

A man with a beard and blue eyes, wearing a green t-shirt, lies on his back on a dense bed of various vegetables and herbs. He is smiling at the camera. In his left hand, he holds a large glass jar filled with a dark, chunky substance, likely jam or preserves. In his right hand, he holds a yellow ceramic jug. The background is a lush, colorful array of produce, including yellow daisies, green beans, red radishes, yellow squash, and large brown potatoes. The title 'FOOD FREEDOM' is printed in large white letters across the top of the image, with a pomegranate acting as the letter 'O' in 'FOOD'.

A Year of Growing and Foraging 100% of My Food

# FOOD FREEDOM

Empowerment Manual for Liberation Through Food

**ROBIN GREENFIELD**

Foreword by *Alice Waters*

## This Book is Not for Sale

**This book is an experiment in the gift economy. I offer *Food Freedom* on a donation basis.** Money is no barrier to access the information within these pages. Your donation can be made as a financial contribution or as a commitment to utilize this book as a tool for personal liberation and the liberation of humanity. Or both.

**Would you like to make a financial contribution for receiving this book?**

We would be so grateful for your donation.

Visit [robingreenfield.org/foodfreedom](http://robingreenfield.org/foodfreedom) or use the QR code below.

**For book orders** visit: [robingreenfield.org/foodfreedom](http://robingreenfield.org/foodfreedom)

To request multiple copies at no cost for schools, libraries and organizations or to serve as an ambassador to distribute *Food Freedom*, visit the website.

**Do you have abundance to share to help us provide this book as a tool of liberation for those who need it the most?** We are seeking financial support to assist us in providing books to schools, libraries and grassroots organizations that request copies.

Please email [foodfreedom@robingreenfield.org](mailto:foodfreedom@robingreenfield.org) or donate via our website.

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***Food Freedom: A Year of Growing and Foraging 100% of My Food***

Robin Press

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**Printed in Turtle Island on occupied Indigenous land that has only recently become known by many as the United States of America.** The US is a nation founded on the genocide of hundreds of Indigenous cultures and the enslavement of millions of humans from Africa. This mass exploitation and colonization of Earth, our global humanity and the plants and animals we share this land with has continued in the modern United States through the actions of many citizens, corporations and government members. This exploitation is inseparable from the truth of this nation.

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## 100% of Profits Donated

**100 percent of profits from this book are donated to Gardens of Liberation**, supporting Indigenous and Black-led food sovereignty initiatives. Our mission is to support the communities most impacted by the destructive food system while contributing to the healing of Earth and liberation of humanity through fostering relationships with our food and our plant and animal communities.

By sharing *Food Freedom* from a place of abundance to all, we are open for abundance to return. As the financial resources we receive go beyond our costs to produce and distribute this book, our ability to support the food sovereignty movement is strengthened.

To learn more about Gardens of Liberation and our deep financial transparency, visit: [robingreenfield.org/liberation](http://robingreenfield.org/liberation)

Gardens of Liberation is part of Regeneration, Equity and Justice grassroots 501c3 nonprofit. [robingreenfield.org/rej](http://robingreenfield.org/rej)

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I have no interest in personally financially gaining from the knowledge that I have to share. After all, I don't own this information. It was all shared with me by others.

I do not earn a penny from this book. Since 2015, I have vowed to donate 100 percent of my earnings from books and media to healers of Earth and humanity.

Read more on my vows at [robingreenfield.org/vows](http://robingreenfield.org/vows).



## **Be the Change You Wish to See**

As you read this book, I invite you to use this page to write down changes you'd like to make in your life to bring your actions into alignment with your beliefs.

*See [robingreenfield.org/100](http://robingreenfield.org/100) for my first 100 changes.*

# This Book is Compostable

At the heart of my being is the quest to live in integrity. For me, deep integrity is the alignment of my actions with my beliefs. Living in harmony with Earth, humanity and the plants and animals we share this home with is the essence of integrity. I walk the difficult balance between living in harmony on a personal level and carrying out a mission to shift our societal way of being.

There are no easy answers or clear rules on how to carry out this experiment with truth and integrity. Critical thought, self-observation and observation of our humanity are key practices in deciding what actions to take. Publishing this book was one of these actions that required deep thought. To choose my own path of existing harmoniously or to print a book and contribute to some destruction in the process?

I chose to publish the book with the highest level of integrity I could find, sacrificing as little as possible, with the belief that the impact this book has on you will far outweigh the impact of printing it. On that note, I'd like to share what I've done to bring this book to you in a relative state of integrity.

**This book is compostable.** Meaning it can and will fully return to Earth. There are no plastics or toxic chemicals in the paper or cover. You can grow food with the compost made from this book. See *How to Compost* in the *Empowerment Manual* for a composting guide. My intention is to one day return to the soil, as I hope this book will, too.

**Printed on 100 percent post-consumer waste paper.** That means no trees were cut down for these pages. FSC Recycled Certified.

**The paper and cover is acid-free, processed chlorine-free (PCF)** and made in a mill fueled mainly with renewable biogas energy.

**The cover paper is uncoated,** FSC and SFI Certified. Through diligent research, we found a 100% recycled cover option as well as a 30% recycled option. To our disheartenment, neither was available at time of printing or without a much larger order of books.

**Printed with vegetable-based, low-VOC inks.**

This book is printed by Sheridan. The paper is sourced from Sustana. Solutions and the cover is sourced from Domtar.

Paper: Sustana EnviroBook 50 lb. white

Centerfold: Rolland EnviroSatin 70 lb. (uncoated)

Cover: Domtar Lynx Opaque 65 lb. (uncoated)

**The binding material is EVA glue**, which is considered to be the most sustainable glue choice in the book industry and is said to be non-toxic.

EVA (ethylene-vinyl acetate copolymer) is composed of products from the production of petroleum and natural gas and I would consider it a plastic. It is not biodegradable, but I would be okay with a quantity of book binding in my large compost pile, or I would simply pull the pages out of the book to compost and put the glue into the garbage can.

These options are the best we know of and what we had access to at the time of printing to do no unnecessary harm in producing this quantity of books. Learn more about our printing ethics on the Robin Press webpage: [robingreenfield.org/opitchi](http://robingreenfield.org/opitchi)

**Ebook.** This book is also available as an ebook. Although this does reduce industrial destruction in some ways, the digital world and our technological devices are fully intertwined in destruction as well.

**We share gratitude to** New Society Publishers, Milkweed Editions and Chelsea Green Publishing for setting the example for printing books with integrity and to Sheridan for offering these options of higher environmental integrity.

## Claimer

**My life is my message.** Primarily through taking personal action, I change myself and I impact my surroundings and the people I interact with. Through personal action, I show that another way is possible. My activism is often designed in extreme ways to reach the masses while showing another perspective on life and alternatives to the status quo. I stimulate critical thought and inspire the willpower to shift ways of being in many of the people who read my words. I make full acknowledgment that some of my actions are perceived as extreme by much of mainstream society. My message is not that you need to be extreme. Through my provocative activism, I aim to show the truth behind “normalcy” and serve as a counterbalance to our destructive ways. I invite you to take the actions that are alive in you through reading this book. Whether it be the embrace of radical transformation in the way you relate to Earth, or simply small changes that improve your life, this is up to you.

**My life is an experiment with truth and integrity.** Most of life is a mystery for me. I don’t claim to have all the answers or even to know what plan of action is most likely to be successful for the healing of our home and humanity. I can simply do my part and I can take full responsibility for that.

I take responsibility for the words in this book and the actions that I took to be able to write this book. I have worked diligently to provide accurate information and speak primarily from my own experience. As I provide knowledge for change on a larger level than myself, I wade into waters of uncertainty. I practice due diligence to provide solutions that are of high integrity. I have made mistakes and will continue to. I share publicly when I learn of my inaccuracies and I aim to shift my being accordingly.

I am dedicated to exploring and understanding the big pictures. I would never expect perfection from myself. After all, I’m living an experiment.

I am dedicated to incorporating community, diversity and biodiversity into all the solutions I bring to the world. I take responsibility for the dominator that is still in me. I request your patience and compassion on this journey, as I really am trying diligently to be of service.

I also want to claim my ego. For a decade, I have been working to reduce my ego and use it as a tool for change. I still have a long way to go. I’m working on it.



If I have shared information that is factually incorrect, I welcome your feedback.

If I have spoken or acted in a manner that is perceived as disrespectful to any culture or individual person, I welcome your feedback. Over the last decade, I have received feedback from hundreds of people that I have incorporated into my life. We listen to each other and we learn from each other. This is one of the core ingredients to our healing as humanity.

I'd like to share gratitude to Sam Thayer, who inspired me to make this Claimer, based on his own in *Nature's Garden*.

In regard to the plants I discuss in *Food Freedom*, this is not an identification book and I have not been exhaustive with this content. It is primarily my story and a tool guide for actions. I have been diligent with sharing accurate information, but I encourage you to utilize the books, videos and resources by my colleagues and others to explore the many details of foraging, growing food and living in harmony with Earth.

Note: The journals shared in this book are a combination of what was written in my personal journal as well as my social media posts. They have been edited to assist in the flow of this book.

## Gratitude

Although the words in this book are my own thoughts on paper, and although I was the one who ate the food that I grew and foraged for 365 days, this story is the creation of community. I can think of hundreds of Dear Friends who played a direct role in this experiment to whom I am deeply grateful. In truth, not hundreds, but thousands of people played a role that I give thanks to.

To those who are not specifically mentioned in words, I see you and I am grateful for you, too. This book is finally being published four years after the experiment was completed, and I have many more people to give gratitude to from the last years of connections. The gratitude I share here is primarily to those who played a role as the experiment unfolded from 2017-2019 and in the creation of this book.

To those I share gratitude with ahead, I mourn that I cannot share the depth of my gratitude to each of you in written word here. Please know that I hold so much more in my heart for each of you than I can summarize on these pages without substantially increasing the length of this book.

I am grateful to:

**The community that brought me to Orlando with such warmth:** Fleet Farming, IDEAS for Us, Chris Castro, John Rife at East End Market, The Orlando Permaculture Community, The Peanut Butter Palace, Eren Tatari and the Rollins College community and many others.

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**The photographers and filmmakers who helped me share the messages** we mutually desire to bring to the world: Sierra Ford Jones, Danielle

Hanusek, John VonMutius, Brandon Kari, Paul O'Neill, Richard Johnson, Kia Ford, Gabriella St. Croix and Daniela Marin.

**All foragers reconnecting with Earth through fostering relationships with the plants.** In particular to this endeavor, my foraging partners during the year: David Warfel, Jeff Trapani, Daniel Koenigkann, Cathy Shepardson, James Garlanger and Robbie Rockwell. **And the foragers who shared their plant and fungi knowledge with me directly:** Andy Firk, Jon Martin, Blake Weeden, Andy Gricevich, Kenton and Rebecca Whitman, Eric Joseph Lewis, Marc Williams and Green Deane.

**The Plant People who shared their knowledge and love of the plants in Central Florida with me:** Pete Kanaris, Marabou Thomas, Alicia Crisp, Melissa DeSa, Josh Jamison, Terry Meer, Jeff Trapani, Caitlin Fogarty, Sarita Arrazola, the Florida Earthskills Gathering community, Fleet Farming, Emily Ruff, Florida School of Holistic Living, Central Florida Fruit Society, Simple Living Institute, Joshua Anderson, Matthew Reece, Micanopy Joe, Robert Bowden, Peggy Lantz, Whitwam Organics and each of you not named here individually. Additionally, Stephen Brooks, Shad Qudsi and the teams at Falling Fruit and WWOOF.

**Those who volunteered in the garden with me and helped build my tiny house:** Matt Jones, Michelle Finley, Bill Hettig, Tim Green, Mark John Smith, Hue Jacobs, Fran Diehl, Chadwick Brown, Yuan Chang, Terri Johnson, Jonathan Mosley, Barbara Ewing Meyer, Sunray, Hattie Spring, Zachary Galliford, Sophie Wang, Nathan Brown, Curtis Dickerson, Galen Meyers, Kristi Thilmony, Heather van Dyk, Larry Opoliner, Rayven Monique and many others.

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Avi Davis and colleagues at BRUT, Mother Earth News, Jordan and Antoinette at Happen Films, Kamea Chayne and more recently KC Baker.

**The community that supported the publishing of this book:** All who pre-ordered *Food Freedom*, especially Jason Root. Rob West at New Society Publishers for coaching me along. Each of you who hosted me while I was writing; including Justin Dolan at Saint Michael's Sustainable Community in the Costa Rica food forest, Ryan and Liz Sandberg in the Chequamegon National Forest of Wisconsin, Natalie Bogwalker and team at Wild Abundance in the Appalachian Mountains, Alyosha on Lake Superior, Christophe Agnus and family in France, and Martha Delaney and Dan McAuliff in the Santa Cruz Mountains, California where I finally completed the book.

**My small family of Greenfields:** Mom, the greatest gift you gave me was to allow me to explore my interests at a young age and the freedom to be myself, without telling me who or what I had to be. I love you so much mom. To my three siblings: Rebecca, Levi and Joe, aren't you happy that none of us turned out to be "normal"? I enjoy being a Greenfield with you. I am grateful to you, Aunt Louise, for supporting me for the last 37 years. I'm grateful to each of you; Myrna, Arthur, Hazel, Michelle, and to my late Grandpa Harold. And although we're not technically family, I'm grateful to you "cousin" Jerry Greenfield, for making it cooler to be a Greenfield (and to you, too, Ben Cohen!).

**I'm grateful to you Mark, for instilling a deep love for nature in me** and helping me to connect with Earth when you were one of the only pathways to nature that I had. Without your influence, I might not be the messenger for Earth that I have become. I'm happy to be living out your lifelong desire to bring more harmony to Earth. I'm grateful to all the Badgleys. When I think of you, I think of the waters and woods of Michigan and Florida.

**The activists, thinkers and Earth stewards who have inspired and educated me through their dedication to Earth, humanity and the plants and animals we share this home with.** In particular, I share my gratitude for Michael Pollan, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Sean Sherman, Vandana Shiva, Leah Penniman and Soul Fire Farm, Thich Nhat Hanh, Mark Boyle, Ron Finley, Annie Leonard, Sam Thayer, Linda Black Elk, Joel Salatin, Alice Waters, Lyla June Johnston, Amanda David, Tashia Hart, Alexis Nikole Nelson, Tristram Stuart, Sandor Katz, Rowen White, Winona LaDuke, Jordan Marie Whetstone, Leah Thomas, Will Allen, Malik Yakini, Eric Schlosser, Karen Washington, Ira Wallace, Tara Houska, Tyson Samson and Leah Song.

**The many Indigenous cultures that have been stewards of Earth and our plant and animal relatives.** Each relationship that I fostered with our plant relatives was founded upon the relationships that you developed and



nurtured over thousands of years. I am especially grateful to the Anishinaabe people of the land that I was raised on and return to each year. At the deepest level within, I am grateful to you.

**The cultures of humanity that fostered the plant relationships that I learned to love in my Central Florida garden.** In this semi-tropical region, most of the foods that brought me sustenance are thanks to the African diaspora, cultures of the Caribbean, Africa, India, Asia and Latin America. I am grateful to each of you for holding strong to your relationship with the plants and growing your traditional foods, even when the dominator culture tries so hard to rip it away. I see you and I am deeply grateful to you.

**Every human working with the Earth and plants to heal humanity.** I am grateful to the teachers, story tellers, herbalists, medicine makers, gardeners, farmers, permaculturists, seed keepers and seed savers, traditional ecological knowledge practitioners, foragers, plant walkers, tree planters, tree sitters, tree huggers, ethnobotanists, botanists, doulas, activists and all stewards, healers and nurturers.

**The plants and animals that I have spent these years with.** Without you, this story would not exist and neither would my life. Every day I am grateful for your being, just as you are.

**Mother Earth, for providing us with everything we need.** I am grateful to the water, which is life, the soil on which we come and go and to all of the gifts of Earth, the land on which we stand, the sky, the wind and fire. I am grateful to the sun, the moon, to all of creation, to The Cosmos, “all that is or was or ever will be.” – Carl Sagan

**As is apparent, I was not alone. It took a community for me to grow and forage 100 percent of my food.**

**And to many of you who have supported me greatly in the last few years, who I would not feel complete without expressing gratitude for:** Jameson and Shikha Johnson, Daniel Troia, Sebastiano Pestoni, Tracy Weiss, Carly Rundle-Borchert, Ayla Fulton, Miranda Crawley, Ethan Harris, Brent Saeli, Will Hassel, Luke Yourzak, Nala Weiss, Melenn Herve, Elise Pickett, Emily Quinlan, Ryan Sandberg, Kandice Segall, Abbey Waterworth, James Burt, Ivan Juric, Tiffany Paige, James and Joan Werning, Kerem Gencer, Kelli Harper, Sue Mannon, Rob Herring, Dan Keston, Camila Prada, Chad Rendell, Peter Barden, Daniel Saddleton, Albert Risemberg, Laura Oldanie, Nathaniel Ogbe and Rikki Ocampos.

**My editor, Connie Moore,** for your dedication to bringing my message into a higher state of integrity. Your encouragement, feedback and support were instrumental in the completion of this book. And to Selena Patterson and Joe Greenfield for creating this book cover, Alissa Hansen for drawing the robin bird for Robin Press and to all who proofread the book and provided early feedback.

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**Gratitude is my fuel for life and a means of expressing my love.**

Gratitude is my medicine, creating healing for myself and for others. I am grateful to the practice of Nonviolent Communication for sharing with me the practical means of living in gratitude. I am grateful to the Haudenosaunee people for sharing their practice of the Thanksgiving Address. “The address is based on the belief that the world cannot be taken for granted, that a spiritual communication of thankfulness and acknowledgement of all living things must be given to align the minds and hearts of the people with Nature.”

– *Thanksgiving Address: Greetings to the Natural World*



## What People are Saying About *Food Freedom*

“In formal debate, taking an extreme position often yields understanding of an issue that would never occur when both sides tip-toe diplomatically around the main disagreement. Robin Greenfield is an extremist, but this is why everyone needs to read his story. Extremists frame truth like no one else. Living at the edge of extremism, Robin takes us on a spellbinding and provocative journey of discovery. Only an ultra-maverick can learn and communicate at this level of awareness and authenticity.

“If you feel enslaved or shackled by industrial food and farming, Robin’s story is like an emancipation proclamation shouting: ‘Free yourself!’ This may be the most profound modern story explaining the path to possibility. His story, compelling and profound, grabs you and shakes you like a rabbit in the jaws of a wolf. Most of us need that level of shaking to embrace truth and practical conviction. Prepare to be challenged, informed, and transformed.”

– Joel Salatin, Farmer, Author

“These times are calling on us to shatter the illusions of limitation, free our imagination, and reject everything our forefathers deemed impossible. Robin’s testimony is proof that the power to dissolve mental and physical prisons is in our hands.”

– Dr. Lyla June Johnston, Dine’ Historical Ecologist

“Join Robin for a nourishing adventure that will forever change the way you think about food. Having lived a few of my own dietary experiments, I can deeply feel the bravery and determination in his story. In *Food Freedom*, Robin’s philosophy and practice merge into a timely call to culinary action and food awareness.”

– Samuel Thayer, *Sam Thayer’s Field Guide to Edible Wild Plants*

“Robin is the ultimate permaculture practitioner. His life is a testament to what is possible by living carbon neutral in modern times, more than is imaginable by the average person. Robin has the highest ethics of anyone I know and the best energy audit lifestyle. This is a book for surviving the future and the present reality. You need this book and so do your grandchildren.”

– Geoff Lawton, World-Renowned  
Permaculture Consultant, Designer and Teacher



“*Food Freedom* is more than a chronicle of Robin’s experiences with food acquisition. Rather, this is an informative, entertaining guidebook that will serve as a roadmap for so many of us who wish to be in right relationship with our Mother Earth. This book draws you in and makes you feel like you are part of Robin’s journey. Although we all have varying experiences and challenges – some of us have 9-5 jobs, some of us have families, some of us are new to food production – Robin’s book is a vision – a glimpse into a world where food has been liberated from the market economy.”

– Linda Black Elk, Ethnobotanist and Food Sovereignty Activist

“Robin’s book *Food Freedom* is the inspiration we need! Through following Robin’s incredible year-long journey, we are given practical and accessible steps we can take toward being in better relationship with our food, community and Earth. Above all, Robin’s book is a testament to his integrity and a reminder that each day we can align our most sacred values with our actions.”

– Amanda David, Community Herbalist and Organizer

“Robin Greenfield’s *Food Freedom* is an intimate offering of one human being’s search for an action-fueled metamorphosis to shed societal norms and embody a sustainable existence.”

– Tashia Hart, *The Good Berry Cookbook: Harvesting and Cooking Wild Rice and Other Wild Foods*

“Robin Greenfield has dedicated his life to bringing humanity back into connection with the earth and all its fellow inhabitants. Food is our umbilical connection to the earth – it’s the way we take nature into our bodies on a daily basis. *Food Freedom* is a call for us to rejoice in the bounty and abundance, and a call for all of us to safeguard and nurture this as a basic human right that should be accessible to all.”

– Tristram Stuart, *Waste*, and *The Bloodless Revolution*;  
Founder of Feedback Global

“Robin set out on a truly remarkable endeavor in doing what most people would call impossible, growing every morsel of food and sustenance on his own. In this empowering book, Robin shows how to incrementally take small steps to your very own Food Freedom, while influencing the communities around us to take back control from Big Food conglomerates. This book will inspire you to take a closer look at your food and to eat what nature intended, real food.”

– Vani Hari, New York Times Best-Selling Author of *Food Babe Kitchen*

*“Food Freedom* is a revolutionary exploration that redefines our understanding of food and its connection to the Earth. With humility and unwavering resilience, Robin’s incredibly rich journey compels us to fundamentally reexamine how we source and consume our food. This book is far more than a guide; it is a profound call to action, urging us to reconnect with the land and cultivate more resilient food systems that prioritize local sources, ecologically sustainable practices and nurture deeper respect and curiosity for nature. Robin’s journey will empower you to take bold, meaningful steps toward embracing true food freedom and becoming better stewards of the world around us.”

– Ashlie Thomas, Gardener and Author of *How to Become a Gardener: Find Empowerment in Creating Your Own Food Security*

“In *Food Freedom*, Robin takes us on a remarkable food adventure where he shares his trials and triumphs while spending a year eating nothing but what he could personally grow or forage. The book is a fascinating story packed with homesteading, gardening and foraging tips, as well as insights about nutrition and our dietary choices, the global food system and community.

“His actions are a combination of educational event, political commentary, street theater, and personal challenge. Few of us would choose such a challenging path, but Robin reminds us that we can always challenge ourselves to do better.”

– Doug Elliott, Naturalist, Herbalist, Storyteller

“Robin is a modern-day monk. His ascetic practice is dedicated to the playful yet devout exploration of the human condition and our relationship to the Earth. I remember Robin staying with us towards the end of his time eating only wild foraged food. He had bags full of nuts and dried persimmons he carried with him, like a giant human squirrel, sea salt and wild rice which he had harvested in his travels. I watched him take a bite out of the first commercially grown apple since his fast began. He proclaimed that it was tasteless compared to the sour and sweet wild fruits he was now used to.”

– Laney Sullivan, Musician, Høly River,  
Co-founder of Fonticello Food Forest

“The ethos of surviving in the manner of our grandmothers and ancestors by procuring food, water and medicines from the natural and horticultured world is the salvation of humanity. If we want this sacred world, we have to fight for that world. Our right to live in a spiritual economic reality is threatened daily by the violence of the corporate, extractive, linear system which has separated us from our connection, our natural abilities, our relatives. Mitakuye Oyasin is a philosophy of the Oceti Sakowin (Sioux Nation) meaning everything that is, is my relative. As a species, we must realize our responsibility to recreate and pursue a respectful relationship with our relatives before we further our own extinction. Only the human will go extinct because it has lost its way. There is a critical mass of us who know the way and are seeking the way to save ourselves from extractive corporate throwaway consumer slavery. We are family and we will depend on each other in this fight for the power of our peace. I look forward to the day we forage in my sacred homelands for the nourishment which has sustained indigenous nations for untold millennia.”

– Chase Iron Eyes, Director and Lead Counsel  
of Lakota People’s Law Project

“Marketers have fed us lies—that we can’t survive without the industrial food system, that this system frees us from the daily “drudgery” of caring for our families and ourselves, and that we are incapable of producing food. Robin Greenfield’s immersive quest shows that we have more options than we may realize. Will you go as far as Robin? Not likely. But you will come away from the story of his journey to food freedom feeling inspired to throw off—or at least loosen—the shackles of industrial agriculture.”

– Anne-Marie Bonneau, *The Zero-Waste Chef*

“Everything about this book shines like a beacon of hope for humanity at this critical moment of our journey to becoming a just and sustainable global civilization. I am immensely grateful to Robin for the profound wisdom and practical information contained in this book as well as his life of utmost integrity that reflects his deep love of the Earth and service to all beings. What a great blessing this book is to all of us looking for inspiration and guidance on our Earth path.”

– Steve Torma, Former President of Earthaven Ecovillage,  
Co-founder of The REAL Center,  
Compassionate Communication Teacher and Life Coach

*“Food Freedom* is an inspiring and thought-provoking read into a quest towards sustainable living and self-sufficiency from the guru and eco-warrior himself, Robin Greenfield! *Food Freedom* provides a detailed account of Robin’s journey to break free from the constraints of mainstream food culture towards a more balanced, equitable, and regenerative lifestyle, ultimately manifesting in the challenge of only eating what he grows and forages for an entire year! I have personally lived with and witnessed the passion that Robin brings to sustainability through his hands-on experiences and the stories shared in this book, and I genuinely feel this book is a must-read for anyone interested in eco-conscious living.”

– Chris Castro, Former Director of Sustainability  
& Resilience, City of Orlando, Founder, IDEAS For Us

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## Foreword

When I first met Robin Greenfield, I was struck by the radical nature of his mission. Robin has made an uncompromising commitment to exist in harmony with the Earth. This is not just a personal commitment; it is a provocative public experiment that reveals what is possible if we reimagine our relationship with food.

*Food Freedom* tells Robin's story of foraging and growing all of his food for an entire year. Robin does nothing by half measures: By his rules, every bit of his food—oil, salt, honey, meat, fish, spices, tea, even medicine—would have to be grown, harvested, caught or foraged. By foregoing the industrialized food system entirely, Robin upends what I like to call fast food culture and its values. Fast food culture extends far beyond a McDonalds drive-through or the ultra-processed foods in the convenience store. Fast food culture is defined by an insidious belief system based around consumption and waste, all to benefit the for-profit multinational conglomerates that exploit the fragile resources of our planet. In an age where the values of speed, convenience, cheapness and uniformity often trump the slower, more earth-bound values of seasonality, simplicity, biodiversity, and beauty, Robin offers an unwavering vision of what is possible when we break free from the fast food values we have been fed for the past 60 years.

Robin has taken food self-sufficiency to its most radical extension—but as he is the first to acknowledge, this experiment depended upon the support he received from his community. Over the course of a year, he learned about wild berries, greens and mushrooms from experienced foragers, acquired seeds from local nurseries, and tended to gardens he planted in his community members' yards. This experiment reveals an important truth: Despite the best efforts of fast food culture to separate us from our food sources and one another, we are all interconnected—and we are at our best when we foster those connections. The health of our food systems, our communities, and our planet are inextricably linked.

We cannot all participate in the same uncompromising experiments as Robin, but we can learn from his experiences. A whole world of delicious wild edibles can be found all around us, at our fingertips, if we open our eyes to it. And when we eat regenerative food that is grown locally—whether we are foraging it, growing it ourselves, accessing it through community gardens, participating in community-supported agriculture programs (CSAs), or purchasing through farmers' markets—we strengthen our community bonds and support the people who are taking care of the land.

I have always believed in the power of food to transform lives and communities. I have witnessed it happen firsthand at the Edible Schoolyard Project, a garden and kitchen program I founded 30 years ago at a public middle school. When you get students out into the garden—when they can plant a seed, watch it grow, harvest it, and cook it into something delicious—their whole relationship to nature changes. Food is far more than sustenance. It is a source of connection and growth, a way to fall in love with nature and mend our broken relationship with the planet. *Food Freedom* shows that when we take control of our food choices, we take control of our future. We become active participants in the creation of a culture that values the planet. This book shows us what is possible and calls us to action, to make these small, meaningful, pleasurable, rewarding changes in our everyday lives. Most importantly, it reminds us that we all have the power to make a difference, one meal at a time.

– Alice Waters

# Chapter 1

## Introduction: Why a Year of Growing and Foraging All of My Food?

It is the dream of millions – complete self-sufficiency – to produce all of their own food and never have to make a trip to the grocery store. But for most everyone, it is just that, a dream. The ease and convenience of our current global, industrial food system is just that, too easy. Too convenient and time saving to pass up. Too alluring. Too easy to resist.

I've been exploring food for a decade and since the beginning I've had the burning questions: Could I exist without grocery stores and restaurants? No packaged or processed foods? Nothing shipped long distances? Could I grow or forage all the food I needed in order to not just survive, but to actually be a thriving, happy and healthy human?

I know that humans have lived in a manner similar to this for most of humanity's existence, but the question is, could I do it in the 21st century in a time when most of us have lost the skills, the knowledge and the basic connection to the source of our food?

Those who are familiar with my work know that when I take on a task, I dive deep. At the time of planning this endeavor, I had never eaten a single meal that I had produced completely on my own or to my recollection, even a fully local meal. I could have set the challenge for something easier. Such as to have a single meal where I collected every ingredient from the garden or nature, or even do this for a week. I could have embarked for a month on the 100-mile diet, where I had to purchase everything I ate from within 100 miles. But that would not go far enough. That would be meaningful, but it would not answer my burning questions. It would not satisfy my burning desire. Could I grow and forage 100 percent of my food for an entire year?

And when I say 100 percent, I mean it. Every calorie, every nutrient, every ounce of protein and fat, all the herbs and spices, even the salt and the oil. No exceptions. I had read *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* by Barbara Kingsolver. Her family embarked on a similar endeavor, but they also purchased food from farmers in their community, ate as needed while traveling and had some exceptions, including olive oil, grains, herbs, spices and coffee. This would be no exceptions. No vitamins. I'd grow my own. No medicine. My food would be my medicine. No alcohol at a bar. If I wanted a bubbly drink, I'd have to grow each ingredient, ferment it on my own and wait for the sweet carbonated beverage to form.



That would also mean no shopping at farmers' markets or eating from a friend's garden. I wanted this to be the deepest immersion in food that I could embark on. I've found no better way to understand a subject of life than to fully immerse in it. What better way to get to know my food than to learn how to grow every ingredient or find it from nature?

In 2011, I was living a fairly average life for a US American. Nearly all of my food came from grocery stores and restaurants. I was an avid shopper at Walmart and put little thought, effort or care into my food. All of that changed when I stumbled across documentaries like "Food, Inc." and books like *The Omnivore's Dilemma* that completely disrupted my dinners. I learned that with every bite I was taking, I was consuming part of the planet.

My food was being shipped on average 1,500 miles from farm to fork and guzzling fossil fuels. It was being drenched in pesticides that polluted my body and the land and water it is sprayed on. My food choices were trashing the planet, leaving behind thousands of pounds of garbage that will be around for hundreds of years after my life is over. The animals were being raised in appalling conditions that I could not willingly be a part of. Species are going extinct at a rate of tens of thousands per year. Topsoil that was built by the inch over thousands of years is being lost by the foot in a mere matter of decades. Nearly half of the food being produced is being wasted, much of it ending up in landfills where it emits methane, a potent greenhouse gas. The lobbyists in Washington, D.C. have more power over my food than the people growing it for me. All this while approximately one in seven US Americans are food insecure and nearly one billion people around the world suffer from severe food insecurity. Every meal I sat down to was one big lie force-fed to me by a powerful set of mega food corporations set on maximizing their profits while making me unhealthy, polluting the planet and exploiting their workers.

This just scratches the surface of what I learned in my awakening. I had enough of the lies. I had enough of the destruction. I was going to take control of my health and my food and eat in a way that doesn't destroy the planet, humanity and the plants and animals we share this home with. That is the journey I have been on since 2011.

The revolution may have begun in my mind, but I was not able to put it all into action immediately. Instead, I wrote out a list of the changes I wanted to make and made a plan to take action one step at a time. I started to skip the drives to Walmart and left my car at home to instead bicycle to the local

grocery store and walk to the farmer's market. I started to buy a lot more whole foods and fewer processed foods. I learned how to cook real food and ditched my microwave. I slowly but surely reduced the number of garbage bags I was taking out by buying unpackaged foods, bringing my own bags to the store and composting my food scraps on my back patio. I was hesitant to switch to organic food at first because of the cost, but eventually realized I could reduce spending by switching to less expensive whole foods instead of processed, packaged foods. I focused on buying as much local food as possible from the farmers' markets and People's Food Co-op down the street. The bulk section at the co-op became the center of my diet. I ditched the factory-farmed meat and based my meals around fresh produce. I experimented with growing a little bit of my own food. I volunteered at a nearby community garden. Step by step I transformed my diet and the impact I was having on the planet through the food on my plate.

Early on in my awakening, I had become aware of my hypocrisy. My actions were not in alignment with my beliefs. The story on the pages ahead centers around food, but I was transforming every way that my actions were contradictory to my beliefs and impacting the world: food, water, energy, waste, transportation, clothing, hygiene, housing and finances, to name a few. Even with all these changes I was making I knew I was still a hypocrite, but after making over 100 positive changes, I had brought my hypocrisy down from a level ten to maybe a level five. After about two years of transformation, I felt like I was being the change I wished to see in the world and it was now time to spread the message.

In April 2013, I departed from California for my first environmental adventure. I cycled across the United States on a bamboo bicycle and lived out sustainability to the extreme. I vowed to only eat local, organic, unpackaged food and carry every piece of garbage I created across the country with me. I learned about food deserts (which are now more accurately described as food apartheid) and how impossible it is to eat a sustainable and healthy diet for many of my fellow citizens. I had one exception to those vows: I could eat any food that was going to waste. I learned that nearly half of all food in the United States is wasted and I learned that I could live off that waste. I am talking about dumpster diving!

In 2014, I cycled across the country again. This time I lived almost exclusively on wasted food for 1,000 miles of cycling from the Mississippi River to New York City. In each major city I passed through, I hosted a Food Waste Fiasco, displaying the bounty of food that I had pulled from the dumpsters in a food mandala, teaching thousands of people about the broken food system that

plays a central role in food waste and hunger in our country. In 2016, I spent a month living in Bankhead, Atlanta, with just \$4/day for food (the amount the average recipient of SNAP receives) to gain a better perspective of the situation millions of US Americans are experiencing under food apartheid.

Later in 2016, I lived in New York City for a month. This time I lived like the average US American, eating, shopping and consuming, but with one big exception. I had to wear every piece of garbage that I created. After 30 days, the trash had accumulated to 87 pounds of garbage. I was a walking trash pile – a moving billboard – that represented how much garbage just one person creates, largely through our food choices. Then in 2017, I cycled across the United States again, this time joined by 30 others and we planted fruit trees and gardens and volunteered in communities we passed through. During all of this, I was visiting gardens, farms and sustainable living projects to immerse myself in my food and gain a deeper understanding.

Food waste became one of my strongest passions and the way that I could consistently get the media to report on our destructive food system. I learned that I could live completely off wasted food from the industrial food system. In this way, I could eat without supporting Big Ag, all while actually diverting wasted food from landfills. That felt in alignment for me to an extent, but all my food was still being produced by a system that I did not support. I wanted to know, is it even possible to live independently from this system? I searched and searched for examples of people who are doing it 100 percent today and I did not come up with any. Maybe there were some out there, but I sure could not find them. It seemed to me there was only one way for me to find out. I would have to do it myself.

I would be my own farmer.

I would be my own grocery store.

I would be my own pharmacy.

I would be my own processor, my own distributor and my own chef.

And there would be absolutely no food scientists in my kitchen!

I do have another agenda by embarking on this endeavor. I want you to question your food. And if you are already questioning it, I want you to question it further. Don't stop at the friendly labels like "USDA organic," "Certified Vegan" or "pasture-raised." The story of our food is far more complex than labels on the packages will describe.

My hope is that you will walk away from this book with a better understanding of the food system that likely brought you much or all of today's meal. I want you to know what you are eating, where it came from, how it got to you and the impact it has on Earth, our plant and animal relatives, humanity

and ultimately, yourself. And if you don't like what you learn, I want you to change it, so you can feel more connected and in alignment with what you eat.

That's the truth.

But I'm not going to leave you hanging there. This is a book of solutions. This is a book to educate and empower you to take back control of your food and live with greater health and happiness. Over the years, many people have shared with me that they feel alone on their journey. There is no need to feel alone though. All across the nation and world there is a good food revolution taking place. Individuals and communities are standing up to Big Ag and taking control of their own destinies. This book will share their stories.

From nonprofits turning front yards into gardens to provide ultra-local food to their community. To organizations collecting thousands of pounds of fruit from trees in the city to feed those in need. To guerrilla gardeners taking back the streets by planting food in them. To cities planting public fruit trees for everyone to eat from. To school garden programs run by the children, growing food for their school lunches. To a network of thousands of people growing food and sharing it free in their community. To grassroots seed libraries providing the seeds to start gardens across the nation. To foragers changing the way people look at the plants they walk by every day. To Indigenous communities bringing food sovereignty back to their people. To land reparations activists working to equitably redistribute land to Black, Indigenous and people of color. To BIPOC-centered community farms working to end racism and injustice in the food system. To farmers regenerating destroyed land into productive abundance. To everyday people producing a majority of their own food right in their own yards. The positive stories are endless.

This path to truly good food need not be a lonely one. It is a path that millions of people have embarked on and they are waiting for you to join them. This book will give you the tools for change. It will help you navigate the aisles of your markets and bring basic common sense back to food. It will help you peel back the lies of the mega food corporations and gain a connection with your food. It will help you get involved with the liberation initiatives already taking place in your community or to start your own initiative. It will help you to begin growing your own food, even if it is just a windowsill herb garden, a few tomato pots on your balcony or a single raised bed in your front yard. It will help you to begin foraging for your food, from the "weeds" growing in your lawn to the fruits on the street to the wild foods inside and outside the city. If you are already growing your own food, my example of 100 percent can inspire you to grow and forage even more this year than you did last year. Whether it's the first step you're taking or your 101<sup>st</sup> step, this book is here to empower you to do so.

As much as this may disappoint some of you, this is not a how-to garden book. I still consider myself somewhat of a beginner gardener and I've primarily grown food in just this one climate. Furthermore, the world is incredibly diverse and the people holding this book live in a wide range of growing environments.

However, this book does include my top recommendations and tips for beginner gardeners and I will share the philosophies that created the foundation for my gardens. This book will certainly provide the inspiration for many to begin growing food, or for those already growing, the inspiration to grow more. Fortunately, there is an abundance of how-to garden books, many which are regionally based, which I have included in the Empowerment Manual along with my online gardening guide for beginners. This book is also not a plant identification guide. There are ample resources for plant identification that I will provide for you. More importantly, this book provides my foraging knowledge, tips and direction to credible resources to assist you in finding and enjoying the food and medicine that is growing freely and abundantly all around us.

Lastly, against the strong demand, this is not a cookbook. I have never written a single detailed recipe, nor have I followed more than a few recipes in this year-long journey. I'm more likely to harvest whatever is fresh in the garden and in my pantry and bring it all together in the moment. I will, however, share some of my most common meals, snacks and goodies that I made directly from the land. Cooking made easy. Nothing complicated.

Back to what this book IS though. Here's a spoiler alert. I did not do this on my own. Sure, I was the only one growing and foraging all of my food, but I absolutely could not have done it without community. I relied on experienced growers, foragers and nurseries for knowledge; and fellow gardeners for seeds and plants; volunteers who spent time with me in my garden and helped me process large quantities of food; neighbors who loaned me space in their yard to garden and thousands of people who encouraged me and gave me the strength to do this. Perhaps most importantly, I relied on the relationships that Indigenous people have built and fostered with these plants over thousands of years. I believe that true solutions lie in community and you will see this throughout the chapters ahead.

### **A Few Words on My Privilege**

Lastly, I want to address something very important. When I first began my journey of sustainable living, I believed somewhere along the line that *everyone could do what I do*. Through ten years of listening to others, I have realized that is just not true. I live a life with much privilege, with an incredible amount

of freedom and free time, with comparatively minimal daily challenges to overcome. As a white man, I live in a society that was built specifically for white men, at the burden of so many others, that provides me with many advantages both seen and unseen. To a large degree, this allows me to live the way that I do with my needs for safety and comfort met and feeling relatively accepted living this way. (See *"On My Privilege" for a deeper exploration of this.*)

I want to be clear that I am not saying that everyone can grow and forage all of their food or that they should. Nor am I prescribing a single diet for the world. This will be made clear throughout the book. Rather, my goal is to use my place of privilege to break down the food systems that contribute to inequity and injustice, and to share and support alternative systems that are beneficial to all. The current food systems provide the most benefit to the financially wealthiest people of the world, largely at the expense of the people with the least finances and access to resources. This will be explored in this book. Many of the organizations and the solutions that I share are both accessible to people across different cultural and economic lives and representative of the people doing the work.

Yes, this is an extreme endeavor I have embarked on. I have chosen this extreme because as "normal" as it may appear to many, our current food system is extreme in itself. The US has just five percent of the world's population, yet consumes 25 percent of the world's resources. This, by definition, is extreme. My strategy is to take you to the other end of the extreme to illuminate the truth and show another way is possible. Throughout the pages ahead, I will be drawing not just on my year of growing and foraging all of my food, but a decade of activism and immersion in food issues. This is my journey to Food Freedom and I am grateful to have you on this journey with me.

## Chapter 2

### No Land and Minimal Experience in a New Environment

The night before my year began, I went for a bike ride. The bags on my bike were unusually filled with food – lentils and flax seed, herbs and spices, coconut and olive oil and fresh fruits and vegetables. This was every morsel of the store-bought food that I had in my house. I was cycling to a potluck at a friend's home where I would give it all away while enjoying my last meal with friends and my last bite of food from a supermarket for an entire year. After a few hours of enjoying the delicious dishes and sharing exciting conversations about the year ahead, I went home with empty bags and an overstuffed belly, ready to create my next 1,095 breakfasts, lunches and dinners solely from foods that I would grow and forage.

But to tell you where my next breakfast would be coming from I have to go back about a year.

It is 10:00 p.m., and I am feverishly scribbling words on the back of my worthless train ticket receipt. I'm angry. I'm anxious. I'm fed up. I want to go home, but I have no home. I've been on the road for nearly two years now, two long years.

I've just had an episode with the train bathroom where I found myself swearing at the door. I'm generally a pretty centered guy, cursing no more than a handful of times in a month. I've sworn ten times already today. I've cursed at the button that gets water out of the sink, at the button that opens the bathroom door, and at that lever-like thing that shuts my sleeper car door.

These are telltale signs of serious fatigue. I'm on a train from Copenhagen to Paris on my second European speaking tour of the year. It is a 17-hour train ride including a two-hour layover in the middle of the night. The company that bought my tickets shipped them to me, but they didn't arrive in Denmark in time, leaving me stuck trying to explain with no success to each conductor that I DID have a ticket. I had no choice but to buy another very expensive ticket.

This is what had me on the train and led to my battle with the buttons: the green and red buttons on the bathroom door in the station. Will I be locked in where I can lighten my load in privacy or will I soon be staring at an unlucky person who opens the door to see me on the toilet? I'm losing the battle with the buttons.

It has been a long two years and I'm ready for it to end. I'm just a month

away from settling someplace where I can live simply and grow my own food. Through these travels, I have been planting gardens and fruit trees and giving away seeds, but I'm never around to see them grow. I'm so ready to be around for the abundance, to watch it day by day. I'm so ready to be present, to eat off the land and to practice radical self-sufficiency.

There is nothing I want more right now than to be sleeping. And after that, growing my own beautiful food.

A month later I arrived in Orlando, Florida, ready to settle down and as many would say, "live off the land." But, it would still be some time before I could eat that first breakfast after my ride home from the potluck. I had a lot of work to do.

When most people attempt to "live off the land," they probably have land to live off. I did not have this. I arrived in Orlando with everything I owned in my backpack, plus a bicycle. I had no place to live. I had no home.

My first task would be finding a place for my partner, Cheryl, and me to live. I arrived in Orlando on a Monday and she came in from California that Wednesday. We may have been without a home, but we were not without friends and they were happy to host us for the first couple weeks.

With our temporary lodging figured out, it was time for me to figure out a place to live long term. The plan was to build a tiny house in someone's backyard. We just didn't know whose backyard it would be in. Actually, we had a backyard use agreement with someone we met on our previous visit to Orlando, but that plan dissolved, leaving me clambering to figure something out with very limited time. I was supposed to be planting seeds, not looking for a place to plant my home!

I embraced the situation and put my feelers out into the community. One of the messages I sent was to Sarah Robinson, whom we had met on our last visit to Orlando. She was already involved in the local gardening movement as the pastor of Audubon Park Covenant Church, which had a large garden in the churchyard. I knew from conversations in the past that she might be interested in having a garden at home and that she often hosted people. So I proposed to her that Cheryl and I stay with her while we were looking for a place to set up our tiny home and in exchange I would turn her front yard into a garden. She loved the idea and we moved into her guest bedroom. The move was easy. All of our stuff was already in our backpacks.

It was now just a few days after the new year began. With the mild winters



in Florida and year-round growing seasons, I wasn't exactly racing the seasons to get my first seeds in the ground. But I had a time crunch more crucial than the seasons. I was giving myself just six months to prepare before saying goodbye to the grocery stores. That meant by arriving in Orlando in mid-December, my goal was to be switched over to a fully homegrown and foraged life by about June. I didn't have much leeway for mistakes and I had very little time to waste. Why was I in such a hurry?

Well, there was one factor I was worried about that could be my demise in this dream. I am not exactly the kind of person who stays in one place. For the last two years, I had been traveling and for the five years before that, I spent about six months of each year away from home in San Diego. It was rare for me to be in the same place for even a month at a time. I was worried that if I spent too long preparing, by the time I was ready to start, I might be itching to leave Florida. I figured six months was the shortest preparation period I could manage, meaning I would have 18 months of staying in one place. I could do that.

Besides the fact that I didn't have a garden yet, there was another problem. I didn't know how to grow food. I had never planted a seed in the state of Florida and had grown only a small amount of food my whole life. I wasn't a complete stranger to the garden. I remember my mom's little garden in front of our house where the chives and mint grew in abundance and where I played with the snapdragon flowers. I remember picking the occasional tomato and rhubarb from the neighbor's garden. But I didn't plant any of that food. I just picked it.

When I lived in San Diego and I woke up to our food system, I was inspired to start a garden, but with my constant traveling, I never actually grew much. I had a raised bed at my apartment that I made out of an old bookshelf that produced small amounts of greens and herbs. Once I moved into my off-grid tiny house in San Diego, I finally put some roots down and made two small raised beds. Here I grew some herbs, greens and tomatoes. Looking back at my journals from 2016, I thought I was growing as much as five percent of my food. Now I know it was just a fraction of one percent. Cheryl and I loved the green tomato hornworms so much that we just let them eat the tomato plants. They were too cute to kill.

