

# **THE RESILIENT GARDENER**

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Food Production and Self-Reliance  
in Uncertain Times

CAROL DEPPE

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White River Junction, Vermont

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Developmental Editor: Benjamin Watson  
Copy Editor: Cannon Labrie  
Proofreader: Eileen M. Clawson  
Indexer: Peggy Holloway  
Designer: Peter Holm, Sterling Hill Productions

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*to*  
Merry Youle



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## CHAPTER ONE

# Gardening and Resilience

*Hard Times Great and Small. Special Dietary Needs as Hard Times—and an Invitation to Gardening Adventures. A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Y2K. Practicing Balance. Appropriate Self-Sufficiency. How Much Land Do You Need? Gardening—an Essential Survival Skill.*

For ten years, I cared for my ill and elderly mother while she was bedridden and slipping into oblivion. Ultimately, she died at home—peacefully—holding my hand. It was worth it. But it was the hardest thing I ever did. At times my garden and my gardening was an immense comfort and satisfaction. It grounded me. It soothed and restored me. It reminded me of the basics. It regularly ushered me into a contemplative time and space that allowed me to see the bigger picture. It also gave me something to show and tell to my mother that she could still understand and take pleasure in. She loved to look at and touch the bright delicious fruits and vegetables and hear the stories about what they were and exactly how I grew them. She couldn't remember the stories, but she liked hearing them. And she still enjoyed good food. Really superb food of the most flavorful varieties, picked at its prime and prepared optimally—it is a special pleasure. My mother enjoyed that great food until the end. The garden helped sustain us both, physically and emotionally.

However, there were plenty of times my gardening fell apart or overwhelmed me instead of sustaining me. There were medical emergencies that took my full time and attention for weeks. The garden wouldn't get tended until they were over. Many times I lost entire crops and much of

the season's labor because of my inability to tend the garden at critical times. I myself sometimes suffered from health problems and injuries that interfered with gardening. When I most needed help, my garden often created pressures and contributed to my problems instead of relieving them.

These days, we tend to design our gardens and our gardening for good times, times when everything is going well. That isn't what we need. Reality is, there is almost always something going wrong. Hard times are normal. My experience of gardening while caring for my mother helped me realize that I needed to garden differently. My garden needed to be designed around the reality that life has its ups and downs. It has good times and bad. How to garden in the best of times was not the issue. I didn't need a "good-time garden." I needed to understand more about how to garden in hard times. I needed a more resilient garden. And I needed a garden that better enhanced my own resilience, in all kinds of times, good and bad.

### Hard Times Great and Small

Hard times happen. They happen in the lives of every individual creature, the histories of every

country and culture, the evolution of every species. They come in all sizes and shapes. They may affect just you, or they may affect your entire neighborhood, country, or planet. They may be temporary, requiring only survival until things get better. Or they may be permanent, and require transition to a dramatically new and different way of life.

Hard times are often individual, personal, and private. They can be primarily physical, emotional, spiritual, or some combination of all three. Or they may be primarily financial. Hard times in the garden sometimes simply represent a time of change in which the garden suffers because people have other priorities. This book is about all these situations.

In a classic Taoist story, Confucius and his disciples are sightseeing below the falls in Lu Liang, where the river races and boils with whirlpools and cataracts. Suddenly, the figure of a man appears on the opposite side of the river and jumps into the torrent. Confucius thinks the man must be committing suicide, and he positions his disciples along the bank to recover the body. The man soon emerges unscathed before them, however, and saunters along the bank, dripping water, singing a cheerful song. Confucius immediately asks the man how he managed to swim in such wild waters. The man explains that he goes in where the whirlpools go in and comes out where they come out. He moves with and uses the currents around him instead of fighting them and drowning. The Taoist tries to live in the world thus. Doing so requires attention to positioning with respect to the various currents around us. That swimmer knew a good bit about water and currents, however, before he ever jumped into the river. And long before he needed to jump into any rivers, *he had learned to swim*. This book is about

positioning ourselves and working with nature, and with the natural and social forces and currents around us. It is also about learning to swim.

