks. No more weed cloth; no more wire mesh. I don't take separating the growing soil from the earth lightly, but also don't want to cut down my beautiful, carbon-sequestering redwoods.

As an energy and climate scientist, I revel the low carbon footprint of the garden. No petrochemical inputs, no fuel-powered equipment, far less transportation energy than purchased food, no need for electricity-sucking refrigerated trucks or retail sales cases, and, over time, an opportunity to sequester lots of carbon in the soil. I chose to bring in (local, organic) soil originally, but the family now generates plenty of fodder for compost and I grow more and more cover crops (oats, fava, purple vetch). Since veggies introduced into the solid waste stream contribute to methane production in landfills—a more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide—I'm extra dedicated to compost-making.

We're within eyeshot of the ocean, and have a gentle climate. Frosts are very rare, but so is the honest heat that lets one grow hot-weather crops. This is kale country, but I grow an arbor of tomatoes and cucumbers and do all my starts in the greenhouse.

Evan Mill's Garden in Mendocino, California



Photo by Evan Mills



Potato harvest ala Francesca

Photo by Evan Mills

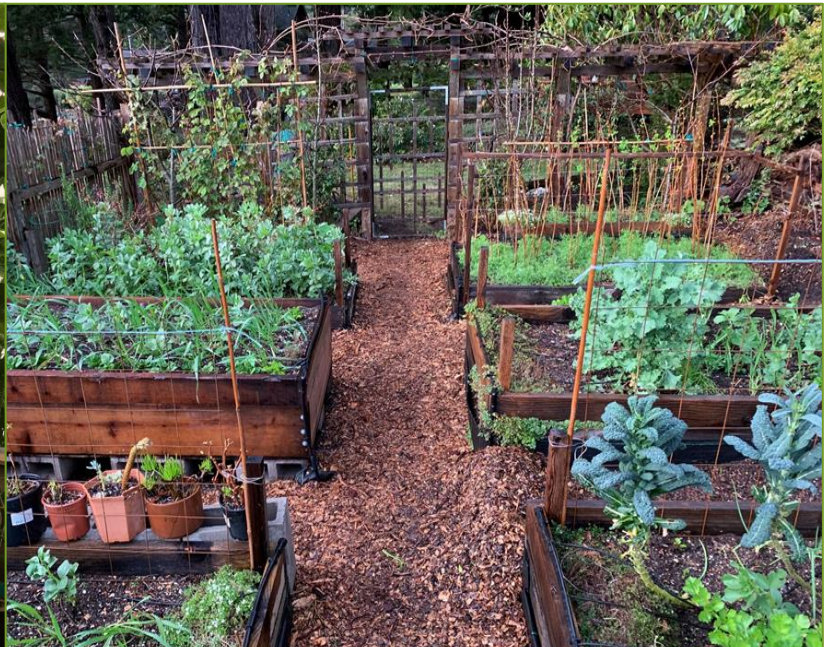
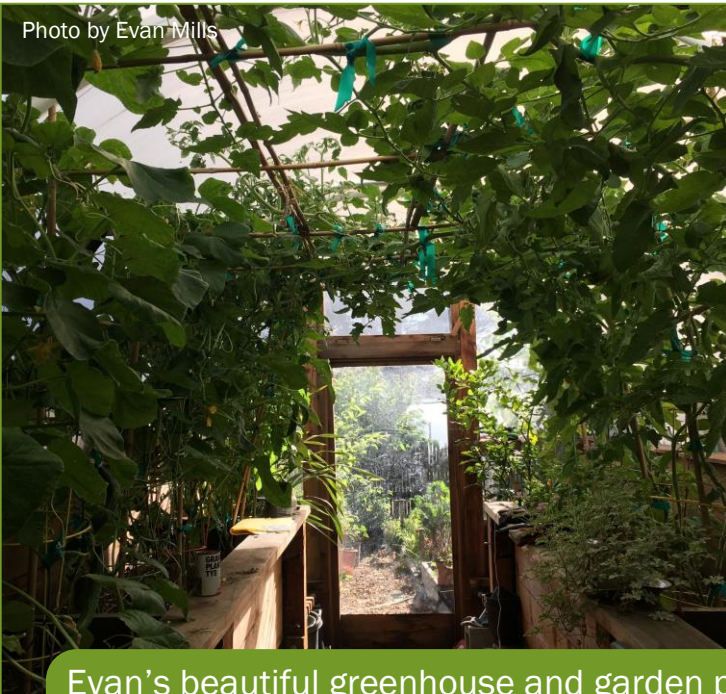
The garden is diverse. Summer yields crops of potatoes, garlic, onions, and the favas from the plants that weren't previously sent to the compost pile. Fall is about finishing the harvest and getting some brassicas in the ground (when I remember) and planting alliums. Winter is about cover crops, kale, and late-harvested carrots and pruning my trees and berries. Spring features lettuces and radishes, and fruit tree blossoms.