So not only did I have no experience with growing food in this particular state, and even less within this particular region, I had about as close to no growing experience as I could have, considering what I was about to do. To be fair though, as little as I had actually grown, I had spent quite a bit of time in and around gardens, and as most people do once they get excited about growing their own food, I had watched a lot of videos and done my share of reading. I had taken my Permaculture Design Course (PDC) in 2016, which was a deep

immersion in the big picture issues. I had volunteered in multiple community gardens and visited small farms and gardens around the country. I had planted many fruit trees and helped others to start their own gardens.

This meant that before I could immerse myself in the garden, I had to explore the internet. I found myself typing the most basic questions into the search engine: “How much water does a carrot seed need?”, “How far apart do you plant beets?”, “How much sunlight does a garden need?”. I was starting at the very basics with what to plant, how much of it to plant, when to plant it, where to plant it, where to get it so that I could plant it and a daunting list of other beginner questions I had. Not to mention the questions like how long does it take to grow, how do I know when to harvest it and what insects might want to eat it before I get to eat it, but those questions could wait until I had actually planted some seeds.

The internet was not my only source of knowledge and I spent a lot of time in the garden gaining this much needed knowledge. Not my own garden, as I didn’t have one yet, but other people’s gardens. I had at least one thing going for me and that was that I was surrounded by experienced food growers. This was not an accident though. These gardeners were the reason I chose Orlando in the first place. In my previous two years of traveling I was keeping my eyes open for a potential place to settle down. I had already hatched this dream of growing and foraging all of my food and was keeping that in mind when visiting potential locations.

We were brought to Orlando in the summer of 2016 to give a talk and we both expected to pass through in a matter of days. The people of Orlando had different plans for us though. When we mentioned that we were looking for our next home base, we were met with much excitement and many invitations. We felt very welcomed. Equally important, we were met by a blossoming movement of local food growers. I know what some of you might be thinking, “Really, in Orlando?!” Orlando is known for amusement parks, shopping and crowds of vacationing tourists. It is not a place where most would expect the “grow your own food” movement to be going strong. I was as surprised then as many of you might be now.

We fell into the right crowd. There is Fleet Farming, a local nonprofit that turns front yards into gardens and sells the food to local restaurants and at the farmers’ markets. Then there is Orlando Permaculture, a group of people that meet once a month to share their knowledge and resources with each other to grow an abundance of food and grow the community. These are the people I wanted to be spending my time with. Many of them practice what they preach at home, ranging from recently converted yards producing a little fruit and

greens, to mature food forests that took over every nook of their lot. I met many of these people at the East End Market where I gave a talk in 2016. East End Market, started by John Rife, has local food at the center of its ethos and serves as an important hub that helped these groups to grow.

I joined Fleet Farming's volunteer days and learned how to turn yards into gardens. I talked to the gardeners and learned what was working for them and what wasn't. My first seeds came from their collection. Since they had been planting these seeds with success for the last couple years, it was a safe place to start. Within a week of settling into the guest bedroom at Sarah's, the first Orlando Permaculture meeting of the year was held and I was there. I saw many of the people I had met on my first trips through Orlando and I got to know more. I had lists of questions prepared and I was asking everyone who I thought might have answers. I was invited over to many of their gardens and food forests to learn and to take plants home with me. One such food forest was located at a small community called The Peanut Butter Palace. Here they incorporated food from their garden into many of their meals and had a stand of banana plants that towered into the sky. I hoped I could achieve something similar in my time ahead.

I rode my bike to the nearby community gardens and familiarized myself with what was growing well. I visited the local nurseries and picked the brains of the staff as I picked out my plants to purchase. I bought books by local authors like Robert Bowden, who instilled 25 years of gardening experience into his book, *Florida Fruit and Vegetable Gardening*. This was all experience from his gardens located within an hours' drive of where I'd be planting my gardens. I found classes to attend and visited sites like HEART and Sustainable Kashi. I also attended the meetings of Central Florida Fruit Society, The Simple Living Institute and The Florida School of Holistic Living, where I learned about sourcing my herbal medicines from the land.

That is just the gardening though. I haven't even mentioned where I'd get the other half of my food. Foraging! I did not find as large of a community with knowledge around foraging, but there was plenty for me to get started with. I was grateful to find a local forager named Green Deane, who has a plethora of knowledge. He hosts frequent plant walks in numerous locations where he takes people out to teach them the edible plants of the area. I also found Peggy Lantz's book, *Florida's Edible Wild Plants: A Guide to Collecting and Cooking*. And I attended the Florida Earthskills Gathering where I took classes to learn about the wondrous wild yam that could supposedly grow to over 150 pounds and how to make nut milk from hickory nuts.

Everything I needed to know was at my fingertips. I just had to gather it all and put each of the pieces of the puzzle into place. Don't get me wrong though,

these gardeners were definitely not growing and foraging all of their own food. Few were probably producing any more than a fifth of their average plate. And when I asked most of them if they thought I'd succeed, I don't remember a single one saying yes. I heard odds of 30 percent, 50 percent and the occasional confidence of around 70 percent. The only person in Florida who I recall fully believing in me during this stage was Cheryl.

And I was not in a green oasis as much as many of the internet commenters like to insist. I did choose Florida for the year-round growing season and because I felt like it would be one of the easier places to attempt this. But this region poses its own set of problems and challenges. First, Orlando does not have a winter per se, but interestingly enough the local gardeners kept referring to the summer as their "winter." What they explained to me is that it is so hot here that most food plants just can't grow in the summer, so gardeners take the summer off. I was told that the summers were so brutal that I wouldn't even want to be outside. I guess that's why the snowbirds go back north by April or May. With heat comes insects, or as many gardeners will say "pests." With six months of 90-degree Fahrenheit temperatures, the insects have time to reproduce into large populations. The insects can be so prolific here in Florida that many gardeners just give up for the summer.

Then there is the fact that the land of Florida was, until recently, under the ocean. Because of this, much of the potential growing area is basically just sand with some grass over it. This is the opposite of the fertile soils that built up over thousands of years in my homeland of Wisconsin. The local gardeners I spoke to in Florida made it quite clear to me that the Northern gardener's belief that "the grass is always greener on the other side" is simply not true. Well, unless we are literally talking about the grass, because Floridians surely do love their manicured lawns as much as anyone.

## Chapter 3

### Six Months of Preparation and I Still Wasn't Ready

So that's how I gathered the information, but the information wasn't going to create any food until I applied it. I needed to plant some food! I got on that right away. Sarah's front yard was my blank canvas but before I started planting into that canvas, I built a greenhouse. I found some old pallets, scrap pieces of wood and plastic with my friend Jonathan and we built a makeshift greenhouse. I spent the next few days figuring out where to put it so that it would get enough sun, but also be out of sight from the road because it looked like a pile of garbage. (I was being careful not to disrupt any neighbors who could in turn disrupt my plans.) The sprawling live oak trees made it hard to find a sunny enough spot on the property and I was unsure how much sun the little seeds needed.

These were exciting times. I was in the garden (sort of, still mostly just a grassy yard) but they were daunting, as I wrote in my journal 1/17/18:

*I feel frustrated, hopeless and anxious... I feel like I don't have room for failure, very little real experience, lost with starting seeds, lost with amount of sunshine, lost with fertility of soil, how much water, temperature, everything.*

Central Florida doesn't have a winter like many North Americans know of, but it does freeze. While I was starting the seeds in my greenhouse, we experienced multiple freezes and the short days of winter made everything much more difficult for a novice. But I kept at it. I had no choice. On 1/20/18 I wrote in my journal:

*Beet seeds are coming up!! First sprouts up! It's amazing with the cold that anything is coming up. I'm moving around the failed greenhouse to get enough light in. I've been down and this feels amazing.*

While the seeds were starting to come up in the greenhouse, I was gathering more supplies. I was truly starting from scratch. I wanted the experience of building my gardens from the ground up, so I made the decision that I wouldn't grow food in an already established garden. Sarah's sandy yard provided the opportunity for that. *See photo one in centerfold.*

Don't let the top layer of grass fool you. Underneath it is a beach of slightly off-white sand, with just a smattering of nutrients in it. I don't think any food had been grown here for a few decades, quite possibly much longer. I suppose a

parking lot would be a more challenging place to start, but it is safe to say I was starting with a challenge.

I learned from Fleet Farming of a mushroom farm just outside of Orlando that sold their spent growing material super cheap. You could pick it up for just \$25 for a truck bed, but better yet, I got the number of a guy who could bring a dump truck full (20 cubic yards) for just \$225. My fertility problem was solved. And this stuff is super fertile. It is the waste product of industrial farming. Because of their quest for the highest yield and profit, they dispose of it long before it is exhausted of nutrients.

My other biggest input was mulch, another waste product. Tree service companies are generally in the business of trimming or cutting down trees. That is where they make their money. The tree is then a burden to them and they have to deal with it. Often the trees are dumped in the landfill, costing these companies money to dispose of. What I learned to do was to keep an eye out for these trucks, and if I saw one in the neighborhood, I would walk over to them and invite them to dump the woodchips right in my yard (I also used the ChipDrop website to get more loads dropped). Generally, they shred the trees into woodchips on the spot because they can fit more into the truck that way. I turned their problem into my solution. My first load of mulch came from a tree that was growing just a few doors down the street.

This stage of the garden building process also had me in the dumpsters. I needed large amounts of cardboard to lay down to kill the lawn. To do this, I simply pulled off the tape and staples and laid the cardboard flat on top of the grass. The cardboard blocked the sun from the grass and without sunlight the lawn dies.

There are seven ingredients that I used to turn the yard into a garden: cardboard, mulch, compost, soil, seeds/plants, water and sun.

The seeds came from multiple local seed companies (my local friends told me there were none but with some research, I managed to find two within about 100 miles), non-local seed companies, friends' gardens from plants they saved seeds from, as well as seeds I harvested from the wild and from unmaintained garden plots. The plants came from nurseries, plant swaps at meetups, plant sales, cuttings from friends' gardens and from the wild as well.

The sun was freely and abundantly available, although as you know, I had a hard time figuring out how much the plants needed.

Lastly, water came both from the sky and from the tap. I watered with a hose to get the garden started and in time I set up drip irrigation which was connected to the city water. I also set up a 275-gallon tote to harvest rainwater which I used for hand watering and I carried up many five-gallon buckets of

water from the lake behind Sarah's house. I started my garden during the dry season, so watering was especially important.

I certainly was not doing this alone. Cheryl was with me in the garden on many days and I hosted multiple volunteer days. Some of the volunteers were experienced growers who provided their support and others were less experienced even than I was, eager to learn about how to turn their own yard into a garden. Most everyone was there to connect with others and grow their community as well!

The weeks and months ahead in the garden were some of the most anxiety filled and rewarding days of my adult life.

*2/11/18 I came back from Earthskills Gathering and nearly all the seeds I planted five days ago have already sprouted. The transplants have doubled and tripled in size. Warm days and nights seem to have accelerated the plants in the greenhouse. Everything is looking good in the garden. Plants look healthy, but slow growing. Everything is still small. Did I transplant them to the garden too soon and stunt them?*

*2/12/18 Sweet potato cuttings are already producing leaves. There is mold growing on the soil on the plants in the greenhouse. I'm watering too much, I think? Also maybe not enough sun? Some plants are lanky and stretchy looking, reaching for the sun.*

*2/13/18 Tomato plants are coming up. At least 14 of the 19 potato sprouts I planted are coming up through the soil. I need to plant the other five rows asap.*

*2/14/18 The plants in the garden all seem to be growing slowly, but I don't know how fast to expect them to grow.*

*3/09/18 The papaya tree that I planted has been wilting away. Each day the lower leaves become wilted and I cut off more every few days. It is down to just a tuft of leaves on top. A lot of the veggies (beets, carrots and lettuce) are doing great and getting bigger. Other veggies, like cabbage and kale, are very small.*

*3/11/18 First harvest from the garden! I thinned the carrots, turnips, radishes and beets and ate what I thinned. It would have been best to have thinned weeks ago. I probably stunted all of the plants. The lettuce is huge.*

*3/13/18 I must finally finish planting rows five through seven! Most of the greens are shooting up. It could be that I thinned them or it could be the cold nights. Beets, turnips and radishes are actually growing now. The garden looks great!*

*3/15/18 I planted enough cassava today for up to 10% of my caloric needs for the year!*

*3/19/18 Found a fire ants' nest in a row. Did I mix too much sand into the soil? Collards desperately need to be thinned. I way over planted. Daikon radish plants are large and needed to be thinned weeks ago. I'm noticing the plants packed too tightly have more aphids.*

*3/23/18 For the first time, I feel like I have more greens than we can eat and I feel a little overwhelmed with harvesting.*

*4/06/18 Cucumbers are growing! A lot of flowers. First tomatoes coming in! Beans growing. 100+ beans and flowers. Potatoes are flowering.*

*4/15/18 So many native pollinators on the flowers. Green bees!*

*4/18/18 Much of the garden is way too overgrown and a lot of the plants are spaced way too close together.*

*Beans are amazingly productive. There are more beans on the plants than leaves and branches! Aphids are out of control. Many ladybugs, too. I learned about ladybug larvae and I am so surprised.*

*5/01/18 Converting soil, air and seeds into vegetables on the dinner table. It's miraculous! The variety of tastes and plants all coming from some soil and seeds is hard to fathom. I harvested potatoes for the first time! Much less yield than I hoped for. Harvested carrots for the first time. Beautiful!*

*5/02/18 I did a major cleaning and organizing of the garden over the last two days. The garden was a jungle. The plants are competing too much. I've learned my lesson to give plants space. It is hard to imagine a seed or plant growing so large, but they do.*

Within a few months of starting the garden, I was growing enough food to share with friends. People driving past were slowing down to look at the garden. Sometimes they even parked their cars to get out to exclaim their excitement and ask about the many different plants. Neighbors were coming over and I was sending them home with fresh greens and veggies. When I wasn't in the garden, people out for a stroll would even come up to the house and knock on the door because they wanted to learn how to garden.

When I was originally planning how I'd write this book, I thought I'd start



on day one of the year, but looking back through my journals, I realized that these first few months of gardening were the most special to me. Every day in the first growing season was a little miracle. I know it sounds cliché, but I discovered the miracle of the garden. The first growing season held many of my greatest lessons worth sharing, too.

The journal entries I shared with you are just a small selection. What these journals don't show is the 100 or so entries documenting the planting of seeds and young plants, or the laying of more mulch and compost, or the installing of the rainwater harvesting and so on. What these excerpts also do not show is that while I was adding on to this newly established frontyard garden, I was also expanding to other gardens.

Word was spreading through the neighborhood about what I was doing. Some of that was through my own words, but some of it I couldn't control even if I wanted to. This frontyard garden was on one of the busier streets in the neighborhood and it was hard not to notice.

This was welcomed news for me, because one garden wasn't going to be enough to sustain me through the year. I planned to plant patches of food all over the neighborhood. My thought was the more space I could cover with food, the more likely I was to have what I would need to make it through the year. I might not have a grocery store to shop at, but the streets of my community would serve as the aisles of my own supermarket. At this supermarket, all the food would be free! That idea was coming to fruition. I quickly had a list of people who wanted a garden in their yard. After all, who doesn't want to be able to walk out of their door to an abundance of free food, while someone else spends most of the money and does most of the work to make it happen?

By early May, I had expanded into my sixth yard, all within cycling distance (less than two miles), and that would be the last yard I would convert into a garden for my personal use. There was still much to be done in some of those gardens and I knew that I could not take on any more while keeping up with what I had. (Note: In four of these gardens, I grew only staples like cassava, sweet potato and perennial greens and I could go weeks without visiting them once they were established.)

But that did not mean that I wasn't turning other yards into gardens!

*4/17/18 My time has been vastly consumed by gardening, but not how I intended. I am neglecting my own growing of food. I haven't planted enough cassava or Seminole pumpkin. I just planted my first sweet potatoes today, months late. Instead I have been focusing on Gardens for Single Moms, Community Fruit Trees and Seeds for the People.*

My goal was never just to grow my own food. It is to empower others to grow their own food as well, partly through my example, but partly through my labor and resources. So, the entire time that I was establishing my gardens, I was establishing three community programs. Through Gardens for Single Moms, we selected five single parent families in the neighborhood and turned their yards into gardens so they would have access to nourishing food right at their doorstep. Through Community Fruit Trees, we planted over 100 publicly accessible fruit trees in the community to increase access to fresh fruit. Through Seeds for the People, we created garden starter kits with a variety of greens, veggies, herbs and flowers to help people start their own gardens. We sent out 2,000 of these packs to people with low access to healthy food and to first-time gardeners who requested them. All of this was done through the help of dozens of volunteers in the community as well as a handful of hired friends. The funds came through a grant from Live Like Ally Foundation.

By May, I was still operating out of Sarah's guest bedroom. The original month that I had planned to be there had turned into four months. The community programs had become so involved and I wasn't making time to find the ideal place to build our tiny house. Just like I had a list of people who wanted me to garden in their yard, I also had a long list of people who had not only offered their space to Cheryl and me to build our tiny house, but were jumping up and down, exclaiming, "Pick me!" It was a pretty great deal after all. In exchange for their unused space, I'd build them a large garden that would be theirs to eat from for many years and improve their property. There was no shortage of takers. The issue was that most of them were either outside of the city or outside of the Audubon Park neighborhood. I was set on Audubon Park because it is the home of Fleet Farming and the foundation of frontyard gardening had already been set here. It is also the hub for Orlando Permaculture. Neither Cheryl nor I had a car, (I had gotten rid of my license some years before), so we wanted to be within easy cycling distance. I wanted to design my living situation around spending minimal time on the road so I could maximize my time in the garden.

We had a handful of offers for yards right where we were looking, but they were either too small or too close to a neighbor. And then along came Ted. Ted was a guy our age, a professor at Rollins College, a novice gardener and he had a dream spot for us to build our house. He wanted me to grow food all over his yard and teach him how it is done. We were all set! Ted asked the neighbors first, just to make sure they wouldn't mind, since having a tiny house in the backyard isn't technically in code. The neighbor to his left was fine, but the neighbor to his right didn't want it to "look like a trailer park

next door.” The plan was squashed and my heart sank into my chest. This was a big setback.

It didn’t take too long to find Lisa. I met her at the Florida Herbal Conference and it turned out she had been following my activism for a few years. We got to talking about gardening and about a week later, I stopped over at her place to see about building a garden there. As she opened the gate to her backyard, the temperature dropped about ten degrees Fahrenheit from the shade of the sprawling live oak trees that blocked the afternoon sun. A cool breeze blew through the yard, made obvious by the wind chimes luring me into a state of calmness.

I saw Lisa’s crumbling raised bed gardens. It had been about five years since she had planted in them and she was yearning to get back to gardening. At the age of 61, and with some challenges with her knees, she wasn’t about to do the heavy lifting to make it happen. She had been working in the corporate world for the last 25 years and explained to me that she spent many days at her desk dreaming of living the simple life at home and eating nourishing food from her land. It was clear that we could enter a mutually beneficial relationship.

The deal was made. I would turn her yard into a garden and she could eat all the food she wanted. I’d also set up rainwater harvesting, compost, steward bees on site and help her get chickens. Basically I’d help her achieve her dream to live closer to the land! Cheryl and I would build a tiny house in the backyard and live there for our time in Orlando. Afterward, Lisa would have a transformed property to enjoy as long as she lived there.

## Chapter 4

### Preparation Continues

The plan was set in motion, but the motion was slow. I was busy in my six gardens and with the community programs. The task of building a tiny house was too much for me at the time. This wasn't just any tiny house. The plan was to build it almost exclusively from secondhand materials, which can be very time consuming. And, I had never built anything much more complicated than a shabby greenhouse out of pallets.

I had more going on than I could deal with. I went back and forth with the idea of just buying a pre-made shed to use as a house, to save time and reduce the stress, but that didn't feel right. I made plans to prioritize the building, then I postponed them multiple times. Cheryl was eager to get out of the guest bedroom and get grounded in her own home. With her encouragement, soon after meeting Lisa, I did get us out of the guest bedroom, but the replacement was a tent in our new backyard. This all took a toll on our relationship.

When my six months' preparation was originally scheduled to be completed I still had not built my home and I was far from ready to begin my year. That's when this came:

"I'm not in love with you anymore." The words hit me hard. But they weren't exactly a surprise. The romance had been fizzling out between Cheryl and me for some time. We'd been through a lot together. We'd shared an incredible chapter of our lives. From the start, we'd always planned to take our relationship one chapter at a time. My philosophy is to continue romantic relationships as long as they are serving the highest interest of both people – as a couple, and as individuals. For quite some time, our paths were closely intertwined, but we had arrived at a point where we had different paths to walk. We decided to take separate paths and to continue our long relationship as friends.

Four days later, Cheryl departed for a trip to Italy, as she had already planned, and I was alone again. This was a challenge, but also a relief and the timing was right. At least we hadn't built a house together. I had work to do and this work was a blessing to keep me busy in emotional and transitioning times.

My tent was more empty now, but my gardens were not. I've written all about the common annual garden veggies I was growing, but those were not as important as my perennial calorie crops. Each of my gardens was heavily focused on producing calories. Without enough calories, there would be no chance I could make it through the year ahead. Cassava, sweet potato, yams and Seminole pumpkins filled my mind and took center focus. The thing about the

tubers is, unlike the pumpkins, they grow below the ground, so it was not easy to take stock of what I had. There were branches on the cassava, vines on the yams and leaves on the sweet potatoes, but was there food in the soil?

These perennial crops take more time to develop than the fast-producing annuals do. Cassava takes about ten months to mature, whereas beets, carrots and potatoes only take two-to-four months to harvest time. I spent a lot of the days ahead in my garden preparing new land and planting more staple crops to build up my bank of calories in the soil. With each planting I was also doing math. I wanted to have a year's supply of calories in the ground before I began.

I was going back and forth in my mind between launching into the year as originally planned, or giving myself more time to let the perennial crops mature. Either way, it was time to deeply explore my calorie sources. My journals share insight into this time:

*7/04/18 I went foraging with Jeff. We found a productive wild yam patch by the golf course. There could be hundreds of pounds of yam below the ground. We also found a mini-forest of feral cassava on unoccupied land along the bike path, quite possibly hundreds of pounds. It was a breakthrough day for calories. But both sources are in jeopardy from bulldozing by the golf course and the land being sold.*

Just two days later, on another hot July morning, I came across one of my first great disasters.

*7/06/18 Pickleworms have destroyed my pumpkin patch. There is a huge infestation. It seems like the pumpkins were decimated overnight, but I know I wasn't paying attention and let the pickleworms get out of hand. The infestation must have started a few weeks ago.*

This disaster also resulted in the largest harvest to date.

*7/06/18 I harvested all the pumpkins because pickleworms were starting to eat some of them as they exhausted the supply of leaves. I harvested 80 pumpkins, many prematurely, and lost approximately six to pickleworms.*

*7/09/18 I've just loaded the 80 pumpkins onto my bike trailer to bring home and I am staring at a garden bounty like I never have seen before. It dawned on me in this moment, it might be time to start!*

*7/09/18 I purchased a seven cubic-feet deep chest freezer for \$100, which can store about 210 pounds of food.*

*7/19/18 After my pumpkin realization and being tempted to begin the year, I made a list of the foods that I need to get stocked up on. My goal is to have a solid amount of food when I start so that I can be comfortable and not struggling to get by at the beginning.*

I decided to go on a few foraging trips to harvest all the foods that I needed before starting, primarily salt, coconuts for oil, fruit to freeze and dehydrate and fish.

I got word that the mangoes were producing heavily down in South Florida. This was very good news for me as mango is one of the most calorie-dense fruits in North America. As tasty as it is fresh, it is also delicious dried or frozen. My friends Jeff and Daniel were as excited as I was, so we packed up Daniel's car and made the trip down. Some people go on vacations and some of us use our days off to go on foraging adventures! My goal was to get at least 50 pounds of mangoes.

This was a new experience for all three of us, so we didn't have one particular destination in mind. What we did have were the tools and supplies needed if we found the fruit we were hunting. We had a fruit picker tool with a 12-foot extension pole, a machete, a coconut opener, rope, a trunk full of empty boxes and durable clothes to aid in tree climbing. Equally important, we had the Falling Fruit app where foragers share their knowledge with fellow foragers by posting fruit trees, and other edible plants, locations on a map. Our plan was to start with some of the locations on the map and expand from there.

It didn't take long for us to come across bountiful mango trees with ripe fruit falling to the sidewalks and streets below. We came across other fruits, some that we knew and some that we had to look up, like pond apples, sugar apples, wax jambu and tropical almonds.

Having never foraged in the tropics of Southern Florida, identifying the new fruits was only the first challenge. We were accustomed to buying our fruit at grocery stores and farmers' markets where we knew whether or not they were ripe. On the trees, we weren't always sure if the fruits were ready to pick or if they would ripen if picked too early. We also didn't know how to store them to allow them to properly ripen. Those questions aside, we were finding a bounty of fruit!

The trees we harvested from were in a variety of places, including public parks and beaches, public medians, abandoned and neglected lots of land and the front yards of people's homes. When we saw neglected trees in yards with a bounty falling to the ground, we'd simply knock on the door and ask if we could harvest the fruit. More often than not, people were excited for us to help them eat the bounty while cleaning up their sidewalk.

After a few days of exploration and foraging, we had a car full of food. Jeff and Daniel had jobs to return to, so they headed back to Orlando with the fruit in the car and I stayed for a few more days of foraging. I stayed with a friend in Fort Lauderdale and used a bicycle and trailer to get around town. With a few more successful days of foraging, I headed home on the train with duffel bags and boxes full of food. From my seat, I scanned the neighborhoods for towering mango and coconut trees, especially those in abandoned lots and public spaces. I took notes of the exciting opportunities I saw to give myself a head start when I returned.

The mango and coconut trees faded as we transitioned from the tropical into the subtropical region of Florida. This gave me time to take my eyes off the trees and think about the experience. I reflected that the amount that I knew now sitting on the train heading north, compared to five days ago heading south in Daniel's car, was almost unfathomable. It was hard to remember what I didn't know just last week, but I knew that I had barely a basic knowledge of mangoes, and now I was fairly knowledgeable. I could identify, preserve and eat many other new fruits as well. I had learned so much from this foraging immersion. I was quite content on the four-hour train ride home.

Summer in Florida is a tumultuous time. Most people choose to hide away from the heat and humidity by isolating in air conditioned spaces, by leaving the state for cooler regions, or heading to the beach. I had a strong desire to escape the heat, but I had some gardening to do upon my return. A lot can change in just five days in the heat of the summer.

*7/23/18 I pulled the last Seminole pumpkins from the garden at Sarah's, about 33 pumpkins, weighing 55 pounds total. They were not attacked by the pickleworms. I have harvested 151 pumpkins this month, weighing a combined 300 pounds.*

Sunflowers were an important sustenance crop that I had planted, but for a second time, squirrels dug up and ate the freshly planted seeds. On top of that, I still had not planted peanuts, a plant-based protein I had in my equation of making it through the year. With the squirrels and the pickleworms, I found myself overwhelmed with three of my most important crops. Crops that were a high priority were slipping through my fingers. I knew I could put hardware cloth over the soil after planting sunflower seeds to guard them from

the squirrels or that I could start the seeds in my greenhouse and transplant the developed plants. All the little tasks were adding up to be too much to do anything more than once after a setback. There wasn't time to do everything I wanted to do.

These critters were getting the best of me. I researched using "organic" pesticides for the pumpkins, but I decided to hold off. I had confidence that I could forage to make up a large portion of my calories and I knew that my perennial calorie banks were stocking up under the ground. This was a blessing because storing food in 90-degree Fahrenheit heat is not an easy task. Especially when you are storing it in a hot shed under the Florida sun. This was another reason to keep as much of my calories under the ground until I would begin.

Now that I was on my own and not responsible for a partner's comfort, I was fairly content with living in my tent, but building my tiny house was also inevitable. I would need a place to store a large quantity of food. Before I could build my house though, I had to collect the materials. Since I had the goal of using as much secondhand materials as possible, this would be a real task, compared to just going to the store. I spent about two weeks salvaging materials from over 20 sources by searching internet sites, secondhand stores, social media and my community. It was August now and time for building to begin!

I absolutely couldn't build this tiny house on my own. My solution was to host volunteer days for people to come learn how to build a tiny house, while growing their community. There was no shortage of volunteers, because so many people are trying to figure out how they can live outside of the mortgage and debt system and live more simply. New friends were made, knowledge was gained and inspiration was spread.

I hosted two volunteer weekends and about 40 people came out over the five days of building. I was so grateful that my friend Sierra Ford Jones asked her partner, Matt, to get involved. He is a carpenter who builds both as a profession and as a passion and even though he builds all week long, he was excited to build alongside a team of inspired people and to help me out. I showed him my basic plan and he was able to lead the build based on that. He brought his tools, as did a few others, and we made progress each day.

The progress we did make was not as quick as I had planned for though and I became extremely overwhelmed. The yard was littered with materials, a product of working with salvaged items. As someone who lives minimally, I struggle greatly with clutter and excess stuff. I was stressing over a lot of the details of the house that I didn't know how to do. I was hiding the house from my neighbors and the city, because tiny houses aren't legal in Orlando and neither is living in a shed, even if it is up to code. I was worried about the little



details of city codes (so that at the very least the structure was up to code). Being the peak of the rainy season, I worried about the sky opening up on my unfinished house and possible hurricanes to come.

I was way behind on sleep and felt that I was on the verge of sickness. I was having an allergic reaction, possibly to the oil from the skin of the couple hundred mangoes I processed, which are in the Anacardiaceae family along with poison ivy/sister ivy. I had hives covering about a quarter of my body for three days. Working in the extreme heat and under stress exacerbated the issue and that set me even more behind on sleep and rest. I just felt behind on everything. And, of course, I was still processing the separation from Cheryl.

Because it was my home, I was having a hard time stepping away. I couldn't get my mind off the mess, the clutter, and all the tasks left undone, not to mention the gardens and the other projects. What I really wanted to do was to get away, relax and take care of my health. But my strategy was instead to deal with the mess first, leaving myself enveloped in it all. I felt that I was at a near breakdown moment.

In mid-August, two weeks after starting the house, I was able to move in. It was nearly complete, just minor details left, the clutter was all cleaned up and I had successfully made only 30 pounds of trash in the creation of the house. With the house and my gardens in a decent state, I decided I couldn't take it anymore and that I was safe to step away now. I took the opportunity to head to the moderate summer in my homeland of Wisconsin to take a break. I left on a Greyhound bus knowing that my heat-loving perennial plants would be soaking in the rain and sun, growing bigger and holding in their nutrients for me to start eating when I returned. Along with my trip, I decided to extend my preparation time by a couple months to release more stress and give myself more time.

After a month-long semi-vacation in Wisconsin, I was relaxed, rejuvenated and ready to return. Upon arriving in Orlando, I was back in the thick of it, finishing the tiny house, gardening, learning beekeeping and researching. I decided to give myself seven more weeks to prepare and I set an official start date of November 11, 2018 – four months behind my original goal. It was also now time to begin the media stage of the project. I found an intern attending the nearby Rollins College and we got to work sending out press releases. The heat was more tolerable now and over the next two months it transitioned away from 90-degree Fahrenheit days into a more comfortable 80- and 70-degree temperatures.

With nine months of preparation down, a lot of people were asking me if I was ready. The answer was yes ... and no. I felt confident that I was ready enough to pull it off, but I could have been much more prepared, especially since my fall annual garden pretty much failed, after I had already planted a month or two behind schedule. With three weeks until my scheduled start date, I wrote:

*10/22/18 The seeds in the garden don't seem to be germinating. I'm worried that all the seeds were destroyed because I stored them in a hot shed all summer long. Or perhaps I just didn't water enough after planting? I let the soil dry out in the hot sun multiple days during germination. The first few months may be some very simple eating until I get my winter garden producing.*

I really don't know what to expect from the next 365 days. A year could be a very long time. I'm both excited, and at the same time not yet feeling the reality of what I'm about to embark on. Convenience is so ingrained into my life that I don't know what it's like to live self-sufficiently. What I know for certain is that this convenience will be gone. No running to the grocery store when my pantry is running low. No grabbing a smoothie in between garden chores. No comfort foods when I am looking for something to get me through an emotional day. I'll feel that in full effect every day for the next year.

But that's exactly what I'm seeking. This year ahead will bring some of my highest highs and likely some of my lowest lows. This year will provide the opportunity for some of my deepest exploration. This is my opportunity to test my limits and answer the burning questions: Can I exist without grocery stores and restaurants? No packaged or processed foods? Nothing shipped long distances? Can I grow and forage all the food I need in order to not just survive, but to exist as a thriving, happy and healthy human?

Ultimately, can I break free from the global, industrial food system? Can I break free and become the human I so desire to be?

## Chapter 5

### My First Completely Local Meal

After a night of gorging on food that I wouldn't taste again for at least 365 days, and then a bike ride home with empty bags and a full stomach, I woke up HUNGRY. That kind of hunger that you get when your stomach has just been stretched to its limits and at the first sign of waking it says, "feed me!" I didn't have much time to feed myself on this first morning though. At 9:00 a.m., I was hosting a Community Fruit Tree planting day. I quickly put together my first meal, a garden fresh smoothie with 13 ingredients: papaya, moringa, katuk, Suriname spinach, longevity spinach, African blue basil, Cuban oregano, cranberry hibiscus, roselle and red pepper from my gardens and mango, coconut and rainwater that I foraged.

11/11/18 (Day 1) *The first sip of food was some of the sweetest coconut water I've ever tasted!*

You might think that in my ten months of preparation I had tested the waters before day one. In truth, this smoothie was my first meal that was completely from my gardens and foraged. Not just in the months of preparation, but of my entire life. And on top of that, I had never made a meal from 100 percent non-industrial foods in my 32 years of eating! Without the store-bought foods like peanut butter, cinnamon and an abundance of ginger and turmeric, the smoothie still turned out tasty, but it left me feeling like I had work to do to achieve the level of deliciousness I desired.

I packed up a pint of blended Seminole pumpkin soup, that was just pumpkin and ocean salt, and I headed out knowing I didn't have enough food for the long day of work. It was in the midst of adding mulch and compost to about 100 Community Fruit Trees along with volunteers that I would normally have taken a quick bike ride to get a smoothie or sit down to a bowl of black bean soup at a nearby restaurant. I thought about it many times throughout the day, but knew that these options of convenience and ease were no longer available to me. Nor was the option to take part in the fruit that Caitlin had picked that morning from her trees and brought to share with the group. That was hard to turn down.

Food was far from the only thing on my mind on this day though. A couple weeks earlier, I had met a woman and had hoped that she might be interested in having dinner with me. It turned out she was interested and she was available to come over for dinner tonight. She was very eager to learn how to grow her own

food. I thought it would be wonderful to have company for my first dinner and for her to share it with me.

After arriving home from the planting day, I had just a couple hours to gather myself and impress my guest. I had a few problems though. I didn't have all the ingredients I needed for dinner, I was far from prepared and I was VERY hungry after my long day of work! I was pretty sure that she was vegan, but for myself I felt like I needed something more. I didn't have any fish yet, I wasn't raising any animals and that left me with one option, a squirrel. I had already bought a few traps. It was time to put them to use. But first, I had to see if the primary ingredient I needed for our dinner was available in my garden.

I walked out to the yard with both excitement and worry in each step. Over the ten months of preparation, I had become very confident in my ability to grow greens, herbs and all sorts of vegetables that grow above ground. But I was very uncertain about my calorie crops; cassava, yams and sweet potatoes. I watched the branches, vines and leaves grow this summer and they were thriving. Because of my morning until night busy days, day after day, I never prioritized the time to dig into the ground and see what was below. It was still a mystery to me as to whether there was food under the ground.

I delicately pushed some of the sweet potato vines to the side and cautiously but eagerly stuck my hand into the soil. My hand met a substance much more solid than soil and sent the stimulus of both surprise and excitement through my nervous system. Could it be? I dug around and the solid mass was more than just a little potato. With my soil covered hands, I pulled up a huge sweet potato, weighing in at four pounds! I let out a sigh of relief both for my dinner date and for what this potentially meant for the year ahead. This was a very hopeful sign that I had many dinners' worth of sweet potatoes waiting for me right in my front yard. The importance of the calorie source aside, sweet potatoes are one of my favorite foods and provide me with great joy and comfort. I walked the 50 steps back to my kitchen with excitement, joy and a bit of pride.

With the sweet potato on my countertop and two hours until my date arrived, it was time to see if I could catch a squirrel. Time was extremely limited because I wanted to have the squirrel caught, prepared and eaten before she arrived. I wasn't about to be doing this in front of a vegan. I cut off a small chunk of my prized sweet potato and put it into the squirrel trap, hoping the squirrel would be as enthusiastic about the sweet potato as I was. The trap was just ten feet from my kitchen and, within minutes, I looked over to see a squirrel running along the top of the fence heading straight to the trap. I had put the trap on the fence line because I observed this to be one of their common

pathways. The suspense inside me existed based on the question, is the squirrel on its normal route or is it on a mission for my sweet potato? Without pause, the squirrel stuck its head in, grabbed the sweet potato and almost instantly the trap went off with the squirrel in its grips. I was left with plenty of time to prepare and eat the squirrel before my date arrived.

Together we made a delicious blended sweet potato and Seminole pumpkin soup under the moonlight. It was a new experience for her, eating 100 percent from the garden and foraged food, and it was a new experience for me, too. We both enjoyed our dining experience and had so much to talk about. I was pretty sure she would come back for dinner again.

With the last of the store-bought groceries given to my friends the night before, I started without much food in my pantry and freezer. I had 50 pounds of Seminole pumpkin, 45 pounds of mango, seven pounds of starfruit, five pounds of papaya, one pound of avocado, two pounds of moringa leaves, 1.5 pounds of pumpkin seeds, one pound of apples and a half-pound of hot peppers in my freezer. In my pantry, I had 70 Seminole pumpkins (130 pounds), ten pounds of dried southern peas, a half-pound of dried elderberry, 0.25 pound of amaranth grain, one pint of moringa seeds, 1.5 gallons of mango; apple and pear vinegars brewing, one pint of honey and a half-pint of sea salt. I also had 55 coconuts stored outside, about half of which were likely not edible.

That might sound like a lot of food, but it was far from what I needed to supply myself with a complete diet. I was anxious about my lack of staple supplies in my pantry and freezer, but I had already built the foundation and had food stored in the ground and on the trees scattered around the neighborhood. I had scouted food throughout the city and the countryside. My supermarket was on nearly every street I walked down and those shelves were stocked.

My gardens had dozens of different greens packed with nutrients: moringa, katuk, chaya, purslane, collards, kale and perennial spinach, just to name a few. I had sweet potatoes, cassava and yams for my main caloric needs. I had pigeon peas in the trees and southern peas on the ground for protein. I had delicious fruits like papayas and bananas. I had hearty Seminole pumpkins. I had many herbs and hot peppers to add flavor and variety to my meals. I had four bee colonies, and the signs were looking hopeful that I'd soon have honey to harvest to satisfy my sweet tooth. This healthy, fresh food would serve as my medicine, but I was also counting on turmeric and ginger in my gardens and elderberries, herbs and medicinal mushrooms from the wild. I knew where I could dig up giant wild

yams in the woods, had scouted out plenty of coconut trees for coconuts to make oil and milk, and had a long list of fruit trees to visit in public parks and urban spaces. Trips to the ocean would procure my fish and my sea salt.

Mahatma Gandhi said “Earth provides enough to satisfy every human’s needs, but not every human’s greed.” I was certain that I wasn’t being greedy, and I believed that Earth would satisfy my basic needs.

Now when I say 100 percent of my food, I truly mean it. That sounds simple enough. But I learned quickly that most people didn’t quite get it when I said 100 percent. Like when a date was coming over for dinner and texted me, “Should I bring the wine?” Or when my friend invited me to dinner and I said, “Yes, but I will bring all the food,” and they responded, “Okay, but we can use my oil and spices.” And then there were the internet comments like:

“Surely he must still be buying his salt, herbs and oil at the store.”

“He doesn’t say no to gifts of food does he?”

“A special occasion must call for a little celebration, right?”

I would leave it simply ALL of my food, but I’ve seen that doesn’t explain it quite enough. I mean down to the individual grain of salt. So what does that look like in practice?

That means no eating from my friends’ gardens. Many of my close friends in Orlando have abundant food forests and that would have made it too easy for me!

That meant if I went to dinner at a friend’s house, I brought all the ingredients for us to cook together, or we ate our separate meals together.

That meant if I was out on a bike ride and became famished, I could not stop at a restaurant or grab something from the store. But if I did come across a stand of bananas in a public park with ripe bananas hanging down like the fingers of god above, I could gorge! (This happened on day 94 on a 30-mile bike ride to go on a local morning show.)

That meant catching my own fish, and if my friends caught all the fish and I caught none, then no fish for me.

That meant figuring out every last detail of my food, down to harvesting my own salt from the ocean. And if I ran out of salt, like I did on day 44, I had no salt until I harvested more.

That meant that if I failed at making my own oil for cooking, that I had no oil for cooking,

That meant foraging for my own caffeine from the native yaupon holly tree, and since I couldn't grow coffee in my climate, a year without coffee.

That meant no chickens for eggs, unless I could figure out how to grow and forage all of their nutritional needs, too. That also meant no feeding sugar to my bees and no baiting animals for hunting or fishing unless it was my own food that I was using.

That meant growing and foraging my own medicine, too. This would be a test of the philosophy, "Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food," most often attributed to Hippocrates. That also meant growing and foraging my own vitamins. Absolutely no pills or supplements of any sort.

That meant no gifts of food, even if the giver grew it in their garden or foraged it for me.

That meant on day three, resisting the reflex of picking a day-old loaf of bread from the bakery dumpster on my bike ride home. No dumpster diving for food to eat.

On day four, that meant when I was asked by the children at Audubon Park Elementary School to identify the plants in their garden for them, realizing I could no longer use my sense of taste as a means of identification in others' gardens.

That meant near disasters in other people's gardens for the first few weeks as I overcame my innate inclination to graze on whatever edible plants are growing around me. And that, of course, also meant overcoming my unhealthy habit of stuffing whatever food is in front of me into my mouth.

That meant being haunted by eating in my dreams, like on day 17 when I dreamed that I accidentally drank part of a beer and woke up in a panic.

That meant on day 28, when I went to my friend's annual curry cook-off, I could not sample the curries, no matter how much my friends tried to rationalize the occasion for me.

That meant that if a recipe called for an ingredient I didn't have, I had to adapt that recipe or not make it at all, like on day 40 when I had to come up with my own recipe for fire cider.

That meant counting my calories packed before every trip to make sure I'd have enough with me. It meant sometimes going hungry if I didn't plan well.

I know, that was a lot of explaining "the rules." But the reason I share them is that our globalized, industrial food system is so incredibly complex and most of us are so far removed from the sources of our food that the mainstream culture barely thinks about or understands where our food comes from. I can totally relate. That's where I've been for most of my life. It is hard not to take our food for granted when it has been turned into a cheap and easily accessible

commodity available in seemingly infinite supply on grocery store shelves, the plates in our restaurants or with the swipe of a finger on our phones.

It has gotten to the extreme that the average meal in the US today travels 1,500 miles from farm to fork. That 1,500 miles is minuscule compared to the shipping of items around the world. We ship apples 7,000+ miles from New Zealand and Chile when we have enough apples for ourselves, but instead export them to Canada, Mexico, South Korea and Japan. The salmon that most of us buy at the store from Alaska already comes from thousands of miles away, but what it doesn't say on the label is that the salmon are often first shipped on ice all the way to China to be processed and then shipped all the way back to the United States. Almost none of the food in our supermarkets comes from our local regions. We are burning vast quantities of fossil fuels to ship each other a bunch of foods that we already have or that we don't really need. In fact, it is estimated that we burn about four calories of fossil fuel energy just to deliver a calorie of food energy to our plates.<sup>1</sup>

It would be one thing if we got a higher quality of food through this globalized system. But this globalized food is not even equivalent to local food. Fruits and vegetables have been hybridized or genetically modified and selected for their ability to ship long distances and handle a beating in the process, at the cost of varieties that are the most nutritious and delicious. Globalized varieties are less resilient to local insects, so they are more likely to be sprayed with pesticides, rather than chosen for local resilience. In shipping and distribution, the key is consistency and uniformity, so the foods are bred to be the same size, again at the loss of nutrition and flavor. When the food has a long period of transport and distribution ahead of it, it is often picked weeks before peak readiness, whereas local food can be picked at peak ripeness and eaten in all of its glory just minutes, hours or days after picking. And, of course, this food needs to be packaged for shipping and preservation, which results in an incredible amount of trash being made and spread throughout the world to regions that do not have systems to deal with that garbage, polluting the land and water.

Today this seems like the norm, but it only takes going back a couple generations to remember a time when it was the norm for people to eat what grew in their region. The first supermarket was created in the 1940s.<sup>2</sup> Just two decades before that the refrigerated rail car came on the scene<sup>2</sup> (and, of course, very little food was being flown by plane until the 1970s).<sup>2</sup> When my grandparents were my age, the average meal traveled less than 100 miles from farm to fork<sup>2</sup> and when my parents were young adults, it was still not commonplace to partake in a globalized diet.



When we don't grow food locally, it allows us to become disconnected from the people, environment, plants and animals that are harmed by the farming practices. It is out of sight, out of mind. We live within a system that acts upon the illusion of infinite resources, but the truth is that our Earth is finite. It was easy to ignore this just a few hundred years ago when humanity was still largely operating in many independent pockets, but today the destruction from this globalized food system has become widely apparent.

The Colorado river is running dry, as the water is pumped by the billions of gallons to grow food in the dry climates of California, where half of the nation's food is produced. This great river no longer makes it to the ocean, but rather comes to a trickle in the desert.

Over half of the largest rainforest on Earth, the Amazon, is gone largely via deforestation to produce soy for factory-farmed animals and for clearing space for beef cattle to graze. This rainforest is one of the most important sources of oxygen and climate regulation on Earth and home to a large portion of Earth's biodiversity.

Our fish stock has been depleted by 75 percent globally with many fisheries completely or near-completely collapsing.

People are also losing access to the foods that have been part of their culture for thousands of years. For example, Indigenous people of the Andes Mountains, including Bolivia and Peru, can no longer afford the very quinoa that they grow, their staple food, because the price of quinoa has gone up 15 fold from Western demand. That's like a \$5 sandwich increasing to \$75!

Local systems create realistic local limits. When a culture is dependent on their water source, they are less likely to run it dry. When they are dependent on their forests, they are less likely to chop them down. When their land provides their sustenance, they are less likely to poison it. Communities work together to ensure their needs are met in a manner that the land can keep producing. A local system is a natural safeguard against monocultures, like miles of corn, because local systems will only produce what they need, rather than depleting their resources to ship food out while having other foods shipped in.