The first half of this book is a synthesis of practical gardening with newly emerging information in many fields—resilience science, climatology, climate change, ecology, anthropology, paleontology, sustainable agriculture, nutrition, health, and medicine. The second half of the book illustrates and extends the ideas and principles with detailed hands-on information about growing and using five kinds of yard and garden crops—potatoes, corn, beans, squash, and eggs. This is a supremely optimistic as well as realistic book about resilient gardeners and resilient gardens surviving and thriving and helping their communities to survive and thrive through everything that comes their way—from tomorrow through the next thousand years.

The first focus of this book is on contemporary personal survival. It's about achieving greater control over our food supply. It's about having gourmet-quality, optimally healthful food in spite of agribusiness patterns that drive out much of the best and best-tasting food, and that virtually eliminate some critical nutrients from the commercial food supply. This book is about yards and gardens that best promote our health and happiness in good times and bad.

The second focus of this book is on surviving the kinds of individual ordinary traumas and minor disasters that happen in the lives of most people and gardens. A drought can mean that you aren't allowed to water your garden. Or there might be no electricity or water because you couldn't pay the bill. A well might run low or dry. Or the well pump might fail, and your garden

might have to do without water for a week or two while the pump is pulled and repaired. A financial setback could mean that you can afford only the vegetables in your garden or the fruit from the trees and bushes in the landscape.

A family emergency or an injury can mean that there is no one to work the garden for a while. You might be injured yourself. Or you might be unable to garden because of the injury or illness or problems of others, whose needs become your first priority. What happens when no one waters, weeds, or tends your yard or garden for a week? A month? All season? Many modern gardens can be destroyed by a mere week or two of neglect—just when their owner most needs their benefits. Many landscape plantings, orchards, and vegetable gardens are completely dependent upon regular watering, which is itself dependent upon electricity. This book is about creating more resilient yards and gardens—yards and gardens that can thrive with minimal care or even total neglect for substantial periods of time, and that create an oasis of restorative peace, normality, and security.

When you or someone in your family has special dietary needs, it constitutes a kind of ongoing hard times. In chapter 4 we will consider how to customize our gardens in ways that help us deal with such problems as gluten intolerance, asthma and allergies, food allergies, diabetes and sugar-control problems, obesity and weight control, and other individual health issues.

Climate change is happening. Even ordinary weather regularly creates bad times in the garden. The last hundred years was an unusually stable weather period. We are likely in for wilder and weirder weather in future years. Chapter 3 focuses on gardening in times of wild weather and climate change.

A third focus of this book is upon gardening in mega-hard times. Mega-hard times do happen. They may not happen in any individual lifetime. But over the generations, they do occur. I like to think in terms of the next thousand years. Can I do the exploring and adventuring, gain the knowledge, help create the patterns, and pass on the knowledge and patterns that will help my own or future generations to survive and thrive? A gardener who knows how to garden in both good times and bad can be a reservoir of knowledge and a source of resilience for the entire community.

Here in the Pacific Northwest, we get about one or two mega-earthquakes every thousand years. Such a massive quake would disrupt most or all bridges, roads, and power lines. It would be at least months and possibly years before everyone had electricity and other services restored and full access to the rest of the world. Also, about once every thousand years, somewhere in the world there is a volcanic eruption large enough to cool the planet drastically for years, decades, or even centuries. Climate change in and of itself can create serious difficulties. The human population is probably already too high for long-term planetary health and is still rising. Concomitant with overpopulation go crises caused by pollution, war, famine, and disease. Pandemics also happen. Past pandemics have often involved communities isolating themselves or being isolated via quarantines. Oil might become unavailable, or too expensive for most purposes. Depressions happen. Stock markets collapse. Currency can deflate and become scarce or inflate and become worthless. Jobs can vanish. Financial or social instability or wars or terrorism can disrupt jobs or access to goods and services.

Traditionally, gardeners have played a major role in sustaining themselves, their families, and their communities through hard times of many kinds. Would you be able to do likewise? Or would your garden fail utterly because it depends totally upon electricity, irrigation, oil, agribusiness imports, and the roads and financial and social infrastructure needed to deliver them? Would your garden be able to actually feed you after you scaled up in response to the situation? Or would your garden be of limited value because you grow only flowers or salad ingredients? Would you be able to grow serious amounts of your own staples, because you've experimented and done a little of it in good times and have learned how? Have you identified the crops and varieties that would work well for you if you really had to depend upon them? Would you be able to grow them without electricity, irrigation water, and imported fertilizer or seeds? Could you do it without a rototiller or the services of the tractor guy? Could you scale up your production to feed more than just yourself and your family? Could you provide the seed and experience to help others to do so? Do you know how to save seed? Could you serve as a source of seed and knowledge for your community?