Golden raspberries fill one bed. Blueberries fill another, and populate recycled oak wine barrels on the perimeter. Strawberries have a half bed of their own, and freeload around the blueberries. Nine fruit trees circle the garden, which I keep pruned in dense, low, vase-shaped forms. Kiwis cover a heavy arbor stretching either side of the main gate, and a couple of guavas further define the entry.

Recent workshops on intensive gardening and seed saving at Victory Gardens for Peace Mini-Farm (a satellite center of Ecology Action out on the coast) refreshed my knowledge of John Jeavons' wonderful system. Matt and his energetic team are inspiring and just plain nice to be around.

For me, it's not foremost about food production. It's about connecting to the land, resting my spirit, quieting my mind, exercising my body, cultivating fodder for conversation other than the episodes of *Orange is the New Black*, and showing my kids that food comes from the earth not from stores.

A great friend of mine says that the best fertilizer is a gardener's shadow. My most precious moments are when I slow down and focus on a particular spot to pluck a weed, flick a clod of dirt away from a young sprout, or just smile at the beauty of a vibrant veggie. Those little moments make my own life more fertile as well.



Evan's beautiful greenhouse and garden provide food and grow soil year round on the coast

Photo by Evan Mills

VICTORY GARDENS FOR PEACE SEED BANK BROADCASTER

The Victory Gardens for Peace Seed Bank has continued to expand in 2019. Thanks to the efforts of those local gardeners and farmers, our current inventory has tripled to over 650 varieties as of fall 2019.

All of these seeds are procured, conserved and made available to our community for free of charge. Donations of seeds and dollars are gratefully accepted and keeps our community seed bank growing strong!

But our seed bank is about more than the seeds – it's also about celebrating and enhancing the culture of community seed-saving. Each spring and fall we host the annual Mendocino Seed Exchange held at our first and last local farmers market. We also are represented each year at the Seed Library Summit at the National Heirloom Festival in Santa Rosa, CA. This winter we will again be hosting our annual Seed Cleaning Jamboree where local gardeners and farmers come together to clean and share seeds.

I would like to thank all of those who volunteered at the Seed Bank and grew out so many beautiful seeds for our community to share. Special thanks to Erica Harrold, Jaime Jensen, Anna Lea Garza, Carol Cox, Leslie Roberts, Kimberley Fisher, Brooke Eichenlaub, Gabriella Cobb, Marin Williams, Iris Steffenson, Justin Bartolini, Magnolia Barrett, Julie Castillo, Sakina Bush, Robert Kuhn, Ron Ortman, Pia Rolandelli, Morgan Dashko, Jenna Hassle and Kristine Askholm!

UPCOMING EVENTS AT VGFP

Seed Cleaning Jamboree

January 19, 2020 at the Mendocino Botanical Gardens in Fort Bragg, CA 12-6PM

Ecology Action's 3-Day Workshop in Willits, CA

March 27-29, 2020

GROW BIOINTENSIVE® Sustainable Mini-Farming 8-Month Internship

March 22–November 22, 2020

GROW BIOINTENSIVE® Sustainable Mini-Farming 2-Month Internship

May 30–July 25, 2020

GROW BIOINTENSIVE® Sustainable Mini-Farming 4-Month Internship

May 30–October 10, 2020

GROW BIOINTENSIVE® Sustainable Gardening 9-Saturdays Basic Skillset Course

Saturdays 9AM-3PM May 30-July 25, 2020

GROW BIOINTENSIVE® Sustainable Gardening 9-Saturdays Diet And Garden Design Course

Saturdays 9AM-3PM August 15–October 10, 2020

GROW BIOINTENSIVE® 3-Day Teacher Training Workshop

August 7-August 9, 2020

Ecology Actions 3-Day Workshop in Willits, CA

November 6-November 8, 2020

If you would like to make a donation to VGFP or more info on our programs, contact Matt Drewno at (847)404-2586 or email Info@Victorygardensforpeace.com We are a project of Ecology Action, a 501(c)(3) non-profit.