By growing food in a globalized manner, we give our power to the large multinational corporations that have no invested interest in any given community's long-term viability. The corporations can always pack up shop and deplete another community's resource base. When these corporations ship our food out of our communities, we ship out the majority of the money we spend along with it. A small fraction of the money (often estimated at 15 percent) stays within the local economy once it enters the globalized food system. On the other hand, when you buy locally produced food and goods, a

large amount of the money (often estimated at 50 percent and in some scenarios as much as 100 percent) stays in the local economy.<sup>2</sup> This money circulates among many different hands, creating a more secure local economy that can take care of the people during times of ease or struggle.

By no means am I saying that we must live in a world where we eat solely local food, as much as that is a worthy goal. There is an in-between the imbalance of our current globalized food system and a fully localized food system. It makes the most sense to ship foods with high nutrient and caloric density. It makes sense to ship foods that are lightweight and can be packed efficiently onto cargo ships and trains. Dried herbs, spices and teas are foods that may most efficiently use shipping resources. Flours and grains would follow and possibly cooking oil as well.

On the other hand, it does not make sense to ship foods and drinks that are primarily water or that need to be refrigerated or frozen. This would include fresh fruits and vegetables which are generally 90 percent water and generally require refrigeration or freezing. This also includes alcohol and soda, which is primarily water. And even though kombucha is much healthier than soda, that includes kombucha, too. The shipping of bottled water is often a crime against humanity in itself.<sup>3</sup>

Embracing localized food systems will lead to finding alternatives that we didn't even know existed. Hundreds of people have asked me about coffee. Where would I get my caffeine? This is one of the most common foods from the globalized food system. I'm not a coffee drinker and I don't have much of a desire for caffeine, but I did find a local source for a caffeine buzz – yaupon holly. Yaupon holly is the only native caffeinated plant that grows in the continental United States and it is as rich in antioxidants as green tea. It is a truly special and underutilized plant. It requires no fertilization, no pesticides and no water beyond rainfall. This means no importing of globally produced fertilizers and pesticides. Many of us drink, or know of, yerba mate, which is yaupon holly's cousin from South America. Yerba mate is a plant that is a solution both in local systems and through globalized shipping. Yerba mate sequesters carbon through its growth process. In fact it sequesters more carbon than it takes to ship it in dried form. Drinking dried yerba mate from regenerative farms is something we can do to improve the environment and support small, local farmers. So, as you can see, local versus globalized is not simply one or the other. We can enjoy food from far-off lands, supporting other local economies and regenerative farmers, by finding the alternatives that exist and applying a set of ecologically based values. But still, I find my food most meaningful and practical when it grows right in my own community.

Although much of US American culture moved away from local food a couple generations ago, the local food revolution has been growing. Today there are local food movements all across the nation, including in many communities where it would surprise even the people who live there. In Orlando, I was first introduced to the local food movement by Fleet Farming, a nonprofit that turns front yards into gardens and sells the food to local restaurants and at the farmers' markets. The homeowners get a garden out of the deal and get to eat fresh salad from their yard-turned-garden. Fleet Farming even does their transportation mostly by bicycle, hosting Swarm Rides for volunteers to join them in the garden.

Fleet Farming is just one example of thousands of initiatives and organizations across the nation that are actively creating resilient local food systems. Farmers' markets are expanding across the nation with over 8,000 in our 50 states.<sup>4</sup> There are around 200 to 300 food co-ops across the nation. These are community-owned grocery stores, many of which have a large focus on providing local food. Willy Street co-op in Madison, Wisconsin proudly states that over 15 percent of their products are local. It has become common for farmers to offer CSA shares (Community Supported Agriculture), where customers pay for or commit to paying for a season of food in advance so that the local farmers are assured they will have the funds to produce the food. During the growing season, CSA holders get a box of fresh produce every week. Sometimes numerous local farms will join together so they can offer complete packages including fruits, veggies, eggs, meat and dairy. Speaking of meat, some farmers offer the opportunity to purchase entire or large portions of a cow or pig, and often a couple families or friends will each take a portion of the animal, creating a more affordable option for wholesome meat.

Eating locally doesn't just mean eating at home either. Thousands of restaurants across the nation have joined and helped create the local food movement by sourcing and serving local food. There are even restaurants where local food is their primary focus and forte like Chez Panisse in Berkeley. If you're looking for a local food challenge, you could try the *100-mile diet*. You've heard of being a vegetarian or a vegan, an omnivore or an herbivore, but how about a *locavore*? A locavore is a person whose dietary focus is to eat local food. Now that's a way to break free from the global food system while still enjoying a wide range of delicious and nutritious foods!

The farmer's market is an excellent place to meet your local farmer and get to know others in your community who have a passion for healthful and tasty food. Although food at the farmer's market is often much more expensive than the supermarket, in many farmers' markets accessibility is increasing.

The *Double Up Food Bucks* program doubles SNAP/EBT dollars, so if you are receiving food assistance, you can get twice the amount of produce for your money. And if your market isn't already doing this, you can encourage them to start it. This program exists in 27 states and other states have similar programs.

The Slow Food Movement began in 1989 as a protest to the Fast Food movement and the globalization of our food, and is alive and well today. There are over 1,300 Slow Food chapters worldwide. You can join your local or regional chapter to help build up your local food system.

Eating local food is at the center of a sustainable diet. In the chapters ahead, you'll be introduced to many more solutions, including growing your own food and finding the food that is growing freely and abundantly all around us.

## Take Action!

### Eat Locally – Top Tips

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Make the farmers' markets a part of your weekly routine. Use [findafarmersmarket.com](http://findafarmersmarket.com) to search for farmers' markets near you.

Become a member of your local food co-op. Use [www.grocerystory.coop](http://www.grocerystory.coop) to find your nearest food co-op.

Sign up for a CSA share.

Purchase directly from farmers and gardeners. Make friends with the local food growers!

Eat with the seasons.

Try out the 100-mile diet for a challenge to get to know your local food system. Read *The 100-Mile Diet: A Year of Eating Local* and *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* for inspiration!

When dining out, choose restaurants that source from local growers.

Buy homemade and cottage industry items.

Purchase locally crafted items, created with local materials.

Support small businesses, avoid large chains.

Talk to grocery stores about which foods they offer are local and encourage them to stock more local foods.

Share with your neighbors and your greater community!

## Chapter 6

### Grow Food Not Lawns

November and December were a period of discovery and excitement mixed with exhaustion, uncertainty and concern.

I weighed in at 153.4 pounds before the first breakfast, which was pretty consistent with my weight over the last year. Within the first couple of weeks, I lost two pounds. This worried me at first, with the thought that this weight loss could continue for the months ahead. However, after some contemplation, I realized it is to be expected that I would lose a few pounds when cutting all processed foods from my diet. My weight leveled off at 151 pounds in the weeks ahead. Going into this experiment, I had uncertainty for my health, both for the potential struggles as well as benefits. I expected I would see benefits from eating a completely whole foods, unprocessed diet, and that I did.

*11/20/18 (Day 10) My digestion feels the best it has felt in a long time and my body feels very healthy. No gas, no bloating, no stomach pain. I have been feeling a lot of stomach pain over the last few years, as long as I can remember really, but I haven't noticed any in the last few days!*

I also was very pleased when I realized that I was not experiencing energy crashes anymore. Even though I believed these benefits largely came from cutting out processed foods, I felt a strong desire for the processed foods I had grown accustomed to. It didn't take me too long to feel the monotony of my diet either.

*11/18/18 (Day 8) I'm feeling a little tired of the same food. I'm not in the mood for yams, sweet potato and seminole pumpkin today.*

My failed fall garden made this more difficult as I expected to have onions and a variety of annual veggies already. I was really lacking in some of the flavors and condiments that I had leaned on for tasty meals.

*I am mentally reaching for convenient and calorie-dense foods. Last night with my soup, and this morning with my leftovers, my instinctual reaction was to cover it with olive oil and tahini to add on the calories and the flavor. I have this mental reach for convenience and rich flavors.*

*I call it a mental reach because I am not physically reaching for it, but it's such a strong mental reach, that I almost physically go for it and then*

*remember that it is not there. And then, of course, the all-important almond butter and peanut butter. Those are my go-to for a quick spoonful of dense calories and sustenance, but I don't have anything like that right now. I come in, and I look at my pantry and there are no 'grab it by the hand and munch it' foods.*

This yearning I was feeling and the lacking in flavor was my daily motivation to explore deeper in the garden. So much untapped potential was waiting for me in many nooks and crannies of my garden! My limiting factors at this point were not the knowledge or the motivation, but the matter of prioritization and effective usage of my time. The most uncertainty was still in the plants that grew under the ground, like my turmeric:

*11/25/18 (Day 15) As I was scrubbing the turmeric in the sink, I became a little worried that maybe the rhizome would be rotten and the whole crop would be rotten. As the soil washed off, I saw the orange of the turmeric coming through the brown soil. Suddenly I smelled the scent of fresh turmeric and my eyes started to tear up. Not because turmeric causes a reaction like cutting onions can. No, it was a great sense of relief, a feeling that I would be alright. A comfort of familiarity. Turmeric is a food that I normally eat every day and is central to my holistic health practice. This was just one of my 20 turmeric plants and I don't know yet how much I will have. But I feel fairly certain that I will need to treasure every piece I harvest and will need to ration it for the comfort and medicine it provides.*

*As I write these words, I'm watching the honey bees through my window, coming and going from their colony, on an amazing superhighway of tiny intelligent creatures. The sun is shining on them at just the right angle to brightly illuminate each one. I see the nectar of life in my near future, thanks to the bees. I feel a little high on the elements of Earth and my existence within. I feel at least a little more connected than I did last week.*

I came up with my own natural chewing gum by chewing on honeycomb soaked in honey and filled with medicinal pollen that I harvested from my beehives. This became one of my go-tos for a pick-me-up.

*11/17/18 (Day 7) I went fishing for a few hours in the canoe and caught 10 mullet. I'm still learning the cast net and it took much more effort than expected. These 10 mullet will likely get me through the next two weeks until I go fishing again.*

11/29/18 (Day 19) *Today I harvested honey. I got 50 pints; about 60 to 70 pounds! And plenty was left behind for the bees. Along with the 75 pounds I harvested last week from my other two colonies, I have a true abundance for the entire year and for gifting to others.*

12/04/18 (Day 24) *I harvested a lot of peppers, a five-gallon bucket worth of roselle, and large amounts of lemon grass and rosemary. We are in the dry season now, but last night we got a heavy rain that topped off all of my rain barrels. This was quite a blessing as this is my supply of drinking water.*

12/05/18 (Day 25) *I harvested five pounds of moringa, also called “the vitamin tree” or “the tree of life”. This will be my stock to eat every day for the next few months. No need for multivitamins from the laboratory! I also harvested 14 pounds of cassava from two plants which processed to 11.4 pounds to eat.*

12/09/18 (Day 29) *Pigeon pea trees are bursting with pigeon peas!*

12/11/18 (Day 31) *The golden milk I made almost brought me to tears with its delicious, nourishing and medicinal qualities. The fact that I made it with all homegrown and foraged food is deeply meaningful to me. Ingredients grown: turmeric, ginger, red pepper and honey. Ingredients foraged: coconut, Brazilian pepper and rainwater.*

12/12/18 (Day 32) *Sweet potatoes are still abundant in the front yard after over a month of abundant harvesting.*

12/20/18 (Day 40) *Good news! I pulled up a ginger plant and it produced much more ginger than I expected. Super productive! I’m quite disheartened that I didn’t plant much more ginger and turmeric. I could have had a nearly unlimited supply ...*

12/29/18 (Day 49) *Collected yaupon holly and have quite a bit stored now.*

1/02/19 (Day 53) *My garden is overflowing with food, especially greens! I had such an abundant dinner of greens. It’s so good to be back in my garden again! (This journal entry was made after ten days of staying at a quiet retreat outside the city, living off what I had brought with me.)*

1/07/19 (Day 58) *Harvested green tea from my tea plant for the first time!*



1/20/19 (Day 71) *I harvested all of the cassava from one of my garden plots and processed it all over the last three days. I processed 75 pounds of cassava total. That is 30 days' worth of calories, eating 2.5 pounds per day. That's the caloric needs of 11% of my entire year! My cassava crops are as productive as I'd hoped. At 700 calories per pound, it is twice as calorically dense as other tubers, so that's the equivalent of 150 pounds of sweet potatoes!*

This abundance was a real blessing. I was getting enough food and didn't even have the time to harvest everything that needed to be harvested! At the same time, the blessing of abundance was one of my greatest struggles. Although I felt quite healthy, I was usually exhausted. I had numerous days in the garden and at home, yearning to be out with friends, but instead found myself stuck at home processing food. When food was harvested, I generally had to process it in a timely manner. The journals ahead record my struggles and my breakthroughs with food processing and prep, time management and getting into a rhythm for eating:

12/04/18 (Day 24) *Today I spent almost the entire day in the garden and the kitchen with quite a few hours of kitchen work ahead of me.*

*Eating has been quite simple for the last 24 days, but still time consuming. I spend as much as three hours in the kitchen on many days. Plus, many hours in the garden, foraging and fishing. It is time well spent, but it does limit my ability to do other things that I yearn to do.*

*Over the next few weeks, I hope to do a lot of food preparation to free up my days from the kitchen. Today I froze 14 pints of Seminole pumpkin soup and I will do the same with cassava. With this system, I'll be able to simply take jars out of the freezer, heat the food and add fresh greens and herbs from the garden. I must streamline my food if I want to make it through this year without struggling.*

The food harvesting, processing, prep and eating was time consuming on its own, but I was also giving some talks, had my community projects and I had the French TV program, "Envoyé Spécial," with me for the first week. It's one thing to harvest food or prepare a meal, it's another to show it to the camera or have interviews in between tasks.

12/05/18 (Day 25) *Another day completely immersed in food, processing everything I harvested yesterday. Not sure how long I can keep doing this. I haven't left the yard today and I really want to.*

I got more effective with food processing and prep as the month went on. The uncertainty of my day-to-day eating dissolved to a large extent, and the workload decreased to some degree.

12/05/18 (Day 25) *My batch cooking has been great. The last two days I've had much more freedom from cooking with time to focus on other explorations. Today I made two ferments: a gallon of green papaya with salt, turmeric, rosemary and red peppers and a pint of radishes, garlic chives, Brazilian pepper and turmeric. I used all but a single tablespoon of salt. MUST HARVEST SALT!*

12/07/18 (Day 27) *I wanted to go to the full moon gathering, but I'm too busy in the garden. I harvested a lot of food that needs to be processed. I'm spending a lot of time alone, when I would like to be with others, but so much time is needed in the garden and kitchen.*

12/09/18 (Day 29) *Spent much of the day at home working on food. Checked all of my vinegars, dumped out the unsuccessful ones. I have ACV! Although it is weak. Processed the five-gallon bucket of roselle. Did not leave the yard today, but it felt good.*

12/10/18 (Day 30) *I'm getting into a rhythm with eating. I wasn't hungry once today for the first time in a while.*

12/12/18 (Day 32) *Finally finished planting the fall/winter annual garden at Sarah's! What a relief I feel.*

12/28/18 (Day 48) *Collected six gallons of salt water in the morning. By the end of the day, I was feeling pretty down and unenthused with my food. Then I put salt water in my cooking pot and it revitalized me! Life was a little tough without salt, and this has really reinvigorated me!*

12/29/18 (Day 49) *Made 10 ounces of sea salt.*

1/03/19 (Day 54) *I'm so full it hurts from a satisfying meal. Perhaps it was the fermented radishes which have just become ready, finally bringing ferments back into my diet. Now I need to start stocking up my pantry to add taste, extra nutrition, enjoyment, variety, more health and convenience to my life. Fermented foods will play a role in all four of those elements of food life. This week I will make jun with honey and green tea, and also forage yaupon holly. I will start a batch of vinegar now that I have honey. Sauerkraut will be*

*coming soon as well as many pickled veggies such as green papaya, and in the future, carrots and beets.*

*1/07/19 (Day 58) Bottled up papaya ferment and it is delicious!*

*01/08/19 (Day 59) Made about four gallons of pumpkin soup and froze them in pint jars to be able to take to go. Ingredients: 13 pumpkins, sweet potato greens, papalo, garlic greens, garlic chives, Cuban oregano, African blue basil, red peppers, ginger and turmeric.*

*1/11/19 (Day 62) I'm two months in, 1/6th of the way, and it's hard to believe how fast it has gone! I'm excited and relieved thinking about how smooth it has gone so far. Many of my days I have felt trapped in the kitchen or the garden, but through this, I am learning so much about food. I am substantially more knowledgeable today than I was when I arrived in Florida. It's hard to even explain just how much I've learned.*

By this time, I was growing nearly 100 different foods in my gardens and foraging a substantial diversity of food.

Here is what a typical day of food looked like during the first two months:

*12/09/18 (Day 29) Breakfast: mango, starfruit, coconut, moringa, turmeric and holy basil smoothie*

*Lunch: cassava, green papaya, cooked greens and herbs*

*Dinner: cassava, fish, cooked greens and herbs*

*Snacks: coconut, honey, greens, starfruit*

Lunch and dinner varied around a similar theme, interchanging cassava, sweet potatoes and yam and having Seminole pumpkin or green papaya at many meals. I ate fish as often as I had the supply (about every other day) and southern peas with some frequency. I changed up my meals by having my fish and starchy vegetable in collard wraps, sometimes mashing the starchy vegetables and sometimes eating them in whole form, making blended or chunky soups, making mixed mashes, or sautéing the veggies (with water, not oil). Ferments improved my meals once I had the abundance.

My breakfast smoothie was often substituted with what was left in the dinner pot from the night prior and I frequently had a lunchtime smoothie instead.

There was not much variety of vegetables due to my failed fall annual garden, but there was a wide variety of greens that I ate in large quantities at most meals. Moringa, katuk, perennial spinaches, collards, kale, mustard greens, sweet potato greens and cranberry hibiscus were my top greens of the season and chaya, roselle, arugula, Swiss chard and Asian green varieties I ate less frequently.

My most frequently utilized cooking herbs and herb toppings were African blue basil, Cuban oregano, rosemary, lemon grass and, more sparingly, Italian basil, ginger and turmeric.

My most common snacks were coconut chunks (dried or fresh), coconut dipped in honey, spoonfuls or swigs of honey, chunks of beeswax with honey and pollen to chew on, fresh greens and whatever was left in the pot from the previous meal. Occasionally, I had roasted pumpkin seeds, golden milk or coconut milk. Elderberry syrup became almost a daily treat in the second month.

I ate fruit daily, primarily starfruit, oranges, papaya, frozen mango and sometimes grapefruit. Bananas entered my life toward the end of the second month and became a daily snack.

On most days, I drank tea, most commonly:

- Roselle, lemon grass, turmeric and mint with honey
- Yaupon holly, lemon grass, ginger and holy basil with honey
- Reishi mushroom tea (in the second month)

And, of course, my food was my medicine!

All of this abundance without a farm!

I was growing over 100 species of foods and medicines on a patchwork of lawns that I pulled together within months of moving to a new land. These abundant gardens weren't the product of simply placing seeds into already fertile soil. Each of them was a grassy lawn with sand below as far as the shovel could dig and just a smattering of organic matter with the grass. Orlando is not a desert, but the unmaintained lawns of this city are about as close to a desert as anything green could be. In reality, the deserts I've been to have a lot more life in them than these lawns!

Not to mention, I was freshly on the scene of growing food. And here were these lawns producing the food that I needed to live independently from the global, industrial food system. I venture to guess the industry would be quivering if everyone decided to do this! I used just a portion of six lawns in Orlando and the abundance I was producing was far more than I could eat myself. By now, close to 100 people had eaten from my gardens and there was still abundance to share. The greens were absolutely endless! This was proof to me that we can grow a lot of food right in our own yards!

But if you set this book down and go out into the mainstream industrial food society, a different narrative will be dominating the conversation.

One of the most frequent comments of critique that I receive on my social media when I talk about my yards-turned-gardens is that we don't have enough space to produce our own food. The story line goes: *Industrial, large-scale agriculture uses space the most efficiently. With our limited space, we must rely on the corporate food system to grow our food for us.* But something that the people reciting this narrative are most likely failing to take into account is that it is actually we as individuals growing the largest crop in the United States and we are growing it right at home and in our communities. That crop? The lawn.

The lawn is the single largest irrigated crop in the United States. We have roughly 63,000 square miles of lawn, which is the size of the entire state of Florida.<sup>5</sup> To produce these lawns, we use seven billion gallons of water per day.<sup>5</sup> That is over two trillion gallons of water used per year to produce this monocrop of grass. We spray these lawns with tens of millions of pounds of pesticides. Millions of pounds of this pesticide runoff into our lakes and rivers and enter our drinking supply. We apply millions of pounds of fertilizers that run off and pollute our water as well. Then, of course, there are the hundreds of millions of gallons of gasoline used to mow our lawns, which is a substantial source of noise pollution that reduces quality of life for many. Not to mention that a lot of grass clippings are still thrown in landfills, taking up space and producing methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Billions of dollars are spent and countless resources are squandered on our lawns every year.

It is out of this ineffective usage of space and resources that the popular saying "Grow Food, Not Lawns" was born and where I gained some of my inspiration. My lack of land ownership was no limitation to how much food I could grow. There were plenty of lawns in sight. By using lawns as space for my gardens, I could help people transition away from fertilizers, pesticides and fossil fuels and turn their monocrop of grass into a biodiverse refuge for the plants and animals we share our communities with.

To create my first garden, I spent about \$500-\$600, including the soil, compost, drip irrigation and plants. Within one year, I estimate this former lawn was producing around \$500-\$600 worth of food *each month!* Both lawns and gardens generally need some continual maintenance and inputs. But once my garden was established, the financial and resource inputs were minimal. No gas needed for a lawnmower. No pesticides by growing in alignment with natural systems. The additional fertility was primarily created by working with plants in the garden and wasted materials that I could scrounge up locally. By focusing on perennials, many plants just kept reproducing themselves. And by

working with plants that need minimal water as well as harvesting rainwater, the cost of water was substantially decreased compared to maintaining a lush lawn. With a lawn, there is a constant expense of money and resources to keep it as a monocrop all while having a continual need to spend money at the grocery store on food. While with a garden, the funds that I spent were returned tenfold in food within a year and could continue to do so for the long term.

Some “Grow Food, Not Lawns” advocates say that growing a food garden is a lot less work than maintaining a lawn. I can’t speak on this with certainty since I have never maintained a lawn. My guess though is that even if it is fewer hours of work to garden rather than grow a lawn, it does require more mental energy and critical thinking to grow food. There is a trade off and gardening is indeed work. But growing food wisely is a lot less expensive, and is far more beneficial to our natural systems. Maintaining the garden can be a time of quiet peace and, perhaps most importantly, the product of gardening is an abundance of nourishing and wholesome food. Our own yards can produce fruits and vegetables that are more flavorful than what we can generally find at the supermarket and it is right outside our doors to be picked fresh each day.

Other people who critique me often ask how much land it took me to grow all of my food. The critics say that we don’t have the space to grow food for everyone this way. I’ll cover that point later, but just as importantly, I want to make the observation that the more space I can convert to growing food instead of grass, the greater the ecosystem service I am doing for Earth. I used about 2,000 square feet total and if I had the capacity, I would have helped to turn every lawn in the city of Orlando into a garden! These lawns-turned-gardens don’t just provide food, they provide ecosystem services. They hold in water and reduce runoff. They sequester carbon. They provide habitat for other species. Gardens can even lower local temperatures, reducing our climbing temperatures by creating shady green space. And, of course, these gardens replace the need to buy long distance shipped foods that guzzle fuels and are wrapped in plastic packaging. The more space I use, the more resilient and abundant the community I’m in!

The Victory Garden Initiative is an example that shows some serious potential in our lawns. During World War I and World War II, the US government encouraged people to grow their own food as a war effort of self-sufficiency. In 1944, there were 20 million victory gardens at people’s homes producing 40 percent of the fresh produce in the nation. This is a truly powerful example. And that is just utilizing our lawns. There is so much other space, too, like abandoned lots, rooftops, public parks and public medians, just to name a few spaces. And how about those golf courses? I’m not talking about producing 100 percent of our food on our lawns, of course. But imagine

communities that produce 100 percent of their fruits and vegetables and, as I shared in the previous chapter, our fruits and veggies are the most essential foods for us to grow locally. This is truly viable. Achieving half of our food production in this manner could revolutionize our communities, our health care and our food systems. Whether we grow *all* our food this way is really a moot point and a distraction from doing what we *can* do.

The next lawn you see, you may see in a different light. And you just may feel a yearning to transform that lawn into a garden! Perhaps it is your own lawn. And if you don't have a lawn, then perhaps your neighbor's. And if not your neighbor's, then perhaps within a walk or bicycle ride you could find someone who has a similar dream and a lawn to share. Lawns aren't too hard to find for most of us. Check your school, your church, your public park or your local neglected lot. A rooftop isn't a lawn, but many of them are viable places to grow a lot of food, too! Brooklyn Grange is a nonprofit in New York City that is growing around 100,000 pounds of food on rooftops each year. Take back the streets and plant on the public median like Ron Finley, the Gangsta Gardener does in South Central LA, or join the powerful movement Incredible Edible has created in nearly 200 cities! You don't have to start big to see the benefits of growing your own food. A balcony or a windowsill can serve as a place to start today!

Inspired to get growing? Find and join a community garden in your area. There are over 18,000 community gardens in the US. See if there's a school garden in your community. The Edible Schoolyard Project has a network of over 5,800 school gardens in every state and it is estimated there are more than 25,000 school gardens in the country! Volunteer with a local food growing initiative to get your hands in the soil. Volunteer on an organic farm with World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF). There are even websites like Shared Earth and Earth Worm that are designed to help you find a yard to grow in!

There are tens of millions of lawns in the United States, covering around 60,000 square miles. What would happen if we as a society took a portion of our time and resources to convert this space into gardens? I estimate that it could be enough to produce all of the fruits and vegetables that our nation needs. We could grow the varieties that yield the highest nutrition, rather than the highest durability for shipping. We could grow the tastiest varieties, not the ones that children try and then never want to eat again. We could cut back on our need for vitamins and supplements and our trips to the doctor. We might even start to feel like we really belong and that we have a place in the world. Imagine what that would do to our consumer spending on clothes and electronic gadgets. The system just may start to crumble. That's the power of the lawn-turned-garden. Start the revolution in your yard or a yard near you!

## Take Action!

### Grow Food – Top Tips to Get Started

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Now, of course, most people are not going to grow 100 percent of their food. Many of the challenges that I endured will not apply to those trying to grow a little, or even a lot, of food. The “grow your own” movement is booming and people are growing food all over! Here are my top tips to begin your gardening journey. If I had all of these in front of me when I started, my life would have been a lot easier!

Start within your means to prevent becoming overwhelmed. You can expand your garden each year.

Talk to local gardeners and find out what grows really well in your area, has the fewest pests and produces a lot of food!

Seek local educational resources – classes, gardening clubs, nurseries, books and more!

Get involved with your community. Join a community garden.

Volunteer at farms or gardens to learn from experienced growers.

Source seeds and plants from local seed companies, nurseries and gardeners.

Plant your garden in a convenient place where you already go, with easy water access.

Grow in full sun as a general rule of thumb. That is six-to-eight hours of sun on the garden each day.

Follow a local planting schedule to plant at the ideal times.

Follow the basic guidelines for planting each plant, including how far apart to plant. Remember a tiny seed can grow into a large plant! Try not to pack plants too tightly.

The health of your soil is the health of your plants. Focus on creating healthy soil.

Remember that it is natural for plants to die. The most successful gardeners have killed the most plants!



Keep it simple. Growing food does not need to be complicated.

Don't believe the chemical mindset. Plants don't need toxic chemicals to thrive.

Practice a mindset of abundance, not scarcity.

Transition away from annuals to perennials.

I recommend starting by growing greens and herbs. They are some of the easiest foods to grow, are nutrient-dense and can be used in just about every meal. They can also be grown in the smallest of spaces.

If you are starting at the basics, read *Grow Food For Free: The sustainable, zero-cost, low-effort way to a bountiful harvest* by Huw Richards and *How to Become a Gardener* by Ashlie Thomas.

Enroll in the Wild Abundance Online Gardening School for an immersive online experience that teaches all the basics, or use their free online resources. For more tips, see the Gardening Guide for Beginners in the Empowerment Manual.

Live in an HOA (homeowners' association) and looking for support on how to grow food within the HOA restrictions? See How to Turn Your Yard into a Garden in the Empowerment Manual.

## Chapter 7

### Zero Waste Life on the Homestead

“The world’s foremost dumpster diver.” That’s the title that Charlie LeDuff at Fox TV gave me in 2014 on my second bicycle ride across the US. He joined me in a few of the grocery store dumpsters of the Midwest that I was dining from for 1,000 miles of cycling to New York City.

That title is a pretty hefty claim, and the actions to back it were that I had dived into more grocery store dumpsters than just about anyone in the country, over a 1,000 at that time. In each major city I passed through that summer, I hosted a Food Waste Fiasco, where I laid out my dumpster findings in a park to expose the hidden food waste from our industrial food system to the public and the media. Through these public demonstrations and the media that interviewed me, I was able to educate millions of people on environmental and social issues that stem from the food waste in our global, industrial food system. Nearly half of all food is wasted in this country, and globally about one third of food is wasted. This is one of the most destructive environmental issues of our time.

As I shared earlier, my passion for dumpster diving was one thing that kept me from growing and foraging food in my earlier years of food exploration. There was such an abundance of quality, free food in the dumpsters – whether I was traveling or at home – that it just made sense to harvest it and eat it. Dumpster diving had made up a substantial portion of my diet for the last five years.

Understandably many people who follow me assumed that I would continue getting food from the dumpster during this year-long immersion. Eating wasted food is very much in alignment with my ethos. In doing so, I engage in noncooperation with the destruction of Big Ag and I divert food from the landfill. It is a win-win as a more environmentally friendly way of eating. And, after all, dumpster diving is also called *urban foraging*! Well, those who assumed that I’d still be dumpster diving were right in a sense. I was still collecting wasted food, not to eat, but rather to create compost and energy!

*I am collecting fruit and vegetable scraps from the nearby juice shop to feed my biodigester to produce gas for my cooking stove. I’m running into a challenge. The smells are tempting me and I’m having to resist eating the food scraps!*

But there was this one error in the process:

*Yesterday I picked up juice scraps for the first time and after I put it in the biodigester, I ate one of my oranges without washing my hands. I was startled*

*to suddenly have the taste of celery in my mouth. Some of the celery juice from the pulp made it into my mouth and I got the vague taste of a food that I didn't grow or forage. I won't make that mistake again!*

Food waste is just one of my many passions. I'm passionate about reducing waste in any form, utilizing wasted resources to create abundance, and establishing closed-loop systems that function in harmony with Earth. My homestead was built upon these concepts. Most have probably heard the term "zero waste" and while that is my goal, my general striving is for near-zero waste, which is more within my means. More so, many of my systems are beyond zero waste, actually being waste-negative!

First, there's the house itself. I designed it to be only as large as I needed it to be, at 10'x10'. I built it with 99 percent secondhand materials, much of which I took right out of the trash, and much of which would have otherwise ended up in the landfill. After completion, I found new homes for most of the excess materials and I had just 30 pounds of trash to send to the landfill!

When I showered at my homestead, I didn't waste a drop of water. How is that possible? Well, the shower system I designed was running completely on rainwater. The water fell from the sky onto the slanted roof of the house where it flowed into gutters. Instead of having these gutters directed into the streets to the sewer, I directed the water into my repurposed 275-gallon totes. I stored this rainwater temporarily and used it each time I showered. As the rainwater ran down my body, it splashed to the soil below, where it soaked into the ground. Much of it was then soaked up by my bananas and turmeric growing nearby. Every time I showered I was contributing to the growth of my food and medicine! Imagine if showers could produce bananas? Well, I have proof that they can!

There are even more benefits to this process. By slowing the distribution of the rain to the landscape, the land has time to soak up more of the rain. This reduces soil erosion, nutrient loss and runoff while keeping the land fertile. The ground can soak up more water with this slower continual release, which creates for more resilience against droughts and decreases the need for watering.

Sometimes the water was colder than I liked, but that was part of living the simple and sustainable life on the homestead!

*2/02/19 (Day 84) A week-long cold spell has just come to an end and I am so elated that warmer weather has returned. Showering in rainwater and sleeping in a tiny house with no insulation, I've been COLD!*

*This rainwater is about 55 degrees. It is not comfortable in the moment, but I feel so alive and refreshed afterwards. I believe immersing myself in cold water keeps my immune system running strong and my mind sharp. The rainwater shower is the life for me. It's one way that I stay connected to nature and live simply.*

The same design was utilized for my kitchen sink. Instead of the sink draining to a sewer, the water was directed to water loving plants. Not only did every drop of water return to the land, but so did all of the bits of food and nutrients that were left on the dishes. Every time I washed my hands and dishes, I was doing a service to the land. You might be wondering about the soap though. Isn't that toxic to the plants? It depends on what soap you are using. I use all greywater safe, biodegradable soaps. The nutrients of the soap actually feed the plants, too. Every personal hygiene item I use is biodegradable and safe to drain directly to the garden. The usage of sink, shower and laundry water on the land is called greywater and can be used directly to water the garden, without any treatment needed. This is compared to blackwater from a flush toilet, which requires treatment.

I take great joy in harvesting my drinking water from the sky. The rainwater that fell on my roof traveled through the gutters and into food grade 55-gallon drums (which are leftover materials from industry). I then take the water from the drums and pour it into my Berkey filter. Rainwater is pure, but it collects bacteria from the surfaces that it falls on, such as the roof, and during storage, bacteria, algae and pathogens can populate. That is why I purify it. I specifically chose a metal roof for my house because there are no toxins released from it, unlike an asphalt roof, and the smooth surface collects less debris and is easy to keep clean.

There were few things that I did with perfection, but I strived to do my best. Energy production was the area where I operated the least sustainably. Because I used very minimal electricity and I was at this homestead for a relatively short duration of time, I opted to use the grid, via an extension cord from the property. For cooking, I primarily used propane from a 20-pound tank that I filled at the hardware store every couple months or so. However, I did set up a biodigester that I fed with food scraps, both my own and what I collected from nearby restaurants. A biodigester is like a huge stomach. Just like we humans generate and let off gas through farts and burps, so does a biodigester. The difference is that this system harvests the gas and stores it in a pressurized bladder. Methane is the primary gas created when the system is operating effectively. I was able to cook for an hour per day on this gas when it

was running effectively. As a bonus, the system also creates a very nutrient-rich liquid fertilizer for feeding the garden.

The biodigester was more of an experiment and a bonus for me when it came to using food scraps. The true gold for me is compost. The key to effective low-waste systems is composting as compared to recycling, which is generally a very resource and energy-intensive process that I have little view or control over. Composting, on the other hand, I can see every step of the process and it requires no energy or resource inputs. I compost EVERYTHING that I can. There are, of course, the fruit peels, vegetable scraps and plate scrapings. But also the meat, bones and oils I compost as well (I had no dairy or eggs during this year, but I compost those as well). Excess plant materials from the garden and property goes into the compost (or biodegrades in place) with rare exceptions. Paper, cardboard, napkins and even cotton rags and clothes go right into my compost pile. Everything from my body – hair, fingernails, skin cells, snot, saliva and blood – goes into the compost. Urine and poop go into a separate pile, which I'll touch on shortly. I know some of you might be feeling a little uneasy hearing about this, so I'm attempting to deliver this message as gently as I can. Our bodies are designed to return to the Earth, along with everything that comes from our bodies. I do not believe myself to be separate from the Earth, but part of it, and thus what comes from me, becomes soil and stays in the cycle of life.

I create very little trash and maximal soil by composting everything that is compostable. An effective compost pile can reach temperatures of up to 160 degrees Fahrenheit and can break down a lot more than you might think. Even whole small animals will fully and safely compost in a backyard compost pile. One of the composting systems that I most enjoy is a banana circle. With this system, I plant a ring of bananas so that the center has plenty of space where I can pile up large amounts of plant materials from the garden. This feeds the bananas as it breaks down and eventually can be harvested for compost to feed and build up the soil of the veggie garden.

The two standard compost systems I used at my gardens were simply three pallets formed into a u-shape or a 17-foot piece of chicken wire or hardware cloth, formed into a circle. The Earth has been composting for longer than humans have been around and knows how to compost just as well today. I let Earth do the work for me!

Now, I mentioned composting my poop. I'd like to enter the realm of poop by inviting you to look at food waste in a way that you may never have before.

At some point in your life, you have probably been told to finish all the food on your plate so you don't waste it. But the truth is that most of us are still

wasting part of the food on our plates whether we eat it or not. Every time we poop and flush it down the toilet, we are wasting food.

In a natural cycle, when food is eaten by an animal, the food is digested and what is not used by the body is pooped onto the land or into the water. Nature has no flush toilets.

That poop is not waste though. No animal body utilizes all of the nutrients, so this excrement still has nutrients in it, ready to be food for the next organism. This poop is food for decomposers and plants, which are in turn food for insects, plants and animals, including us. The poop is all part of a closed-loop cycle.

On the other hand, when we poop into the toilet and flush it down the drain, we create a burden to be dealt with and we miss out on a precious opportunity. It becomes a toxic slurry mixed with other chemicals like bleach, soap and detergents that are also used in our homes. Dealing with the poop in this way is a resource-intensive process, using precious water, chemicals like chlorine and electricity generated by fossil fuels. After this long process, it is a waste product that has to be dealt with.

Every time we eat and poop in this manner, we are taking nutrients and carbon from the land and flushing it away. With it, we are flushing away our soil and potentially our future for an inhabitable Earth. We are not returning those nutrients to the land and that is depleting our soil levels, one of the main reasons the industrial food system is so dependent upon chemical fertilizers.

You probably already know that we commonly use animal poop as a fertilizer. Cow, horse, goat, rabbit and bat poop are all quite commonly used, among other animal poops. But did you know that we can use our own poop, too? We've been doing this for a very long time and we have been doing it safely. The process is called humanure, the combination of the words human and manure.

How composting poop works is quite simple and basically the same as the composting of plants, with some minor precautions and safety measures. Human poop can carry pathogens that if not properly dealt with can be spread. We don't want that. However, a properly functioning humanure pile can heat up to 160 degrees Fahrenheit. This temperature comes from billions of microorganisms (bacteria) and macro organisms (insects) moving and eating in the pile. When they eat, they create gas. Gas comes out hot (think of your own farts) and gets trapped in the pile, heating it up. The creation of heat is simply part of the natural process of the decomposition of organic matter. If the pile gets up to a minimum temperature of approximately 130 degrees Fahrenheit and maintains the temperature for three consecutive days, all potentially harmful pathogens, including bacteria, viruses and parasites, are killed. That's

the magic of the compost pile. Yet, the standard humanure practice is to compost human poop for one year, compared to the approximately three months needed for garden materials and food scraps. The reason for this is that time without access to a vector also kills these pathogens. One year of composting is the guarantee that these pathogens are destroyed even if the pile did not reach the temperature needed.

This is exactly what I did at my homestead. There are numerous systems that people use. Some are multi-thousand dollar toilets that even the most choosy people would likely be content to sit on. I enjoy those when I come across them in my travels, but my go-to system is just a wooden box with a toilet seat on top of a five-gallon bucket. I built my outdoor compost toilet for under \$30 with secondhand lumber, pallets, screws, burlap and two toilet seats. My landmate didn't want me to compost the poop on site, so I stored the poop in 55-gallon barrels, which I took to a friend who was happy for me to compost on their property.

I keep my poop in the loop.

After pooping, I simply cover the poop with a scoop of sawdust. Ample carbon that is finely shredded keeps smells and insects to an absolute minimum. It's okay to pee in the toilet but keeping this system dry is ideal. To remedy this, I have one seat for peeing and one for pooping. The pee bucket was sometimes filled with biochar, sometimes diluted with water, and was always used to water the plants (diluting the pee to a 10:1 ratio with water).

I loved that my kitchen, shower and toilet were all outside. It made cleaning a lot easier, as any spills could just soak into the ground. Sunshine and fresh air are two of nature's most powerful disinfectants, so this system allowed me to practice natural cleanliness with less need to bring in any resources from outside. Keeping my poop in the loop is extremely satisfying, too. In fact, sitting on my compost toilet brought me great joy.

*The birds are peacefully chirping, the bees are coming and going from their colony in the golden hour. The air is satisfyingly crisp. And I'm experiencing this all from my compost toilet. I sit here knowing that these nutrients will be nourishing fruit trees in the near future and, in the slightly further off future, people will be enjoying the fruits of this very moment.*

I also grew my own toilet paper, topping off my closed-loop system. The plant I use, Blue Spur flower or *Plectranthus barbatus*, produces leaves the same size as toilet paper squares, to be conveniently plucked off the plant. These leaves are softer than most toilet paper sold at the store (I call it the "Charmin

of the Garden”), yet are durable, so my fingers do not break through. What makes these leaves so soft is the thousands of tiny fuzzy fibers, which on dewy mornings hold onto the moisture, turning the TP into a wet wipe. Also called Boldo or boldo gaúcho in Brazil and Kikuyu toilet paper in Kenya, it is in the mint family, so it has a wonderful minty smell. Plus it puts out purple flowers that I saw hummingbirds visit numerous times. Many people love the plant enough to grow it as a landscaping plant, without even knowing that it is nature’s gift to us as a toilet paper!

My friend Tyler Zender gave me two cuttings (which are just pieces of a branch) and within a year I had a Toilet Paper Plant ten feet wide that I estimate was enough to supply a family of five. No matter how much I used, I never noticed any reduction in my abundance. In fact, I often had to prune the plants and I gave cuttings to dozens of people for them to start growing their own toilet paper at home. Imagine getting a couple sticks, putting them in the ground and never having to buy toilet paper again! Nature grows toilet paper all across the world. Mullein is another plant that I’ve used in Northern climates with great satisfaction. *See the Empowerment Manual to learn how to grow your own toilet paper.*

This is primarily a book about food, but I am of the belief that everything is connected, so it is impossible for me to discuss only food. A truly harmonious production of food involves creating systems that are interwoven with all areas of our lives. That’s the way it’s been until very recent times. There is no sustainable food without sustainable water harvesting and management. There is no sustainable food without working with the abundance of plant matter on site. There is no sustainable food without looking at how we create and use our energy. There is no sustainable food without creating systems that prevent waste and utilize “waste” as a resource. After all, in permaculture we say “waste is just a resource out of place.” There is no sustainable food without ... poop! There is no sustainable food without sustainable transportation. That’s where my bicycle with a trailer that could tow up to 200 pounds of plants, compost and garden materials came into the system.

I’ve barely scratched the surface of closed-loop systems, and I’ve just shared my example that was designed for my needs in this little backyard three miles from downtown Orlando. I can’t share all that I’d like to, but I could not feel complete in this discussion of waste without sharing how I’ve found that growing and foraging food is the true zero waste food! Generally when you learn from zero waste educators online about how to eat zero waste, the discussion centers around how to purchase your food package free. I am an advocate for this as well. However, when growing my own food, harvested



by my own hands and brought to my own kitchen, there is no need for any packaging at all. No plastic, no fancy compostable packaging, not even paper. And definitely no fruit stickers! When shopping at the grocery store, it can be very hard to eat in a way that doesn't require a garbage can and a landfill. By growing and foraging my own food, I had the easiest time in my long journey of living low waste, because generally food packaging has been one of the main ways in which I create trash. No garbage cans were needed for my meals. In fact, I didn't even have a garbage can in my house.

I don't want to paint the picture that there are no hardships in homesteading. It all takes work. Although I was really appreciating my systems that allowed me to live simply and sustainably, by no means was everything easy.

*2/25/19 (Day 107) I'm down and out. Moments ago, I contemplated going to a restaurant and getting a meal. It was a real thought. The idea has crossed my mind in the last 107 days, but this was me being truly tempted to give up.*

*Life is happening. Last week I collected about 50 coconuts and I am still working on turning them into oil. Some have molded. I think I over-dried them and the oil making process with the press I have is not going well. I had made a commitment to go away over the weekend and left them outside, not ideal. I have put in many hours of work and have no coconut oil to show for it. If I don't get this process figured out, they could all mold and I'd lose many very important hours. As I type, I am watching a squirrel eating my coconuts that are laying in the breeze to keep them from molding. I'm just going to let the squirrel keep eating for now.*

*The coconuts are just one thing. I've felt a bit heartbroken the last few weeks from a romantic relationship. Life is so much harder when my heart hurts. I'm lonely and want company. I haven't been sleeping as much. My digestion is off. All of this is making it hard to be on top of everything at the homestead and in the gardens. The cold spells have continued to be challenging for me since I did not insulate the house or put in a wood stove.*

As I've shared, there is very little waste created in my small scale, low waste, waste-imported and closed-loop systems. On the other hand, the global, industrial system is the antithesis of what I've just described. The idea of Big Ag is to scale up, far beyond the limits of natural systems. Waste is built into these systems everywhere. It is not an accident in these systems for there to be waste, but rather, waste is essential in the design. Once systems get too big, nearly all natural loops are broken and the system becomes dependent on outsourcing.

Outsourcing within Big Ag design means extraction and exploitation. The true costs and impacts are externalized and, because this takes place generally in far-off lands, it is easily hidden. Within these systems, there is a lack of accountability for where resources are coming from and how they are procured and processed, and generally, even a lack of knowledge of most of the people involved because it is all isolated and compartmentalized, not to mention incredibly complex. These systems function through hiding the truth, because when the truth becomes known, there is often pressure from the public to change the system.

In the paragraphs ahead, I'd like to summarize how Big Ag creates big time waste, in contrast to the systems I utilize.

Nearly half of all food produced in the US, and one-third of food globally is wasted – starting at the farms, continuing through processing and distribution, at the supermarkets and restaurants and in people's homes. In this process, all of the resources used to grow this wasted food are wasted as well – the land, water, chemicals, fossil fuels, packaging, human labor, the animal lives, potential and so much more. Most of this wasted food is not composted, but rather is sent to landfills where it is not able to properly biodegrade and instead emits methane, one of the most potent greenhouse gasses. Big waste, extraction and exploitation. Not harmony, not closed-loops.

Water “used” in harmonious closed-loop systems is not necessarily “used” at all, but rather cycled. In Big Ag, water is generally used in such large quantities that it must be extracted in a manner that burdens the water supply from rivers, lakes or groundwater. Many water supplies have been depleted to complete collapse and many are in the process of collapsing. When rain falls upon these industrial farms that have been depleted of top soil, the land is not able to absorb the water and it runs off. With this runoff comes the soil as well as the pesticides, herbicides, pharmaceuticals and chemical fertilizers. This pollutes the bodies of water nearby. There have been countless examples of this polluted water causing mass die-offs of animal and plant life when it overwhelms the ecosystem. Most drinking water in the US is now contaminated by chemicals in this runoff. We are literally drinking these pesticides, which are not easily filtered.