We gardeners love to experiment. In this book I invite all gardeners to do the kinds of exploration and adventuring that would prove most valuable if they or those they teach ever experience mega-hard times. You may never have to experience mega-hard times yourself. But if you build the appropriate knowledge base and pass it on to others, and encourage them to do likewise, it is likely that sooner or later—to someone somewhere over the next thousand years—that knowledge will matter.

I believe that the potential role of gardeners in

mega-hard times is more important today than ever before. In times past, a large portion of the population knew how to grow and preserve food and could survive on what they could grow and preserve. In the United States today, only about 2 percent of the population farms, and they farm largely in ways that are totally dependent upon imported oil and gas, electricity, irrigation, roads, national and international markets, and an intact financial and social infrastructure. In many kinds of mega-hard times, those farms would not be functional, and the knowledge of how to farm in those ways would be useless. In some of the mega-hard times of the future, what food we have may be a result of the knowledge and skills of *gardeners*. I challenge all gardeners to fully accept their role as a source of resilience for their communities in mega-hard times, and to play and adventure in good times so as to develop the kinds of knowledge and skills that would most matter.

It's easy to build knowledge and experience in good times. In good times, learning such things is a matter of enjoyable adventuring. In addition, learning how to garden with minimal inputs and minimal labor teaches us more than just how to deal with hard times in which the inputs might not be available. When we know how to minimize labor, water, and other inputs, we spend less, waste less, pollute less, and are more sophisticated and efficient gardeners, in good times as well as bad.

### **Special Dietary Needs as Hard Times— and an Invitation to Gardening Adventures**

I can't eat wheat or wheat relatives (barley, rye, spelt, triticale). I have celiac disease, which is

an intolerance to wheat gluten. I'm also severely allergic to wheat and mildly allergic to cow's milk and certain other foods. (Celiac disease breaks down the integrity of the gut, so one tends to pick up additional food allergies beyond the initial wheat problem.) Nearly all commercial prepared foods—everything from bread and canned soup to soy sauce and most condiments—contain wheat. Those who can't eat soy or dairy products have a similar problem. Wheat, soy, and dairy ingredients are so ubiquitous in our food that being unable to eat them deprives you of the food and food patterns of our culture. Being unable to eat most of the food of your culture creates a kind of ongoing personal hard times.

Like many others with celiac disease or other food intolerances and allergies, my attempts to get a medical diagnosis went nowhere for years. Modern medicine failed me. My gardening, though, did not fail me. Long before I knew why I was having problems, I found my gardening interests changing. I became increasingly interested in growing my own staples—delicious gourmet-quality staples—staples that made wheat superfluous.

I cooked and evaluated hundreds of heirloom and traditional corn varieties. I discovered that modern commercial cornmeal is all very poor-flavored compared to meal made from many traditional varieties, and that commercial cornmeal represents only one class of corn flavors. There are many other flavors that are powerfully delicious and dramatically different—so different, in fact, that people don't even know the grain in the bread is corn until they are told.

I found flint corn varieties that can be cooked into a delicious polenta (cornmeal mush) with just seven minutes of stirring. I found the best

varieties for parching corn, a great, healthful snack and camping food.

As a gluten-intolerant person, one of the things I wanted most was bread. Most modern cornbread recipes include wheat, and produce what is basically corn-containing wheat bread that depends upon the gluten and cooking characteristics of the wheat. Such recipes were no help to me. Older recipes were dependent upon particular kinds of corn, which are unspecified. The information about which varieties of corn go with what recipes and cooking methods has been lost. I rediscovered the uses of various kinds of corn and developed recipes for using them that didn't require wheat. My recipes make delicious breads, pancakes, and even cakes without wheat or any other grain, without milk, and without xanthan or other artificial binders. My standard corn-based skillet bread is more like a dense traditional wheat bread in texture than what most people think of as cornbread. It holds together so well it can be used to make sandwiches. It contains only corn, water, eggs, salt, baking powder, and butter (or fat or oil of some kind).

I also began breeding short-season corns for making polenta, cornbread, corn cakes, parching corn, and savory brown corn gravy.