Energy used in the global, industrial system is primarily fossil fuels. The system design relies first upon the extraction of fossil fuels from Earth, which can then be used for further extraction of resources from the land. The extraction, production, distribution, consumption and disposal is all built upon this. In fact, the production of corn, one of the main calorie crops grown in this system, often uses more calories of fossil fuel energy than actual food calories

are produced. This system is based on drawing resources from here and there, based on exploitative financial models that allow it to be financially profitable, while wasting resources along every step of the way.

Much of the farmland used by Big Ag was once fertile enough to produce a bounty year after year. Today many of these farms have lost all of their fertility. They now rely almost exclusively on chemical fertilizers, rather than compost. The natural cycle of carbon and nutrients returning to the land is broken. The poop and urine of animals that would normally be a gift to the land, is not able to be absorbed by the land in CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations) and it is instead a waste product to be dealt with. Although the manure is often used on industrial farms, it is spread in a manner that allows it to runoff into our waterways and to off-gas in a destructive manner. While we have all the fertility we need via composting of plant matter and poop, this system relies upon extraction of finite resources, largely through mining, creating wastelands in the process. Many former farms are now wastelands that would take decades or centuries to regenerate into highly functioning ecosystems or farmlands.

The trash created through food packaging in this industrial model is one of the most visible forms of waste for most of us. While it can be harder to see the waste at the farm, we can all see our garbage cans filling up. This system is built around an extreme excess of plastic packaging. In some instances, this packaging is beneficial, but most of it is now to get us to buy more of their products and for extreme convenience. Imagine this: when you eat a small bag of chips, you get maybe five minutes of enjoyment. And how much real nourishment or sustenance? Likely not much. Yet, that bag may be here for over 500 years, about 20 generations from now. Through this system, we are filling up landfills (which I like to more accurately call organized littering) as a best-case scenario. But we are all seeing that this system is filling our oceans, lakes, rivers and all our ecosystems with plastic and other destructive waste.

What I've learned through my decade plus of analyzing this system is that whenever I take part in a convenience created through consumerism, it comes at a cost. The burden I do not experience has been placed elsewhere, whether by people working in poor conditions, cultures being eroded, animals or plants being exploited, ecosystems being destroyed or resources being depleted. Just like the concept of energy not being created nor destroyed, so, too, do I believe is the case with convenience not coming out of thin air, but being attached to suffering elsewhere.

It is my belief that waste takes place through disconnection and separation. Waste is easily built into the systems that we are separate from and feel no connection to. It is easy to hide it and to ignore it when we are not a part of

it. On the other hand, when we are fully part of a process, we see the value behind everything and everyone involved. We see the interconnectedness and interdependence of it all. With food systems that are interconnected with all areas of our lives, it comes naturally that there is very little to no waste. We do not need to force systems upon ourselves, because the systems weave their way into our lives with joy and abundance. It is in the flow of life that nothing goes to waste, nothing gets sent “away,” and much fewer resources are needed through exploitation of faraway lands.

Are you looking into your trash can and thinking about how to create less waste? Or maybe composting is sounding quite appealing? Maybe dumpster diving would be a fun adventure to you? Or perhaps you are feeling overwhelmed with these systems of big waste and don't know what to do to get out of them. The inspiring news is that there are individuals and communities taking action globally that are showing the way!

As a start, one of the most accessible changes is to simply not waste your food. Just make sure to eat the food that you actually have! *The Zero-Waste Chef* by Anne-Marie Bonneau is a helpful book for this, as well as her social media pages and website.

Composting is quite easy. I've shared a beginners guide on how to compost, as well as how to build a compost bin for free or very low cost, in the Empowerment Manual. If you don't have space to do it at home, you could check out community compost programs that are popping up all over the country. BK Rot in Brooklyn is a youth-led nonprofit that picks up compost at homes in their neighborhoods by bicycle! In Los Angeles, LA Compost has drop-off locations, many of which are at farmers' markets. In Orlando, O-Town Compost is a small enterprise that picks up from hundreds of businesses and residences. See [makesoil.org](http://makesoil.org) and [sharewaste.com](http://sharewaste.com) to find a compost initiative near you. You can also start your own Community Compost Program through my how-to guide found in the online resources section.

Composting will have already reduced your garbage substantially, but food packaging creates a lot of trash, too. To reduce this, you can learn to shop low waste through buying unpackaged and less-processed foods. All food co-ops have a bulk food section as do many local and franchise grocery chains. There are also many zero waste shops that have popped up in the last decade. No bulk food section in your area? Start a Buying Club with your friends! Together you can access wholesale prices for nourishing bulk food. Frontier Co-op can

help you get started: [frontiercoop.com/starting-buying-club](http://frontiercoop.com/starting-buying-club). The Take Action section of this chapter shares my top tips for reducing your waste through food. My How to Live a Near-Zero Waste Life Guide, found in the online resources section covers broadly how to reduce your waste.

Maybe the idea of eating wasted food appeals to you and you'd like to try dumpster diving. [Freegan.info](http://Freegan.info) is an excellent community resource for both veteran and beginner dumpster divers. My extensive Dumpster Diving Guide for Beginners in the online resources section shares what you need to know to get in the dumpsters with confidence and overcome your concerns. The legality of dumpster diving is explained and my Dumpster Divers Defense Fund has you covered if you ever run into legal trouble (which is very unlikely). Dumpster diving can be a tool for feeding yourself, your community, your soil or animals.

You don't have to get into a dumpster to rescue food. There are thousands of food rescue programs across the country that partner with grocery stores, restaurants, caterers, farmers and gardeners. Their central goal is to prevent food from being wasted and to distribute the food to be eaten, especially to folks who are food insecure. Boulder Food Rescue has rescued over five million pounds of food by bicycle. Feedback is one of the leading food rescue nonprofits, especially in their work to transform the system and their educational resources. Food Shift in the Bay Area has been doing this work for well over a decade. Campus Kitchens and Food Recovery Network are two organizations to get involved with on university campuses. Food Not Bombs is a radical organization resisting corruption and feeding wholesome food to people on the streets. They rescue food both by relationships with markets as well as dumpster diving. Feeding America exists in all 50 US states and has partnerships with many of the largest grocers. Gleaning is the process of harvesting food at farms that is going unharvested. Concrete Jungle in Atlanta and ProduceGood in Southern California are two of many organizations who glean from farms and distribute to people in need. Volunteer with a food rescue program or start your own using my How to Start a Food Rescue Program guide. To create change within a school use my How to End Food Waste at Your School guide. The Good Samaritan Food Donation Act protects any food establishment from liability when they donate food to nonprofits, so the law is on our side with partnering to rescue food and feed the people!

Every one of these actions plays a role in transforming Big Ag, whether through the action of noncooperation or through changing your interactions with these companies. There is also much opportunity to put pressure for truth and integrity on the system. My Food Waste Activism Resource Guide

and Donate Not Dump Campaign can be a guiding force in this. This includes action steps for industry transformation that can be encouraged and shared.

For any solution to be a sound solution, there must be education behind it. Tristram Stuart's TED Talk "The Global Food Waste Scandal" is one of the most powerful talks on the internet on food waste, and his book *Waste: Uncovering the Global Food Waste Scandal* is my top recommendation for understanding the issue of food waste. "Just Eat It" is a feature documentary that follows a couple's six month journey of eating only wasted food, mostly from dumpster diving, while sharing a deep education on food waste. *The Story of Stuff* by Annie Leonard along with "The Story of Stuff" video series and *Garbage Land* by Elizabeth Royte will share everything you really need to know about the truth behind consumer waste. The Food Waste Resource Page found in the online resources section will direct you to many more educational resources.

For me, the compost toilet was the holy grail of sustainable living. It took me nearly five years of transforming my life to take this step. I consider it to be a revolutionary act in an "out of sight, out of mind" society. The hard part is not the act of composting our poop, but rather it is overcoming the social stigma. Once that is overcome, the rest is relatively easy. *The Humanure Handbook* by Joseph Jenkins (also called the Pope of Poop) is the bible for this topic. For those wanting to have a compost toilet but who don't have a yard to compost it in, it may be easier than you think. A five-gallon bucket fills up in about two-to-four weeks with one person's poop and sawdust. Buckets can be stored long term (with the lid on, there are no smell or spill issues) and occasional trips can be made to a site, such as a farm outside the city, to empty the buckets into a humanure compost pile and return home with clean, empty buckets.

In closing, remember, there is no such thing as "away" and landfills are just organized littering or patches of former nature that are being decimated. Landfills make up 25 percent of all EPA Superfund sites, which are some of the most toxic places on Earth. They emit toxic air, toxic effluent and methane (a greenhouse gas 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide). If you are looking for a way to stand up to Big Ag and support the regeneration of Earth and your community – make soil, not waste, and feed the people!

## Take Action!

### Reduce Your Waste Through Food

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From over a decade of looking through thousands of trash cans, it is clear to me that what we eat and how we dispose of it is one of the primary ways we create trash. By striving for zero waste in our diet, we can drastically reduce our overall waste. Here are my top tips!

Compost. Keep it simple. Remember, Earth has been doing this for millions of years. Compost EVERYTHING you can! See the Empowerment Manual for my How to Compost Guide and for instructions on how to build a compost bin. If you can't compost at home, join a community compost program or find a place to compost. Get chickens and turn your food scraps into eggs!

Buy just what you need and eat what you buy. Eating our food is one the simplest and most enjoyable ways for us to reduce waste.

Nourish yourself with parts of plants that you might be tossing out. Beet greens are my favorite green. Read *The Zero-Waste Chef* for comprehensive advice.

Buy unpackaged produce. Find this at farmers' markets, direct at farms and in grocery stores that offer fruits and veggies without packaging.

Shop the bulk section. The bulk section at many food co-ops and grocery stores offers hundreds of unpackaged options including grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, dried fruits, herbs, spices, herbal teas, granola, pasta and snacks. Many bulk sections even include oils, vinegars, olives, ferments, condiments, nut butters, kombucha and more! You pay by the weight and get just what you need.

Bring your own bags and containers to the market. Not only shopping bags, but also for produce and food from the bulk section.

Carry reusable dishes, utensils and a water bottle with you. Use these at restaurants and anywhere where disposable is being used.

When eating out, bring reusable containers and take home any extra food to enjoy later. You can even bring home the food scraps and napkins to compost.

Cook! Making nourishing and tasty meals is much simpler and time effective than many of us believe. Cook with whole, minimally processed, unpackaged ingredients.

Make your own food and eat out less. This is a simple way to control your waste, both what you see and what happens out of sight in the restaurant kitchen.

Say no to one-time use items! Ditch the tin foil, plastic wrap, disposable dishes and utensils, napkins, paper towels and anything that is designed to be used only once or a few times. There are reusable options for everything!

Follow the 7 R's -- Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose, Repair, Rot and as a last resort, Recycle.

Grow your own food and forage, the most zero waste of all!

Make humanure. Compost your poop!

Read *Closing the Loop on Zero Waste: Living in Alignment with Nature* by April Hepokoski and *Zero Waste Home* by Bea Johnson.







I arrived in Orlando with no land of my own and minimal experience in growing and foraging food. This sandy yard is where my garden journey began.



Within three months, my frontyard garden was producing more greens than I could eat and plenty to share. This photo was taken four months after planting the first seed.



I quickly experienced the abundance of food growing freely all around me. This bounty – that would have cost \$700 to purchase organic at the grocery store – is from a weekend of urban foraging on bicycle.



I lived simply and sustainably in this 10'x10' tiny house. To build it, I sourced 99% secondhand materials and spent less than \$1,500. Community came out and we built my home together.





I lived connected to Earth, in the middle of the city. I harvested and drank rainwater, composted everything I could – including my poop – grew my own toilet paper and much more. Here I am showering in rainwater.



After ten months of preparation, my adventure of living without grocery stores and restaurants began. This is my outdoor kitchen where I prepared my meals.



I did most of my gardening, harvesting, foraging and compost collection on my bicycle with this trailer in tow.



I grew 100 different foods in my gardens. Banana was one of my staple crops along with cassava, sweet potatoes, seminole pumpkin, papaya and pigeon peas.



Nature was my garden, my pantry and my pharmacy. I foraged over 200 foods. Nothing packaged, processed, or shipped – not even multivitamins, supplements, or spices.





My meals varied with the changing of the seasons. Common meals included blended Seminole pumpkin, carrot, coconut milk soup (top), pigeon peas and greens (left) and collard wraps (right).



I rarely used a recipe. Instead, I let nature guide me to creating simple, satiating food. Here is a cassava and mullet collard wrap with Everglade tomatoes, sauerkraut and garden herbs.



On many days, I ate a pound of greens. I ate my greens in salads, soups, smoothies, juices and steamed. Pictured here is one of my medicinal green juices. My food was my medicine.



There was no “fast food” in my diet. Here I am holding sauerkraut that I had fermented over six months, stored underground to insulate it from the extreme Florida summer heat.





I partnered with honeybees to satisfy my sweet tooth. Being immersed in the life of thousands of highly sophisticated and organized creatures deepened my connection with our insect relatives.



This photo was taken by a drone flown by Envoyé Spécial as I was out cast-netting for mullet. Mullet is one of the most sustainable fish to harvest and, on a successful outing, I would catch a couple weeks' supply.



I harvested saltwater from the cleanest stretches of beach in Florida and evaporated it to make my own salt.





As I stood in the garden on one of the last days, I realized I was nearly a foot above the sidewalk. The lawn was almost level with the sidewalk when I started the garden! Much of this mass was sequestered carbon. Imagine if we did this with every lawn in the nation!



I did not do this alone. It took a community. Communities around the world are taking back control of their food and creating food sovereignty. For me, the true solutions lie in community and diversity.



This was never just about seeing if I could break free from the grocery store. I want you to question the food system – to know what you are eating, where it came from, how it got to you and the impact it had on Earth, our plant and animal relatives, humanity and ultimately, yourself.

## Chapter 8

### Growing Abundance in Harmony with Nature

I'm standing in my garden soaking it all in. There are 50 species growing abundantly around me, in a place that grew just a few species, mostly grass, when I arrived. There are bountiful annual veggies and herbs in the garden rows. The ground is covered by southern peas, pumpkin vines and sweet potato greens. There are bushes of greens like katuk and chaya springing into the sky. Papayas are abundantly hanging down the trunk in view for all to see. By now, the moringa tree is a formidable tree with enough greens to share with everyone on the street!

There are butterflies gliding from plant to plant and bees buzzing from flower to flower on the African Blue Basil and *Bidens alba*, surely making me some honey while they pollinate the plants.

The air is alive and so am I.

I am waiting for the garden owner to meet me to do some gardening together. As I wait, I bask in the beauty that I have created alongside nature.

"What are we going to do about the aphids on the kale? And there are caterpillars eating the pumpkin leaves!" These are nearly the first words out of her mouth as she walks into this peaceful space.

She is distressed about these insects eating some of our plants. I'm at a loss for words as to how to respond. Sure, we have some "pests" but they are only on a couple of the species of plants we are growing. We have another 48 or so that have no apparent insect damage. My response is to focus on the abundance of those 48.

This concern she expressed is a common theme among gardeners. And that is to focus on the problems, and perhaps to assume the worst in what they don't know. To see aphids on the leaves and assume that the leaves need to be discarded. To see some holes in the leaf, rather than the rest of the leaf that is still entirely edible. To see any "imperfection" as a reason for concern. To see any plant that they didn't put there as a weed or to see grubs in the soil as surely something that must be killed or removed. To see visiting creatures like snakes as something to fear. Ultimately, to apply the supermarket mindset where everything has an exact place and every food is consistent and void of all blemishes or insects. I frequently see people applying this supermarket mindset to their gardens, and it supplants many potential moments of joy and gratitude with worry and unnecessary work.

For many, this is where the pesticides and herbicides come in. But not for me! Throughout the year, people frequently asked what I did about pests. I was never able to answer that briefly in a social media post. It is not that simple. I'm grateful to have the opportunity to lay it out for you in more depth here.

Going into the year, I knew without a doubt that I wasn't going to spray any toxic chemicals into my garden. I was certain of that. But, I didn't know much about organic pesticides and was still open to using them. When pickleworms plagued my cherished Seminole pumpkin patch leading into the year, I had some thinking to do.

*7/06/18 Do I use my first pesticides? Bt is totally "organic," but what is the impact of making it? What is the impact of using it?*

I looked into the commonly used organic pesticide, Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*), and it sounded relatively okay to me. It's a naturally occurring soil bacteria that is commercially formulated into an insecticide. This is then sprayed onto the leaves of the plants and the caterpillars consume it as they eat the leaves. Once the bacteria is in the stomach of the caterpillar, the bacteria reproduces and eats the caterpillar from within. The caterpillar (and the bacteria) then fall to the soil and return to earth. I was very tempted to use this pesticide, but instead, I decided to harvest all of the pumpkins, many of them somewhat prematurely. I had never used a pesticide before and at this point it wasn't an absolute necessity to me. As the months went on and I continued to see abundance in my gardens, I became more and more certain that I was not going to use any pesticides, not even organic ones.

As far as insects go, I dealt with aphids, cucumber worms, caterpillars, earwigs, root-knot nematodes and perhaps some others that I don't recall. I also experienced some bacterial and fungal issues, especially mildew, and an unknown disease on my Okinawa spinach. Unlike others I've met, I didn't have issues with deer, rabbits, wild pigs, moles, rats or mice. My biggest issue was the squirrels, and as you know already, I dealt with them totally organically.

Perhaps my most substantial issue in the garden, where many others would choose to spray, were the "weeds." In Florida, it only takes a couple weeks in the warm months for them to get out of hand! I've seen gardens turn into overgrown jungles in a short time. Torpedo grass was often a topic of conversation in the gardens I visited.

Although I did have these kinds of issues, and I did have concern, as I reviewed my journals covering this time, there was a much stronger theme coming through. Abundance! This time of year, there was some real abundance

coming into my gardens, along with some challenges and some joys outside of the garden that I'd like to share.

*3/14/19 (Day 124) My spirits are soaring. I spent half an hour harvesting from the garden and was quickly overwhelmed with a magical feeling. It was a feeling of extreme abundance. I was pulling fat carrots from the ground, when just weeks ago I thought maybe I would only get little slivers. I pulled up some heads of garlic, and they weren't forming cloves yet, but the heads were quite large and I am very excited about the progress. Cycling home, I had a taste of garlic in my mouth and for me that taste meant one thing. Success. Not sweet success, but pungent success! I could feel the healthfulness of the garlic coursing through my veins. I was feeling so motivated that I ran my bike the rest of the way home rather than ride it. It was in that moment that I realized I may be in the best shape of my recent adult life. My body is in a state of flow and there is no question that this lifestyle and this food plays a primary role.*

*I also left the garden feeling a little overwhelmed, but it was an exciting form of overwhelm. It is the overwhelming feeling of abundance. I'm feeling like I have so much food, and that is very exciting, but I have so much to harvest and process to make the abundance last into the summer. I'm minimally experienced with processing foods, so that makes it more of a challenge. I'm learning as I go.*

*I am excited for flavor. There have been some bland moments and some bland meals. But the last few days have been quite tasty, and I intend to continue that fullness of taste deep into the weeks to come.*

*3/24/19 (Day 134) It has been a busy time. I have been doing a lot of media interviews, which amounts to a part-time job in itself. Last week we built two Gardens for Single Moms and we sent out 2,000 free seed packs. Plus, of course, there's all the growing, foraging, cooking, preserving and eating!*

*3/30/19 (Day 140) My garlic was successful beyond my dreams – bulbs with fully formed cloves. Nearly everyone said that I couldn't grow garlic in Florida, but I was so determined to have this important medicine and flavor for my meals and that determination yielded success.*

*3/31/19 (Day 141) I'm still around 40 days away from being even halfway done. I'm feeling how long a year is. I'm wondering how many calories I have, enough to make it through the year? I'm feeling relieved to get sweet potato slips in the ground but also worried. I'm 6-8 weeks late in planting.*

*4/04/19 (Day 145) Yesterday about 25 people came to my beginner gardening class in the frontyard garden and every single one was a beginner gardener, many of whom had never grown any food at all! I think that food is the greatest gateway to transforming a life.*

*4/04/19 (Day 145) I harvested 5.5 pounds of pigeon peas from the four trees at Lisa's and I had already harvested from them a few times. That is over 60 servings at 1/2 cup of cooked peas per serving.*

*4/12/19 (Day 153) I have just come home from four days of canoeing out on the 10,000 Islands in Everglades National Park. I subsisted largely on fish and coconuts and fueled my body with much-needed fat and protein. I also ate sweet potato, carrots, greens, tomatoes, sauerkraut, oranges, loquats, grapefruit, lemon, sapodilla, smilax and tea that I brought with me. I foraged tamarind, sea blite, sea purslane and other greens.*

*I napped in the afternoons to catch up on sleep. I bathed and basked in the salt water and soaked in the sun. Life revolved around the tiny mangrove island and I barely even thought of life back on the mainland. Out there, I had no screens to look at, no outside communication with the world and no clock to tell the time. I gauged the time using a tide chart and the incoming and outgoing tides, along with the sun. It wasn't exact, but out there, nothing needed to be. I have restored some peace and serenity inside of me.*

*4/19/19 (Day 160) The squirrels are still providing me with challenges in the garden. They devoured my freshly planted peanuts and sunflowers and perhaps my cucumber and bean seeds as well. No one task is that challenging on its own, but when I'm so busy, I don't usually make the time to plant again after the squirrels get me. I'm so determined to make my own peanut butter with coconut oil and honey though!*

*I have been so incredibly busy. I caught up on rest in the Everglades, but quickly went back to 40-60 hour weeks of planting, harvesting, processing, cooking and eating. It seems to never stop. There's always something to harvest or process.*

*I have spent a lot of time with journalists lately including National Geographic, CBS Radio, Huffington Post, Daily Mail, Despierta America, most of the local TV channels and two of the largest print outlets in Orlando published cover stories. This all keeps me incredibly busy. But it is what I live for.*

*4/22/19 (Day 163) My garden is flourishing. I can't keep up with the amount of greens in my garden even with large green juices and an abundance of greens at most every meal. There have been some short stints over the last five months where I felt I had to ration, but those days have been the small minority. My life is substantially more vibrant if I'm drinking my daily green juice.*

*My green juices can vary with dozens of different ingredients depending on what's fresh in my garden, but they currently consist of kale, collards, cabbage, celery, Spanish needle, Italian basil, holy basil, mint and Cuban oregano. I'll often add in garlic and turmeric as well and if I have cucumbers and citrus, I'll add that, too.*

*My freezer is packed and my shelf of dried foods is nearly overflowing. The dried herb mix I've crafted has made for quicker and more convenient cooking.*

*4/28/19 (Day 169) This week I was up until about 1:00 a.m. on multiple nights processing foods. I'm working steadily at harvesting my spring bounty to preserve for the summer, when my gardens may be far less productive. The easy gardening season is coming to an end. I'll still be growing and eating fresh food from the gardens daily, and I'm grateful for that, but right now will likely be the most bountiful time for the rest of this year.*

*My last harvests yielded 40 pounds of carrots, a dozen heads of cabbage and kohlrabi, a small number of beets, 60+ bulbs of garlic, a dozen onions, a few pounds of moringa, 50 hot peppers and many herbs like holy basil, coriander, dill seed and chamomile.*

*For preservation, I have been primarily freezing and dehydrating, and also doing a little fermenting. I have nearly depleted my sweet potato supply and I don't know what's going to happen this summer. I do have a huge bank of cassava under the ground around the neighborhood though.*

During this time I managed to grow an abundance of food (and accomplish a lot more outside the garden) without using a single pesticide. In fact, looking through my journals for the entire year, I found almost no references to issues that would bring into question the usage of pesticides, herbicides and the like. I found almost no references to "pests" or "weeds" being an issue. Reflecting now, I'm quite certain the issues were there, but they seem to have been of minor concern. But I believe my focus was not on these issues. Rather, my focus was on gratitude for the areas in which I had an abundance.

Would pesticides have resulted in some veggies being more abundant in the short term? Would herbicides have reduced my time spent pulling up “weeds”? Would synthetic fertilizers have produced more calories from my sandy lawns turned gardens and lessened my calorie concerns? Perhaps, but I had other priorities as to how I wanted to manage my garden.

So how did I cultivate this abundance, with minimal “pest” problems? No doubt there was some luck in this regard. I’ve heard that “pests” can develop more after the garden has been around for a couple years and the insects have had time to find it and make it home. But I suspect that there was a lot more than just luck and time. The following is the basis of my pesticide-free garden practice.

When I started this project, I did not walk the aisles of the supermarkets in Orlando and think about what I would like to eat. Instead, I talked to the locals. I asked them what grows so well that their main problem is harvesting and giving away the extra. I asked them which plants in their gardens have never had pest problems and which thrive even under neglect. In summary, I asked what was really easy to grow in abundance and that’s where I put my focus! If there were particular foods that I wanted, I would ask how they grew for them and, if they didn’t grow well, I would find alternatives. For example, chives didn’t thrive in any of the local gardens, but garlic chives did. Mint didn’t thrive, but Jamaican tree mint did. I wanted green tea, but I got consistent feedback that it was difficult to grow here. So I planted one plant as a bit of an experiment, but put my focus on the native yaupon holly, which has the same health benefits as green tea (and the energy buzz) while growing in wild abundance.

One of my first ways of learning was to bike to the nearby community gardens to look at the plots. With dozens of plots, where each was individually managed, I was able to see themes of consistent success. For example, I saw plenty of Everglades tomatoes, but not large tomato varieties. It wasn’t just a matter of which foods, but which variety. Everglades tomatoes basically became “weeds” in many of my friends’ gardens, coming back on their own year after year, whereas large tomatoes were a consistent source of disappointment. So I exclusively grew Everglades tomatoes and a few other small cherry and plum tomato varieties that were recommended to me.

Wherever possible, I sourced plants and seeds from the area, rather than having them shipped to me from elsewhere. And when I say local, that meant ideally from within a couple hours’ drive from my garden. These plants were adapted to the environment in which I would grow them, including the heat, rain, sun conditions, soil type, insects and more. I sourced my seeds from Crispy Farms that focused on just a few dozen varieties of seeds, and Southern Heritage Seed Collective in Gainesville that lived this ethos to a substantially

higher integrity than even myself. These were the seeds for success. The same went for my plants, sourcing them from ECHO, A Natural Farm, Josh Jamison at HEART, Sow Exotic, Green Dreams and Orlando Permaculture friends. I made friends with the people and they shared their passion and knowledge on each particular variety they offered along with the ideal growing conditions.

I planted for abundance. If I had only two tomato plants and one was eaten by tomato hornworms, then 50 percent of my potential yield would have been destroyed. But if I had ten plants and a couple were eaten, then I could still have more tomatoes than I could eat. When I visited new gardeners who had just a few plants, I saw how much worry and concern went into each of those plants. But when I visited gardens with a large number of plants, I saw how easily the gardeners would shrug off the issues. So, I planted an abundance of whatever I wanted to eat, to make room for loss.

Even more importantly, I planted a diversity of plants. When I had dozens of different foods and medicines growing, I could always handle it if some of them didn't make it. I categorized my foods and medicines by what nourishment I was seeking from them and made sure to grow a variety of plants from within each of these categories. For example, if my sweet potatoes failed to be productive, I still had cassava, yams and green bananas. If my Italian basil failed, I had African blue basil, Thai basil and holy basil. If there were plants that were more delicate or susceptible to issues, I made sure that I was never dependent upon them and I had plants in that category that had a high likelihood of success.

By focusing on diversity, monocultures were naturally not a part of my garden. When you see acres and acres of corn or soy, that is a monoculture. Nature does not do this. This is a recent human-made design. So, when we create unnatural systems like this, the only way they can stay in balance is if we force our way upon nature. This means pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, pharmaceuticals and so on. On the other hand, when we plant in a manner that is part of the natural cycles of life, then nature can take care of the balancing act for us. In my largest front yard garden, I may have had ten tomato plants growing at once, but they were not in a row. Instead they were spread throughout the garden. In this way, caterpillars could not just move from one plant to the next. While one plant may have been decimated by those caterpillars, the tomato plants on the other side of the garden may have been thriving. The opposite of monocultures are polycultures. In a 10-foot by 10-foot area of my garden, I was likely to have at least a dozen species of plants growing (with a few exceptions). Within this realm, there is also companion planting, which is learning which plants actually thrive by being planted with each other. Some plants can even protect others.



I depended upon perennial crops, with annuals being wonderful if they succeeded, but it being okay if they didn't. Many perennial plants tend to have much fewer insect pests, be more drought tolerant and be more resilient to the elements in general (less fertilizer, tilling and time intensive, too). Instead of annual spinach, I grew a variety of perennial spinaches like longevity and Okinawa spinach. Instead of just the common greens, I grew some that I had never heard of before like katuk, chaya and moringa. Very few of my perennial plants had any insects eating them.

I learned that just as important as the right plant and the right variety is planting at the right time. *Florida Fruit and Vegetable Gardening* had a planting calendar that I did my best to follow closely for my annual plants. I learned that if I planted my Seminole pumpkins too late in the season, they didn't have time to become large thriving plants before the cucumber worms came. They could handle the worms when they had masses of large leaves established, but if the cucumber worm eggs hatched into larvae on a young plant, the tender leaves could be devoured in a matter of days. I learned that if I tried to grow carrots in the summer here and they turned out small, no chemical fertilizer would have created fat carrots because they simply can't tolerate the heat and are to be grown in the cooler months. These are the types of things I made sure to learn before I planted by following the lead of experienced locals.

One thing I learned more by observation than by reading was that when my plants were grown too close together, they were more likely to have substantial aphid problems. This is in alignment with the concept that if a plant does not have its basic needs met, it is more susceptible to "pests." The same goes for us humans. When we are tired and stressed, we are more prone to infections and diseases. I also saw that aphids were more of an issue when the plants were not getting enough sunlight. Thus, they did not have enough energy and were weakened and vulnerable. A key to gardening without pesticides is to plant the right plants at the right time in the right locations, in the right soil conditions and to give them the right amount of water. Different plants have different baselines of needs for thriving. Again, some plants are much more sensitive and particular than others, and those are the ones that I mostly avoid.

After some experience and time in the garden, I learned that when there was an issue, to find the root cause before seeking a remedy. Whereas some see an issue and think "okay, what can I spray to kill the problem?" or "what quick nutrient can I add?" I always tried to look at what the root cause was and what basic tenets I hadn't followed. Usually, the issue was something that could be remedied over time through sustainable practices. And, in the meantime, I was okay with that plant dying, because I had others that I could depend on.

That said, I also adhered to practices to help provide quick fertility such as by creating compost tea and foliar sprays that I applied either directly to the leaves or to the soil, or by adding animal poop to the soil. I absolutely did not add synthetic fertilizer to my soil, which has been shown to weaken plants' defense systems against insects.

One of the most holistic ways to create healthy plants is to create healthy soil. In fact, I have heard numerous farmers say that they are soil farmers more so than they are plant farmers. Healthy soil is alive. Some would say that's the difference between soil and dirt. Soil is alive and dirt is dead. I've heard gardeners say that you know you have healthy soil when you pick up a handful and half of it crawls away. Healthy soil will have thousands of species of bacteria, fungi and microorganisms and many familiar insects like worms, grubs and rolie pollies, as well as insects you've never heard of. Plants are not independent of the soil. They are an extension of the soil. They are a part of the soil. I composted everything I could on site to create a supply of lively compost to add to the soil. I practiced "chop and drop" methods of pruning plants and dropping them to the ground to decompose in place. I grew plants like *Tithonia* specifically to build fertility for the soil. Often insect "pests" are a sign that the plants are not well nourished. So my general lack of "pests" likely signified that my system was providing the nourishment these plants needed.

Fertility was one of my struggles, as was the case for most of my gardening friends in the sandy regions of Florida. The mushroom compost I brought in helped me establish quick fertility, but I'd also like to share that this practice wasn't as holistic as I would have liked. Early on, a heavy rain came when my large uncovered pile was yet to be added to the garden. I watched in agony as I saw the dark water running off into the street full of nitrates and nutrition where it would flow straight to the lake behind the house, harming the lake and its population of fish, insects, amphibians and birds. From then on, I made sure that this fertile compost was surrounded by ample mulch on all sides, to act as a sponge to soak up the nitrogen and nutrients. Certainly nature felt the repercussions of my action to establish quick fertility, which can be established over a longer period without any potentially harmful practices like this.

Just like I protected this compost, I protected my soil. My goal was that I, and the sun, would never directly see the soil, unless I pulled back the mulch that was covering it. Sun kills bacteria, and in that way the sun is our ally, but when we want soils that are alive, the sun can be damaging. To keep my soil alive and thriving, I did my best to always keep it covered with mulch, whether that was from bags of leaves I picked up from the neighbors, straw, or tree mulch from the local tree trimmers.

My friend Elise Pickett likes to say that “the garden’s best friend is our own shadow,” more literally our own presence. Many of my nurturing female friends share that love is what a garden plant needs more than any other ingredient. My colleague Amanda David lovingly speaks to the plants in her garden. Whether I choose to call it love, or care, or dedication, no doubt my garden thrived when I gave it the attention it needed. It is possible to create gardens that need very minimal human contribution, but that takes time. Most of the people who approach me with their struggles simply do not spend enough time in their garden giving it the care that it needs. Especially when it comes to organic gardening, my success came from observing the plants and trying to see issues before they became major problems.

A close companion to love is gratitude, although the two don’t necessarily go hand in hand for all, I’ve found that as my love grows for life, so too does my gratitude. My attitude of gratitude was one of my most potent pesticides because I no longer considered these creatures as pests. Thus, I was not only more tolerant of their existence in my garden within balance, but I could appreciate them for their existence and see them for their whole selves, not as enemies.

You’d be amazed at how powerful an insect controller our own hands are. When my plants were young and tender, I made it a practice to touch every single leaf nearly every day. Primarily, I was checking them for insects that were harming them. In this way, I killed thousands of caterpillars, aphids and other insects that were detrimental to the system I was trying to create. Each time I killed a cucumber worm or squished their eggs between my fingers, I stopped the potential for what could have been dozens or hundreds more worms being hatched on the plants. When I gave the garden this kind of care, I was able to deal with insects very effectively. This practice facilitated my close attention to the garden, allowing me to watch for other issues that were arising. It also helped to establish my routine presence in the garden, which was much needed. Focusing on this one simple task got me closer to Earth and in close connection with the plants I was growing. I remember this practice as one of my most meditative and joyful times in the garden. This was a practice of mindfulness and presence.

I’m sure there are some who are reading who can’t stand the idea of killing these insects. Of course, I am a lover of all creatures no matter the stigma society has put upon them. I believe that there is no such thing as a pest. That is simply a human-made concept. Every insect has a place on Earth. There is no such thing as a “good” or “bad” insect in my mind. There is no insect that I hate. There certainly are insects that I am more timid of or even feel disturbed by, but I still love them, because I know they serve their purpose. So, some

would wonder, how I could rationalize choosing which insects to kill or not to kill. My answer is simple. I feel very strongly about existing as part of the circle of life. When I squish the cucumber worms, I return them directly to the soil, where they will transform into another life force. They ate the plant, now the plant will eat them! Of course, discretion is needed and that is why I learned the different insects and whether they were scarce or in abundance or whether they were beneficial or detrimental to the garden. This philosophy takes critical thinking and there are no black or white answers. For life to exist, so must death. For life to flourish, so must death. Many believe that life and death are one, as do I. And the aphids, I didn't worry about them too much. When I harvested leaves to eat and there were some aphids on the leaves, I ate them along with the leaves. After all, the aphids on a kale leaf are basically a manifestation of kale in insect form. However, when a plant had more aphids than I wanted to eat and more than the plant could likely handle, I simply pulled off the leaves with the most aphids and composted them or just pulled the entire plant if it was time to harvest.

As I was picking off the insects, I was also taking care of another important task, and that was weeding. Just as there is no such thing as a "pest" there is no such thing as a "weed." This is also a human-made concept. My strategy was to pull the young undesired plants from my garden almost daily. By doing so, they were not able to get out of hand and not able to establish deep roots. This made pulling them an act of joy, rather than a burdensome chore. When they got "out of control" that's when I became overwhelmed. And this was the constant pattern I saw in the gardens I visited. Daily weeding of just 15 minutes each day saved many hours of more taxing work in my gardens. Keeping my soil covered, whether by mulch, a cover crop, or by a crop of food was also key to reducing weeds, because when they had no access to sun, they simply couldn't grow.

In some gardens, you will see only the exact plants that were planted there. Not in mine. Many of the "weeds" I left there as ground cover, nitrogen fixers or sources of nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies and pollinators. *Bidens alba* was one of my most common "weeds" and, besides it being one of the most important flowers for the bees, it was also a wonderful source of nutrition for me. Often the "weeds" are more nutritious than the plants we grow in the garden. Purslane is said to be Mahatma Gandhi's favorite vegetable, yet millions of people pull it up as an unknown and undesired weed in their garden. There were even some weeds I wish I had more of in my garden like lamb's quarters. Again, this takes getting to know the plants, being able to identify them and thinking critically. There are times when I would leave the *Bidens* and times when I would pull it, depending on the circumstances.

At the same time as I was cycling the lives of some of the insects back into the soil, I was welcoming many of them into the garden. I planted a beneficial insect attractant flower mix, which as its name implies, attracts beneficial insects into the garden. The mix that I planted had about 13 different flowers that brought in pollinators and also wasps. Now, why would I want wasps in my garden? Well, these wasps are parasitic. They lay their eggs into the caterpillars, which then hatch into larvae that eat the caterpillars. Nature doing the work for me! I loved watching another species of wasp fly around my pumpkin patch and cucumber vines. I knew exactly what they were doing. They were searching for the cucumber worms to eat them. It was always a joy to see the wasps fly off with the cucumber worms in their mandibles. So you see, I loved having wasps in my garden, when many of my gardening colleagues fear them. Setting aside a portion of the garden as a native pollinator section may reduce your food growing space, but it can improve the yield of the rest of the garden and reduce workload at the same time.

Every time I saw a lizard, toad, frog or snake in my garden, I was grateful. Each of these creatures was there to eat the insects from the garden, and the snakes would even eat mice and rats. Whether or not these animals are doing anything that directly benefits me or not, I still wanted them in my garden. The day I saw a toad in my garden for the first time was a milestone of transformation from the prior monocrop that no toad was interested in. Unlike monocrop agriculture, where the goal is to keep all life out, my goal was to create ecosystems that supported life and brought it in. I saw that as my duty to the plants and animals I shared this space with. Although it was important to produce food, it was also important to me that this space for growing food served as a home and safe haven for others. The more life I had in the garden, the more it controlled the life that didn't serve the ecosystem. It all worked beautifully. I fondly remember the day that a hawk flew down into my garden to eat a lizard right off one of my plants!

So was my garden "organic"? And do I think that organic is the answer to the destructive issues of the industrial food system?

In truth, I hesitate to even use the word organic, as the term has been largely co-opted by the Big Food industry. And the word means different things to different people, with wide variation. Ironically enough, even with the diligence and care that I put into my garden, I don't think my fruits and vegetables would have qualified for the organic label if I had wanted to become certified and sell my produce at the market.

Organic can be organic while using large quantities of pesticides (certified organic), while depleting the soils through excessive tilling, while being grown as monocrops and creating spaces that are void of all other animal and plant life. Organic can mean confining animals in CAFOs with no ability to practice their natural habits. Organic can mean using vast quantities of water, sucking the water sources dry. Organic can include burning vast quantities of fossil fuels in production and distribution. Organic can still be organic with little to no truth or transparency. Organic can still be organic while being more of a factory-made food than a food from the land and without being wholesome or nourishing to our bodies.

I've read that only around five percent of food in the United States is grown organically, and from what I can tell, most of it is grown in a way that is destroying life, not restoring it. Welcome to the world of Big Organic.

The most prominent organic label on the market is USDA organic. This is operated by the United States Department of Agriculture. At least on the surface. In truth, it is operated by industry. The largest distributor of food under this label is not the farmer at your local market. It is the megastores like Walmart, Sam's Club and Whole Foods. One of the greatest flaws of our political system is that it is largely bought by corporations. In this way, we don't have a true democracy. All votes are not equal. Large corporations with their lobbyists "vote" with their millions of dollars and get the regulations and laws changed and created to suit their needs. Some might assume that Whole Foods holds different standards, and with some brands they distribute this is the case. But for the most part, they are part of the same machine. They are owned by Amazon, one of the largest companies in the world, and not one that is known for high ethical standards, but very well known for their greenwashing.

When the organic label was being created in the 1990s, the push came from farmers and gardeners who were passionate about providing food that was truly good for the Earth, good for the animals and good for the people. But the government and Big Ag had different agendas. Whereas the grassroots farmers and activists were striving for truth, integrity and transparency to be the pillars of the organic label, the powerful agriculture industry intended to get the word organic to be as loosely defined as possible. To a large degree, the industry got what they wanted. Many of the terms used to define organic are so "vague as to be meaningless – and, therefore, unenforceable."<sup>1</sup> "The word 'organic' has been stretched and twisted to admit the very sort of industrial practices for which it once offered a critique and an alternative."<sup>1</sup> With these low standards created, industrial farming practices could change as little as possible while still using the USDA organic label. The regulations of USDA organic don't require ecological

farming at all. The certification is guided more or less just by a list of what farmers are allowed or not allowed to put on their fields, on the plants and in the animal feed or give to the animals.

It doesn't end there. "The USDA became largely indistinguishable from the industries it was meant to police."<sup>6</sup> The USDA has a revolving door between its employees and the food executives, with it being very common for executives at Monsanto to take a position at the USDA and bring the Monsanto agenda, and then return later to Monsanto. It would not be inaccurate to say that the USDA operates more out of interest for the industry than us, the people eating the food. It is a public agency withholding an incredible number of secrets from us against our wishes and at our expense.

Simply put, USDA organic is not what it was meant to be and not what most supermarket shoppers expect and hope it to be. The images on the packages depicting ecological farms and free-ranging animals are generally not the truth. My analysis is that if the truth was depicted on the package, there's a high likelihood that the shopper would not want to buy it, or pay the extra price for it.

In my travels through California, I have seen industrial organic farms and industrial conventional farms that grow our vegetables and fruits. From the road, I can't see much difference between the two, and I can see acres of these monocrops at once. Often the organic farms sit directly next to the conventional farms, owned and operated by the same conventional corporation. I have also visited organic farms that are the source of organic chicken eggs and organic milk. I won't dive deep into the terms free range, pasture-raised and grass fed, but will say that most of these "free range" chickens are packed 20,000 into a shed and never spend a moment ranging outside, many of the dairy cows do not spend any time grazing on pasture, and many grass-fed cows spend as much as a year of their lives in a CAFO, even if labeled USDA organic.

When chain grocery stores offer organic produce, the vast majority of it comes from a select number of large-scale organic producers. Perhaps you've seen some of the brands, like: Cal-Organic, Earthbound Farm and organicgirl. When you find the same exact fruits and vegetables in the store year around and in hundreds of stores across the country, it becomes quite apparent that these are not small farms. These are not farms building up deep, rich topsoil. These are not farms contributing to biodiverse ecosystems. These are mega farms of thousands of acres. These are factory farms.

That's all just at the farm. Once the food arrives at the factory, the facade continues. When you look at the labels of most of the food from Big Organic with a critical eye, you'll find ingredients that beg the question: "How could this really be organic? And, if this is organic, then what does this label even

really mean?” These highly processed foods can have all sorts of food additives, synthetic chemicals, emulsifiers, synthetic preservatives and “natural” flavors that would not be recognizable as anything that came from Earth. However fewer or less toxic than non-organic food, how “organic” is that?

All said, the USDA organic label does not hold up to what so many of us would like to believe it does. But for those of us shopping at a chain grocery store, I do generally recommend organic over non organic and I’ll generally choose it myself. USDA organic does mean that the food is non-GMO. It does mean that the pesticides used are not highly toxic and we are likely not being exposed to cancer-causing agents, endocrine disruptors and neurotoxins from pesticide residue. It does mean that no synthetic fertilizers were likely used. It does mean that no antibiotics or growth hormones were used on the animals. Organic reflects the true cost a little more. The welfare of people, planet, plants and animals is at least a bit more accounted for and in many circumstances less harm is caused to our ecosystems. The soils are not being poisoned and toxic water is not entering our watersheds. The people working on the farm are not being exposed to toxic pesticides. Yet, I do not delude myself to consider this food sustainable or what we need to move forward as humanity. This form of organic is not truly progressive and it is not equitable or just. With a small percentage of exceptions, this food is still a force of destruction, not regeneration.

But this is Big Organic I am speaking of and I would never paint a broad stroke of all organic. Within the USDA organic food you’ll find at the supermarket or even the food co-ops and health food stores, there is a wide range of practices. The key is to research the different companies if shopping in these settings. For example, Organic Valley is a brand that you’ll find in many major chains across the country. However, they are not a megacorporation. Instead, they are a farmer-owned co-op of 1,600 small, family-owned, organic farms. I’ve visited some of these farms, spending multiple days on some of them. I spent time in the pasture and the milking stalls with the cows, and the farmers and I happily drank that same milk at breakfast, lunch and dinner together.

But “true organic” is the exception, not the norm in the Big Ag system. Take out the USDA organic label and true organic practice means a lot to me. There are many people who grow organically with truth and integrity and proudly label the food they sell as organic. I have a lot of respect and trust for these folks. When I go to the farmers’ markets, I do look for the organic labels and signs, but I don’t stop there. If I really want to know the truth, I ask questions and sometimes even go to the source. It’s generally much easier to accomplish this with small-scale organic farmers. Once operations are scaled up too much, it becomes harder to know the truth.



Although I will never put all my faith behind a label, there are some labels that take it to the next level that I have a lot more faith in, including Regenerative Organic Certified, Real Organic Project Certified, Certified B Corp, Fair Trade and Non-GMO from The Non-GMO Project.

Other certifications that you could explore that seem to hold substantial integrity are Certified Animal Welfare Approved, Certified Humane, Certified Naturally grown, Certified Grass Fed, Demeter Biodynamic, Food Alliance Certified, Leaping Bunny and Rainforest Alliance Certified. A resource for understanding food labels is the Food Alliance's "Understanding Third Party Food Certification" article.

When it comes to deciphering labels for meat, eggs and dairy, it is important to understand what the labels really mean. Free-range, pasture-raised, grass-fed, cage-free, humanely raised, raised without antibiotics and raised without hormones can have different meanings for different farmers. A resource for understanding these labels is Food & Water Watch's "Understanding Food Labels" article.

True solutions are not in comparing conventional to conventional organic. They are both within the broken system. We need to look outside of mainstream systems and take part in solutions that are considered fringe by the mainstream. Rather than simply organic, we can source our food from farmers practicing regenerative farming, food forestry, biodynamic agriculture, syntropic farming, Permaculture, SilvoCulture, no-till farming, ecological agriculture, agroecology and traditional ecological knowledge as well as foragers, hunters and fishers harvesting in harmony from the ecosystem. When we source our food from growers with beyond organic practices, we can take part in increasing biodiversity, restoring our ecosystems and treating people and animals with dignity. It is possible to regenerate the earth with every bite that we take!

Get your hands in the soil and work with the plants at a small organic farm. Find a farm to immerse yourself in through WWOOF. NuMundo is an excellent resource to find permaculture farms and ecovillages to visit. Open your mind to what is possible by taking a Permaculture Design Course. Classes are offered by many organizations both online and in person. Take part in a Permaculture Action Network action day! And the next time you are passing by an industrial organic operation, stop in and experience the difference.

## Take Action!

### Grow Sustainably – Organic Gardening Tips

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Build the fertility of your soil through composting, animal manure, compost teas and practices like Korean natural farming. View your soil as a complex, living entity that must be nurtured as much as the plants.

Protect your soil by keeping it covered with mulch (woodchips, leaves, straw) whenever possible.

Keep your plant matter on site, rather than having the city pick it up. Compost everything you can, bring in waste sources and embrace practices like chop and drop to build up organic matter. Aim to create most of your own fertility on site.

Create habitat to bring in beneficial insects, pollinators, birds, snakes, frogs, toads and other animal relatives. Consider the space theirs as much as it is yours.

Involve domesticated animals in your system if you have the time, ability and space.

Weed with your hands and embrace weeding as a mindfulness practice. Reduce weeds through mulching and other natural practices.

Eat the weeds! Remember many of these plants are more nourishing than the fruits and veggies we grow.

Be an integral part of the life and death cycles. Learn to create harmony in your garden by embracing death, controlling the undesired insects through your hands and practices such as companion planting.

Seek the root cause of any issues in your garden, not the instant remedy.

Make biodiversity your top focus. Plant a wide range of plants and intermix them. Plant for abundance.

Grow the plants and specific varieties that are adapted to and thrive in your region. Focus on what grows within the means of your area and requires the fewest inputs.

Transition away from annuals to a focus on perennials.

Spend ample time in your garden, giving the plants the attention and care they need. Expect a substantial time investment as your system develops and design for resilience that will develop in time, reducing your workload for the long run.

Practice gratitude. It just may be the most potent organic medicine.

## Chapter 9

### The Quest for Fat and Protein

By now, I was coming close to the halfway mark of the year. In many ways, I was really settling into the experience. Although there was still much discovery, there were fewer surprises and I was getting into more of a rhythm and flow. My weight was holding steady. In the 11 weigh-ins I had done over the last three months, my weight was between 149 and 151 pounds, a mere two pounds of fluctuation. This was between two-to-four pounds less than when I began.

*4/29/19 (Day 170) Physically, I am in the best-looking shape that I can recall since I was weightlifting and taking supplements back in 2012. A diet completely free of processed foods suits me well. As far as I can tell, although I cannot see inside of me, I am healthier than when I began and I'm getting what I need. There are other factors where I could be doing better, such as sleep, stretching and meditation, but those are factors that I am often not on top of outside of this year either.*

The summer heat also set in and changed my day-to-day life.

*5/04/19 (Day 175) The heat has arrived here and it is amazing how much more quickly food starts to sour if I leave it out. The colder days of winter where food storage without a fridge was easy are over. Many of the plants in my garden will now start to die off. My diet will likely be shifting quite a bit in the month to come.*

Abundance was both my blessing and my struggle. There were areas of my dietary needs that were being met with an overabundance of food from the gardens. I was likely putting more work into the tending, harvesting and processing of that abundance than needed, whereas I was neglecting some areas that were already sparse and needed more time and energy. Fat and protein were the areas where I felt the least food security.

As you've read in previous chapters, I was having problems with the squirrels. They devoured my freshly planted peanut and sunflower seeds, which were my best attempt at fats that I could produce from my own garden (along with my hope for homegrown comfort of nut butters). My annual beans didn't come up either, likely from the squirrels eating the seeds, which meant the loss of one of my homegrown sources of protein. My top protein sources from my garden were my pigeon peas and southern peas and, of course, I was eating

over a pound of greens on most days too, which have protein. I felt frustrated reading comments on social media like, “why don’t you just grow more beans?” and “why not just make tofu?” I just didn’t have time to do it all.

I was eating a lot of mature coconuts, which were my primary source of fat, whether from eating the meat fresh or dehydrated or making coconut milk. There was fat in this, but it came with a very large quantity of fiber to digest! Six months in, I had yet to make my own coconut oil. Going into the year I had confidently projected having a gallon of coconut oil on my shelf. I had certainly collected enough coconuts. My research showed that a medium-sized mature coconut could yield about three ounces of oil. With that math, it only takes about six coconuts to make a pint of oil and 40 coconuts to make a gallon. I had gathered enough coconuts but not prioritized the time or energy to develop the skillset to effectively turn them into coconut oil.

Avocado was an option for oil, but I did not come across avocado trees to forage. Wild nuts are not abundant in the semi-tropical and tropical parts of Florida. There are no fatty black walnuts or starchy chestnuts and the tropical almonds were not the nut I imagined by the name. I had collected acorns in the fall, but they are a very time-intensive food to process. Other foods had taken priority, especially given that I was just getting started, getting to know my garden and nuts are more advanced foraging. It was way beyond nut season here now anyway.

I ate two squirrels that I trapped from my yard, but they are tiny here in Florida. Compared to squirrels in the North, they look more like rats. They weigh about three-fourths of a pound and yield about a third-of-a-pound of meat, which is not much more than a serving. I cooked the two squirrels into soup that I ate over seven meals, three little servings of meat spread into seven meals.

Perhaps most importantly, I was really struggling to catch enough fish, which continued to be a surprise, given that fishing was my strongest skill going into this. Even more so, I was mostly eating leaner fish from inland water as of late and I was not successful in catching mullet in the cast net, which is the fatty fish that I had been planning to eat in abundance. Experienced and knowledgeable people catch a year’s supply of mullet in one cast! I, on the other hand, threw casts for hours, the mullet constantly evading me with my smaller net and less precision from a shaking canoe, especially being alone in the canoe much of the time. I researched catching mackerel, which would have been the dream food, but didn’t make it happen. Looking over my journals, I recorded that I ate fish 30 times and fish stock 14 times over a 90-day period. My math says that I ate fish – my only animal protein besides the two tiny squirrels – at just 11 percent of my meals and 16 percent of my meals including the fish stock. The Florida Everglades trip made up a substantial number of those meals.

*4/21/19 (Day 162) I went fishing near New Smyrna with Zach and David. Nice day on water, but only one fish to eat.*

On the milestone day of making it halfway, I had a successful day out, when I discovered a fish called bowfin while fishing for bass in a pond.

*5/11/19 (Day 182) I went foraging and fishing with Pete Kanaris. I caught three large bowfin and one bass.*

Over the next two weeks, I ate fish at 28 percent of my meals, but still not a fatty fish.

During this time, I was doing research on hunting wild boars and I talked to a few local hunters. The wild boar population here is far outside of balance with the ecosystem, so I felt deeply in alignment with harvesting one. And it would be an absolute game changer in sustenance for me. I thought I had a hunt lined up with a local who was sure we'd get one, but I learned that they bait the animals, along with almost everyone else. That went against my guidelines of not using industrial food to procure my food. There was an option to hunt without baiting, but the certainty of success was much lower and I chose not to risk putting a whole day or multiple days in with no food certain, whereas my foraging was always a guarantee to yield some food.

In late January, I had made my first attempt at finding a car-killed deer a bit further north in the Gainesville area and we did find two, but neither was fresh enough to harvest. Living in the center of a large city made finding a deer much more challenging for me. I knew that one deer would potentially transform my whole experience. Now that the heat of summer was here to stay for six months, it wasn't going to happen.

There was the option of going to South Florida to harvest iguanas, which are not native to Florida and are extremely out of balance with the ecosystem and in extreme abundance. They are called *pollo de los árboles* (*chicken of the trees*) in Puerto Rico. Other foods took priority. There was the feral rooster I attempted to catch with my cast net in an Orlando park in late March, but it was far too fast for my casting. I wanted to eat that chicken so much. I had confirmed it had been there for multiple years, so I considered it fair game, but after I discovered it was still being fed, I gave up trying to catch it.

All along, I didn't expect any of these aspects to matter that much, because I still believed that I'd catch an abundance of fish and make a substantial supply of coconut oil.

On the other hand, while the fat and protein were scarce, carbs and sugar

were abundant and I found myself eating much more than I wanted. Grains are much more dense, at around 1,500-1,700 calories per pound. But sweet potatoes are only 400 calories per pound, which meant often eating three or more pounds of sweet potato, yam or cassava each day. I certainly had no shortage of fiber in my diet and it felt like I was putting too much bulk through my system and it was taxing. On many days I felt like I just couldn't stop eating. Dried coconut dipped in honey was a daily activity for me as was drinking honey straight from the jar. I wanted to begin intermittent fasting, but I was so constantly hungry, it didn't seem possible. That said, I was celebrating this success and finding more ways to prepare this abundance to create variety and bring in more flavor. I stayed busy, so there was no doubt the carbs kept me going!

*5/09/19 (Day 180) I went on a three-hour forage tonight which took me on a 12-mile bicycle ride through Orlando.*

*I gorged on mulberries at a tree by the train station. I collected a dozen grapefruits with my fruit tree picker. I found 5 new racks at a wild banana stand in a public park, but they weren't ripe yet. I harvested a small rack from another park. It's clear to me that most of the spring fruit abundance – loquat, Suriname cherry and mulberry – has dwindled. I haven't eaten much fresh fruit for the past few weeks. This may be a period of fruit scarcity. My freezer is also dwindling. But mango season is just 4-6 weeks away and that is the most abundant fruit I have come across in Florida and one of the most delicious.*

*I'm yearning for the more moderate summer of the Northern climate.*

*5/15/19 (Day 186) I went foraging for wild yams with Jeff, Daniel and David. We harvested about 100-150 pounds together. I took home about 60 pounds.*

That harvest yielded what I expected to be a month's worth of yam!

*5/16/19 (Day 187) I found a white sapote tree at Leu Gardens that is loaded with fruit and hanging over onto the public area, with many falling to the ground and spoiling! This could be one of the biggest fruit scores of the year.*

And it did turn out to be a continual harvest. I devoured this high-sugar fruit, eating it about five days out of the week for the next two months.

*I'm really happy to say that I've made it through the busy spring season and now have time on my hands. I feel a sense of freedom that has been lacking for the last few months. I knew the light was at the end of the tunnel, and now I'm in the light!*

*I now have time for some food experimentations that have the potential to really improve my quality of life.*

*Now, I'm off to bike 13 miles to record a podcast with Wild Ideas Worth Living. Tomorrow I am at the local elementary school inspiring some of the students and helping in their garden. Saturday I'm hosting a Gardens for Single Moms action day and Sunday I'm teaching a Gardening for Beginners class in my garden.*

*5/22/19 (Day 193) I made my first attempt at a pancake today. It came out as mush and it was only decent, but it almost brought me to tears because it took me back to healthy potlucks with friends. The mush was made with wild yam, banana, sea salt, honey and coconut butter which I also just made today for the first time!*

*5/26/19 (Day 197) It was another very long day in the kitchen. I made ten green juices, four cups of dry pigeon peas, a big pot of yam and I froze some yam. I have two dehydrator loads of yam prepared to make flour and majorly cleaned up the greens in the frontyard garden. It seemed like an entire day around food, yet I didn't eat my three meals in as timely a manner as I would have liked.*

On social media, I started to see comments on many posts that said "You're looking thin" or "You look like you are losing weight." I didn't weigh any less, so that didn't make much sense to me. However, I was feeling fatigue and the heat that arrived was starting to get to me.

*5/25/19 (Day 196) Biked to Green Deane's plant walk at Jay Blanchard Park. 25 miles. Exhausted. Deficient or heat?*

*5/25/19 (Day 196) For the first time I think I may be deficient. It's not the first day that I've had this thought, but it is the first day that I've started to seriously think it. I felt this for the first time within the last couple weeks. I've been overworking and not sleeping enough, so first I thought maybe I am just deficient in sleep. Maybe I'm just tired. Also, spring has transitioned to summer and it is HOT. It is above 90 degrees most days and we are*



*embarking on a record heatwave. I live mostly outside in this heat, but I am taking precautions to stay out of the midday sun.*

*Yet, I would not be surprised if I'm deficient in something, now that I'm six months in. I feel like I'm eating a more complete diet now than I was before this year started, so I'm not sure what I might be deficient in. That being said, I biked 25 miles today to do a three-hour plant walk. I am active and I am well. I doubt it is anything major. I did just worry a tiny bit about not being able to finish the year though.*

*I think it's a good time to get some labs done. I did before the journey began and it seems like a perfect time to check in. I am far enough into this journey to have developed a deficiency.*

*5/29/19 (Day 200) The heat wave is still going strong. It is 95 degrees right now at 5:00 p.m. I've had some very hot days in the tiny house, hot enough to make me want to get a fan, which I haven't had for as long as I can remember. I noticed the hottest place I've been during this heatwave is my house in the late afternoon, because there's been no breeze coming through. It's actually cooler riding my bike down the blacktop in the blazing sun! My solution is to get out. I'm adapting to the heat. I think it was an adjustment period with the changing of the seasons.*

*I haven't felt deficient the last couple days. I feel solid. I have been going to bed earlier and doing my outdoor work in the cooler mornings, plus napping to catch up on sleep! I've been eating a lot of nourishing food, too.*

*6/04/19 (Day 206) I went fishing with a guide, desperate to catch a bounty of fish, especially sea trout and to learn what I may have forgotten from when I used to be so much more successful fishing. I caught the largest sea trout of my life – 27" – which would have yielded substantial food, but I released her because she is too vital to the population. Other than that, we didn't catch any fish. The guide was as surprised as I was.*

*6/08/19 (Day 210) Yesterday I met Pam Legowski, who is a registered Dietitian Nutritionist. We discussed my diet and lifestyle and we went over my labs that I had done at the beginning of this project and discussed what labs it would make sense to do now to check for a deficiency.*

*Ultimately we agreed that I don't likely have any major deficiency and, if I do, we know what it likely is and what I need to eat to bring my body*

*into balance. We also agreed that I'm not in danger or risking my health substantially.*

*I've decided not to do any labs. I'm interested in them, but after looking into the cost, I've decided it's not the best way to spend the very limited money I have.*

*Going into this year, my labs showed that I was slightly low in vitamins A, D3 and E, omega-3, manganese, L-carnitine, EPA, DHA and BUN. I believe this was due primarily to my mostly vegan diet. The simple solution to most of this is more fatty fish and red meat.*

*Pam agrees my diet is low in fat and protein and she suggested heme iron as well. But I was not majorly low as she did some visual checkups that looked fine.*

*6/19/19 (Day 221) The heatwave is gone and the temperatures are now in the comfortable high eighties and low nineties. It has rained every day for the last two weeks, with many large storms. I haven't had to water my gardens once and they are flourishing with colors, mostly green! I love this rain.*

*Last week, I went down to Fort Lauderdale to spend a long weekend foraging for mangoes. I harvested over 250 mangoes, all from public parks and empty lots. All over South Florida, mangoes are falling to the ground and rotting. I have a load of mangoes in my dehydrator right now.*

*I've decided that I am taking a trip to my homeland. I will be departing on July 13th and expect to spend up to two months there. I will have a lot of food preservation to do to prepare for the long trip away from my gardens. I am stocking up with dehydrated fruits, flours, beans and greens.*

*I am thoroughly enjoying life. I have slowed down greatly over the last few weeks and am coming close to finishing my to-do list. It has allowed me to be so much more present in everything I'm doing. Gardening is just one example of an activity that went from a chore to a blissful activity, present in my actions and interactions.*

With my upcoming absence from my gardens for two months, I needed to arrange for their care. With mostly perennials, they could theoretically do well with very little care, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized this could be a really ideal opportunity for someone. There are a lot of people who are yearning to garden and grow food, but don't necessarily have the space or the experience to feel comfortable on their own. So, I

started brainstorming. How could I get my gardens taken care of, but do it in a way that would be beneficial to someone else? How could I enter into a mutually beneficial relationship where we'd help meet each other's needs?

I decided to make a post on social media explaining that I had five weeks before I was leaving and that I would spend time mentoring them in the garden until I left. Plus, I'd supply them with plants and seeds each week to take home for their own gardens. They could eat fresh food from the gardens while I'm away. Plants, knowledge and fresh food, in exchange for work. The more I thought about it, the more I realized it was an ideal opportunity for some people in my community.

I got a handful of serious responses and, at first, thought I had to pick just one. Then I realized, we could do it all together! So five of us have spent a morning in my gardens for the last three weeks and we will do two more sessions. Each week they've gone home with plants, knowledge and some quality time in the garden. My gardens are in tiptop shape with their help!

*6/28/19 (Day 230) Marabou came over to teach me how to make tortillas using my homemade flour. We made tortillas with yam flour, cassava flour, green banana flour and a mix of the three. This was my first bite of bread (bread-like at least) in 229 days. It was fantastic and I'm excited to make more.*

*7/02/19 (Day 234) I went over to Marabou's and we experimented together, making yam pancakes and yam noodles. I'm very low energy today, so exhausted. I have been putting in long days for many days in a row processing food. Saturday I taught a cassava workshop and Sunday a coconut workshop, spending morning until night on food.*

*Also, I'm not sleeping that well because of the noise of the city. They have spent multiple days chopping down a tree next door with chainsaws. It's hardly bearable. I'm so ready to get out of Orlando.*

*7/05/19 (Day 237) I feel like I haven't stopped since Saturday morning – food, food, food. It just won't stop.*

*The harvesting. The processing.*

*Cutting. Chopping. Freezing. Dehydrating. Washing. Cleaning. Cooking. Eating. The maintenance of the gardens. Teaching classes and getting help from the attendees in the above. It just keeps going.*

*A couple months ago, I said that the spring harvesting was done, but with my trip to my homeland for two months I'm now stocking up on the calories. I'm aiming to bring at least 1,000 calories per day, leaving me to forage the other 1,000-2,000 I'll need daily.*

*I'm catching a ride there in a small car without much space, so I'm dehydrating as much as I can to shrink and preserve it for traveling.*

*Making flour takes time. Learning new foods takes time.*

*I'm running on near empty now. So busy, hardly time to write a social media post. I tried a few times this week, but didn't finish before having to get off the internet to do something else. I'm going a little bit stir crazy. I can hardly fathom freedom from food.*

*7/09/19 (Day 241) For the last year or so, I've been telling people that 150-pound wild yams exist in the woods of Florida. I was just repeating what I'd been told by reputable foragers in the area. But this week I finally saw it for myself. My friend James and I came across large vines climbing the trees and followed them down to their soil connection. I've done this many times, but this time what I found was an unusually large mound pushing up through the forest floor. It was hard to believe but it appeared that this large mound was a yam below, bulging up through the sandy soil. I thought it was going to be big, maybe 100 pounds, but I never expected it to be this big.*

*157 pounds! That's the size of me, plus a little more!*

There was no shortage of calories in all this time. This yam could have supplied my caloric needs for a few months, but I was already stocked up on yams, including 180 pounds I had harvested with James a week prior, so I gave it all away.

I continued eating fish (at 17 percent of my meals and 26 percent of my meals including fish stock during this time), but very little of it was mullet. I never made the wild boar hunt happen. Instead of going for iguanas, I foraged for mangoes in South Florida. And the squirrels in my garden, well, they could never have added up to be enough even if I had dedicated my days to it.

Many people read tidbits of my journey here and there as I shared it on social media and did media interviews. Some of the comments I read quickly judged my experience and made broad claims like, “It’s obviously not healthy to try to live off the land, without supplements.” Or, “That’s why we have the grocery store!” Or, “There’s no point in going back to the caveman era, we’ve got a food system that works!”

Sure, I was having my own health struggle, but to take my individual experience and make these broad judgments would be to ignore the health struggle of those eating the Standard American Diet (SAD). So, what is the state of our health as a nation after a few generations on the industrial diet?

According to the CDC, if you have 100 adults standing in front of you, about 70 of them are overweight and an astounding 40 of them are obese. A whopping 20 percent of our children are obese. Many of these humans have “high blood pressure, high cholesterol, Type 2 diabetes, breathing problems such as asthma and sleep apnea, and joint problems.”

We are suffering from numerous types of cancers, including high rates of colon cancer, stomach cancer and breast cancer. Heart disease is now part of the norm, along with strokes and heart attacks. Yes, there are other factors causing these conditions, but without any doubt, the food we are eating plays a very central role in this. These diseases are literally killing us.

These health issues are largely caused by the industrial diet. This diet is one that would be largely unrecognizable to our recent ancestors if they were able to visit us today. For them, whether they realized it or not, their food was their medicine. Now, our food is our poison, and we have “medicines” that are designed to cure us of the ailments that our industrial diet inflicts upon us.

Much of the food we are eating today can hardly qualify as being called food. Michael Pollan uses the term “food-like substances” and that has stuck with me since I first read those words a decade ago. When you look at the ingredient lists of many of the ultra-processed foods, you can understand why this term would be used. Natural flavors, food dyes like red 40 and yellow 5, emulsifiers like lecithin, carrageenan, guar gum and xanthan gum: when any human pictures the food they want to be eating, I don’t think these are the ingredients that come to mind. Yet, some of these ingredients are in most all processed foods from the industrial system.

Many processed foods are created exclusively of, or almost exclusively of, components that are not recognizable as food at all. And this is not just the “junk foods” that I’m talking about. Let’s take a look at this fancy macadamia nut milk I found in my friend’s fridge: filtered water, macadamia nuts, calcium phosphate, natural flavors, guar gum, pea protein, sunflower lecithin, sea salt,

gellan gum, zinc sulfate, vitamin A acetate, vitamin Ds, riboflavin (B2), vitamin B12. That does not sound like macadamia nut milk or even food to me!

Although the average US supermarket is said to have 40,000 different items available, the diversity is not as it seems. It is mostly just a different combination and synthesization of the same few monocrops – corn, wheat, sugarcane, soy and palm oil.

Much of this food is devoid of nutrients, so the food scientists fill it with synthetic vitamins, so it looks good on paper.

Why is it devoid of nutrients? When it comes to a lot of these ingredients, they were not grown with nutrition in mind. They were grown with chemical synthesization in mind with the plan to add synthetic vitamins in the factory.

And even with whole fruits and vegetables, this system does not focus on vitamins and minerals. Instead, it focuses on durability in shipping, shelf life and uniformity. We now know that food that comes out of these systems is not the same. As much as Big Ag would like us to believe, a carrot is not simply a carrot, leafy greens are not simply leafy greens, milk is not simply milk and beef is not simply beef. It matters where and how it is grown. Produce grown at these industrial farms (even organic produce) with nutrient-deficient and barely living soil, does not have the same levels of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants as food grown in rich, fertile soils that are teeming with bacterial, fungal and insect life.

This diet does not encourage us to eat fresh fruits and vegetables, because the profit margins on produce is much lower than the packaged, processed foods. This means that these diets are very low in fiber – what we'd normally get from just eating "real" food. Instead, US Americans are taking fiber supplements. I was astounded to learn that many US Americans now poop only once each week!

On the other hand, this diet does promote a lot of meat, eggs and dairy from factory farms. Here the animals are pumped full of pharmaceuticals and antibiotics. This has led to the evolution of antibiotic-resistant "super bacteria" that have become one of the potentially greatest threats to our survival as a species. Would you believe that Big Ag is actually Big Pharma's biggest customer?

Until recently, discussions of gut microbiome were barely held in the mainstream. We now know that diets that are high in GMOs, pesticide residue and antibiotics are destroying our gut microbiomes, which we now know are intrinsic to our digestive system, immune system and mental health.

Our Western industrial healthcare system has been built right alongside our industrial food system. (When you find McDonald's restaurants in many of the hospitals across the country, it becomes quite clear that the two systems do not

oppose each other.) This system makes trillions in profits off our health to the point where some people call it the “sick care system” instead of the “healthcare system.” It is, indeed, focused on dealing with sick people, and not preventing people from getting sick. It is estimated that about 75 percent of all visits to the doctor are simply due to poor diet and lack of exercise.

Just as we have come to rely on expert opinions with the most basic issues in our body – like seeking a pill for every ailment – we have come to rely on food science to tell us what to eat. This is the same food science that removes the nourishing stuff from our foods and fills it with high fructose corn syrup, hydrogenated oils, refined sugar, refined flour and fillers like cellulose, which are much cheaper, thus increasing their profit margins substantially. Yet, we go to them to ask them what we should eat for optimal health. The more afraid and confused we are, the more dependent we are on them. And they know this.

These are the people who think we can simplify our soil down to NPK (nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium). They think we can simply define a fruit or vegetable just by what vitamins are in it. Sure, we’ve learned quite a bit about the nutrition in our food. But, although they can tell us a lot of what is in an apple, they certainly do not know it well enough to create an apple. We now know that synthetic vitamins in pill form are not the same as the vitamins delivered through eating them in the actual fruit or vegetable, along with the many unknown natural constituents that exist within the whole form. There is more that we don’t know than we do know. Yet, food science has prescribed an answer to us that shows they believe otherwise.

And the most ridiculous part about all of this is that none of this is needed! The healthiest cultures on Earth are not listening to food scientists or eating the “miracles” of industrial agriculture. They are listening to thousands of years of food culture from their grandparents and their parents. The sickest cultures on Earth – that’s us – have lost connection to our food and instead are relying on the food industry through food scientists, PR firms and government entities like the USDA that they have hired to work for them.

All of this stuff we just don’t need is destroying our own health and destroying the health of Earth.

What I also feel quite certain of is that our food can be medicine that keeps our bodies healthy and functional, or it can be poison that slowly kills us. Although this concept has by now become quite natural and flowing for me, I remember how far I was from this place ten years ago and that this is where many of my fellow humans are today. So, I invite you to embrace your food as your medicine and I’d like to share some of what I’ve learned in this immersive year and through my many years of transforming my diet.

## Take Action!

### Eating Whole Foods and Food as Medicine

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Eat whole foods. That simply means foods in their whole, unprocessed form. Base your diet around whole foods – any whole foods – and you will be embracing thousands of years of the human success story. Fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, meat, whole milk and eggs – these are all whole foods.

Eat minimally processed foods. Processing is not inherently detrimental and in fact processing is necessary to preserve and store the abundance of the land. Even more so, there are numerous processes that make food more nourishing, wholesome, digestible and medicinal. Many minimally processed foods are one ingredient. For example almonds into almond butter, wheat grains into whole wheat flour, and milk into butter. Minimally processed foods can also have numerous ingredients such as whole wheat flour, salt, rosemary and sesame seeds to make bread. Minimal processing includes chopping, blending, dehydrating, canning, freezing – all processes that can be done at home without any inaccessible technology.

At the supermarket, to follow this ethos diligently would mean looking at the ingredient list of every food you are interested in buying and only purchasing it if there are no ingredients that are not clearly a food to you. Just imagine, could you eat that ingredient simply on its own? This simple guideline to follow would take care of all “natural flavors,” food dyes, emulsifiers, fillers, gums and synthetic vitamins. Any food that has a single one of these ingredients brings the integrity of the entire food into question for me. To take it even further, you can make sure that every ingredient is one that has been minimally processed; for example whole wheat flour, not white flour.

One of the simplest ways to accomplish this mission is to purchase only unpackaged foods. There is only a small percentage of unpackaged foods that are more than minimally processed in most stores that offer unpackaged food. On the other hand, the vast majority of packaged foods are highly processed or ultra-processed. The bulk section at a food co-op or health food store is the center of a whole foods, minimally packaged and unprocessed diet for many people who eat this way.

Now, you can still have whole foods that are very nutrient deficient. A whole foods diet is taken to another level by sourcing food from anywhere that produces food with high integrity, with a focus on soil life, biodiversity and ecological farming practices. These foods can be many times more concentrated with different



vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and all the health you hope to get from your food. These foods won't have pharmaceuticals and growth hormones in them.

Eating the rainbow is an enjoyable way to meet your goals of a balanced diet. Different colors represent different vitamins and eating the rainbow is a simple way to make sure you are eating a diversity of foods.

Most supplements and vitamins are not whole, unprocessed foods. With the deepest level of faith in this type of eating, they are no longer needed. And there are plenty of people who follow this today (like billions of humans have until now).

Of course, eating a 100 percent homegrown and foraged diet can result in perfect adherence to this diet, whether we grow and forage it ourselves or source this food directly from the community.

I don't think people are particularly interested in eating most of the food-like substances that they do. It's really the convenience that they are after. Eating solely off the land, I generally didn't miss any particular food. What I missed was convenience. But, we can make our own convenience and people have been doing it for a very long time. We can process our own foods and we can package them up, creating the same ultra convenience that the supermarkets, delivery foods and restaurants provide.

Dehydrating fruits gives us dried fruit to snack on. Dehydrating meat gives us jerky. Pressure canning of soups and stews allows us to pop one out of the pantry, and eat it on the spot. Water bath canning of fruits gives us sauces (like applesauce), jams, jellies and juices. Drying of herbs and a simple blending creates convenient herb powders for cooking. Dehydrating and blending of a variety of greens can serve as a convenient daily multi-vitamin! With some foresight and labor, these processes can create incredible convenience for the months and years ahead. These foods are naturally preserved, requiring no added preservatives.

The freezer is a helpful tool, of course. Frozen mangoes or bananas can be quickly blended to make a fruit "ice cream." And, of course, the refrigerator can be helpful if you have one of those, but some people eating this diet no longer even keep a fridge!

With convenience, we are all seeking to save time. And giving up the convenience of the grocery store means that we are taking on the responsibility of managing our own time effectively. That is where bulk food prep and meal prep comes in.

If you are limited on time, you will find it very difficult to prepare breakfast, lunch and dinner each day. But if you prepare a large soup at once, it doesn't take too much longer than preparing the same small soup. Then you can eat it for dinner every day for the next week. Once I started making meals in bulk in the spring of this year, my life changed dramatically for the better. Many people

will food-prepare for the week, not necessarily by making the meals in bulk, but by processing the ingredients on a Sunday so that they can be easily used at each meal during the work or school week.

A crockpot can save many hours. You can put all the ingredients in the pot in the morning and come home after a day's work to a hot and ready meal. I embraced the Instant Pot and was able to put my meals together, turn it on, go to the garden for an hour or two and come back to hot food, without any concern of it overcooking. I generally embrace the least technology possible, but the crock pot/electric pressure cooker has been an incredible tool for me.

In this realm, I also encourage the embrace of simple eating. Many people believe that our food needs to be complex in order to be loved by our guests. But there are so many foods that we can make that take very little time, yet yield the satisfaction we desire. We can even easily make our own granola bars, bread, chips, popcorn, ice cream, bone broth and so much more, without stepping into the world of processed foods!

For the kitchen tools I recommend and used during this year, see the Gear and Tools List in the Empowerment Manual.

Most who embrace this diet find that they have a lot less desire to eat out. One reason is it can be much more difficult to tell what's in the food at restaurants, even when asking. However, there are many restaurants that serve truly whole foods, and what creates convenience is making them your go-to when you choose to eat out, rather than trying a new restaurant each week.

As I've said many times in this practice, our food is our medicine. However, there are many plants that are used solely for medicine and are not foods. Herbal teas, made of dehydrated or fresh herbs, were part of my daily medicine practice. There are many schools both in-person and online that teach this practice, including the Florida School of Holistic Medicine, People's Medicine School, Chestnut School of Herbal Medicine and more. And there are even "Farmacies" that you can purchase this type of medicine from. Walden Farmacy is one that I visited that inspired me greatly. You can read *Rosemary Gladstar's Medicinal Herbs: A Beginner's Guide* to get acquainted and begin your practice. To learn more about herbal medicine see the Introduction to Herbal Medicine in the Empowerment Manual.

When it comes to the ultimate food and medicine in one, we come to wild fermentation. The practice embraces that there is bacteria and yeast present in every breath we take and on every surface of food that comes from the earth. By working with this bacteria, we can transform our foods into being more bioavailable, digestible and nourishing. Wild fermentation creates probiotics and many ferments are shown to improve digestion and support a healthy

immune system. In my opinion, wild fermentation is essential to a healthy gut microbiome. At the same time, fermentation often makes our food more tasty! Sauerkraut, sourdough bread, apple cider vinegar and pickled veggies are four of my favorite wild fermented foods and these foods require no fancy ingredients or expensive equipment. Read *Wild Fermentation* by Sandor Katz – the Johnny Appleseed of Fermentation – to explore deeper. However, I have warned you that after reading this book you may start to love bacteria and no longer fear it.

When we bring this all together, this is convenience and comfort that doesn't destroy our health in the long run. On the contrary, this is convenience and comfort that keeps us out of the doctor's office. Imagine the nation we'd be living in if we embraced the simple practices of eating whole, minimally packaged, unprocessed foods along with herbal medicine and moving our body? It would mean the crumbling of much of the destructive society we have today and the creation of a much more harmonious society. It would be a revolution.

Contrary to popular belief, when you bring this all together, this doesn't end up being more expensive. It actually saves money. And I'll tell you from experience, it's really not as hard as the food industry has tried to convince us that it is to prepare delicious and nutritious food. Nature's already done most of the work for us. We just have to keep it simple!

For a deeper dive into my practices, read: "My Natural Personal Hygiene and Preventative Healthcare" article. See also My Ideal Diet in the Empowerment Manual for details on the ideals that make up my own personal whole foods diet.

You've likely noticed that I do not adhere to or recommend any specific diet types such as paleo, keto, vegan or gluten free and there is very little food science discussed. Instead, I just focus on what billions of humans have done for thousands of years, eating whole foods from the Earth. I don't want to overcomplicate things or contribute to the confusion and overwhelm that so many are experiencing today. That said, there are a few resources for nutrition that I have found to be of high integrity that I'd like to share with you to explore:

*Nourishing Traditions* by Sally Fallon and her website [nourishingtraditions.com](http://nourishingtraditions.com) for her take on nutrition and traditional diets.

The writing by Zach Bush MD on the gut microbiome and *The Good Gut* by Justin and Erica Sonnenburg.

*Glucose Revolution* by Jessie Inchauspé the "Glucose Goddess" as well as her sharings online about the role of blood sugar in our lives.

Traditional Ayurvedic food and medicine through The Ayurvedic Institute and online resources [ayurveda.com](http://ayurveda.com)

The book *Healthful Foods* by Jethro Kloss was one of my first introductions to natural foods for health and healing.

## Chapter 10

### “Does My Skin Look Stretchy?”

It's day 247 and I'm sitting on the couch on the 23<sup>rd</sup> floor in my aunt's apartment in downtown Chicago. I've been pulling at my skin, stretching it out with awe and alarm for the last hour. I'm yanking on the skin of my forearms, my triceps, my chest, my thighs and my armpits. I'm now standing in front of the bathroom mirror, pulling out my cheeks, my neck from all angles and all around my waistline. I've convinced myself that my skin is stretching out much more than it used to. And I'm certain my skin is far more loose than is normal for a 32-year-old body. Maybe I'm losing collagen and elasticity? Maybe my muscles have just shrunk or I've lost my fat, leaving loose skin? Maybe the sun exposure and age are just catching up to me now? I'm searching for answers.

I look over at my sister with my neck skin between my thumb and pointer finger, stretched out as far as it will go. “Hey sis, does my skin look way stretchier than normal?” I ask my aunt as well, “Do I look different since the last time you saw me?” They are both interested enough to give me their attention and respond, but they are not looking at my skin with worry like I am. “Yeah, I think it looks stretchier than normal,” says my sister. “You might look a little more skinny, but I don't know for certain,” my aunt says.

I am assured they both agree with me that I'm not making it up, but more so by the fact that it doesn't seem nearly as extreme in their minds as it does to me. A double relief, but overall I am still worried. This is an abbreviated conversation of the many times I stretched out the skin of different parts of my body and asked questions like, “How about this? Does this seem stretchier than normal?”

*7/15/19 (Day 247) I'm officially over two-thirds of the way through the year. I've become convinced that I am deficient in fat and protein. I'm really struggling in this regard, but I'm also in high spirits because I've got a plan of action and a hope for success. The plan includes the waters of Lake Superior and the fish beneath the surface, as well as something I have seen on the side of the road hundreds of times before in my homeland.*

*7/20/19 (Day 252) I didn't do well fishing today, barely enough for one meal.*

*Cycling home I saw deer twice. Both times my mind was churning with ways that I could get the deer onto my dinner plate. I imagined crashing into them with my bike, doubtful that would work. I rode on, staring back, wishing ...*

*It appears I'm losing muscle. I feel like I'm dwindling away a little bit. My thoughts aren't as clear. I'm concerned my brain is not getting enough fat.*

*7/23/19 (Day 255) I went fishing at the marina for a little while and didn't catch anything.*

*7/24/19 (Day 256) I went fishing at the Hot Pond in the evening and caught some rock bass. I caught hundreds of rock bass during my childhood and I never ate one of them. I would have considered that stooping low. I took what I caught home and ate the smallest fish of my life. This is feeling kind of ridiculous.*

*7/26/19 (Day 258) Caught two northern pike at Travis's cabin. On the small side, but some real food!*

*7/29/19 (Day 261) Still no deer. I had the two opportunities for a car-killed deer just after I arrived that I missed and haven't had any opportunities since. I haven't been eating nearly as much fish or meat as I'd like and that means I've been eating more of my calorie stock than planned. I need to get into one-to-two pounds of meat per day soon to ration my calorie sources.*

*7/31/19 (Day 263) Went fishing for lake trout with Ben on his boat out in the islands. I had extremely high hopes of bringing home 10-20 pounds of fish. It was Ben's worst day out this year. We caught a very small lake trout. I boiled the fish head and it softened to the point where I could eat the ENTIRE head – brains, eyes, skull, jaw, cartilage and all. I also ate the organs and all of the skin. I utilized the whole fish, more than I ever have before in my life.*

*8/01/19 (Day 264) Went fishing in the evening at the lakeshore. Caught four very small bass. Ate two of them.*

*8/02/19 (Day 265) Went fishing at the lakeshore near the Hot Pond in the morning. Didn't catch anything today.*

*8/03/19 (Day 266) Went out with Ben again and within an hour of getting our lines in the water, I had my first fish on. I could tell immediately that this was a fish that could really feed me. As I reeled it in from the depths, I trembled with excitement, but also worry. Please don't break the line ... Please don't shake the hook ... I continued reeling and as the fish breached the surface, I confirmed that my aspirations were within arm's reach. This was a big fish. The biggest I'd ever caught from Lake Superior. It could nourish me for the next two weeks. And it was a lake trout, the fattiest fish in the water. This*

*was exactly what my body was needing – high quality fat. I could already imagine the fat soaking into my body, satiating 200+ days of yearning.*

*Once by the side of the boat, Ben dipped the net into the water and the fish glided in. He lifted the net and there it was, out of the water within arm's reach. Seconds later it was in the boat and no sooner in my hands.*

*It was a blimp of fat, around 15-20 pounds, which is about 13% of my total body weight. My body trembled. Eating a pound per day, I could eat for about two weeks. I could have some time for rest and relaxation and maybe fatten up on the couch, or have time to explore some of the plants that had called me all the way up from Florida.*

*But there was one question on my mind. Was it too big? I wasn't really planning to catch a trout this big. A fish this big could be 15 years old and if it was a female it played a very important role in the breeding population. My whole life I've let fish like this go on the occasions I caught them, always preferring the smaller, younger fish that the lake could provide without stress on the population.*

*I looked to Ben and asked, “Would you keep this fish or would you let it go?” His answer was quick, without much thought. “I'd let it go.”*

*He knew these waters better than I did. He knew these fish better than I did. This was his boat and I was a guest. I didn't have time to ponder on it. The fish had to either go back into the water quickly or I had to keep it. I had tremendous respect for this fish and if I wasn't going to keep it, I wanted to ensure it would live. So with little time to think, I released the fish back to the water and watched it swim away. I was confident that more fish would come, and hopeful they would be smaller.*

*We continued trolling on calm waters with blue skies ahead. After not too long, Ben looked at me and said, “Were you asking if YOU should keep the fish?” The question startled me a bit. “Yes, that's what I was asking.” He responded with zeal, “Well, yeah you could have kept it! I have plenty of fish to eat and plenty of food, so personally I would let it go. But you've got to eat!”*

*My heart sank deep into my chest, deeper than it has been in a long time. I was crushed. We discussed more about the lake trout population and how the local fishery keeps every fish they catch, all the big ones, many much larger than the one I released. The lake and the fish could share this one with me. It was clear. I had just made the biggest mistake of the year.*

*Yet, I was hopeful that there would be more fish to come. And there was. We caught a few more in the size range that I was hoping for. One of them was about two-to-three pounds, quite small for a lake trout. The fishing was going well enough and the day was still quite early so we released that one, since the limit is two per person and we had more time.*

*But then, without much warning, the land sent in strong wind and the waves started to really churn up. Lake Superior is no place to get caught during a big storm, so Ben made the decision and we headed in hours earlier than planned.*

*We came in with four fish. It was another of Ben's least productive days out. I feel so defeated and I want to give up. I wanted to give up a few days ago, too. I feel like I have a fishing curse. Ben is practically a professional and when he takes me out he has two of his worst days. The guide in Florida got skunked with me, something he said never happens. I just can't get into the abundance. I'm just scraping by.*

*On the bright side, the one lake trout I brought home yielded seven pounds of meat plus the head and organs. That's one week of food, eating one pound per day. The standard recommendation of protein is 56 grams per day and one pound of fish has 110 grams of protein. That's about twice the needed protein per day. So that's really solid. I can comfortably take a break from fishing for a few days and get some rest.*

*8/04/19 (Day 267) Much to my surprise, my skin has drastically changed today. First I noticed that my biceps and triceps are larger and more solid. A surprisingly drastic change. As I squeeze my arms, there is an obvious feeling of difference. To a lesser degree, I can even visually see the difference. My upper legs are larger as are my butt and chest muscles. My skin is nowhere near as thin. Now when I pinch my skin there is fat in the pinch between my fingers, not just skin.*

*In a matter of 24 hours of gorging on this lake trout, it has changed my body. It's as if my body soaked the fat of the trout straight into where it was needed. It assimilated into my being so rapidly. Just 24 hours ago, this trout was swimming in the depths of Lake Superior, and today it has become fat on my body. The lake trout became a part of me. The lake trout has become me. How could it not be? It's so clear.*

*I feel such a deep level of healing, a cellular healing. I still have a ways to go, but I made a great gain in this short time. I am feeling deeply relieved. In the next week or two perhaps I'll be doing real good.*

8/05/19 (Day 268) *Went to Tom Nutt's to meet him and forage together. I ended up there from 9-6. It was a long day, getting bitten by dozens of mosquitos, poked in the eye by a stick, getting rained on and accidentally spraying bug spray into my face. Not a relaxing day.*

8/06/19 (Day 269) *Went fishing for bullhead and rock bass in the sloughs with Tom. We only caught 10 fish in a few hours. He expected to fill a cooler. He said it was one of his worst days of fishing. I'm trying to stock up on fish. The difficulty continues.*

8/08/19 (Day 271) *Very rough day. I got a call from Lisa that code enforcement came and my house has got to go. I am also dealing with having someone move my bees at Sarah's because they became aggressive and stung the neighbors. This happens with wild hives sometimes. My large pot of fish stock spoiled and I accidentally wasted a lot of nourishment. Not much was going well for me today. The house smells, I've scratched their nice pan trying to make tortillas that failed, the house is full of fruit flies and the Hines are coming home today. (I was a guest in their house while they were on vacation.) I'm trying to plan too many things. I'm worried about running out of fish. Life is just stressful overall.*

8/09/19 (Day 272) *Went fishing for whitefish with Brad and lots of hope. I've heard stories of others bringing home 50 pounds of whitefish from an hour of fishing. We went to the spot we were told to go to. We got skunked.*

*I saw a dead raccoon on the side of the road, stopped to pick it up, but the smell got to me before I got to it.*

*Ben and I had plans to go out for lake trout again in two days, but he just canceled.*

8/11/19 (Day 274) *Went to Tom's and hoped to shoot a rabbit that has been eating from his garden daily, but it didn't show up. I practiced with his pellet gun and my shot seems to be on.*

8/12/19 (Day 275) *I have not eaten well the last three days. I'm out of fish, skunked twice and was expecting fish. My food is feeling extremely scanty without fish. My cassava porridge, one of my main staples in savory dishes, is not tasty because it's really sweet for some reason. Mom's kitchen is hard to navigate and it's resulting in me not cooking. This is not good.*



*Woke at 5:00 a.m. today to catch whitefish and we got skunked. The water was really rough, so I was nauseous the whole time. I kept wanting to give up, but Tom continued trying, hoping the fish would come. I caught one perch that I made for lunch.*

*90 more days to go and I just want to be done right now. I feel like I'm failing so badly.*

*I went trout fishing with my friend Mark and caught two trout. But I broke a rule. Mark was catching fish with worms and I wasn't catching any on spinners, so I used one of his nightcrawlers that came from the bait shop, breaking my rule of baiting only with food that I either grew or foraged.*

*We had such a wonderful time on the river though, pure beauty.*

*8/13/19 (Day 276) Today I am busy preparing for five days offline in Boundary Waters. I am yearning for this getaway.*

*I am going into the Boundary Waters with no choice but to catch fish or be extremely hungry. I'm bringing a minimum supply of food. I'm hoping to eat three pounds of fish per day. I'm hopeful this will be rejuvenating, but without fish it could be a massive challenge. I'm feeling a little rough, like I could be coming down with a cold. This is the time when I would benefit from elderberry syrup, but I don't have time to make it before the trip. I'm only going to get about five hours of sleep tonight before leaving early.*

*8/14-8/18/19 (Days 277-281) Five days in the Boundary Waters.*

*I missed the first 10 of 12 fish that hit my lure. I seemed to be doing everything right. I had the hook set on every one of them, but somehow they got off. One broke the hook. It has been a very frustrating and deflating start. I think maybe the hooks on the lures are dull. Fortunately, I managed to land one northern pike for dinner.*

*From there, the tides turned for the second and third days.*

*Day 2: 1 walleye for late breakfast, 2 walleye and 2 pike for dinner with fish leftover.*

*Day 3: 1 walleye for breakfast, 2 walleye and 1 pike for lunch and dinner.*

*Day 4 was more of a struggle. I had a bass on a stringer that got caught in the rocks and came off. I had 2 walleye for lunch. I released 4 bass that it turned out would have been in my best interest to have kept, because I didn't end up having any fish for dinner.*

*Overall I ate 7 walleye and 4 pike. Day 2 and day 3 I ate more fish than I've ever eaten in my life. This was a substantial amount, but I still struggled for enough. 8 of the 12 meals I could have eaten more. I did feel so satiated by the fish though. They held me over really well and digested really well. I hardly felt hungry the entire trip. This was such a great break from the carbs and sugar. My digestion feels great and my bowel movements are ideal.*

*Portaging my canoe, totally naked, left hand providing balance to the canoe on my shoulders, right hand holding freshly caught fish that would soon be over a fire, I felt more alive than I have for a long time.*

*8/19/19 (Day 282) First day back, I went to the Hot Pond first thing in the morning and caught a large sucker and five rock bass. I ate fish all day. On the way home I foraged and looked at new plants. That was rejuvenating.*

*8/20/19 (Day 283) Ran out of prepared food and didn't feel like cooking so it was a very skimpy day of eating. I was on the computer all day working. I went fishing at the marina for a bit in the evening and didn't catch anything.*

*8/21/19 (Day 284) I went to Hot Pond in the morning and caught only 1 small rock bass. I am starting to get desperate for a substantial amount of fish, so I called some local guides.*

*In the afternoon I went with Tom to the sloughs and caught 50 bullhead and 25 rock bass. He would have been happy for me to keep all of the fish, but I'm only keeping my half. Not the prime fish, but today I got some real sustenance. It was a long day and a late night.*

*8/23/19 (Day 286) I went to Tom's in the morning and helped him in his garden. We set out his raccoon trap with some fish organs in it. I'm hoping to catch a fat raccoon.*

*Today I pressure canned fish for the first time. I'll be able to open up a can of fish any time with convenience and not have to cook, especially while I'm on the road ahead.*

*Went fishing in Iron River in the afternoon. I caught just 2 largemouth bass and 1 pike. Very slow fishing. I remember catching 30 pike in a day here and over 50 bass in a day when I fished here in high school.*

*8/24/19 (Day 287) I got up to fish at 4:30 a.m. and we fished for seven hours straight. We only caught one fish, but it was a pike that weighed about seven pounds. It's not enough to stop fishing, but it's a good amount of meat. Afterwards, I collected mushrooms with Tom. I got 12 pounds of chanterelles and lobster mushrooms!*

*Something went into the trap but didn't trigger it. No raccoon yet.*

*8/25/19 (Day 288) My body has been feeling and looking so much more fit the last few days. I'm eating far less carbs and far more protein. Still much more sugar than I'd like.*

*My digestion has been excellent, but since I haven't gotten enough sleep the last few days, it's getting worse again. It seems that quality sleep, as much as food, is absolutely essential to good digestion, body function and happiness.*

*8/28/19 (Day 291) Started intermittent fasting.*

*8/31/19 (Day 294) It's been a great week for food. I've been in Minneapolis and I have barely had to forage. I haven't been fishing at all, but between the big pike and the canned bullhead, I have had all the fish that I want to eat. I've made large batches of food for multiple meals. I've harvested large amounts of greens in short periods of time. Having fresh greens drastically improves the quality of my diet and the enjoyability of my food.*

*Intermittent fasting is going really well. My body feels good. I've spent less time cooking and in the kitchen because I'm eating way less frequently. I am eating large meals, maybe even too large as my stomach has been feeling too full at times. But overall my stomach is feeling really good.*

*8/31/19 (Day 294) Today I headed back to Ashland from Minneapolis. I found a ride to Duluth and Tom had some errands to do there, so I met him to continue the ride back to Ashland together. He's been on the lookout for car-killed deer whenever he's driving and, upon seeing me, he told me that this morning he spotted a fawn. It was 4:00 now, so the whole day had passed and it might be gone. But we were heading back the same way, and as we neared the area where he saw it, my eyes were peeled on the road. By now it was 5:00,*

*and the sun had been beating down all day. So even if it was there, neither of us were certain it would still be good.*

*“There it is!” We pulled over. It had been exactly 50 days since I left Orlando. I had thought I’d have been eating deer way back at the beginning of summer. Now the seasons were shifting into fall and I still hadn’t found success with one of my main missions for the journey to this land.*

*We got out of the car and walked to the deer. By this point, I had watched some videos on YouTube and had numerous conversations with people who knew what they were doing. But I sure didn’t know what I was doing. I had never harvested a large animal, never cut into the body of anything larger than a chicken or a large fish. But none of that mattered, because I was walking up to the deer with Tom. He’s been hunting his whole life and has processed hundreds of deer.*

*The first good sign, as we walked to the animal, there was no smell greeting our noses. Tom figured it had been there since early morning, so about 10 or 11 hours on a 70-degree day. It was a small fawn that had been born that spring. It still had spots on it. It was not a large deer, but I looked at it with hope. There were no visible broken bones and no blood on the road. The eyes were clouded but still completely intact and still had some vibrancy in them. Flies were there but they were relatively few. For the most part, it just looked like it was sleeping. The intestines were spilling out of the stomach area, but even that had minimal smell.*

*We leaned in and touched it. One beetle crawled away. No maggots though. A good sign. We pulled at the hair. It didn’t pull off the skin, instead it held tight to the body. That’s what we were hoping for. We felt the body. The muscles seemed in good shape, just one of the four shoulders was damaged. That’s where it was hit by the car. All signs were pointing towards this deer coming home with me.*

*But we didn’t take the deer home, not the whole deer that is. Instead we pulled it off into the woods, out of sight from the road.*

*We had what we needed with us. I was prepared. Earlier in the summer, I had borrowed a knife from my friend Brad, and carried it with me every time I got on the highway, just in case I came across a deer. Tom, of course, had one, too. We cut into the skin, first down the spine. I was surprised at how little blood there was. Tom showed me how he ran the blade along the spine, and then with just his fingers he rolled the backstraps right out. I was amazed at how easily the meat came out.*

*He lifted the meat to his nose and smelled it. Then he lifted it to mine. It smelled sweet! Another surprise. All these years and somehow I never knew that meat could smell sweet.*

*Tom did much of the work. He was confident and effective. He shared his knowledge with pleasure. He loves to bless others and this was his way of blessing me. Yet, we were on the side of the road and he didn't want to spend any longer than needed there.*

*I arrived home with 8.5 pounds of meat from the back straps and three of the four quarters. We probably could have gotten a bit more, but with the ruptured stomach, Tom was cautious to harvest only the parts that were easily accessible without possible contamination on this small deer. The rest of the body laid in the woods where it would return to the earth.*

As for me, it was time to feast. I felt confident that another deer would come. It was no longer summer, and as the fall transitioned in, the deer would be more active again, meaning more would be hit by cars. The evenings and the days would be cooler as well, so if I found another deer, the chances would be higher that it was still harvestable. Plus, I would be on the road multiple times in the weeks ahead, specifically on roads that were very common to find car-killed deer.