I grew and tasted dozens of varieties of dry beans of several species and found varieties that are delicious, productive, and easy to grow. I also bred two new varieties, 'Hannan Popbean', a garbanzo that can be grown organically in the maritime Northwest without irrigation, and 'Fast Lady Northern Southern Pea', a very early maritime- and northern-adapted cowpea (Southern pea), also selected for organic production.

I became enchanted with gourmet winter squash, especially those that store well and that

thus could become a major part of my diet for most of the year.

I also studied and learned to reproduce the Hidatsa Indian way of making dried squash—squash picked in the green summer-squash stage, then sliced and dried to produce a long-storing staple. I even developed a few modern variations on the traditional method. Then I expanded upon the Native American information by evaluating modern varieties for use as dried squash. Many were bland. A few varieties, however, produced unique, new, delicious flavors that are so good they are worth growing just to make dried squash. Delightfully, some of the varieties that make the best dried squash are among the best summer squash too. So we can have plenty of summer squash, and can dry all those that get past the prime summer-squash stage—producing an extra staple crop essentially for free. Dried squash has become one of the major bases for my winter soups and stews.

Trying to live and be healthy on an agribusiness diet is itself a kind of hard times, even for those who don't have special dietary needs. Being gardeners allows all of us to achieve greater control over our food supply. We can produce better, more nutritious, more delicious food than anything we can buy. For those of us with special dietary needs, our gardening is especially important. Having truly gourmet food of a quality that cannot be bought goes far toward making up for the fact that there are certain things we can't eat. In addition, we can focus our gardening to provide exactly what we need. Once I knew I couldn't eat wheat, I focused my gardening deliberately. My personal dietary needs became factors that informed, guided, and added originality to my gardening and plant breeding. My dietary

“problems,” in other words, became a rich source of gardening and cooking creativity.

### **A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Y2K**

Many people got very worried toward the end of 1999 as the year 2000—and the so-called Y2K event—approached. They feared that a computer glitch would bring modern society tumbling down, at least temporarily. They spent a lot of money buying expensive and bad-tasting commercial dried food and expensive backups for their computers. I didn't. Bad-tasting food still tastes bad in hard times. One might have to make do with bad food in hard times, but I never arrange for bad food deliberately. Any arrangements I make involve eating well. As Y2K approached, I did precisely nothing. Because of my special dietary needs and how they had shaped my gardening interests, by 1999 I had a garden full of overwintering vegetables, bags of potatoes in the garage, and a pantry full of dry corns, beans, winter squashes, and dried squash—all of gourmet quality—plenty enough for my own family and neighbors besides, at least for a while. I already had equipment for grinding the corn. I had already developed the recipes. Growing and using these staples was an ordinary part of my life.

And as for my computer . . . it had always had a hard time with time. By Y2K, my computer was about two years behind. I figured what it didn't know wouldn't hurt it. Sometimes different kinds of hard times cancel each other out.

We gardeners already know that we can grow much better food than anything we can buy in the grocery store. This is even truer for staples than



it is for the more ordinary garden vegetables. So I grow some of my own staple crops. It's deeply satisfying. Doing so enhances my emotional as well as physical resilience. It gives me greater control over my food supply. My small, private, individual resilience translates into resilience writ larger, however. I don't grow and store staples because I'm expecting civilization to collapse within the next season so that I need the stored staples in order to keep from starving. I do it primarily because growing and using those potatoes, corn, beans, and squash provides superb food of a quality I can't buy, personal satisfaction, and greater joy and health for myself.

If some kind of major disaster were to hit my world, though, a few hundred pounds of dry corn and the equipment and knowledge needed to turn them into human sustenance might make a big difference for me and my neighbors. The resilience of individual gardeners working for personal satisfaction and joy in ordinary hard times (such as having special dietary needs) can thus be transformed into resilience during more extraordinary hard times, for both the individual and his or her community. Life is full of hard times. By learning to garden our way through the small and ordinary hard times, and by passing that knowledge on, we can help our children, our children's children, our country, and our species through both the ordinary as well as the extraordinary hard times that happen through the generations.