Those 8.5 pounds of meat lasted just a few days. My body was craving this nourishment and I ate as my body, my mind and my whole being desired, plus I shared with others. This time, my confidence turned out to be correct.

*9/02/19 (Day 296) Harvested a second deer.*

*8/31-9/06/19 (Days 294-300) Ate deer for every single meal.*

*9/06/19 (Day 300) Harvested a third deer. This was a larger fawn on my way to Duluth to give a talk at University of Minnesota-Duluth. I am so abundant in venison, more than I will need for the time in Wisconsin most likely. From this deer, I harvested 19 pounds, including the bones from the two front quarters, one hind quarter, the neck and the back straps. It was at 4:30 p.m. The deer was probably out the whole day with temperatures in the high 60's. With less than an hour to spare, I managed to harvest the deer and stay clean enough to give a talk to over 100 people at UMD.*

*Tom and Shari canned my venison and applesauce. So much food!*

On September 23<sup>rd</sup> (Day 317), I was visiting University of Wisconsin-La Crosse where I attended university from 2005-2009. I was being hosted by Scott Cooper, a professor of biology, during my few days here. He mentioned that he had access to the dunk tank for hydrostatic weighing which is used for measuring body fat percentage. I was really curious about what my body fat percentage was. It had been 70 days since I was sitting on the couch on the 23<sup>rd</sup> floor in my aunt's apartment in downtown Chicago pulling at my skin, stretching it out in awe and alarm. I could feel and see the difference in my body. I was feeling as solid as ever. Better, in fact, than when I had begun the immersion 317 days prior. My muscles were back. The stretchiness of my skin had diminished. The fogginess was gone. I had cut back substantially on the carbs and sugar and had a balance that felt beneficial for my digestion. Intermittent fasting was going well. All signs were showing that I had come out of my deficiency. But still, I was interested in what the science would say.

So I headed over to UWL, to Mitchell Hall where I had taken classes some ten or so years ago and found the room where the tank was. The results said that my body fat percentage was 15.5 percent, a very healthy percentage, not too low by any standards. The operator said that the test is based on the average male having more muscle than me and that I probably had lower body fat, perhaps around 12 percent. Exact details aside, it aligned with what I felt in my body. I weighed in at 152 pounds, which is one to three pounds more than this spring and just one pound less than when I started.

It's been over ten months of living solely from what I can grow myself or forage from the land: 317 days without grocery stores or restaurants, nothing packaged or processed, no multivitamins or supplements. I've had plenty of food to eat and I've thoroughly enjoyed it. I am officially out of my slump and in my flow. I am in the home stretch.

Although I have struggled, I have always had enough food and have been in relatively good health. My weight has fluctuated by only a few pounds or about three percent of my body weight. That's less of a fluctuation than in any of my previous years of life I believe. My goal was not just to survive the year, but to see an improvement of my overall wellbeing and health. At this point in my journey, I feel that I have accomplished that.

Has my health been perfect? No. But it's never been perfect. It wasn't perfect when I was eating fast food. It wasn't perfect when I was vegan. It wasn't perfect before this immersion began. Can we expect perfect health? I don't think that's how the body functions. I don't think that's the natural way of being. I believe that struggling and moving in and out of highs and lows is the human animal experience.

Interestingly enough, the central dietary struggle of the last ten months has been the same dietary struggle of my last four years. This struggle has been attached to a moral question that millions of people grapple with today. That struggle? To eat meat or not to eat meat. And, if yes to eating meat, then what meat to eat? For some, the question goes further: whether to eat any animal foods at all, or to eat exclusively plants.

The motivation behind this question varies from person to person. For some, it is a question of animal consciousness and suffering and our role as defenders of the voiceless. For some, it is the question of environmental sustainability. For some, it is the question of how meat, eggs and dairy impact human health. For some, it is spiritual or religious. And for others, it's just a matter of being squeamish about death.

When I first began my journey of sustainable living in 2011, the discovery of how animals are treated in industrial agriculture through the practice of factory farming was a striking wake-up call. After watching "Earthlings" and "Food Inc.," I could not look at the meat on my dinner plate, the eggs with my toast, or the milk in my cereal bowl in the same way. I was deeply disturbed and shocked to realize that I was taking part in such a cruel and destructive system. Through these documentaries and many other educational resources I immersed myself in, I learned:

Billions of animals are housed in concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs). Chickens for meat are kept 20,000 to a shed, where they have little space to move and never see the light of day. Chickens for eggs are housed in battery cages so small they are not even able to spread their wings. The hundreds of millions of male chicks that are born in the egg industry are disposed of as a waste product, often ground up alive. Female pigs used for breeding are held in crates too small to even turn around in. Dairy cows are treated as milk machines, spending much of their lives in a single stall. Many of these animals never spend a moment of their lives outside. Cows for meat are generally outdoors, but standing in waste up to their ankles or knees, with no pasture or grass growing on site. Farmed fish are raised in tight quarters, swimming in high concentrations of their own poop and commonly infested with parasites.

These animals are bred to produce the most meat as quickly as possible. This results in chickens with breasts so heavy that they struggle to even move their own body. Many of these animals are pumped full of growth hormones to quickly put on weight.

It is common practice to debeak chickens, cutting off part of their beaks to keep them from pecking other chickens in their crowded sheds. The tails on

pigs are removed for similar reasons and tails on dairy cows are even removed to make the milking process easier.

Because these animals are raised in such close quarters and in such an unhealthy manner, their immune systems are weak, so they are pumped full of pharmaceuticals to keep them alive long enough to be slaughtered for meat.

These systems are prone to the spreading of bacterial and fecal contamination and this often enters the nationwide distribution system. Foodborne illness through contaminated meat spread widely across the US. Due to the excessive use of antibiotics, one of the greatest health risks we have today is antibiotic-resistant bacteria, which is considered to be one of our greatest risks as a human species.

This concentration of animals creates very polluted air, water and land. The waste of these systems is hazardous material and is often dealt with haphazardly. Huge manure lagoons full of poop, urine and pharmaceuticals leach into the ground and pollute drinking water and sometimes burst into natural bodies of water wreaking havoc on ecosystems.

The nearby rural communities of these factory farms are victims of the polluted air and water. These farms are generally located near low-income communities, and especially low-income communities of color. The people suffer from lung diseases at rates higher than most any other communities, along with many other health problems. Simply breathing is a challenge on many days in these communities.

The workers in the meat packing plants have some of the most dangerous jobs in the country. Workers commonly suffer from injuries due to the factory systems of rapid processing of animals on the production line. Meat packing plant jobs generally have very low pay and provide minimal health benefits. The workers are treated as dispensable and since many are undocumented immigrants, it is hard for them to fight for basic rights.

With millions upon millions of animals being killed daily in these factories in the United States, the system is set up to kill animals quite quickly, and that means a lot of suffering as the animals are treated like products on conveyor belts, often being butchered alive by the systems that function with some error. Most of these companies regulate themselves, so there is no shortage of turning a blind eye to these issues.

These are sick animals, with diseases, unhealthy bodies and systems full of antibiotics and pharmaceuticals. There is no magic that makes this wholesome meat, eggs and dairy once it is on our plates.

My eyes were fully opened to the truth about where the meat I was eating was coming from and the harm and suffering that I was causing to these animals



as well as to our Earth, our global humanity and to my own body. It was a relatively easy decision for me to give up factory-farmed meat, eggs and dairy. Over a period of a few years, I phased them out of my diet. Continuing to watch documentaries like “Cowspiracy,” I transitioned to a nearly 100 percent vegan diet in 2014 and considered myself to be vegan. I questioned whether it was really even possible to be an environmentalist and eat meat at the same time. I felt confident that the most sustainable and ethical diet that I could eat was one that excluded meat, eggs and dairy altogether.

In the fall of 2016, I was embarking on a new project, *Trash Me*, where for a month I’d live like the average US American and wear every piece of trash that I created. The purpose was to create a striking visual of how much garbage just one person creates and inspire critical thought and self-reflection. To make trash like the average person, I had to eat like the average person, which meant eating meat for the month.

Before the project began, I did a basic blood panel so that I could compare my health before and after. That’s when I learned that I was very deficient in B12. It was a coincidence that I discovered this just days before I’d be eating meat.

Now, one might expect me to feel horrible eating the Standard American Diet (SAD) after multiple years of eating a plant-based, whole foods, organic diet. But to my surprise, my health started to improve. I quickly started to feel more energy. I gained about four pounds, about half of which was muscle. I was less tired, less agitated and less achy. I was feeling healthier by eating factory-farmed, low-quality meat. As a vegan who was pretty sure that veganism was the healthiest diet for me, this was not what I expected and not a realization that I wanted to be true.

I started reflecting on my health and my diet over the years prior. When I first began my journey of shifting my diet and lifestyle, with a substantial focus on moving toward veganism, my health improved to the prime of my adult life. I remained in peak health, but after about a year of veganism, much to my surprise, my health started to decline. I started to have less energy. I was constantly tired, never feeling like I could get well rested. I was much more agitated and easily annoyed. My body was often achy and I had lost a lot of my strength. I felt that I was constantly just below an ideal weight for my body. I remember thinking that I felt like an old man, at the age of 30. I didn’t ever want to believe it could be my diet, so I blinded myself from the truth. It was all clear now.

Although my health was important to me, the health of the Earth was more of a priority, so I decided not to make any drastic changes right away. With my eyes now opened, it was time for me to explore more deeply this question of whether or not to eat meat and if I were to eat meat, how to source it.

I was surprised with what I learned. I realized I had overlooked and ignored a large portion of the conversation that was taking place among many of my colleagues and the environmental movement as a whole. When we learn how awful something is, we have a tendency to be drawn to the polar opposite. I had done this to some degree. But the polar opposite is rarely the truth either. I learned that the answer as to whether to eat meat or not is not as simple as the environmental vegan narrative that I'd taken in claimed it to be (which was that all meat, eggs and dairy are unsustainable). It became clear that much of the popular environmental and health-focused vegan content is based almost exclusively on factory farming. Indeed, the vast majority of meat consumed today in the US is factory farmed. However, this is a limited perspective on humanity's relationships with animals. Factory farmed meat, dairy and eggs simply do not represent all meat and food from animals. It is not that simple. This narrative did not explain the whole story of our diverse relationships with animals over thousands of years or what is possible for humanity for the future.

It became clear to me that veganism can be a part of systems of deep harmony that I stand for or of the systems of mass destruction I stand against, or be anywhere in between on this spectrum. Yet, in mainstream society and even along the fringes of society, the conversation around veganism is rarely treated as the complex subject that it is. Instead, there are often polarized viewpoints of “right and wrong,” “good and bad” or “better and worse” in the discussions. However, with eight billion humans living in thousands of cultures, interacting with millions of different species, with an infinite number of relationships being carried out at every second of existence, this is an incredibly complex interwoven thing we call life.

What I'd like to explore here is not veganism as a whole, but rather what I have come to call Big Veganism, the more accepted and even loved relative to Big Ag, Big Organic, Big Oil and Big Money. I'd like to explore this relatively unspoken concept in the mainstream vegan narrative and what I see as holistic solutions. Before beginning, I want to be clear that I strongly support the choice to be vegan or vegetarian and I honor and respect all who have chosen this path.

Enter Big Veganism.

What veganism is in theory and what it is in the practice of modern society are two very different stories. When we look more closely at most veganism today, what we really see is just a variation of the global, industrial diet. In fact, I would go as far as to say that most modern veganism is a product of the industrialized and globalized food system that it in theory stands against. My analysis is that the modern vegan exists not in spite of Big Ag, but because of Big Ag and is dependent upon this system.

Sure, the modern vegan does not see blood on their hands directly when they eat and they don't have a death tally from directly killing their food. But when we look deeper, we see that we all have death on our hands from this industrial diet, and far more death than most of us would like to believe. The more entrenched we are in these systems the more death that is happening in our name, out of sight, out of mind.

Let's ask a few questions:

Are fossil fuels (and oil spills) really vegan? Is plastic really vegan? Are pesticides (organic or not) really vegan? Are monocrops vegan? Is farming grains, vegetables and fruit on land where animal habitat has been cleared really vegan?

The answer to each of these questions is undoubtedly no.

Most of us would be surprised about how destructive our fruit, vegetable, nut and grain farming is and how many animals have died for this food to get to us. First, all farm land in this system was once animal land that was cleared. All of the animals that were there were either exterminated or displaced to provide us with that land for growing vegan food. Then that farmer routinely prevents animals and insects from eating the crops. This can be done by pesticides, trapping and poison, but just as much of it is done by creating systems that create a void of life. If it's organic and vegan, animals are still dying to grow most of the food on the supermarket shelves.

From the farms, to the factories and warehouses (and the laboratories), to the semi-trucks and the grocery stores, death is inseparable from this system.

Today, fake meats are a craze of the vegan movement. It is seen as great progress that fast food restaurants are serving these fake meats as alternatives to factory-farmed meat. However, my analysis is that this is actually contributing to the power of multinational corporations and the industrialization of our food. The creation of these fake meats requires some of the most sophisticated food technology that exists. Many are made with GMO ingredients grown in monocrops. There are hundreds of patents involved which withhold information from the public. Some of the products are actually owned by the major factory-farmed meat brands like Cargill and Tyson and some products, like Beyond Meat, get their GMO soybeans or peas from the companies they are supposedly helping society break free from.<sup>7</sup>

Further, there is no evidence that these ultra-processed fake meats with no whole food ingredients are even nourishing and wholesome. "Surveys have indicated that vegans and vegetarians consume higher levels of ultra-processed foods than non-vegans, mainly because of plant-based alternative products."<sup>7</sup> They claim to be the solution, yet they are displacing much more sustainable plant-based options that already exist.

At the same time as this movement is feeding into industrialization, it is also contributing to globalization. These fake meats can be made in a lab anywhere and shipped anywhere in the world. It is part of the homogenization of our food. This globalization – including the industrialization and homogenization that goes hand in hand – is the very source of the human race’s systematic destruction of entire ecosystems, mass extinctions of species and the loss of Indigenous culture (and culture in general). It is well known that biodiversity is one of the single greatest factors necessary for the survival of any ecosystem and, thus, in any single species or individual. Globalization is the antithesis of biodiversity. And yet, that is largely what feeds the modern vegan movement.

Just like the factory farming of animals, these are systems that depend on us, the people, being disconnected from the source of our food.

I have searched for examples of societies and communities of vegans who exist largely independent of industrial food systems and I have come up with just a very few isolated examples. Yet, I have found countless examples of societies and communities that exist independently that do incorporate animals into their food systems and their diets. This is part of what has shown me that veganism exists not in spite of industrialization and technology, but because of it.

This disconnection from our food source is what has turned many of the accurate statements about factory farming of animals into false blanket statements on humanity’s relationships with animals as a whole, which includes localized regenerative agriculture, ecological farming and tending the wild.

*“Going vegan saves 100 lives per year.”* An average deer or wild boar yields around 40 pounds of meat, plus organ meat, bone broth, clothing and tools. One hunter could get all of their meat needs from one or two deer or boar per year. One cow can provide enough meat for an entire family for an entire year.

*“It takes 2,400 gallons of water to produce one pound of beef. Therefore, end all beef production.”* In truly regenerative systems, not a single drop of water is “used.” In fact, through cycling water and nutrients, a substantial amount of fruits and vegetables can be grown with high yield and increasing biodiversity while also raising goats, sheep, cows, ducks, rabbits and many other animals for food, clothing and insulation for shelter. The water is cycled right into the soil where it is naturally purified before it returns to the drinking water supply.

*“It takes ten pounds of grain to make one pound of meat.”* Raising cows or sheep on pasture requires no grain at all. Hunting wild animals requires no grain at all. Raising pigs on food waste requires no grain at all.

*“Our global fish stock is exploited, so ALL fishing is unsustainable.”* Yes, “roughly 75 percent of all our fisheries are either fully exploited or overexploited” as shared widely in “Cowspiracy.” However, we still have

many thriving ecosystems on Earth. Fish stocks can be depleted or pushed to extinction in one region, while other regions can have abundance. There are many bodies of water with healthy populations of fish and even ecosystems that have exceeded their natural capacity to sustain certain populations of fish.

This is just a small example of common narratives, to illustrate how this vegan movement is one of disconnection from the realities for billions of humans. This is the narrative that creates blanket statements such as that veganism is the only ethical diet and the only sustainable diet for humans: that all meat and food from animals is environmentally destructive; that veganism is the only wholesome and nourishing diet and that all humans would benefit from going vegan; and even that meat and food from animals is inherently unhealthy for the human body; that a person cannot be an environmentalist or a steward of Earth and also eat meat. This is the narrative that allows applying the vegan label to oneself to create a false safe zone.

When we look only at your urban neighbor in the US, it's easy to make the mistake of making blanket statements like this, but when you bring the lives of billions of people globally into the picture, including over one billion peasant farmers, you see these statistics are not being used accurately.

I've already shared that there is a death toll behind every food or product that we buy at the grocery store. But when removing ourselves from these industrial systems and embracing closed-loop natural systems with the Earth – which involves animals – we can actually increase the population and biodiversity of animals through the killing (the cycling) of life. This is how natural systems work without humans – and as much to the contrary of modern humans' belief – how natural systems can work with us as a part of the system. After all, we are animals, too. We came from the earth and we return to the earth just like the rest of the animals. We are not inherently separate and we can embrace our interdependence with these natural cycles of life.

And yes, theoretically, we can do this in a vegan manner, but when you examine humanity on a global level and look deep into our ancestry, that is not what we find. I have yet to find a currently existing, or historically reproducing society on Earth that is strictly vegan and lives in an environmentally sound manner.

To the contrary, when you look at the societies that have lived most harmoniously with Earth and who live the most harmoniously today, you see diets that include some meat or food from animals, and often in substantial amounts.

From what I've seen, most every Indigenous culture has a relationship with eating animals and this was central to their relationship with the land. I believe in and honor Indigenous lifeways and foodways past and present. I believe in

their current wisdom and ancient wisdom. As much as mainstream society believes Indigenous people are people of the past, this is false. They are people of the present practicing their lifeways across Turtle Island and all around the globe. As much as many 21st-century vegans believe, their modern knowledge does not supersede Indigenous wisdom.

The land where I grew up is Anishinaabe land. Although the current generations have lost much of their knowledge of their traditional ways due to colonization and genocide, they have never stopped holding a deep relationship with the land and still practice much of their traditional lifeways today. I am fortunate to be a part of the Anishinaabe foodways through my Anishinaabe friends and colleagues. In these foodways that have continuously existed for many, many generations, the eating of plants and the eating of animals is not separate. They are inseparable. My firm belief is that if we are to have a habitable future as humanity on this Earth, it will come by listening to and embracing the practices of Indigenous people, not the modern science that has created laboratory meats and exists dependent upon the industrialization of our food.

What these Indigenous communities had and many still have is connection. Connection to their food, and connection to the animals.

### **Vegans Return to the Land**

There has been a very common theme that I’ve seen over the last decade of being involved in the movement of people trying to live more harmoniously. That is a desire for reconnection with Earth and the animals and to live on the land.

What I’ve seen is that when people move closer to the land to live more sustainably, more often than not they find themselves working with animals. Ecological agriculture, permaculture, regenerative farming and Indigenous foodways work with animals in their systems and typically involve eating animals, eggs and/or dairy. I’ve met many vegans who have left the cities to live on a farm or homestead and, much to their surprise, realized that it made sense to eat meat, eggs and/or dairy. Not because they were craving the meat, but because it was the way to produce food in the most environmentally sensitive manner, that utilized natural resources (or gifts) to the fullest extent, and therefore, caused the least animal suffering in the bigger picture. At the same time as there are many people converting to veganism, there may be just as many vegans converting to raising animals, hunting, or sourcing meat, eggs and dairy from within their local community of farmers, gardeners, fishers and hunters.

What I’ve generally seen over the last seven years is that once people gain a deeper connection to the earth, by becoming deeply part of a variety of cycles

of life – not separate from them – veganism no longer seems to hold the moral high ground or to be the most sustainable option for them.

People are realizing that it's not just what we eat, but what we eat eats, too. Meat, eggs and dairy from a factory is wildly different from animals that spend their lives on the land eating directly from the land. Not only is this food not detrimental to the human body, but it is a life force for the human body.

What most find is that permaculture, regenerative farming and Indigenous foodways typically do not go hand in hand with strict veganism. On the contrary, they generally exclude one another, because these systems do not function without the animals being an integral part of the system, both on the farm, in the field and on the plate.

What they realize is that when they learned about the problems of factory farming, they hadn't fully explored the alternatives of relating to animals, because the sources they learned from completely left these alternatives out of the conversation, or entirely wrote these options off. They realize that the viewpoint that there is no harmonious alternative to factory farming is a view that can only be held through a lack of holistic education and understanding of our biological cycles and food systems. It becomes incredibly clear the factory farming of animals is not the same as the local, ecological farming or hunting of animals. And when one starts to explore not just their community, but communities across the nation, they find that these alternatives are widely out there. In fact, in many areas it is easier to find regenerative beef than it is to find regenerative vegetables.

Once freed from the mindset of compartmentalization, through feeling connected with their ecosystem, they realize that it makes sense to scrutinize our fruits and vegetables, grains and legumes and vegan vitamins, supplements and fake meats just as much as we scrutinize our meat, dairy and eggs. Through this big picture lens, they no longer feel that grocery store veganism provides the comfortable place at the dinner table that they once thought, as it does not promote the humane treatment of Earth after all.

Going vegan does not solve the issue of control of our food by megacorporations who have power over Washington, via lobbyists and a revolving door of Big Ag representatives turned politicians turned back to Big Ag representatives.

So what does solve the problem? Local food grown and raised by small and medium-sized farms, practicing regenerative and ecological agriculture. Growing our own food at home and in our communities. Right relationships to the land through foraging, hunting and animal stewardship. Animals, plants and humans working together across all of these means of food production.

Whole foods that need no ingredient list or marketing and little explanation because they are simply one ingredient. Those ingredients then turned into only slightly more complex foods by local artisans, bakers, herbalists, cheesemakers, butchers and chefs. These skilled people having a connection to both the producer of the food supplied to them and the consumer of the food they make it for. Transparency and community involvement throughout the process. And a movement that is dedicated to self observation, critical thinking, nonviolent communication and community building.

All of this together is what takes away maximal power from factory farming and Big Ag and puts it back into the hands of the people who will take care of the animals, take care of the environment and take care of the community. Strengthening the systems, day by day, year after year, creating a positive feedback loop in the growth of resilient, regenerative food systems, that take the place of Big Ag and the factory farming of animals completely!



## Take Action!

### Eating Meat in Harmony with Earth

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Need more education on the truth of factory farming of animals? Start with Food & Water Watch's Farm vs. Factory website: [farmvsfactory.org](http://farmvsfactory.org) and the [foodprint.org](http://foodprint.org) website.

Don't stop there! Educate yourself on the holistic ways to raise animals through regenerative agriculture, ecological agriculture, hunting and traditional ecological knowledge. Here are a few resources to get started: Watch "The Biggest Little Farm" for an inspirational introduction to regenerative farming. Explore the Regeneration International, Weston A. Price Foundation and Rodale Institute websites for knowledge on regenerative agriculture. Listen to Will Harris of White Oak Pastures on episode #1893 of the Joe Rogan Experience. Read *The Compassionate Hunter's Guidebook* by Miles Olson.

What can you do to eat meat in a way that is in harmony with Earth, your local ecosystems and the animals you share the region with?

Find a balance and eat within the means of your ecosystem and what your body really needs. Eat a balance of nourishing veggies, fruits, grains and nuts, along with food from animals, if you have access.

Purchase from farmers practicing regenerative agriculture. Pasture-raised chicken and turkey, grass-fed beef and pastured pork are common to find at many farmers' markets along with eggs from chickens and milk, cheese and yogurt from cows, sheep or goats raised on pasture. Besides the farmers' markets, there are many opportunities to buy directly at the farm and many do deliver as well or offer these foods through CSAs. Visit the farm, be a part of the animal raising and butchering process, if possible. At Joel Salatin's Polyface Farm you can see the chickens being processed right out in the open.

Raise animals yourself. Backyard chickens for eggs is one of the easiest places to start.

Use the whole animal. Get to know the nose-to-tail movement. Eat the organs. The heart, liver, kidney and tongue are four of the most common organs to eat. Make chicken broth with the chicken carcass. Make bone broth from the bones of mammals. Make fish broth from the head and the whole body. Pressure can cartilaginous fish to break down the bones and eat it all. Eat the eggs of any

fish that you harvest. Take it to the next level and make clothes, tools and other items from the skin and bones. Earthskills Gatherings are a great place to learn these skills.

Salvage wasted parts of animals from farmers, hunters and processors. Bones for bone broth are the easiest to find. Organ meats are common and are more nutritionally dense than the prized meat cuts. Organ meats have traditionally been the most important part of the animal for many cultures. If there's a local market for it, they might sell these items, but in many places they give it away for free.

Eat “invasives.” What I mean by this is to harvest or source species that have been introduced from other ecosystems and are outcompeting the native animals and causing destruction to the ecosystem. In this way, eating meat isn't only done sustainably, but can be an ecosystem service, contributing to habitat restoration and quality of life for the plants and animals native to that land. In Florida, for example, there are wild boar, iguanas, and lionfish, to name a few.

Eat low on the food chain. Animals that reproduce in large quantities and are low on the food chain are much more sustainable to harvest, like mullet in Florida. Suckers, carp and bullheads in Wisconsin are other examples.

Learn what animals are reproducing out of the environment's carrying capacity and in abundance and hunt them. This includes deer in many regions of the country.

Eat animals that are a nuisance in the garden as part of an organic gardening practice, like squirrels, groundhogs, deer and rabbits. In permaculture, we say to turn the problem into the solution!

Eat the animals that other people don't want to eat. In US English, we have the absurd term “trash fish.” Not surprisingly, these fish are often delicacies in other countries and are often found in abundance. Mullet, ladyfish, jacks and sail catfish in Florida; and bullhead, rock bass, suckers and carp in Wisconsin. I have found no correlation in desirability between what is prized by the dominator society and what is hated by them. It's just a matter of knowing how to prepare it. Learn from other cultures!

Go “vulture fishing” like my friend Andy Firk does on the Florida piers. He shows up with a cooler, sets it in a central location on the pier and walks around to each of the fishermen and shares that they can put any fish in there that they

wouldn't keep. You can also show up at the local marina at fish cleaning time and take home large quantities of fish bodies to make fish stock.

Harvest animals hit by cars. In Wisconsin alone, 20,000 deer are killed by cars each year. I have many friends who were formerly vegan who eat deer that are hit by cars. In fact, I've had numerous vegan friends say that meat from a car-killed deer is the most truly vegan thing they'd ever eaten! See *How to Harvest a Car-Killed Deer* in the Empowerment Manual for guidance.

As far as buying meat at the supermarket, I don't feel comfortable providing much advice. I need to be closer to the source. However, my recommendation is to do your due diligence when selecting – use critical thought and don't simply trust the labels – and use the guidelines I've shared through the Take Action pages of this book.

## Chapter 11

# Food is Growing Freely and Abundantly All Around Us

What brought me to Wisconsin was the foraging. Not just any foraging though. There was one plant in particular that drew me to Wisconsin more than any other. It is a “weed” that most of my fellow Wisconsinites never think twice about, and many have never even noticed. But, perhaps if they had a childhood similar to mine, they might remember a particular smell that wafted up as they cut through the park on their way to school or as they tramped through a friend’s scrappy yard while playing backyard football. They may not have even realized exactly where this unique and pleasant smell was coming from. I knew the plant, but I didn’t know its name. I now know it as the pineapple weed.

This plant of my childhood returned to me as I was researching foraging to begin this project. I was seeking out sources from nature that could satisfy every need that I was currently satisfying from the supermarket. One such need was a nighttime tea that would help me to fall asleep on those nights where I was feeling stressed or anxious. In the past, chamomile tea had been my grocery store solution. I had already long given up on things like sleeping pills and energy drinks, but the grocery store was still my primary source for needs such as a bedtime relaxant. I was not excited to give up chamomile and I learned that it didn’t grow particularly well in hot climates like Florida. The very thought of not having my chamomile to calm my anxious days was creating anxiety in the moment!

And then I came upon it, the pineapple weed! It was on a foraging website that I was frequently visiting, [eattheweeds.com](http://eattheweeds.com), and I learned that it is a wild relative of chamomile. I read that it provides the same relaxing benefit as chamomile and even tasted similar, too. I had to find it! I was fortunate enough to have the creator of that very website hosting monthly foraging classes just ten miles from my home. During one of his plant walks, I asked him about this plant in more detail. He said pineapple weed could indeed be found in the area, but from the sounds of it, it was not in the abundance here that it was in my childhood homeland.

I’ve since learned that there are hundreds, maybe even thousands of plants around the world that can be made into tea for relaxing, but I don’t think I was after just any relaxing tea. I was after my childhood. I was after a smell that brought me back in time to when I had barely a worry in the world and

all the time in the day to be free. I was craving the comfort of familiarity. The pineapple weed would be my portal out of the busy city of Orlando where I was feeling overwhelmed and anxious from the never ending leaf blowers, lawnmowers, weed whackers, drag racers, garbage trucks, one of the busiest airports in the United States, another local airport two miles away and daily emergency and news helicopters. I'll be honest, I also needed to get out of the Central Florida summer heat.

The escape aside, I wanted to revisit the land that raised me. I now had a new set of lenses to look through and I wanted to apply these lenses to the land where I spent my formative years.

As a child, I did a little bit of foraging. Raspberries, blackberries and blueberries were part of life for many of us children. I took the occasional bite from a sour crab apple and spit it out. I think I knew that dandelion leaves were edible, but I don't recall if I ever ate one. I also fished, but mostly that was for fun and I let most of the fish go. Once my dad brought me into an abandoned apple orchard, where we picked some apples, and that memory has lasted a lifetime. I'll never forget the day he showed me a plum tree on the edge of a friend's property and we ate them right off the tree, or when we accidentally hit a grouse with his car and stopped at the next campground to cook it over a fire and eat it for lunch.

I certainly had more experience eating off the land than many people I know. But for the most part, I realized as I learned to forage in Florida, that I had spent nearly two-and-a-half decades of my life walking and driving past the plants that could provide me with food and medicine. All while I walked to the Taco John's for Taco Tuesday as a child and drove through the McDonald's drive through for the dollar menu once I had my license. It was now time to revisit the plants of my childhood, including the pineapple weed.

There were many people who saw me escaping from the Florida summer who thought I was going to take a vacation to eat pizza with my family. Yes, this would serve as a vacation from the city, and I was going to visit my family and yes, there even was pizza. But as I sat at the table with my family, the glorious smell of pizza entering my nostrils, I ate my own 100 percent homegrown and foraged meal, while they ate their pizza. This trip posed a whole new challenge, existing without a garden. I was leaving behind the security of my established gardens for the insecurity of no garden and a land that I was unfamiliar with as far as sustaining myself.

Some would see this as potential for disaster, but to prepare for this trip I worked morning until night for the weeks prior – gardening, foraging and preserving food – until I almost forgot what it was like to relax. Flying would not be an option, not with the multiple coolers and duffel bags full of food

that I had. Instead, I found a ride with someone heading that way (one of the Gardens for Single Moms recipients actually) and I strapped a cargo bag on the roof of her already filled Prius. I packed 120,000 calories, enough to live off for around two months at 2,000 calories per day. I brought 17 pounds of flour made from cassava, yam, coconut and green banana, seven pounds of coconut flakes, 10 pounds of dried beans, six pounds of dried fruits, 70 pounds of yam, a gallon of honey, plentiful dried herbs and spices and large amounts of fresh fruits and vegetables. Not to mention the nearly two pounds of moringa powder, my homemade multivitamin. It was not a complete diet, enough to survive but certainly not enough to thrive, and that is where the foraging and fishing would come in. I was ready.

The trip to Wisconsin was long, a car full of two kids, not exactly happy for the road trip. I made matters worse through the malfunctioning car-bag that broke the seal on the doors and allowed water to come pouring in when the skies opened up on us in Georgia from the bands of a tropical storm coming off the Gulf of Mexico. I ate both for sustenance and comfort the whole way to Chicago. That is where I spent the week in my aunt's 23<sup>rd</sup> story apartment building and that is where the foraging began.

The first place I looked for food was not the trees, but rather the internet, particularly an app called Falling Fruit. I was amazed that there are thousands of entries for the area, including more fruit trees than I could ever visit during my week in the city. It was so easy, it almost felt like cheating.

Walking the concrete jungle of Chicago, a city packed full of millions of people, I found food growing abundantly. Within the first few days, I found mulberries, serviceberries, some sort of cherry, apples, lamb's quarters, plantago, sorrel, dandelion, clover and black walnuts. That was just scratching the surface! I was not familiar with most of the edibles in the region yet and I had plenty of food with me from Florida, so that was what I found just by going on casual foraging outings within a few miles of my aunt's downtown apartment.

Out on a walk with my aunt, we came across a fruit that I've never once seen at a supermarket and rarely if ever at a farmer's market. Some people have confused it as a blackberry and have even called it a blackberry tree. But blackberries don't grow on trees and these berries are much sweeter. Do you know what it is yet?

Mulberry is one of the most common fruit trees growing in much of the United States and they can be quite the treat. This scrappy tree was growing in an abandoned lot, but the branches of this tree were far from abandoned. They were absolutely loaded with fruit! We gorged on the fresh, sweet berries and I returned to the apartment with purple hands and feet and a satiated belly.

Although I was quickly finding an abundance of foods I was familiar

with, there were so many more foods I wanted to learn. My next steps included checking out some regional foraging books at the library and purchasing a few books at a local bookstore. This would do until I could meet up with some local knowledgeable foragers.

After a week in Chicago, we packed up my aunt's car with my 100,000+ calories and gear. I had my mind set on apples, pears, plums, berries, greens, mushrooms, fish and deer and I was confident that my homeland would provide.

*7/21/19 (Day 253) I went blueberry foraging with my family. I foraged blueberries (abundant), serviceberries (abundant), raspberries (very few), wintergreen leaf and berry, a few unidentified berries (perhaps wild cherry) and I saw an abundance of hickory nuts. I found a super abundant cherry tree on a public median near the house. Very tasty! I learned that the chestnut trees I've been seeing and excited to harvest from are the inedible horse chestnuts.*

*Apples are quite a ways out. It seems like at least a month.*

*7/22/19 (Day 254) I'm discovering many plum trees in the corridor but they are not yet ripe. It looks to be at least one month out until harvest time.*

*A lot of raspberries along the lake shore.*

*Blueberries at the park behind the police station are ripening, but most are still white. I'd say they are a bit over a week from peak harvest time. I'm finding serviceberries and pin cherries along the lake path.*

*7/23/19 Day (255) I picked raspberries by the lake with Rebecca, Louise and Levi.*

*7/25/19 (Day 257) A fellow forager that I met while out riding my bike showed me his lobster mushroom and chicken of the woods spot, but we had no luck. He took me to his chanterelle spot and we harvested three pounds or so in an hour. The best mushroom foraging of my life!*

*I went to a blueberry spot and did well.*

*7/28/19 (Day 260) I drove to ReWildU with April and foraged greens with Kenton Whitman and his family. I learned a half dozen or so new green plants to eat and I ate about 15 different greens. It felt so great to have these fresh tastes in my mouth after eating mostly dried foods for the last couple weeks. I really want to start eating fresh greens daily. The smell and taste of balsam and balsam sap brought me such joy.*

8/02/19 (Day 265) *I've already learned more than 30 new plant species from my guide books, spending time with locals and remembering some knowledge that is ingrained in me from childhood that I forgot was there. It's been a beautiful feeling to easily connect with these plants. Some would call this an intuitive connection to the plants. But I believe this intuition is simply a connection to knowledge within me that I was previously unable to clearly access.*

*Today I am reflecting on how just two years ago I knew very little about foraging. Now anywhere I go I'm able to identify many plants around me. I'm so thirsty for the plant knowledge surrounding me.*

8/06/19 (Day 269) *I found my first ripe apple tree of the season. The sidewalk was littered with ten gallons of them. I'm elated for the first apples of the year. They are ripe even a bit earlier than I had expected. I'm feeling confident that I will have the fruit that I need for the rest of my time here now that apples are ripe. Apples are so much of an easier sustenance food than berries.*

8/09/19 (Day 272) *I found two more dropping apple trees with 100+ on the ground. It's becoming apple time!! Baked apples will be amazing. I am excited to try drying them, too.*

8/22/19 (Day 285) *I went mushroom foraging and harvested some boletes and hedgehogs. This was my first time harvesting hedgehogs. The forest was so full of mushrooms. It was a magical scene. I'm certain there were many edibles that I don't yet know how to identify.*

8/24/19 (Day 287) *I made applesauce for the first time. It was incredible. I will need to make a LARGE batch of this.*

*I collected mushrooms with Tom and harvested 12 pounds of chanterelles and lobsters.*

9/10/19 (Day 304) *I walked around La Crosse and revisited my university while foraging for food that I walked past my entire four years of college. I collected a bounty of aronia. I found two apple trees within eyesight of the house I lived in senior year.*

9/15/19 (Day 309) *I went foraging with Dane at Devil's lake. I found my first ever chicken of the woods and comb tooth mushroom (similar to lion's mane).*



9/16-9/17/19 (Days 310-311) *I went foraging with Andy Gricevich, a local and highly knowledgeable forager. He introduced me to many new foods as well as some I've recently learned. Honewort (leaves), sow thistle (leaves), cow parsnip (leaves), sochan (leaves), Solomon's plume (berries), curly dock (leaves), hackberry, pheasant's tail mushroom, hairy wood mint, Virginia waterleaf (leaves), butternut, Echinacea (flower and leaves), mountain ash (berry), wild garlic, garlic mustard, wintercress, catnip, bee balm, stinging nettle, wood violet, oxeye daisy and multiple mints.*

9/20/19 (Day 314) *Today I went mushroom foraging with Blake Weeden, a local mushroom forager and I had the most diverse mushroom experience of my life. We harvested and cooked a large sampling of mushrooms; honey mushrooms, comb tooth, hen of the woods, three species of puffball, shaggy mane, porcini, stinkhorn, cinnabar chanterelle and Suillus.*

My fall diet was quite different from my spring diet in Florida and the diet that sustained me for the summer portion of my time in Wisconsin. My daily meals now consisted of venison or fish at almost every meal along with a variety of mushrooms and fresh wild greens. These meals were flavored with freshly foraged herbs or dried herbs. My dried herb mix from Florida was Italian basil, African blue basil, garlic, garlic chives, green onion and serrano pepper. Sourdough cassava and coconut flour tortillas added a lot of satiation to my lunches and dinners. Southern peas and pigeon peas from Florida were in many of these dishes as well. Apple and pear sauce (often with plum or grape juice mixed in) accompanied many meals and was a consistent pleasant snack. I snacked on fresh apples, pears and plums, roasted Seminole pumpkin seeds and drank wild grape and aronia juice. Elderberry syrup was an almost daily medicine and deer bone broth fueled me on many days. After dinner, I had blended frozen mango topped with coconut flakes and honey for dessert but I finished off that supply of food from Florida in very early fall. Apple crisp (baked apples with honey and coconut/green banana flour) kept me company on more than a few nights. Morning and evening tea was quite consistent. Foraged nettle, goldenrod, bee balm and mint were common teas as well as my mixes from Florida: yaupon holly, lemongrass, holy basil, mint for my morning tea and holy basil, chamomile, lemon grass for my evening tea.

During my time in Wisconsin, I foraged over 100 species of plants and mushrooms and achieved my goal of growing and foraging over 250 different species this year of greens, herbs, fruits, berries, mushrooms, herbs and more. I reflected on the amount of knowledge that requires. Can you imagine? From

learning how to identify, to going out and harvesting, to preparation and eating. And I knew almost none of this when I started. No wonder it's been a busy year!

Arriving in Wisconsin in mid-summer, I struggled to find the abundance I was hoping for at first. Mid-summer is the least productive time for a lot of food, especially greens and veggies. Even with the initial abundance, at first it was really hard being in a new place during the peak of summer, but I got into the flow and late summer and fall really opened up the abundance.

Many people have stated that I could only accomplish this year because I was in Florida. But on the contrary I experienced abundance here unlike what I ever came across in Florida. Yes, Florida has food growing year around, but what the colder climates lack in year-round growing, they make up for in abundance spring through fall. In fact, I have come to believe that I could achieve this with more ease in colder climates than in Florida. The key is simply to make best use of the growing season and preserve the bounty to last through the year until the bounty returns.

One of the main purposes of this undertaking was to deeply immerse myself in food and gain a more extensive connection to my source of life. It is safe to say that it has been a success so far. Today, I would feel confident going for a walk almost anywhere in the United States and being able to forage a delicious and nutritious selection of food. I couldn't have said that just a year ago!

I wanted to stay. I felt such a connection to my homeland like I had never felt before. It had been 14 years since I left Ashland at the age of 19 and I had never been back for more than a week since then. But now, I had rewritten my relationship with the land. I had connected to so many plants and created dozens of new healing relationships, but there were so many plants that I still wanted to get to know.

I had reconnected to the plants of my childhood and the land that made me. I had found the pineapple weed that beckoned me from afar. When I cupped it in my hands, eyes closed and took in a deep breath, the stress melted inside of me. The scent was the same, but it had taken on a new meaning. Yet, for all I knew, as long as I kept my eyes closed and the plant close to my face, it could have been 1996 again.

*I am filled with some grief leaving here. It has been such an incredible stay. People here are friendly. Life is slower. The air is incredibly pure. The water is so fresh and revitalizing. I am so grateful that Northern Wisconsin and Lake Superior are in my roots. I am so thankful for all of the people here who welcomed me, especially Tom Nutt. We had not met before I arrived, but we spent many, many days together over this summer on the lake, in the woods,*

*and in his garage processing the bounties we harvested. He taught me so much and took me in like family.*

*I am not alone in this and I absolutely couldn't do it without the help and experience of so many people.*

*I would not be here today without the help of dedicated foragers across the world. Their knowledge and their decades of passion are the foundation that has allowed me to be here. I give thanks to them and to all the humans who inhabited this land long before us and to whom this knowledge ultimately comes from.*

*I am healthy and happy and I'm leaving here with many jars full of food for the travels ahead. The woods and the lakes, the sun and the rain, all of the elements came together to provide my body with the necessities of life. I am harvesting and eating with gratitude.*

*I have left Lake Superior behind, but the water I drank from it is still coursing through my veins.*

*Thus I am Lake Superior. My skin cells, my fallen hair, what was my body days ago is now Lake Superior. Thus Lake Superior is me.*

*Today, I look back at my time here with great satisfaction. I swam in pure bodies of water nearly every day. From Lake Superior, to tiny ponds and trout streams, to powerful waterfalls, the water cleansed me daily. The lush forests, the fresh air, the plants and the animals nourished me deeply, both physically and mentally. I took in all of the elements from the simplest of smells to the warm breeze after coming out of a brisk water. I yearned to know the plants that grew by my side for my early years. I satiated that yearning by learning and eating over 50 new species of plants, most of which I walked by completely clueless for two decades.*

*When I arrived, I was about eight months into the immersion and I was feeling a bit deficient. Today, I leave revitalized, with just 40 days left in the year.*

I have been immersed in food my whole life. There may have been no time where I was more drawn to food than in my formative years as a child on these same lands that I spent the last few months foraging on.

But my connection to food was quite different then. Much of my early connection to food was through the advertisements I saw on TV, the cartoons on boxes in the supermarket, the prizes that could buy my happiness or even make me a millionaire, and the promises of the body that I yearned for, as taught to me by mainstream society. I was an advocate for the Pillsbury doughboy and LOVED his products. I collected all the points I could from the dinner rolls to proudly earn my Doughboy T-shirt. Above all other sodas, I drank Sprite, because under each bottle cap there were points, enough to earn me a sweater, like so many of the cool kids were wearing. McDonald's was my fast food of choice, especially during Monopoly season when each fries, hash browns, or drink was an opportunity for me to become a millionaire. And then, of course, there was the Teenie Beanie Marathon era of my life. Our freezer was stuffed with Happy Meals and we gave dozens to friends, because we couldn't eat enough McDonald's to satisfy our need for the Beanie Babies! It was never enough. And it never could be enough.

As much as I felt that I was part of something, in truth I was living a life of separation, of disconnection. While the advertisements and packages promised a better life, everything I needed was outside of my door. But there was a real good reason I didn't know this. There were people who didn't want me to know.

They didn't want me to know that plants for food were growing abundantly and that the Earth didn't charge a penny for them. They had food to sell me.

They didn't want me to know that plants can provide all the medicines for every ailment. They had pharmaceuticals to sell me.

They didn't want me to know that the Earth could provide for me with every need I had. Because then I wouldn't need their products.

They wanted me to fear the Earth, so that they could easily rationalize destroying it.

This disconnection started in childhood, but it went far beyond. In Scouts, all through my teens, even as we camped 12 months of the year, we went TO nature. We weren't part of it.

In university, I majored in biology, the study of life. We learned all about how the Earth worked, how the many ecosystems worked. We learned about all sorts of plants and animals. But there was one animal that was different. The human animal. We were separate.

The central theme through all of this is that we were not only different, we were better. We were the most special of them all. And because of this, we got what we wanted. We got to control the plants and decide which were “good” and which were “bad”. We got to decide how many fish would be in the river, how many deer in the forest. We got to decide if there were too many wolves and bears. We controlled it all.

As a separate entity, although industry was allowed to destroy nature for our needs, we as individuals did not belong as part of it. All too frequently, if we were to want to eat the plants that grew out there, we were deemed irresponsible and reckless. *What if everyone wanted to eat the plants*, mainstream society would say, *then we would kill them all*.

As individuals, we could enter nature, but we must leave it *exactly* as we found it. This is the story that has been going on in dominator societies for multiple generations. Much of this story was ingrained in me, through my childhood, my teens, into my twenties and even as I started to see through the narrative that I was separate, much of it still stayed with me.

If there is one thing that dissolves this narrative, it is foraging. The illusion of separateness is quite easy to maintain, as long as we remain separate. Over my first five years of shifting my life, I made hundreds of changes and the separation was certainly fading. But still, I was, for the most part, living separate from Earth. My house was built of all industrially manufactured materials. My clothes were made in a factory. Where the materials came from, I had no idea. My food, for the most part, all came from a store, and even if from the farmer’s market, I had never been to the farm. My water, although not from a bottle, still came from a faucet, and from where before it arrived in my faucet? And, of course, my energy. I sure didn’t have much connection to it. And yet, the narrative was dissolving: as I started composting and seeing my food scraps turn into compost that nourished my food; as I canceled the flush toilet and composted my own poop and saw that turn into the richest soil I’d ever seen with no unpleasant smell at all; as I grew some of my own food and saw the miracle of soil, water, seeds and air turn into food on my plate. But I still chose when and where exactly those plants would grow. I was still the chooser.

But with foraging it is different. Each plant is growing on its own accord, independent of my existence. Along with that plant, thousands of other species of plants, animals, fungi and bacteria, are interacting in their own dance of life. And then I come along. At first, just with a desire to use it. I’m looking for some sweet berries. I’m looking for something to add some flavor to my meal. I’m looking for a hearty harvest to fill my dinner plate. I’m looking for medicine because the cold season is coming.

But every forager can tell you that as you go looking for any of these things, and if you come back enough times, you find so much more.

As you harvest the first greens of the season and feel the life coming back into your body after a period of winter depression.

As you see the raspberries peaking up in the spring, and you yearn day after day, week after week for their sweetness of summer. And after months of anticipation you taste them, with vibrancy unlike anything that the supermarket provides.

As you come back next year to that same loquat tree and the memories of your last loquat with your loving partner flood back into your heart space.

As you put your hands in the soil and you feel your depression alleviate.

As the nettle stings you and your tingling skin reminds you that you are ALIVE.

As you harvest the mushrooms and you realize that just the smell of them rising from the soil gets you high on life.

As you harvest the plant medicines that cure your cold or flu and you feel gratitude for their gift to you.

As you start to live your life based on the life cycles of the plants, rather than the weekly sales of the market.

The separateness dissolves.

You realize you are a part of each of these plants.

Season after season, experience after experience, you build a relationship with these plants.

You are IN relationship with these plants.

And then it all changes more. Because you want to nurture these relationships. You want to give back to what gives to you. You want to learn what the plant needs to thrive, yes, so that you can enjoy more of it, but also because you love the plant. We love what we know. We love what nurtures us.

We fear what we don't know. Too often we hate what we don't understand.

Even the plants that we have been taught to despise, new relationships and connections are formed that replace the dominator narratives we formerly held onto.

After 34 years of calling it Poison Ivy, it is now Sister Ivy or Guardian Ivy.

After cursing the burs of the Burdock plant, I now am grateful for the food and medicine that its roots provide.

After calling the plants "weeds" and going along with society's beliefs that they deserve to be destroyed, I now cherish them as some of the most medicinal and nutritionally dense plants in the garden, as well as healers of our hurting Earth.

After labeling plants as “invasive,” I now think and speak more gently of these relatives and know that they mean no harm. They are this way because of humans’ unbalanced interactions with Earth. They don’t deserve any hatred. How can I work with them as food and medicine and reduce their population and make room for the native plants that have been outcompeted by them?

This is what is called reciprocity. When we are no longer separate. When we are no longer just takers. When we become both the taker and the giver, in balance with the plants. We learn what the plants need and we give it to them. We learn how much of themselves they can share with us and we take only that. We learn when it is the right time to harvest them and when not to. We learn the plants that are in jeopardy and we admire and nurture them and harvest only if it supports their population. We learn the plants that exist in such abundance that we can eat them as gifts as much as we desire.

We learn to work WITH the Earth, not against her.

It is no longer theoretical that the Earth can provide me with everything I need. I can feel it inside of me. The narrative of separateness has completely dissolved. I know with certainty that I don’t need their fast foods. I do not need their packaged supplements and multivitamins. I know in my heart that convenience doesn’t create lasting happiness. My yearnings will never be satisfied from what they want to sell me. I know this not just theoretically, but through experience. I feel it in my being.

And you know what, I didn’t discover a thing. As much as food megacorporations don’t want us to know it, this is what we’ve always known. It is innate in us and as soon we return to the land as our source of life, we return to being a part of it.

As I come to know that these plants are our teachers, I now grasp that there have been countless cultures that have always lived in this way, connected to the plants, even considering them relatives. Through a life of reciprocal relationships, they have lived as part of the Earth and many still are today. I now see that they’ve been telling us this all along. But most of us have not been listening. I certainly was not. Were you?

I am now listening. And I now believe that our best chance to move forward as humanity is to listen to what the Indigenous people desire to share and transform our ways of thinking, speaking and being with plants, animals, each other and Earth. This I believe you will find, too, if you come to the plants as your teachers and relatives and honor the people who fostered these relationships to make them possible for you today.

## Take Action!

### Start Foraging – Top Tips for Beginners

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After reading that, you might be feeling ready to get out foraging. I know I felt that way just writing it! But in a society of separation, how do you get started?

There's a lot of fear. Many of you might be wondering, how did I eat all these new plants and not die? It's a common thought, which is apparent when you see that the world's most watched forager, Alexis Nikole Nelson @blackforager, ends most every video with "Happy foraging, don't die!"

I'll share with you how you "don't die" when foraging as well as how to avoid potential contaminants.

There's also the worry of getting ticketed or arrested for foraging, as I wrote in my journal at the beginning of my preparation for the year:

*1/06/18 On my first plant walk I learned that foraging is illegal.*

*FORAGING is illegal. My well being, my success, my existence, for the next year is illegal!*

Well, I learned that it is not so illegal after all. I'll share with you about that.

But then you still may be concerned about how to ensure you are not a taker, but also a giver. I'll help you with this.

Okay, now you are pretty sure you aren't going to die, or get arrested and you feel some confidence that you can be a friend to the plants. But if you've been going to the grocery store for years, you might be a little confused about where to go to start this new found passion. I've got you.

And even then, now that you have an idea of where you are going to go, you might be concerned about how you are going to look at the wall or carpet of green, and pick out which of the greens to eat. You'll still have to do some deciphering, but I've got some real helpful tips for you. And I've made an extra section for all the folks who live in the city and want to make sure that they don't accidentally infringe on their neighbor's fruit tree.

And okay, that didn't tell you exactly which plants to eat, so I've even shared my top 50 wild edibles to get to know first.

One last thing. You want to eat A LOT of wild food? I share my experience of doing just that, narrowed down into some top tips. All of this is in the Empowerment Manual.



### **My Top Foraging Tips**

Go out with a forager in your area who knows the plants. There are many teachers who offer classes and many foragers who are happy to have a friend to walk in the woods with. Use [findaforager.com](http://findaforager.com) to find a forager near you!

Don't over-complicate it. "Foraging" is a cool word for saying "eating food." Humans have been eating wild plants for tens of thousands of years and you can, too.

Start where you are. This could be your yard, your garden or a park down the street. Just get started!

Start with one plant. You only need to know one plant to eat one plant – like dandelion. Some people think they need to learn all the toxic plants before eating one, but that is not the case.

Eat the weeds. Start with the easily identified, widespread, common plants. "Weeds" are a minimally intimidating place to start. There are many that you likely already know but just didn't know are edible.

Learn one new plant at a time. If you learn one plant per month for a year, that's 12 plants. In just one year, with very little time commitment you could have 12 new plant friends that you work with as food and medicine. If you are super dedicated, you could learn one new plant per week for a year, that's 52 plants. Within a year, you'll be the plant wizard of your community. *Botany Every Day* with Marc Williams can support this practice!

If you use social media, follow foragers to keep foraging on your mind. I highly recommend Sam Thayer, Linda Black Elk, Alexis Nikole Nelson and Eric Joseph Lewis.

Get a foraging book for your region. Samuel Thayer's book series: *The Forager's Harvest*, *Nature's Garden* and *Incredible Wild Edibles* are my top choice.

Attend a foraging gathering to make foraging friends. Midwest Wild Harvest Festival, Great Lakes Foragers Gathering, Mycofest, Pawpaw Fest and Earthskills Gatherings are great opportunities to deepen your foraging skills. The Woodstore, Weeds, and Wildwoods Wisdom Walk with Doug Elliott at Firefly Gathering in Asheville, North Carolina is an absolute joy, and this gathering as a whole has changed the lives of many of my colleagues and friends! It is worth the trip to become a part of this community.

## Chapter 12

### Community and Biodiversity at the Center

I arrived home to a jungle of food!

After nearly three months without a garden, it was such a blessing to have a bounty of food growing right outside my doorstep. I came home to racks of bananas in the sky, piles of sweet potatoes in the ground and herbs and greens at every level in between.

Nature kept working all the time I was away. The sun shined, feeding all things green in the garden. The rain fell, keeping the soil moist and watering the plants. The bees visited the flowers for pollen and nectar, pollinating my flowers in the process. And, of course, the interns were fantastic stewards and ate much of the bounty all summer long!

*10/05/19 (Day 329) I have just over five weeks left and it looks like I'll largely be able to coast in with this bounty of food that lies before me. No need to stay up until late hours of the night preserving food. No need to stock up for the future. I will simply be eating fresh food straight from the garden and from nature's pantry for the weeks to come.*

You may be wondering how I made the long trip back to Florida from Wisconsin. From Chicago, I boarded the Amtrak train, for a 38-hour ride through the eastern and southern United States. Certainly I was the only one eating homegrown and foraged food for the entire ride! The day before, I cooked up a large pot of food in a crock pot/pressure cooker. At each meal, I plugged it into an outlet and I had a hot meal ready to enjoy in just a few moments. Some of the Amish folk took a real interest in my hot dish! Venison, mushrooms, greens and herbs stewed together and thickened with yuca/coconut flour and then topped with apple, pear, wild grape sauce! I also managed to drink my foraged herbal teas each morning and night by filling my jar with hot water at the cafe and to take my daily medicine of elderberry syrup. As smooth as the ride went, getting my luggage on and off the train wasn't as easy. I carried three duffel bags with around 200 pounds of gear and food, including my pressure-canned jars of venison.

Although I didn't need to go foraging now back in Orlando, I was excited to get reacquainted with the plants of the region and to enjoy some fresh tropical fruits after being gone nearly three months. I visited the park where I had found five racks of bananas just before leaving for Wisconsin and found

that all five had ripened and rotted while I was gone. It was a disappointing moment for me to see that nobody had harvested them, amongst a city that ships in millions of bananas from abroad. I harvested grapefruits from Dickinson Azalea Park, which were now back in season, and starfruit from a few blocks down the street. With more exploration in the garden, I confirmed that I'd have what I needed to finish the year, along with catching some fish. Plus, I was confident I could harvest all the wild yam I needed if it did come to it. I re-initiated my intermittent fasting, eating generally from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and fasting for 16 hours from evening until morning.

As much as I was keen to stay in my tiny house with my garden at my doorstep for the month ahead, the universe had other plans for me. On October 15th (Day 339), I dismantled the tiny house and moved out. The house had been reported to code enforcement while I was in Wisconsin and they served Lisa a letter. They knew I was living in it and they wouldn't have it, now that I was in their system. They also saw that my "shed" was not up to code. The options were to either get it up to code and use it as a shed only or to take it down.

When I got word of the notification back in Wisconsin, I did a lot of research and went back and forth. I did originally design the house so that it could get permitted as a shed if needed, but ultimately there were a few minor things that I don't think would have passed. Plus, it would have cost me around \$1,000 to permit, which did not make financial sense for me.

I tried really hard to get an extension until my year would be complete, and fortunately they gave me an extension until I got back, but they wouldn't budge any further than that.

I always knew this could happen. And I didn't hide my home. I had almost every major Orlando media outlet over. My life doesn't conform to all the city codes. I follow Earth Code – living in harmony with Earth and my community of plants and animals – first and foremost. That doesn't always make life easy for me when dealing with the government.

Whenever a difficult situation comes up, I ask myself how I can turn the situation into something positive. So I came up with the idea of donating the tiny house to the Sustainable Kashi community where it would be used in their ecovillage to house volunteers and serve as a classroom. It would get far more use there than in the backyard. Plus, they were already planning to build a tiny house, so this saved them money, time and resources. They, along with some of the dear members of the community, helped me take the house down and move it.

This also helped me to realize I wanted to be somewhere more peaceful for my last couple months and get out of the busy city of Orlando. My time in my homeland inspired me to spend more time in quiet nature.

So that's what I did. I moved into one of the communal houses in the Kashi community. Although I didn't have my gardens with me there, I had community work and media interviews to do in Orlando, so on these visits I harvested fresh produce from my gardens and brought the bounty back with me. And at my new home, I could easily walk to the water to catch fish!

*10/30/19 To whomever reported my tiny house, I have you to thank. Thank you for helping this home fulfill a greater purpose. Thank you for encouraging me to get out of the city and be in a more peaceful place. You have improved my quality of life and that of others too. I harbor no ill feelings to you (or the city), only gratitude and joy.*

The room I stayed in at Kashi was even smaller than my one-room tiny house. It was small because it is part of a community where people share space, which means less time in our rooms. I sat in the communal sitting areas to do my work. I did my cooking in the communal kitchen and used the communal bathrooms as well. All the shared resources meant I didn't need to have all my own. I was grateful that I had fewer chores and work to do because everyone pitched in to make the place function smoothly. I only had to clean the kitchen once each week!

It was so fitting that I finished the months of October and November living in a community, rather than in my tiny house, where I was often all alone. Cooking my meals, eating them, and then cleaning up, all alone. Awake until one in the morning processing my mangoes, all alone. Figuring out how to deal with my problems, all alone. Lost in the sprawl of the big city, a million people within walking distance, yet separated by the concrete and traffic. All alone, together.

All alone, yet together, is how I see US American society. Sure, we have people in our lives – friends, family, classmates, colleagues and more. But most of us are spread so thin that we are not able to fully foster any of these relationships and each of these relationships is so compartmentalized. We have access to seemingly everything, yet most of us are not able to access wholeness within. All alone, within ourselves. There are communities of us across the nation operating like this, separated from one another, going at it all alone. As a nation of these communities combined, the dominator narrative penetrates our society – it's US against THEM! All alone in this world.

I certainly was all alone in the sense that I was the only one that was growing and foraging all of my food. That meant that I had a lot of work on my hands

trying to take on The Big Food System, especially living in Orlando, one of the consumer capitals of the world, where community has been fractured so deeply. Attempting to operate outside of it, while living within it is not an easy task.

So, yes, in my attempt at food self-sufficiency, I was spending 20-80 hours of my life per week on food. Twenty hours were the rare weeks when everything was flowing just right. Forty-to-sixty hours were the most common weeks. But 80 hours was quite common too, when you include all the gardening, foraging and fishing and not just the processing, preserving, storing, cooking, eating and cleaning.

But I can't leave out all these factors that played into those very long weeks: starting the project not knowing what I was doing and having to figure it all out in a short period of time; starting out in a community I was not familiar with; sourcing and accruing all of the tools and materials needed; starting six gardens from scratch and depending on these young undeveloped systems. These were spread out in the community, which I learned was a very inefficient use of my time. Other factors included: lacking some necessary resources to work effectively and efficiently and streamline the processes; doing the work in small batches due to limited space and resources; doing tasks alone that would be so much more effective in a group; continuing to figure out all sorts of processes along the way; and sometimes having nobody to help me when I needed it the most. In summary, I was attempting to do every single job and often with limited knowledge and resources.

And yet, the only reason I was able to accomplish what I did was because of the community that existed around me. All of my seeds and plants came from local nurseries, seed companies and new friends who shared the bounty of their plants; gardeners and farmers taught me how to grow every food that nourished me; foragers and herbalists taught me how to harvest each medicine from the wild that I needed. My gardens were on the land of people who welcomed me onto it, sharing their yards, and, in extension, their homes. Volunteers joined me for chores in my gardens and helped me process my foods. Interns took care of my gardens while I was gone. The community gatherings filled me with hope to continue what I was doing. And all of the knowledge and each of these resources were here because of the communities that came before this one, sharing from one generation to the next.

This truly was a community project.

We don't each have to do it all.

With true community, where we share land and resources, we do each task more efficiently and our yields are greater. We have systems in place that continue from one generation to the next. We have the knowledge to operate these systems, and the tools needed. We have partners to do the otherwise

monotonous tasks with, as we share stories, singing and company. We have support systems that create true security both now and for our future. We have more leisure time for self care and to pursue our higher being. And with this comes community wellbeing, because we take care of each other.

One of my garden interns, Tom Huse, shared his experience of working with community in an email he sent me:

*"I don't have the experience you have had with community support (none, really), but having experienced it a little while working with you, I've started to see the power community has, and how we all become exponential in our abilities through community."*

It used to be the norm to exist as community. In fact, it is only a recent phenomenon that we've lost it. Many are awakening to realize that our current food system is at play in this loss. Through the industrialization and globalization of our food, large-scale farming, patenting and genetic modification of seeds, commodification of staple crops – all wrapped up in corporate control – we have lost community. As a society, we traded in community for cheap, convenient food. But this loss has been no accident. The loss is not just a byproduct of this system. It is part of the system design. And where communities have not made this trade willingly, it has been forced upon them.

With this system, we have received toxic pesticides and herbicides that have poisoned our land, water and people and farmers who are now dependent on the continual use of these products. We have received synthetic fertilizers that have destroyed our soils. We have received GMO seeds, which are used as a weapon against us with extreme corruption, taking away farmers' rights to save and distribute their own seeds. We have gained a small selection of new crops at the loss of the diversity, nutrition and flavor we had always enjoyed. We now have incredible food insecurity with constant crop failures and famines. We have received food contracts with companies that are mercenaries of war. Napalm and Agent Orange, chemicals designed and used in warfare, were manufactured by Dow and Monsanto, who also manufacture the chemical pesticides. Much of the food we receive on our plates is inseparable from war through both these pesticides and the copious amounts of fossil fuels needed from abroad.

And as much as anything else, we have become a disconnected group of people that through our purchases impart cruelty to the people of other communities. The workers spraying our strawberries with pesticides are suffering from cancer and respiratory diseases from pesticide exposure. Over 100,000 peasant farmers have died by suicide in India after GMOs, pesticides and chemical

fertilizers took their power and security away. Low-income Black and Brown communities get the brunt of the suffering with the chemical plants, oil refineries and toxic landfills placed next to their homes. Simply breathing or drinking the water in these communities is often a dangerous act. In Big Ag, none of these externalized costs is accounted for. It is not only paid for by the suffering of many, it is also paid for by taxpaying citizens via billions of dollars of subsidies and the healthcare costs to take care of all the people made sick by industrial agriculture.

A substantial amount of destructive extraction in the US takes place on Indigenous land, almost never with their true consent, but rather through “manufactured consent.” And this is a global pattern, with examples to be shared in every biome and Indigenous community across the world. We know of the Indigenous people of the Amazon who are losing their forests by the millions of acres each year, but there are countless stories of this across every continent. Diverse grain crops have been turned into homogenized commodities that are traded on the stock market, destroying the diversity of grains that has sustained countless cultures for millennia. Thousands of cultures along with their languages and their knowledge for how to live in right relationship with Earth have been lost or nearly lost. Environmental injustice is built in throughout this entire system.

Only a people that have lost connection to their sense of community with our plant and animal relatives could conjure up these systems. Only a people who have lost the sense of community with our global humanity could embrace this way of being. Only a people who no longer see the whole Earth as a living community could continue in this manner. Only a people who have lost the knowledge that they exist as a part of community, not separately, could continue this with no moral qualms.

First, the communities had to be fractured for this corporate control to be let in and then the corporations needed to continue this fracturing of community to keep their grip. That’s the part of the story you won’t read about in the corporate mission statements and on the food packages. Truth.

If we agree to measure our success as a society as solely yield-per-acre and based strictly on the terms of the industrial food system, then their case will sound reasonable and right. But these terms are based on a complete disregard of the lifeways of Earth and our people and the delusion that we can keep up the extraction forever without giving back. Ultimately these narratives from the industrial system are based on a desire to maximize profits at the cost of our global humanity and Earth.

The more I immersed myself in the alternatives to this system and grew my

community around these alternatives, the clearer this all became to me. Day-by-day working alongside my community, the separation mindset was fading as I heard what the gardens meant to members of my community. Jen, one of the Gardens for Single Moms recipients, shared about how connecting and healing it was to have a garden in her front yard. One of the garden recipients explained that the feeling of connection they had with the plants each time they looked out the window literally saved their life as they were suffering from severe depression. People, for the first time in their lives, knocked on a stranger's door (I was the stranger) because they were driving past and just had to ask if I could show them around the frontyard garden. The plants I shared with people became the plants they shared with people, and gardens are thriving that were not there before (I see you Michelle and Rhonda). These gardens and the food that they yielded built community. It became so clear to me that community and biodiversity must be a part of all solutions to overcome the destruction of our ecosystems, the extinctions of our plant and animal relatives and the unnecessary suffering of humanity. All solutions lie in community.

This recent phenomenon of the loss of community at the hands of corporate control is coming to an end. Maybe not for the whole world, but for millions who are choosing to end it. The examples are inspiring, hopeful and bountiful.

Navdanya, in India, has created 150 community seed banks that are freely saving, sharing and breeding their native varieties. Through their network, half-a-million farmers are utilizing over 5,000 varieties of seeds, growing a diversity of food and medicine on millions of acres of farmland, without pesticides, herbicides or chemical fertilizers. Earth, women and farmers are at the center of and lead this movement of protecting and restoring biological and cultural diversity.

Vandana Shiva shares: "More than 3,800 rice varieties have been collected, saved, and conserved. Hundreds of varieties of [grain] crops such as millets, pseudocereals, and pulses, which had been pushed out by the Green Revolution and by growing monocultures, have been conserved and promoted."<sup>8</sup> The ancient grains that cultures have evolved around and depended upon are returning to the people.

In Andhra Pradesh, the farmers of 8,000 villages chose to adopt ecological farming and halt the use of pesticides on nearly three million acres of farmland.<sup>9</sup> The results were improved quality of life for the people and a revitalization of the ecosystems.

In a span of just 20 years, small farmers in Niger "have 'regreened' 12.5 million desolate acres of the country ... through a farmer-managed strategy reviving a centuries-old practice."<sup>9</sup> This form of agroforestry has "enhanced food insecurity for 2.5 million people, or about 16 percent of the population."<sup>9</sup>



The organization Via Campesina represents 200 million small-scale farmers and food producers that have formed into 180 local and national organizations in 80 countries. Alone, individuals are often easy targets by Big Ag, but together peasant farmers have become a global force to be reckoned with. Through organizing, they are protecting themselves and showing that family farm-based sustainable agriculture can feed the planet.

Women are at the forefront of this movement, making up the majority of farmers, seedkeepers and activists in many communities.

Indigenous Seedkeepers Network and Sierra Seeds is a network of seed stewards, seed keepers and seed growers revitalizing and nurturing Indigenous cultural diversity on Turtle Island. Their community seed exchanges bring people together through multigenerational activities carrying on their heritage. These initiatives are putting control of the seeds back into the hands of the community while restoring diversity and resilience.

Seed libraries are popping up across the US and the world. Napa County Seed Library is a mother-daughter seed library in Northern California that is one of many inspiring examples of bringing communities together through seeds. Local seed companies that produce regionally adapted, organic seeds are flourishing. My visits to San Diego Seed Company, an urban seed grower, and Southern Heritage Seed Exchange in Gainesville, Florida filled me with much inspiration and hope.

The Green Belt Movement was founded by Wangari Maathai in Kenya in 1977 and since then their network has planted more than 51 million trees. More than 30,000 women have been trained in forestry and other trades that help them earn income while preserving their lands and resources. Their approach restores degraded watersheds improving the livelihood of the local communities. The Fruit Tree Planting Foundation has worked together with local communities planting millions of fruit trees, including orchards for food pantries and schools in underserved communities. We planted an orchard of 50 trees together in a churchyard in Orlando and it was one of my most joyous days!

I first learned about community composting in Athens, Georgia when I visited Let Us Compost. I was amazed by the steaming compost piles in the community garden that were almost as tall as I am. BK Rot in Brooklyn has diverted over 1.5 million pounds of wasted food and organic matter from landfills which they have turned into over 650,000 pounds of compost since they began in 2014. Community compost initiatives are thriving worldwide, rebuilding local soil and fertility.

In 2013, on my first bike ride across the country, I visited Growing Power in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, founded by farmer Will Allen. The yields they

were producing in this small urban farm through sustainable practices were making headlines across the country. At the time, his story was unique in the media. Others were likely doing it, but the coverage wasn't there. Now it is clear that the Black-led urban farming movement is capable of and successful in producing nourishing and healing food while building urban communities back up. The urban farming movement in Detroit is a sight to be seen including D-Town Farm, the Detroit Black Community Food Sovereignty Network and the brand new Detroit People's Food Co-op. Malik Yakini is a community member abounding with inspiration for all of us. In 2010, Karen Washington co-founded Black Urban Growers (BUGS) which helped to organize and galvanize the movement. Black urban farmers who thought they were alone realized they were one of many.

Learning about Joel Salatin's regenerative farming practice at Polyface Farm in Virginia was revolutionary for me when I first came upon it. He was called "The world's most famous farmer." The term regenerative agriculture was hardly spoken about in the mainstream at the time. Now we see regenerative agriculture at the heart of rebuilding deteriorated social, ecological and economic systems. Regeneration International and Organic Consumers Association have created a Regenerative Farm Map and the map is FULL of farms!

Indigenous people are rising up to bring food sovereignty back into their lives and the movement is thriving in my homeland. Visiting the Anishinaabe Agricultural Institute and Winona's Hemp Farm is a day I'll never forget. Corn towering 12 feet high, grown with absolutely no pesticides or chemical fertilizers and minimal fossil fuels. The heritage blue corn that Winona peeled out of the husk was one of the most soul-nurturing sights I have ever seen. Here they are restoring a localized food economy on the White Earth Reservation. My visits to the Bad River Food Sovereignty programs have left me with great hope. The Bad River Tribe is one of many tribes with a Food Sov program and The Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance supports Native communities nationally with advocacy, education, and networking as they revitalize their Indigenous food systems.

The most powerful and delicious meal of my life was at Owamni, an Indigenous restaurant created by Sean Sherman, The Sioux Chef, that is bringing North American Indigenous foods and culture into the mainstream. North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems (NĀTIFS) is creating a new North American food system that generates wealth and improves health in native communities.

It's not just their food that is being revitalized, it is their culture and their language. Seeing young people like Giiweden (@giiwedinindizhinikaaz)

embracing and sharing their native language is powerful. As food sovereignty grows along with language and culture revitalization, communities prosper and wellbeing grows, helping them to stand strong against extractive projects and ally with other communities for support.

The White Earth Band of Ojibwe recently recognized Manoomin's (wild rice) inherent legal rights. This recognition is one of numerous strategic actions in the Rights of Nature movement. This movement is recognizing the rights of ecosystems and species, just like we have rights as humans, and wins are taking place to put these rights into law. The Law of the Rights of Mother Earth, passed for the whole nation of Bolivia "declares both Mother Earth and life-systems (which combine human communities and ecosystems) as titleholders of inherent rights specified in the law."

Some would be surprised to hear that so much is happening when they mostly hear about the control of companies like Cargill, Syngenta, Bayer and Unilever. But to hear the stories of their control, and to bring awareness to them but look no further, may actually increase the power of these companies, not dismantle it. Far too many people falsely believe that Big Ag has won and fully dominates the food and seed supply. This plays into their strategy of control – make the people believe that they've already lost.

The big question is not just whether we can come together as single communities to create local food sovereignty, but can we come together as a global humanity? Do we need Big Ag for their efficiency? Do we need them for their "high yield" and "pest resistant" seeds and at the same time for their chemical fertilizers and pesticides in order to "feed the world"? Or is the power of community and diversity – the power of the people – strong enough?

With all my heart and my mind, I believe it is.

Small-scale farming in the hands of the people has proven to produce more nutrient-dense food and more total food per acre. Navdanya's report, "Health Per Acre," shows that with small-scale ecological farming, food production can be doubled in comparison to the industrial model when measured in nutrition per acre.

Ecological farming of crops has been shown to be more pest and disease resistant. In the hands of the people, we have seen that our farms can be more drought tolerant and more resilient overall. All while protecting and regenerating the soil and the water; increasing biodiversity while improving the wellbeing and happiness of the people growing the food and the people eating it.

If this sounds unbelievable to you, ask yourself, how much of your narrative is coming from Big Ag and how deeply have you explored the resistance movement?

Even with the corporate control we currently have, “globally, half-a-billion small scale farms still feed the world’s majority” according to the UN Environment Programme. “Evidence from a range of studies by respected bodies demonstrates that ecological farming can produce enough for the current population and for the expected increase.”<sup>9</sup> Further, a megastudy put together by over 400 scientists makes the case that “sustainable agriculture is the only pathway capable of feeding humanity.”<sup>10</sup> When one sees these communities rising around the world rebuilding food sovereignty like few could believe, not even themselves at first, studies and statistics like these help to bring it all together; what we know in our hearts. This industrial food system that supposedly is needed to “feed the world” is precisely the reason that the world is not well-fed. We, the people, can feed ourselves, and together we can feed our global humanity.

When I decided to put all of my gardens in the front yard instead of the backyard, I must have had at least an inkling of this already. When I planted all the fruit trees on the street in public spaces, I’m sure I had an idea that community was the solution. But now I KNOW that community is the only way forward that I want to embrace.

So, my friends, if you are joining the frontyard revolution, make it a community affair!

## Take Action!

### Get Involved with Your Community

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Maybe you want to stop living individually and start living communally. Thousands of intentional communities and ecovillages are waiting for you to join them. Check out the Foundation for Intentional Community, the Global Ecovillage Network and the Cohousing Association of the United States to find a community near you. Or use their resources to start a co-living space or community. Communication is often considered the most challenging aspect of living in community, so perhaps take classes in Nonviolent Communication/Compassionate Communication.

Plant public trees in your community in collaboration with others. Community Fruit Trees can support you on this path.

Source your seeds and plants from small scale, community seed growers, seed libraries and seed banks who are breeding diversity and resiliency. Seed Savers Exchange, Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, Ujamma Seeds and Truelove Seeds are a few high-integrity organizations that distribute nationwide. See *Where to Get Seeds* in the Empowerment Manual.

Start a seed library or a community seed network. Community Seed Network and SeedLibraries.org are excellent resources to help you get started.

Join a community compost initiative or start a community compost initiative if there's a need. Cycle the compost back into small-scale ecological gardening and farming. Find an initiative or learn how to start your own through the Community Compost Program.

Harvest food that's already growing, but not getting utilized and get this nourishing, local produce to the people who need it the most. Concrete Jungle and ProduceGood are beautiful examples to follow.

Join or start a community garden or school garden in your community. Community Gardens of America and Edible Schoolyard Project can help with this.

Seek out or start a Food is Free Chapter and share your garden bounties freely with your community members.

Join a community-led, ecological food initiative. A few that have inspired me include Soul Fire Farm, The BIPOC Community Garden, Bartlett Park Community Garden and the Fonticello Food Forest. Support the initiatives that are taking place. They are doing the work and they need our support to continue.

I have faith in all who are dedicated to healing our communities through food, but I've put my greatest faith in Indigenous and Black-led food sovereignty initiatives, especially women-led. Why? Indigenous people make up just five percent of the world population but steward 80 percent of global biodiversity. They know what they are doing! And women have traditionally been the stewards of ecological farming generation after generation in many of these cultures around the world.

Read *Farming While Black* and *Black Earth Wisdom* by Leah Penniman. Read *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Read *Wealth Per Acre* and *Seed Sovereignty, Food Security* by Vandana Shiva. Watch Lyla June Johnston's TEDx "3,000-year-old solutions to modern problems" and read her PhD dissertation: "Architects of abundance: indigenous regenerative food and land management systems and the excavation of hidden history."

Listen to the original stewards of the land.

Take part in land reparations for Black communities, so that they can achieve food sovereignty. Learn how and find communities to support via the Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust. It was Malcolm X who said "Revolution is based on land. Land is the basis of all independence. Land is the basis of freedom, justice, and equality." Land is needed for food sovereignty. If you have land to share, you can distribute it.

Learn about and take part in the LANDBACK movement to return land to Indigenous people so they can build food sovereignty while stewarding our global resources. Learn more from [landback.org](http://landback.org).

Although I was soaking in the community life in my new home, I still had a lot of work to do to leave the Orlando community I had arrived in nearly two years ago, with the highest integrity I could manage.

I hosted numerous garden events and leaned on the community for support one last time. But, unlike the initial volunteer gardening days, we were mostly socializing at these events. We did some maintenance for some of the Gardens for Single Moms, as they would now be in their full autonomy. The frontyard gardens that had served as my life source were transitioned over to the former lawn owners as we had always planned. We celebrated that we had built gardens for 15 people, planted over 200 Community Fruit Trees and sent out over 5,000 free seed packs to help people grow their own food.

I met with the local TV channels and newspapers one last time. I spoke at the Orlando Public Library and gave one final talk, sharing my experience at Orlando Permaculture, in the heart of Audubon Park, where I had spent countless hours biking from frontyard garden to frontyard garden. I shared final hugs with those I had hugged dozens of times. And there was that one last honey harvest that I shared with my community.

I gave away most of my possessions, much of which had been given to me. My bike went to someone who was in need to get to their job. The biodigester, Berkey filter, books, solar ovens and many other items went to Sustainable Kashi along with my tiny house. Each item was distributed to a home that would benefit from it.

I left Orlando with everything I owned fitting into a duffel bag. When it came to material items, I left with even less than I had arrived with. But I left with a community that I knew forever would be one of my homes, and friends and colleagues I would be in connection and service with for years to come.

I made it through the year without getting sick once – the testament that my food could indeed be my medicine. I had grown over 100 different foods in my garden and foraged 200 from nature, meeting all of my basic needs. I weighed just one pound less than when I started. I was in the healthiest state of my adult life.

As truth and transparency is my religion, I would not feel complete without sharing the self-imposed guidelines of this experiment that I broke. On day 17, when I made dinner for a friend, I accidentally ate a few grains of the industrially produced salt she had sprinkled on her plate. On day 119, I ate a loquat from a friend's cultivated backyard tree in a moment of weakness. There were a few times that I accepted more than my share of the bounty I foraged with a partner. As far as flavor goes, there was the smoked fish, smoked with wood I didn't forage and potentially some flavors that came off the grill. And, of course, there was that nightcrawler on day 275. Most importantly though, the foraging from urban fruit trees was a gray area as there were likely times when I ate from a cultivated tree.

## Conclusion

### The Realization of Reciprocity

It's a few days before my year is about to come to an end. I'm standing in the front yard where the journey began some 23 months ago. As I look around, I see it is no longer accurate or reasonable to call this space a yard. It is closer to a forest than it is a lawn. That's when I notice something that I somehow hadn't in the hundreds of hours I had spent here before. I'm standing nearly a foot higher than the sidewalk. I look down at my feet. I'm not on a mound or bulge. The entire surface of the former lawn is raised up this high.

I have built up nearly a foot of soil. Almost all of this was carbon that would have been dumped into the landfill, removing it from the natural carbon cycle. I have harvested hundreds of pounds of food and medicine from this soil, yet there is more soil here, more life and more for the earth to give than when I arrived.

I have managed to give more to this little patch of land than I took. In theory, I had known this was possible. But this was my first time experiencing it, beyond a doubt. Now I really KNEW it. I could be a giver, a nurturer, a steward. I could live in reciprocity.

There are so many ways in which I desired to be more successful – the many varieties of seeds I purchased that I never got to plant, the numerous yards that I intended to transform into gardens that remain lawns, the large community meals I dreamed of hosting. I never became self-sufficient in making cooking oil and I never made my own peanut butter. If I chose to focus on this, I could be left feeling powerless and deflated. But in that moment, I saw that I was standing on one of the greatest success stories of my life.

My goals are lofty. I'd like to see the complete transformation of our food system and the regeneration of the Earth. And when I first began my activism in 2013, I was under delusions of grandeur of what I could accomplish. By now, I've realized that there's only one thing I can control, and that is myself. I can't control my neighbor, the corporations or the government. But I can take responsibility for my own actions, and in doing so, be an example for others of what is possible. Sure, I only transformed a couple of yards – not the whole food system. But in doing so, I saw first hand what is possible. What is possible for us all.

Can you imagine if we did what I did here with one million lawns, ten million lawns, or the 50-plus million lawns we have in this nation? None of us can control the whole food system, but most of us with this book in our hands can control what food we are choosing to eat and how we use the spaces we have, at least a little bit more than we are now.



There were many times when I was processing foods alone at home asking, is this all worth it? Here I am toiling away with my food, when I could be in my community being of service. Looking back now at the full picture, I see that the mundane was all part of the journey. We each have our gifts to society. One of my gifts is to immerse myself in the most basic elements of life that we have forgotten. To immerse myself so deeply that it creates a story for others to follow and learn from. A story that guides them to reconnect to the basics of life – to what gives us life – that we have become so disconnected from. When I set out, I didn't know if it was possible to grow and forage all of my food and by doing so break free from the industrial food system. Perhaps you didn't know either when you picked up this book. But now I know – and you know – it is possible.

Although I set out to do this journey on my own, it was never because I wanted independence. I chose to grow and forage all of my food because this was the best way I knew how to fully understand my food and gain a deep connection with it. I have no desire to be independent of humanity. And, in fact, even harvesting nearly every bite of my food with my own hands, I still wasn't independent. This became clearer each day. Many of the weeds I ate came over with European settlers hundreds of years ago as their foods and medicines, much of my fruit came from trees that had been planted by someone who was thinking of the future, and all these plants existed today because of Indigenous cultures that had fostered relationships with them for thousands of years. I never could have deluded myself to believe that I was independent from humanity.

It wasn't people I was trying to escape, it was Big Ag – their corporate control and industrial farming practices that are destroying life on Earth. Did I manage to escape that system completely? No, the mushroom compost I used was a byproduct of that system and most ironically the deer that I ate were likely fattened up with industrial corn they browsed from farm fields. There is little chance of me ever escaping the system completely. We exist together on this "pale blue dot" in the Cosmos. This planet once seemed infinitely large and the resources seemed inexhaustible. But we now clearly know that we are all in this together – we are all global neighbors – and what each local community does affects communities around the globe. I've committed to being the best neighbor I can be, which in part means growing my food in the front yard – in harmony with my community of plants and animals – and sharing the food and space freely with whomever would like to take part.

I'm sure some questions might arise. Like "Do I plan to continue growing and foraging all of my food?"

Well, it's been four-and-a-half years since I completed this immersion and what I can tell you is that my life has not been the same since. In the fall of 2022, I

embarked on a month of foraging 100 percent of my food (no gardens this time), starting with no food and giving myself just nine days to prepare. That took my relationship with Earth to another level. Now, wherever I go I am harvesting food. Just as some see the billboards and fast food arches as they drive down the road, I see the signs of Earth. Her gifts of food and medicine are everywhere, offering themselves to me freely, with a silent agreement of reciprocity.

Right now, on many days, half the food I am eating is foraged. On many days it is every bite. My diet often consists of Manoomin, pressure-canned fish, dehydrated venison, dehydrated mushrooms, dried herbal and medicinal mushroom teas and green powder that I carry with me on my travels, along with fresh fruits and vegetables that I source locally and a small selection of grocery store items. Manoomin (wild rice) is the plant I have fostered the deepest connection with. I feel that I am a messenger for this food that grows on water. I have returned to my homeland every fall since the trip of 2019 when I healed and rejuvenated my relationship with the land that made me. I have come to see the Manoomin waters as my mecca. Each fall, I spend days with her, filling up the canoe with sustenance. I believe that I feel here what others seek in church. Under the blue sky, on the calm water, communing with the plants and animals, I am in my temple.

As I travel from land to land, I have carried large buckets of Manoomin with me to nourish myself, as well as to share with others, hoping that the connection I feel will come across so strongly that their love for this plant – and connection to all plants – will grow. This is my duty as a messenger of the plants.

Yet when I am visiting friends, it is unlikely I will resist the snacks in their pantry. I have not liberated my mind from cravings and all too often I find myself succumbing to the packaged foods that eat away at my integrity without even satiating the momentary inner yearnings. But I believe this full liberation will come, through my continued practice and dedication. I am of the belief that even if we fully physically liberate ourselves, if we do not liberate ourselves mentally, we will always be vulnerable to falling back into the convenient and comfortable ways of the consumer society, at the expense of our integrity and our greater purpose in life.

What I have come to believe deeply is that a quality existence takes time. Although I spent 20-80 hours per week, in a sense just feeding myself, it was so much more than that. None of this was time “spent” but rather time growing, learning, living, healing and connecting. Foraging and growing food is my medicine, it is my fuel for life, it is my connection to Earth. It is my way of being in relationship with the plants and animals we share this home with. It has been the single most powerful practice in coming into the state of wholeness, completeness and oneness that we all desire.

I am not alone on this plant path. I have come to find that growing food and foraging is the medicine of the masses. Those who reconnect to the plants find it to be one of the most nourishing aspects of their life and a source of deep purpose and passion. I believe this feeling of deep connection is our bodies' way of telling us that we have reconnected to the universal truth of being human: that we are a part of this Earth, not separate from her. What we all really want – every single one of us – is connection. Time and time again, I've seen people finding this connection through developing relationships with the plants.

It is clear to me that the cultures that feel the most connected are the ones that still have a relationship with their food and medicine, through harvesting it themselves and as part of a community. It is clear to me that the societies that forget this, the societies that believe extreme convenience will create quality existence, are the ones that suffer the most and spread their suffering far and wide, diminishing quality of life for all on this shared home, Earth.

Of course, not everybody can do what I did. This is a common critique of my work, and in my earlier years this was a source of some agitation for me. Now I've come to realize that this critique is the product of our disconnected society.