### **Practicing Balance**

As it turned out, pretty much nothing happened on Y2K. I don't know whether it was because all the major companies managed to fix their

computers in time or not. This I do know: There are many kinds of disasters we can foresee, and many or most of them never materialize. Even if they do materialize, it might not be in our lifetimes. Disasters also happen unforeseen. But we don't get our choice of hard times. You could spend huge amounts of time and money stockpiling things for the disaster you expect, and instead get a disaster such as a fire, when what you need to do to survive is to forget all those supplies and evacuate. Furthermore, living too much in the future is emotionally unhealthy. It's important to position ourselves and our societies so as to enhance our resilience in good times and bad, and that requires some advance planning, learning, and exploration. We also need to enjoy life and to live fully. For that it's important to live primarily in the present.

In hard times, I might not have electricity for watering or irrigation. So I learn how to minimize the need for electricity and irrigation in my current gardening. But I don't try to do without electricity entirely. I have shifted my gardening so as to minimize the need for irrigation as well as to get the optimum use out of the irrigation I do apply. In this way, I enhance my ability to garden in any potential future hard times, but I also garden more efficiently in good times. I avoid wasting water, which means that I also minimize the electricity required to pump it and the labor involved in watering. Excess water leaches out some soil nutrients, also. So minimizing watering and avoiding unnecessary watering helps minimize my fertilizer needs. It allows me to have a smaller ecological impact on the land. It makes me a better, more ecological, more efficient gardener, in good times and bad.

Hard times might make fertilizer unavailable.

So I learn exactly how much fertilizer I need in what situations, when I can get away without fertilizing at all, and how I can best use the resources I have to retain and enhance fertility. This means if I suddenly need to do without any external inputs for a while, I'll know how. It also means that I avoid overfertilizing, thus saving money in good times. By not overfertilizing, I avoid polluting in good times and bad.

While mega-hard times are likely over the next thousand years, you personally may never need to deal with anything more than a broken leg or your city limiting yard and garden watering temporarily because of a minor drought. To the possibility of hard times of all sizes and kinds, I suggest a gentle, moderated response. Your current gardening is most likely based upon the assumptions that things will continue in the coming years as they have in the past, that society will remain intact and functional and bring you rototiller parts, gas, fertilizer, and seeds, that you will always have plenty of water and electricity for irrigating, that you can easily buy all the foods you want, and that you can consider growing and preserving food as primarily a recreation or luxury. I suggest you devote a portion of your learning and practice of gardening to all the *opposite* assumptions. Continue to focus primarily on your ordinary life and your ordinary gardening. But also learn and play and adventure in your yard and garden so as to increase the resilience of your yard and garden and yourself. Continue to give your primary attention to your ordinary life and to full enjoyment of the present, however. Your first job in surviving any possible future hard times is to survive long enough to get there.

### Appropriate Self-Sufficiency

How independent should we be? How independent should we *want* to be? And of what and whom? Many people who become aware of the uncertainty of life and the reality that hard times happen respond by going somewhat overboard, I feel. They assume, for example, that a breakdown in the social fabric through social or physical disaster would mean that they would have access only to what could be provided in and by their immediate neighborhoods. In fact, humans have never been so limited. We weren't so limited before we had horses, oxen, and wheels. We aren't now. If a major disaster were to destroy our current means, methods, and patterns of trade, I am confident that it wouldn't take us long to create new ones. To err may or may not be human, but to trade definitely is.

Humans have been trading for millennia. For instance, the best obsidian and flint for making tools is found only in certain places. Throughout the world, it was always widely traded beyond those places. Here in the Pacific Northwest there were regular trade bazaars held at certain times of year. Coastal and Columbia River tribes traded dried salmon to inland tribes for dried camas-root cakes, dried elk meat, and other goods. Lewis and Clark passed over the mountains on a road made by Indian traders. Navigable rivers were major trade routes. Rivers and oceans have always been thoroughfares for trade, and many settlements grew up on and near waterways. Those waterways are still there. Even in the worst of all possible scenarios there would still be rivers, oceans, lakes, waterways, traders, and trade. I don't see humans having to depend more than temporarily upon only their own skills, talents, and immediate

local resources. Instead, I imagine them rapidly rebuilding societies from whomever and whatever is left, and quickly setting about to do what they have always done—specialize, swap with neighbors, and trade over seriously long distances.

I think a worst-case scenario is not that a human family or community will be knocked back to totally local resources indefinitely. Instead they will be knocked back to local resources temporarily, or trade over long distances will become more expensive, difficult, or dangerous. In the latter case, communities would need to depend more upon resources nearby and less on those from long distances. People, though, will still have different personalities, inclinations, skills, and talents, and their land will still be suitable for growing some things and not others. People will still specialize. Individuals will not need to grow all their own food, make all their own tools and shelter, or provide all their own law enforcement and protection. Since well before the start of recorded history, humans have always had families, communities, societies, specialization, and trade to provide these things. In mega-hard times, however, your ordinary job may be irrelevant, and food production and food items to trade may be what matters. For such times, you want a repertoire of survival skills. Your gardening can be one of these.

Is “independence” even a virtue? It seems to me that, to be truly independent, I would have to love and care about no one, and be loved and cared about by no one. And I would have no one to learn from and no one to teach. It’s a depressing image.

Humans are inherently social creatures. Even those of us who are relatively serious loners are only loners intermittently. We are all parts of a

complex web of relationships and mutualisms. It isn’t normal, natural, or healthy for us to be “independent.” What is healthy is interdependence. In ordinary and good times, we don’t really seek true independence, but rather, enough knowledge and skills so that we can build and hold up our end of honorable interdependence. I think the same applies to even mega-hard times. We don’t need and need not bother wanting to be “independent.” Instead, we need the kinds of knowledge and skills that allow us to be valuable and contributing participants in honorable interdependence in both good times and bad.

### **How Much Land Do You Need?**

Owning good gardening land is a great joy. At least, I suppose it is. I hope to own some myself one of these days. I’ve never owned any land at all until recently, and what I have is nothing like good gardening land. It’s about half an acre, mostly occupied by the house, heavily shaded by trees on adjacent properties or set aside as septic easements. All of it is heavy clay. Some is less than a foot of heavy clay over solid bedrock. Until the neighboring trees grew so high they shaded my backyard totally, I used the limited decent gardening space for vegetables on raised beds and for much small-scale experimenting. Then, as soon as I found a corn or bean I really liked, for example, and had learned how to grow it on a small scale, I made cooperative arrangements with other people who had more and better land. In some cases I actually contracted with local farmers to grow a variety I wanted. At a later stage, I grew some vegetables and experiments in the backyard, but also had a tilled field elsewhere on

the property of a friend or friendly farmer for the corn, beans, and squash. Now that my backyard is totally shaded, I've expanded to two acres of leased land elsewhere, and the backyard is forage for the duck laying flock. The land is far more suitable for growing duck eggs than it ever was for vegetables.

You don't need to actually own any land. Over the years, I've gardened on ten different pieces of Oregon land, all but one begged, borrowed, rented, or leased. There is vulnerability in not owning the land where you garden, of course. But land ownership doesn't confer invulnerability. It doesn't guarantee that your neighbor won't ruin your garden by careless fencing of his herd of cattle. My first planting of my first garden in Oregon was killed by herbicide drift from spraying on the nearby power company right of way. "Ownership" is a strange concept, anyway, when applied to land. Given that we have to pay taxes on it and can't take it with us, "ownership" of land isn't really ownership; it's just one kind of leasing arrangement. What is critical isn't ownership of land so much as the knowledge and skills to use it. When and if the time comes that people in your region need more local food production in order to survive, if you have the knowledge, seeds, and tools, people will make the land available. Up until then, you only need enough land to play and learn on, and to produce what you care most about and what you most enjoy.

You can start your learning in a plot in a community garden, for example. If you're a university student, your school may have a garden club you can join and get access to land—usually prime agricultural land, already tilled. Friends and neighbors often share gardens. If your neighbors have a patch of great garden soil they aren't using,

offer to tend their pets or water their garden while they are on vacation in exchange for use of that patch. Sometimes a landless gardener just puts an ad in the local newspaper asking for access to good garden land in exchange for a share of the crop.

Finally, in agricultural areas you might be able to formally lease enough land for all the garden you would ever want. Leasing even prime agricultural soil here in the Willamette Valley—the prime agricultural land in Oregon—is cheap compared with land ownership. Leasing fees normally cover little beyond taxes and irrigation costs. Often, an owner needs to lease some land to someone who is doing agriculture on it in order to qualify for the lower agricultural property tax rate. Much ordinary agriculture involves leasing. People arrange for long-term leases and grow even crops like Christmas trees or raspberries. Your local agricultural newspaper may have a section that lists land for lease or wanted for lease. For many people, actually owning land is far from their first step down the road to gardening.

Last spring, after gardening together a couple of years and deciding we liked it, Nate France and I pooled our gardening efforts and obtained a long-term lease on two acres of prime soil just a five-minute drive from home. Our approach was simple. We used Benton County Soil Survey maps to identify every piece of prime agricultural land close to home. Then we put fliers in the boxes of all the people located on that land. "Wanted: Long-term lease on 2–5 acres for production of organic grains, vegetables, and seed crops. Payment in terms of money, labor, farm care-taking or management, or delicious organic vegetables."

Gardening on other people's land has its disad-

vantages, of course. But it also has advantages. You may get to learn firsthand from other experienced gardeners. In addition, every piece of land is different, and has different soil. When you garden on just your own land, you learn certain patterns, some of which work for just that one situation. You often don't realize how specifically your patterns are tied to that particular land and soil. Then when you move—even to another property nearby—you find that to some extent you have to learn to garden all over again. To really understand how to garden in your region you need experience with different kinds of land. Such experience is also the ideal preparation for buying or long-term leasing land for gardening or farming.

However, even leased or borrowed land isn't strictly necessary. You can raise amazing amounts of herbs and food entirely in containers. And if you are a student or a person whose life involves dislocations, container gardens have the advantage that you can just put them in a pickup truck or van and take them with you.

In addition, *growing* plants and food is only part of what this book is about. Learning to process and store food and use it optimally are equally important. I think it's a useful goal to learn to process and store all the crops produced in your region that are potentially good staples. This doesn't mean you have to grow them. Many more people know how to grow most fruits and vegetables than know how optimally to turn them into long-term staples that can be used as a serious part of their food supply. So if you learn and practice (and teach others) all about the storing, preserving, and using, that also contributes food resilience to you and to your community.

Anderson's blueberry farm is about two miles

from my home. They sell perfectly picked berries (virtually all ripe and without stems) for \$1.80 a pound. Just avoiding the time and labor of having to pick them myself is worth that much to me. I buy about forty pounds per week in season, eating many in savory dishes that are my main carbohydrate staple in July. Most I preserve to eat in midwinter and early spring when no local fruit is available.

What matters to me about blueberries—what enhances the quality of my life—isn't growing them. It was learning to use them—developing recipes for using blueberries in main courses (not just desserts) and learning to preserve them. To learn to preserve and use blueberries takes a kitchen, not land. We are not all situated to garden in every year of our lives. Nor can we grow every kind of crop that can be grown in our region. But we can be developing a repertoire of information about what is grown in our area, who grows it, and how to store, preserve, and use it. We can develop knowledge and patterns with respect to those crops that enhance our day-to-day quality of life, our personal resilience, and the resilience of our communities.

If you had to do everything—if you had to be “independent”—then you would need a lot of land to grow everything. But you aren't “independent,” and don't need to be. You don't have to do everything. You just have to do something. You make a start. Then you do what you can, what you want to, what you most enjoy.

### **Gardening—an Essential Survival Skill**

There are some things everyone should know in order to be a fully functional and productive

member of society. Some of these skills define adulthood. Mastering them is part of becoming an adult. Others require decades of further living for full mastery, and mark the transition from mere adulthood to wisdom. Everyone's list would vary somewhat. Here's mine:

You need to be able to walk, run, stand, and crawl. You can read, write, do basic arithmetic, and type. You can drive, swim, perform first aid, use contraception, deliver a baby, tend the old or ill, comfort the dying. You are able to support yourself. You wash your hands. You are courteous. You function at least adequately in an emergency, perhaps excellently, and you know the difference between an emergency and an inconvenience. You can give orders, take orders, lead, or follow, and you know when to do which.

You either don't drink or can hold your liquor. You know when to speak and when to be silent. You know how to listen. You know how to say, "I'm sorry," and mean it. And "I was wrong," and mean that too. You can build a fire. You can cook a delicious meal from simple basic ingredients. And you can garden.

*You can garden.* You know how to grow food, including some staples. You may not garden every year of your life, but you at least know how.

Knowing these things promotes individual personal happiness and survival—survival physically, emotionally, and spiritually. A community in which many people know these things is a healthy and resilient community—a community that is maximally positioned to thrive in good times and to survive the rest.