I've never said that everybody should do what I did. In fact, I don't even want everybody to do what I do. A society where everyone has to do this is a broken society. It is a society that is no longer operating as a community, but rather as many individuals and small groupings of disconnected and likely lost souls.

My role as a social reformer is to take things to the extreme, serving as a counterbalance to the extreme disconnection in which we are living. To shine a light on how broken things are, even when they appear so normal. To show truths that are obscured in plain sight.

So, if through this grand gesture I'm not saying, "if I can do it, you can, too," then what am I saying?

My calling is that it is time to shed the delusions of individualism and separateness and to radically embrace community and interconnectedness. Embrace that each of us is dependent upon one another for our basic needs. And to take the concept of community beyond just the human community. To embrace that we are just one species among millions of plants, animals and fungi – no more important or deserving than the others. To embrace that even the rats, mosquitoes, snakes, spiders and bacteria are our relatives and every being has a place on this Earth. To remember each day that we are more bacterial cells than we are human cells. Or to put this in another way, even our own body, which we see as an individual life form, is an interconnected community that exists only through biodiversity.

Why do I call this a radical embrace of community? Because if we embraced

community in this way, the systems of separation and domination would collapse and we would give rise to a new way of being. This is exactly what the current food industry, and the web of consumerism that it is woven into, does not want.

The food system that I am envisioning and taking part in creating has community and biodiversity at its very core and in every tenet of design and implementation. In this system, people share space, resources and responsibilities. People are growing food all over the place: in their front yards, at schools, places of worship, at the libraries, city halls and state capitals. Abandoned lots are reclaimed into community spaces. Fruit trees are planted throughout the community. The line of ownership is blurred because community stewards these spaces together. The concept of ownership is no longer even practiced in many of these spaces. There is no clear line between garden and play space or community gathering site. No clear line between farm and sanctuary. No clear line between producer of food and steward of land, water, air and life. Yield is measured not in pounds of food but in biodiversity and the lives supported both on site and off.

These spaces are closed-loop systems, keeping all fertility on site and bringing minimal resources from off site. Very little to no waste is created; rather the spaces serve as sponges of fertility for the carbon and nitrogen of the community. Community compost sites exist within walking distance of every household. Everything is composted that can be (yes, even human poop and pee). Vibrant and fertile soil is at the heart of these spaces. Rainwater is harvested to our best ability and water sources from the region are utilized with respect and care. Water is viewed as life.

Even in the city, these spaces are integrated into the natural cycles to the fullest degree possible. There is little desire for control and all the desire for collaboration. There is little desire for separation and all the desire for integration. Food is grown organically with the philosophy at heart, not a certification or label. Animals are a part of these systems – both domestic and wild – to their own satisfaction and to the humans tending the space. Each of these spaces is unique from the others, operating based on their own microclimates and seasonality and the needs of all beings involved locally. Energy comes from the sun, mostly through the extension of plants and animals, as well as simple technology. Energy also comes from human power, wind and water.

Neighborhood and regional food hubs are spaced throughout the community to meet the needs of every person equitably. Food is seen as a basic human right, and money is no object to access, as long as each member

contributes in their own way. The food has no advertising or health claims. There is only an integral sharing of relevant information and the stories behind the offerings. Food and medicine is brought in from other food hubs when it is in the best interest of both the giving and the receiving communities. This means there are no communities burdened through our food choices.

The plants, mushrooms and animals that we harvest from these systems are both our food and medicine. Diets center around whole foods, recognizable and tangible to the form they had when they came from the earth. Any processing done makes the food more nourishing or contributes to system resilience. In two words, the food is nourishing and wholesome. Our food is our medicine, with no clear distinction in most cases. Preventative, natural health care is intertwined into this foodway through movement, clean air, time outdoors, human connection and a sense of being a part of something greater than oneself. Food is generally cooked where it is eaten; at home, at schools, at community eating centers. Wholesome meals that involve dozens of plant ingredients are made together. Children are involved in every step of the process, learning through experience with their elders and community members.

Community decision making is at the heart of these systems. The systems work because people understand them, not because the truth is being hidden from them. The true cost of our food is easily seen because the community is part of every step of the process. When the community is in control, there is no room for corporate control and no need to buy their poisons. All of the issues and movements that were once separated into supposed “social issues” or “environmental issues” are now viewed as intersectional and inseparable. All suffering, anywhere, is connected.

This holistic approach to life takes work, critical thinking and self reflection. It is hard work. It’s not as convenient and comfortable as we were once used to, but we’ve built a lot of convenience and comfort in, in a new way. There are no beliefs that everybody must do what we are doing, but rather an embrace of personal and community responsibility. There are no clear rules that apply to every situation and the way forward is not always known. Transition ethics are applied as we transform the spaces and our lifeways. Purity may be the goal, but never the requirement or expectation. Although simplicity is the call, there are no absolutes. The vision is not for the past, not going backward in time, but for embracing the now. Technology plays a role where its implementation is truly of service to the community and not at the expense of the ecosystem and beings where the resources were harvested or without their enthusiastic consent.

Although it is work, it is work that is done with joy, gratitude and celebration of life, knowing that we are living in reciprocity to the best of our ability. Feeling that we are interconnected with and inseparable from it all as stewards of the land. Embracing the mindset of abundance rather than the mindset of scarcity. Knowing that the old way, although full of its own benefits, no longer serves us.

This may sound like a pipe dream to some of you. Maybe a bunch of unattainable idealism. But there are already people living this way or with a near model. There are many more who are working on making food systems like this a reality in their communities at this moment.

Whether we attain this level of the ideal is not of the utmost relevance. It is whether we are attempting to attain it. It is whether we have decided to leave our past ways in the past to the best of our abilities, and to move forward with truth, integrity and reciprocity at our core.

Where to start? Well, there's only one place you can start. Where you are. As yourself. In the moment you are in.

Learn where the food you are eating comes from and if you don't like what you find, change it.

Grow some food. Forage foods and medicine. Buy from your local farmers and gardeners. Prioritize regenerative and ecological practices. Support the organizations and activists doing the work. Keep it local.

My suggestion is to think of all the aspects of your life that you want to transform. Make a list of each tangible change that you can make. Include the easiest of tasks all the way to the grand ideas you aren't even sure are attainable. Commit to making one of those changes per week, no matter how small and incorporating that new way into your life practice moving forward. Do that for a year, and you'll have made 52 changes. Keep this up for five years and you'll have made over 250.

Start with what you are most excited about and what will make a noticeable change in your life immediately, no matter how small. Start with what you CAN do; don't focus on what you can't do. Take action one step at a time to avert overwhelm and transform your life at the pace that is sustainable for you. Be empowered. Stay empowered through action and take it further whenever you have the ability to.

When all you can think about are the catastrophes you see in the headlines ... how the possible extinction of humanity and the collapse of life as we know it looms in the not-so-distant future ... remember that you are doing this in the pursuit of truth and integrity. If this is your purpose, then it is not the past or even the future that matters, but the now.

I invite you to keep this book close to you, whether at your kitchen table, in your daypack or car, or on your bookshelf. Use it as a reference to come back to week after week. Utilize the resources in the Empowerment Manual. Read the books, watch the films, listen to the people and join the organizations I've shared. Put the power back into your hands and distribute that power among your household, your school or workplace in a shared mission of community food sovereignty.

## Meals, Ferments, Medicines & Mixes

Many of you who followed this journey as it unfolded requested recipes. I have never written a detailed recipe, nor did I follow more than a few recipes on this journey. What I do is harvest whatever is fresh in the garden and available in my pantry and bring it all together in the moment. In this section, I share a few of the meals, ferments, medicines and mixes that I made directly from the land. More than being recipes to follow, I hope this provides insight as to how I was eating and inspiration to embrace simple, whole foods from the land. Cooking made easy. Nothing complicated.

Those attempting to make meals solely with foods from their garden and foraged from the land may find some inspiration here, ideally with more fat procured than I had!

Ingredients with [G] were from my garden and with [F] were foraged.

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### Morning Nourishing and Medicinal Smoothie

half a fresh papaya <sup>F</sup>	1 frozen mango <sup>F</sup>
2 frozen starfruits <sup>F</sup>	2 frozen bananas <sup>F</sup>
chunk of ginger <sup>G</sup>	chunk of turmeric <sup>G</sup>
a few sprigs of mint <sup>G</sup>	a handful of holy basil <sup>G</sup>
spoonful of honey <sup>G</sup>	a cup or 2 of rainwater <sup>F</sup>
handful of moringa leaves <sup>G</sup>	meat of half a mature coconut <sup>F</sup>

The fruits varied by the season. This was a typical smoothie for the first four months. I simply added all the ingredients to the blender and blended until smooth. Makes three pints to two quarts of smoothie.



### **Mashed Sweet Potatoes or Cassava with Peas and Greens**

4 pounds of sweet potatoes or cassava<sup>G</sup>  
 southern peas or pigeon peas<sup>G</sup>  
 small chunk of turmeric<sup>G</sup>  
 a few sprigs of rosemary<sup>G</sup>  
 a few leaves of garlic greens and/or handful of garlic chives<sup>G</sup>  
 a few handfuls of garden greens<sup>G</sup>  
 a few large pinches of sea salt<sup>F</sup>  
 fish stock made from the fish heads and bones<sup>F</sup>  
 fresh garden herbs<sup>G</sup>

I cut the tubers into chunks and boiled them in water. I boiled the peas in a separate pot. Then I combined all the chopped ingredients together into one pot and cooked them. This made a few meals' worth, decreasing my workload in the kitchen. I ate the first meal fresh and for the next few meals I simply reheated the food in the pot and garnished with fresh herbs from the garden such as cilantro, dill and basil.

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### **Cassava and Fish Collard Wraps**

3 pounds of cassava<sup>G</sup>                      1 fish (frozen or fresh)<sup>F</sup>  
 1 pound of garden greens<sup>G</sup>              4 serrano peppers<sup>G</sup>  
 a few large pinches of sea salt<sup>F</sup>  
 topped with Everglades tomatoes<sup>G</sup> and daikon radish ferment or sauerkraut<sup>G</sup>  
 (loaded with green onion<sup>G</sup>, garlic<sup>G</sup>, turmeric<sup>G</sup>, ginger<sup>G</sup> and sea salt<sup>F</sup>) and fresh  
 garden herbs

I boiled the cassava, sautéed or steamed the greens and steamed the fish. I then wrapped the cassava, fish, greens and ferment into a collard leaf. The simple collard wraps really filled out the meal, added a crunch and added variety to my life.

### **The Entire Pumpkin Soup**

2 Seminole pumpkins (about 1.5 pounds each)<sup>G</sup>  
a pound of carrots<sup>G</sup>      garden herbs<sup>G</sup>      sea salt<sup>F</sup>

I cut the carrots and pumpkins (skin and insides included) into chunks then added them to a pot with the herbs and a cup or two of water, cooking until soft. Then I added the pumpkin seeds and salt and blended until smooth. To take the nutrition to the next level, I would blend in steamed or raw greens as well. Garnished with ferments, fresh herbs and sea salt.

Playful Warning: Eating this daily along with copious mango and turmeric may turn your skin harmlessly orange or yellow, which may start insightful conversations. I speak from experience.

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### **Green Papaya Coconut Milk Curry**

My favorite meal to make was green papaya coconut curry. I foraged for coconuts and made coconut milk for the base. Green papaya was a staple available year-round in the Florida garden. I used whichever fresh veggies I had in my garden, such as Seminole pumpkin, sweet potato and eggplant along with fresh greens. The herbs were a combination of fresh herbs from my garden and dried herbs including coriander, holy basil, red pepper, curry tree leaves and more. The salt came from harvesting ocean water. I could eat this meal almost every day!

To make coconut milk, I simply broke open a mature, brown coconut, removed the meat and blended the meat with a couple cups of water in the blender. Then I strained the liquid through a metal sieve or cloth bag.

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### **Golden Milk**

To make golden milk, I made coconut milk (see above) and then blended in fresh turmeric and ginger with the skin on. To get the most out of these medicines, I didn't strain out the skin. Then I added honey (and sometimes Brazilian pepper or a bit of hot pepper) and enjoyed warm.

**Green Juice (without a juicer)**

My green juices would vary with dozens of different greens and herbs depending on what was fresh and available in my garden. Common juices in the spring consisted of kale, collards, cabbage, celery, Spanish needle, Italian basil, holy basil, mint and Cuban oregano. I often put in garlic and turmeric as well and if I have cucumbers and citrus, I'd include them, too. Instead of a juicer, I used a high power blender by simply adding water, blending up all the ingredients and straining through a mesh bag. Because it is diluted, it isn't as potent as most juices, but it still packs in all the nourishment.

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**Daikon Kraut Ferment**

Daikon radishes are very easy to grow and they get big, so it's easy to make a lot of daikon radish kraut. Simply grate the radish up, add salt (about 2% weight of salt to the weight of the vegetables), and knead it in a large mixing bowl with your hands. The salt pulls out the liquid creating a brine. No water is added. Once there is enough brine to cover the radish, it can be packed into glass jars, making sure to have liquid fully covering the vegetables. Cut a few circles of daikon to put on top to help keep the kraut packed down. Keep the jars on a glass tray, because they may bubble over. Open the jars to pack them down daily if needed as gas is created that pushes the veggies upwards. Start enjoying after a few days to a couple weeks. I stored mine for six months in a wooden box in the soil in the summer heat of Florida!

See *Wild Fermentation* by Sandor Katz for many wild fermentation recipes.

### **Herbal and Mushroom Medicinal Teas**

My most common herbal teas were:

Yaupon holly, lemon grass, ginger and holy basil with honey in the morning;  
Roselle, lemon grass, turmeric and mint with honey in the evening.

Making herbal teas is very simple. They can be made with fresh or dehydrated herbs. Herbs are very easy to dehydrate because they already have very little water in them.

My go-to medicinal mushroom tea during the year was reishi, but now my standard medicinal mushroom tea blend is foraged reishi, turkey tail, hen of the woods, chaga (and lion's mane if I find it). I simply break the mushrooms up into small pieces and dehydrate them in the sun. Then I blend them up to make a powder. I add the powder to water and bring it up to a boil, then keep it simmering for at least 45 minutes, up to a few hours.

Since completing this immersion, I started to enjoy my tea without the added honey.

See *Rosemary Gladstar's Medicinal Herbs: A Beginner's Guide* for all the basics to start making your own medicinal teas.

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### **Dried Herb Mix**

Herb blends added so much convenience and flavor to my meals. My Florida dried herb mix was Italian basil, African blue basil, garlic, garlic chives, green onion, thyme, rosemary and serrano pepper. To make this mix, I simply dehydrated each ingredient and then blended them together, and stored them in a glass jar to use at home or to bring with me on my travels.

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### **Green Powder**

My own homemade multi-vitamin. In Florida, my go-to was moringa powder. But now I gather a dozen different greens (a lot of "weeds") to make my green powder. Simply dehydrate the greens, then blend them up into a powder. I add this to any dish for a convenient way to get my greens in, especially when fresh greens are not available or I'm traveling.

### **Dehydrating Herbs and Greens**

Air dry out of direct sunlight, with ample airflow, ideally in low humidity on window screens or in baskets, or in an electric dehydrator at 90 to 110 degrees Fahrenheit. Once crispy, store in a sealed jar.

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### **Sea Salt**

My process for making sea salt is quite simple. I select the cleanest beach in the region and go there with a five-gallon container, ideally on a calm day. I wade out to where the water is minimally stirred up by shoreline waves. I then fill the container by holding the opening below the surface, so that minimal surface water enters. Pollutants such as oil sit on the surface of the ocean. At home, I put the water into glass baking trays in the sun and simply let the water evaporate, leaving me with hand-harvested sea salt. Or I put the water into a stainless steel pot (with no lid) and boil it down until there is just salt left. When the water is low, I turn the heat way down. Sun evaporation is preferred because it uses no energy, or the use of a fire that is accomplishing another task as well. Ocean water is about 3.5% salt. A five-gallon bucket of water makes about two cups of salt or a pint jar. It's as simple as that to make your own sea salt!

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### **The Semi-Tropical Milk and Honey**

One of my most common snacks was mature coconut chunks dipped in honey. Dried or fresh chunks both make a delicious treat. Simple coconut milk with honey was a gift from the earth that was almost too delicious to be true!

For photos and more details of what I ate during the year, see Photos of My Meals in the online resources section.

See *Homegarden Cuisine Toolkit: Ideas for Making Food in the Humid Subtropics* by Marabou Thomas for a book full of inspiration and ideas for food from this climate!

See Samuel Thayer's book series: *The Forager's Harvest*, *Nature's Garden* and *Incredible Wild Edibles* for how to process and effectively utilize your foraged bounty.

## Plant List

The following is a list of most of the foods that I grew and foraged. Some of these were staples while others I sampled on occasion or even just once. Foods marked with an [\*] were main staples and those with an [^] were main foods for at least part of the year. I have generally structured each section in order of the foods that I ate the most coming first in the list. Note that I have not listed all varieties of some of the plants I grew and foraged. For links with details for these plants, see List of the 300 Foods I Grew and Foraged in the online resources section.

### Foods that I grew in Florida

Calorie crops and staple hearty crops: sweet potato\*, cassava\*, yam (*Dioscorea alata*)\*, green papaya\*, banana\*, southern peas\*, pigeon peas\*

Perennial greens: moringa\*, katuk\*, Okinawa spinach\*, longevity spinach\*, Suriname spinach\*, chaya\*, sweet potato greens\*, cranberry hibiscus\*, cassava leaves^, malibar spinach, garden sorrel, Haitian basket vine, Brazilian spinach

Annual greens: collards\*, kale\*, mustard greens\*, arugula\*, nasturtium\*, a variety of Asian greens\*, radish greens\*, turnip greens\*, cabbage^, Caribbean sorrel^, amaranth^, Swiss chard, purslane, plantago, lettuce, broccoli, beet greens, chicory

Veggies (and veggie-like fruits): carrot\*, daikon radish\*, Everglades tomato\*, tindora cucumber\*, turnip\*, yardlong beans^, cucumber^, beets^, radish, green beans^, eggplant, kohlrabi, borage flowers, celery, bell pepper, onion (bulbing), potato

Fruits: papaya\*, banana\*, passion fruit^, mulberry, loquat, pomegranate

Cooking herbs and spices: African blue basil\*, Cuban oregano\*, lemon grass\*, garlic\*, garlic greens\*, garlic chives\*, rosemary\*, turmeric\*, curry leaves\*, serrano pepper\*, Italian basil\*, green onion\*, ghost pepper\*, Thai basil\*, cilantro\*, dill\*, thyme\*, oregano\*, papalo^, sage^, dill seeds^, coriander^, mustard seeds^, papaya seeds, fennel, ginger, tarragon, parsley

Herbal teas: lemongrass\*, holy basil\*, mint\*, Caribbean sorrel\*, Costa Rican bush mint\*, yerba buena\*, chamomile\*, lemon bee balm\*, lemon balm\*, green tea\*, ginger, lavender, *Plectranthus barbatus*

Other: honey\*, jun\*, beeswax\*, bee pollen\*, honey wine^, bee propolis, amaranth grain, sunflower seeds

### **Foods that I foraged in Florida**

Fruits: mango\*, banana\*, starfruit\*, wild orange\*, loquat\*, Suriname cherry\*, white sapote\*, sapodilla\*, grapefruit\*, beautyberry\*, elderberry\*, prickly pear cactus fruit^, mulberry^, bitter melon^, mandarin orange^, tangerine^, cocoplum^, java plum^, avocado, monkey orange, sea grapes, pond apple, blackberries, blueberries, lemon, hog plum, black nightshade, tamarind, black cherry, Barbados gooseberry, queen palm fruit, dragon fruit

Greens: *Bidens alba*\*, dollar weed^, gotu kola^, bacopa^, pellitory, purslane, plantago, amaranth, sea blite, sea purslane, chickweed, clover, oxalis, false hawksbeard, pennyroyal

Vegetables (or veggie like): Smilax\*, nopal cactus pads^, saw palmetto, cattail shoots

Fish and meat: mullet\*, largemouth bass^, bowfin^, striped mojarra^, sand perch^, sea trout^, redfish, crevasse jack, sheepshead, sail catfish, shad, crappie, fish eggs\*, squirrel^

Herbs, spices and herbal teas: yaupon holly\*, Brazilian pepper, peppergrass, camphor, bottlebrush, wax myrtle, pine needles, Browne's savory, red bay, swamp bay, bamboo leaf

Mushrooms: chanterelle\*, reishi\*, honey mushroom

Nuts: coconut\*, acorn, hickory nuts, tropical almond

Other: yam (*Dioscorea alata*\*), Turks cap hibiscus\*, blue porterweed, seaweed (multiple varieties), hairy cowpea, reindeer moss, glasswort, sword fern, horseweed, fireweed/burnweed, Caesar's weed (flowers), perennial peanut (flowers)

Other: rainwater\*, sea salt and ocean water\*, many species of bacteria and yeast\*, small insects that were on my food such as ants and aphids\*

**Foods that I foraged in the Great Lakes Region**

Fruits: apple\*, aronia\*, mulberry\*, tart cherry\*, riverside grape\*, plum\*, chokecherry^, crab apple^, blueberry and huckleberry^, pear^, serviceberry^, raspberry^, blackberry^, pin cherry^, black nightshade, wild strawberry, sand cherry, wintergreen berry, Solomon's plume berries, hackberry, mountain ash

Greens: stinging nettle\*, wood nettle\*, dandelion\*, lamb's quarters\*, purslane\*, watercress\*, wintercress^, garlic mustard^, plantago^, wood violet, wild mustard, wood sorrel, amaranth, curly dock, sheep's sorrel, heal all, lady's thumb, oxeye daisy, clover, creeping Charlie, hawkweed, honewort, sow thistle, cow parsnip, sochan, Virginia waterleaf

Fish: lake trout\*, northern pike\*, bullhead\*, rock bass\*, smallmouth bass\*, walleye\*, largemouth bass^, sucker, rainbow trout, perch, whitefish

Herbs and herbal teas: stinging nettle\*, mint\*, goldenrod\*, bee balm\*, wintergreen\*, pineapple weed^, horseradish, rose hips, wild garlic, echinacea, catnip

Mushrooms: chanterelle\*, chicken of the woods\*, hen of the woods\*, honey mushroom\*, puffball^, lobster^, bolete, oyster, hedgehog, comb tooth, pheasant's tail, shaggy mane, stinkhorn, *Suillus*

Nuts: butternut, hickory nut, acorn, lotus nut

Other: deer\*, wild parsnip^, wild carrot, acorn grubs, balsam sap and leaves, spruce leaves, wild rice



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## Food Freedom Online Resources

I have spent the last decade designing my website to be of service to you on your journey of sustainable living. Here I have shared a selection of relevant resources. For brevity, I omitted robingreenfield.org from each resource below. For each item, simply type in robingreenfield.org followed by the [/].

### Food Freedom Deep Dive

Photos of My Meals and Food	/foodfreedomphotos
Daily Food Log	/foodfreedommeals
The 300 Foods I Grew and Foraged	/foodfreedomfoods
Guidelines for Food Freedom	/foodfreedomrules
Tour of My House	/tinyhouse
How I Built My Tiny House	/tinyhousebuild
Food Freedom Video Series	/foodfreedomseries

### Online Resources and How To's

Florida Resource Guide	/growflorida
Florida Food Forest How To Series	/foodforest
Foraging Guide for Beginners	/foraging
Find a Forager Database	/findaforager
Gardening Resource Page	/gardening
Gardening Guide for Beginners	/grow
How to Turn Your Yard into a Garden	/yardintogarden
How to Compost	/composting
Fruit Tree Care Guide	/cftcare
Start a Community Compost Program	/cc
Seed Saving Resource Guide	/seedsaving
How to Live a Near-Zero Waste Life Guide	/waste
Food Waste Resource Page	/foodwasteres
Food Waste Activism Resource Guide	/foodwasteguide
Dumpster Diving Guide	/dumpsterdiving
Dumpster Divers Defense Fund	/dddfund
How to Create an Environmental Activism Campaign	/diyactivism

### Community Programs and Offerings

Seeds for the People	/seedsforthepeople
Community Fruit Trees	/communityfruittrees
Gardens for the People	/gardensforthepeople

Food Forest Starter Bundle	/foodforest
Grow Your Own Toilet Paper	/tp
Grow Your Own Food Seed Pack	/seeds
Community Seed Pack	/communitypack

**More**

My Mission Statement	/mission
FAQ	/faq
Start-Here Guide for Website	/starthere

## Organizations

Anishinaabe Agricultural Institute	<a href="http://anishinaabeagriculture.org">anishinaabeagriculture.org</a>
Atlanta Food Forest	<a href="http://aglanta.org">aglanta.org</a>
The Ayurvedic Institute	<a href="http://ayurveda.com">ayurveda.com</a>
B Lab/B Corp Certification	<a href="http://bcorporation.net">bcorporation.net</a>
Bad River Food Sovereignty	<a href="http://badriver-nsn.gov/food-sovereignty">badriver-nsn.gov/food-sovereignty</a>
Bartlett Park Community Garden	<a href="http://robingreenfield.org/bartlettpark">robingreenfield.org/bartlettpark</a>
BIPOC Community Garden	<a href="http://rootworkherbals.com">rootworkherbals.com</a>
BK ROT	<a href="http://bkrot.org">bkrot.org</a>
Black Girls with Gardens	<a href="http://blackgirlswithgardens.com">blackgirlswithgardens.com</a>
Boulder Food Rescue	<a href="http://boulderfoodrescue.org">boulderfoodrescue.org</a>
Brooklyn Grange	<a href="http://brooklyngrangefarm.com">brooklyngrangefarm.com</a>
Center for Nonviolent Communication	<a href="http://cnvc.org">cnvc.org</a>
Central Florida Fruit Society	<a href="http://centralfloridafruitociety.org">centralfloridafruitociety.org</a>
Certified Wildlife Habitat	<a href="http://nwf.org">nwf.org</a>
Cohousing Assoc. of the United States	<a href="http://cohousing.org">cohousing.org</a>
Community Fruit Trees	<a href="http://robingreenfield.org/cft">robingreenfield.org/cft</a>
Community Gardens of America	<a href="http://communitygarden.org">communitygarden.org</a>
Community Seed Network	<a href="http://communityseednetwork.org">communityseednetwork.org</a>
Concrete Jungle	<a href="http://concrete-jungle.org">concrete-jungle.org</a>
Dr. Bronner's	<a href="http://drbronner.com">drbronner.com</a>
ECHO	<a href="http://echonet.org">echonet.org</a>
Edible Schoolyard Project	<a href="http://edibleschoolyard.org">edibleschoolyard.org</a>
Environmental Working Group	<a href="http://ewg.org">ewg.org</a>
Fair Trade	<a href="http://fairtrade.net">fairtrade.net</a>
Falling Fruit	<a href="http://fallingfruit.org">fallingfruit.org</a>
Farm Aid: Farmer Resource Network	<a href="http://farmaid.org">farmaid.org</a>
Farm Lab	<a href="http://farmlab.eusd.net">farmlab.eusd.net</a>
Farmer's Footprint	<a href="http://farmersfootprint.us">farmersfootprint.us</a>
Feedback	<a href="http://feedbackglobal.org">feedbackglobal.org</a>
Feeding America	<a href="http://feedingamerica.org">feedingamerica.org</a>
Fleet Farming	<a href="http://fleetfarming.org">fleetfarming.org</a>
Florida Earthskills Gathering	<a href="http://floridaearthskills.org">floridaearthskills.org</a>
Florida School of Holistic Living	<a href="http://holisticlivingschool.org">holisticlivingschool.org</a>
Fonticello Food Forest	<a href="http://fonticellofoodforest.com">fonticellofoodforest.com</a>
Food & Water Watch	<a href="http://foodandwaterwatch.org">foodandwaterwatch.org</a>
Food is Free Project	<a href="http://foodisfreeproject.org">foodisfreeproject.org</a>

Food Not Bombs	foodnotbombs.net
Food Recovery Network	foodrecoverynetwork.org
Food Shift	foodshift.net
Foundation for Intentional Community	ic.org
Freegan.info	freegan.info
Frontier Co-op	frontiercoop.com
Fruit Tree Planting Foundation	ftpf.org
Global Ecovillage Network	ecovillage.org
Green Belt Movement	greenbeltmovement.org
Gulfport Food Forest	eatbegrow.com/gulfport-food-forrest
HEART	heartvillage.org
Honor the Earth	honorearth.org
Humans Who Grow Food	humanswhogrowfood.com
Incredible Edible	incredibleedible.org.uk
Indigenous Environmental Network	ienearth.org
Indigenous Food Lab	natifs.org/indigenous-food-lab
Indigenous Seedkeepers Network	iskn.org
Intersectional Environmentalist	intersectionalenvironmentalist.com
LA Compost	lacompost.org
LANDBACK	landback.org
The Land Institute	landinstitute.org
Little Free Garden	littlefreegarden.com
Live Like Ally Foundation	llaoundation.com
Moms Across America	momsacrossamerica.com
Napa County Seed Library	napacoseedlibrary.org
Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance	nativefoodalliance.org
Navdanya	navdanya.org
New Dream	newdream.org
Non-GMO Project	nongmoproject.org
North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems	natifs.org
Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust	nefoclandtrust.org
Organic Consumers Association	organicconsumers.org
Organic Seed Alliance	seedalliance.org
Orlando Permaculture	@orlandopermaculture
O-Town Compost	o-towncompost.com
Owamni	owamni.com
People's Medicine School	rootworkherbals.com
Permaculture Action Network	permacultureaction.org
Permaculture Institute of North America	pina.in

Permaculture Women's Guild	<a href="http://permaculturewomen.com">permaculturewomen.com</a>
Polyface Farms	<a href="http://polyfacefarms.com">polyfacefarms.com</a>
ProduceGood	<a href="http://producegood.org">producegood.org</a>
Real Organic Project	<a href="http://realorganicproject.org">realorganicproject.org</a>
Regeneration International	<a href="http://regenerationinternational.org">regenerationinternational.org</a>
Regenerative Organic Alliance	<a href="http://regenorganic.org">regenorganic.org</a>
Rootwork Herbals	<a href="http://rootworkherbals.com">rootworkherbals.com</a>
Save Soil	<a href="http://savesoil.org">savesoil.org</a>
SeedLibraries.org	<a href="http://seedlibraries.org">seedlibraries.org</a>
Seed Savers Exchange	<a href="http://seedsavers.org">seedsavers.org</a>
Sierra Seeds	<a href="http://sierraseeds.org">sierraseeds.org</a>
Slow Food	<a href="http://slowfood.com">slowfood.com</a>
Slow Food USA	<a href="http://slowfoodusa.org">slowfoodusa.org</a>
Small Planet Institute	<a href="http://smallplanet.org">smallplanet.org</a>
Soul Fire Farm	<a href="http://soulfirefarm.org">soulfirefarm.org</a>
Southern Exposure Seed Exchange	<a href="http://southernexposure.com">southernexposure.com</a>
Southern Heritage Seed Collective	<a href="http://workingfood.org">workingfood.org</a>
Story of Stuff Project	<a href="http://storyofstuff.org">storyofstuff.org</a>
Transition Towns	<a href="http://transitionnetwork.org">transitionnetwork.org</a>
Truelove Seeds	<a href="http://trueloveseeds.com">trueloveseeds.com</a>
Ujamma Seeds	<a href="http://ujamaaseeds.com">ujamaaseeds.com</a>
United Plant Savers	<a href="http://unitedplantsavers.org">unitedplantsavers.org</a>
The Urban Harvest	<a href="http://theurbanharvest.com">theurbanharvest.com</a>
Via Campesina	<a href="http://viacampesina.org/en">viacampesina.org/en</a>
Victory Garden Initiative	<a href="http://victorygardeninitiative.org">victorygardeninitiative.org</a>
Walden Farmacy	<a href="http://waldenfarmacy.com">waldenfarmacy.com</a>
Weston A. Price Foundation	<a href="http://westonaprice.org">westonaprice.org</a>
Wild Abundance	<a href="http://wildabundance.net">wildabundance.net</a>
Winona's Hemp Farm	<a href="http://winonashemp.com">winonashemp.com</a>
Women's Earth Alliance	<a href="http://womensearthalliance.org">womensearthalliance.org</a>
WWOOF	<a href="http://wwoof.net">wwoof.net</a>

See more organizations I recommend at: [robingreenfield.org/nonprofits](http://robingreenfield.org/nonprofits)

## Educational resources

Wild Abundance Online Gardening School	<a href="http://wildabundance.net">wildabundance.net</a>
For the Wild Podcast	<a href="http://forthewild.world/podcast">forthewild.world/podcast</a>
Green Dreamer Podcast	<a href="http://greendreamer.com">greendreamer.com</a>
Civil Eats	<a href="http://civileats.com">civileats.com</a>
Food Tank	<a href="http://foodtank.com">foodtank.com</a>
Bioneers	<a href="http://bioneers.org">bioneers.org</a>
Permaculture Magazine	<a href="http://permaculture.co.uk">permaculture.co.uk</a>
Urban Organic Gardening	<a href="http://urbanorganicgardener.com">urbanorganicgardener.com</a>
FoodPrint.org	<a href="http://foodprint.org">foodprint.org</a>
Food and Environment Reporting Network	<a href="http://thefern.org">thefern.org</a>
Real Food Media Project/Food Mythbusters	<a href="http://foodmyths.org">foodmyths.org</a>
Epic Gardening YouTube Channel	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/@epicgardening">@epicgardening</a>
Exploring Alternatives YouTube Channel	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/@ExploringAlternatives">@ExploringAlternatives</a>

Food & Water Watch's "Understanding Food Labels" article:

[foodandwaterwatch.org/2018/07/31/understanding-food-labels-2](http://foodandwaterwatch.org/2018/07/31/understanding-food-labels-2)

Food Alliance's "Understanding Third Party Food Certification" article:

[foodalliance.org/blog/food-certifications](http://foodalliance.org/blog/food-certifications)

See my social media page recommendations at: [robingreenfield.org/sm](http://robingreenfield.org/sm)

See my YouTube Channel recommendations at: [robingreenfield.org/youtube](http://robingreenfield.org/youtube)

## Directories

Explore these directories to grow your community and find organizations, initiatives and opportunities near you!

Farmers' markets:	<a href="http://findafarmersmarket.com">findafarmersmarket.com</a>
Food co-ops:	<a href="http://www.grocery.coop">www.grocery.coop</a> & <a href="http://grocerystory.coop">grocerystory.coop</a>
Zero waste shops:	<a href="http://robingreenfield.org/zws">robingreenfield.org/zws</a>
Land for gardening:	<a href="http://sharedearth.com">sharedearth.com</a>
Community gardens:	<a href="http://communitygarden.org/garden">communitygarden.org/garden</a>
Community food forests:	<a href="http://communityfoodforests.com">communityfoodforests.com</a>
Community compost sites:	<a href="http://makesoil.org">makesoil.org</a>
Community compost sites:	<a href="http://sharewaste.com">sharewaste.com</a>
Seed libraries:	<a href="http://seedlibraries.org">seedlibraries.org</a>
Community seed networks:	<a href="http://communityseednetwork.org">communityseednetwork.org</a>
Permaculture events:	<a href="http://pina.in/calendar">pina.in/calendar</a>
Permaculture projects:	<a href="http://worldpackers.com">worldpackers.com</a>
Earthskills gatherings:	<a href="http://earthskillsgathering.org">earthskillsgathering.org</a>
Intentional communities:	<a href="http://ic.org">ic.org</a>
Ecovillages:	<a href="http://ecovillage.org">ecovillage.org</a>
Permaculture sites:	<a href="http://numundo.org">numundo.org</a>
Wood chips:	<a href="http://getchipdrop.com">getchipdrop.com</a>
Volunteer on organic farms:	<a href="http://wwwoof.net">wwwoof.net</a>
American Herbalists Guild:	<a href="http://americanherbalistsguild.com">americanherbalistsguild.com</a>
Foragers:	<a href="http://findaforager.com">findaforager.com</a>
Foraging locations:	<a href="http://fallingfruit.org">fallingfruit.org</a>
Regenerative farms:	<a href="http://organicconsumers.org/regenerative-farm-map">organicconsumers.org/regenerative-farm-map</a>



## People

Will Allen	<a href="http://farmerwillallen.com">farmerwillallen.com</a>
Wendell Berry	
Mark Bittman	<a href="http://bittmanproject.com">bittmanproject.com</a>
Linda Black Elk	<a href="mailto:@linda.black.elk">@linda.black.elk</a>
Anne-Marie Bonneau	<a href="http://zerowastechef.com">zerowastechef.com</a>
Zach Bush	<a href="http://zachbushmd.com">zachbushmd.com</a>
Amanda David	<a href="http://rootworkherbals.com">rootworkherbals.com</a>
Sally Fallon Morell	<a href="http://nourishingtraditions.com">nourishingtraditions.com</a>
Ron Finley	<a href="http://ronfinley.com">ronfinley.com</a>
Jean-Martin Fortier	<a href="http://jeanmartinfortier.com">jeanmartinfortier.com</a>
Vani Hari (Food Babe)	<a href="http://foodbabe.com">foodbabe.com</a>
Dr. Mark Hyman	<a href="http://drhyman.com">drhyman.com</a>
Jessie Inchauspé	<a href="http://glucosegoddess.com">glucosegoddess.com</a>
Lyla June Johnston	<a href="http://lylajune.com">lylajune.com</a>
Pete Kanaris	<a href="http://greendreamsfl.com">greendreamsfl.com</a>
Sandor Katz	<a href="http://wildfermentation.com">wildfermentation.com</a>
Robin Wall Kimmerer	<a href="http://robinwallkimmerer.com">robinwallkimmerer.com</a>
Winona LaDuke	<a href="http://winonashemp.com">winonashemp.com</a>
Geoff Lawton	<a href="http://discoverpermaculture.com">discoverpermaculture.com</a>
Eric Joseph Lewis	<a href="mailto:@ericjosephlewis">@ericjosephlewis</a>
Wangari Matthai	<a href="http://greenbeltmovement.org">greenbeltmovement.org</a>
Bill McKibben	<a href="http://billmckibben.com">billmckibben.com</a>
Alexis Nikole Nelson	<a href="mailto:@blackforager">@blackforager</a>
Marion Nestle	<a href="http://foodpolitics.com">foodpolitics.com</a>
Leah Penniman	<a href="http://soulfirefarm.org">soulfirefarm.org</a>
Micheal Pollan	<a href="http://michaelpollan.com">michaelpollan.com</a>
Sadhguru	<a href="http://isha.sadhguru.org">isha.sadhguru.org</a>
Sean Sherman	<a href="http://seansherman.com">seansherman.com</a>
Vandana Shiva	<a href="http://navdanya.org">navdanya.org</a>
Tristram Stuart	<a href="http://tristramstuart.co.uk">tristramstuart.co.uk</a>
David Suzuki	<a href="http://david Suzuki.org">david Suzuki.org</a>
Sam Thayer	<a href="http://foragersharvest.com">foragersharvest.com</a>
Marabou Thomas	<a href="http://marabouthomas.com">marabouthomas.com</a>
Ira Wallace	<a href="http://southernexposure.com">southernexposure.com</a>
Karen Washington	<a href="http://karenthefarmer.com">karenthefarmer.com</a>
Alice Waters	<a href="http://edibleschoolyard.org">edibleschoolyard.org</a>

Rowen White

[sierraseeds.org](http://sierraseeds.org)

Malik Yakini

[@beblackandgreen](https://twitter.com/beblackandgreen)

See more people I recommend learning from at: [robingreenfield.org/people](http://robingreenfield.org/people)

## Books

### My Top Recommended Books

*Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer

*Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farm's Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land* by Leah Penniman

*Black Earth Wisdom: Soulful Conversations with Black Environmentalists* by Leah Penniman

*The Story of Stuff* by Annie Leonard

*The Intersectional Environmentalist* by Leah Thomas

*Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* by Marshall Rosenberg

*The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander

*Thanksgiving Address: Greetings to the Natural World* – Native Self-Sufficiency Center

### Food Systems and Food Education

*Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* by Eric Schlosser

*The Omnivore's Dilemma, In Defense of Food, Botany of Desire, Food Rules: An Eater's Manual, and How to Change Your Mind* by Michael Pollan

*Waste: Uncovering the Global Food Waste Scandal* by Tristram Stuart

*Grocery Story: The Promise of Food Co-ops in the Age of Grocery Giants* by Jon Steinman

*Seed Sovereignty, Food Security* by Vandana Shiva

*Wealth Per Acre* by Vandana Shiva and Vaibhav Singh

*Folks This Ain't Normal* by Joel Salatin

*Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* by Barbara Kingsolver

*American Wasteland* by Jonathan Bloom

*Healthful Foods* by Jethro Kloss

*The 100-Mile Diet: A Year of Local Eating* by Alisa Smith and J.B. Mackinnon

*Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health* by Marion Nestle

*Diet for a Small Planet* by Frances Moore Lappé

*The World According to Monsanto: Pollution, Politics and Power* by Marie-Monique Robin

*We Are What We Eat: A Slow Food Manifesto* by Alice Waters

*Food Fix* by Dr. Mark Hyman

*The Good Gut* by Justin and Erica Sonnenburg

*Ultra-Processed People: The Science Behind Food That Isn't Food* by Chris van Tulleken

*Architects of abundance: indigenous regenerative food and land management systems and the excavation of hidden history* dissertation by Lyla June Johnston

### **Growing Food and Ecological Gardening**

*Farming While Black* by Leah Penniman

*Grow Food For Free: The sustainable, zero-cost, low-effort way to a bountiful harvest* by Huw Richards

*The Year-Round Vegetable Gardener: How to Grow Your Own Food 365 Days a Year, No Matter Where You Live* by Niki Jabbour

*How to Become a Gardener* by Ashlie Thomas

*How to Grow More Vegetables* by John Jeavons

*Gaia's Garden* by Toby Hemingway

*Perennial Vegetables* by Eric Toensmeier

*Paradise Lot* by Eric Toensmeier

*Four-Season Harvest* by Eliot Coleman

*Florida Fruit & Vegetable Gardening: Plant, Grow, and Harvest the Best Edibles* by Robert Bowden

*The Edible Ecosystem Solution: Growing Biodiversity in Your Backyard and Beyond* by Zach Loeks

*Earth User's Guide to Permaculture* by Rosemary Morrow

*One Straw Revolution* by Masanobu Fukuoka

*The Market Gardener* by Jean-Martin Fortier

### **Foraging**

*The Forager's Harvest, Nature's Garden and Incredible Wild Edibles* by Samuel Thayer

*Samuel Thayer's Field Guide to Edible Wild Plants of Eastern and Central North America*

*The Forager's Feast: How to Identify, Gather, and Prepare Wild Edibles* by Leda Meredith

*Backyard Foraging* by Ellen Zachos

*Mushrooms of the Southeast* by Todd Elliott

*A Field Guide to Eastern Trees* (Peterson Field Guide)

For my homeland of the Great Lakes Region, I recommend (in addition to Samuel Thayer's books):

*Midwest Foraging* by Lisa M. Rose

*Midwest Medicinal Plants* by Lisa M. Rose

*Mushrooms of the Upper Midwest: A Simple Guide to Common Mushrooms*  
*Wild Berries and Fruits Field Guide of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan*

For Florida:

*Florida's Edible Wild Plants* by Peggy Lantz

The Forager's Harvest book store has hand-selected many of the highest integrity foraging books for the US.

Also, *Botany Every Day* with Marc Williams is a helpful resource!

### **Food Prep and Cooking**

*Nourishing Traditions* by Sally Fallon

*Wild Fermentation* by Sandor Katz

*The Zero-Waste Chef* by Anne-Marie Bonneau

*The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen* by Sean Sherman

*The Good Berry Cookbook* by Tashia Hart

*The Art of Simple Food: Notes, Lessons, and Recipes from a Delicious Revolution:*  
*A Cookbook* by Alice Waters

### **Holistic Health Care, Herbalism, Natural Medicine**

See Chestnut School of Herbal Medicine's article: "Our Favorite Herbalism Books." [chestnutherbs.com/our-favorite-herbalism-books](http://chestnutherbs.com/our-favorite-herbalism-books)

### **More**

*The Compassionate Hunter's Guidebook* by Miles Olson

*Drinking Molotov Cocktails with Gandhi* and *The Moneyless Manifesto* by  
 Mark Boyle

*Garbage Land* by Elizabeth Royte

*Project Drawdown* by Paul Hawken

*Fibershed* by Rebecca Burgess

*The Humanure Handbook* by Joseph Jenkins

*Honeybee Democracy* by Thomas Seeley

All books by Vandana Shiva

All books by Charles Eisenstein

All books by Thich Nhat Hanh

See more of my book recommendations at: [robingreenfield.org/books](http://robingreenfield.org/books).

## Films

“Cooked” (series)  
 “Common Ground”  
 “David Attenborough: A Life on Our Planet”  
 “Earthlings”  
 “Fantastic Fungi”  
 “Fed Up”  
 “Food, Inc.” and “Food, Inc. 2”  
 “Food Matters”  
 “Fresh”  
 “Gather”  
 “Happen Films” YouTube Channel  
 “Inhabit: A Permaculture Perspective”  
 “Just Eat It”  
 “Living the Change: Inspiring Stories for a Sustainable Future”  
 “Seed: Mother Coming Home” (short film)  
 “Seed: The Untold Story”  
 “Seeds of Death: Unveiling the Lies of GMOs”  
 “Supersize Me!”  
 “The Biggest Little Farm”  
 “The World According to Monsanto: Pollution, Corruption, and the Control  
 of Our Food Supply”  
 “Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Prices”  
 “3,000-year-old solutions to modern problems,” TEDx by Lyla June Johnston

See more of my film recommendations at: [robingreenfield.org/films](http://robingreenfield.org/films).

## Foraging Resources

Food is growing freely and abundantly all around us. The Earth is offering us these gifts freely with a silent agreement of reciprocity. This gift is growing in all climates, in all regions, and all cities. As a gift, it costs no money whatsoever. It is some of the most nutrient-dense food on Earth and the medicines are absolutely potent. Harvested with reciprocity, your hands can actually improve the world around you. How's that for a food to eat?

## How to Safely Forage

Many people have a deep yearning inside of them to forage. But what is stopping them is the concern over safety, from both the uncertainty of identifying the plants correctly and the potential pollutants from the many sources of human-made toxicity in our world. First I'll cover the former, and then the latter.

I have very good news for you. There is one simple rule that you can follow that guarantees with absolute certainty that you will not die from eating a misidentified plant or mushroom. That rule? Only eat a plant or mushroom if you are 100 percent certain that you have identified it correctly and that you know how to eat it. It's that simple. To start, you only need to be able to identify one plant with certainty to eat it. The other numerous millions can still be a mystery. Don't let this fear stop you if you really want to forage, my friends. Within this, there is much to learn and much nuance, but you don't need to know it all to start. My Top Foraging Tips in Chapter 11, as well as many of the words ahead, are basic guidelines to foraging safely.

Now, people often ask me about pollution, toxins and contaminants that may be on the plants or in the soil. Common concerns include pesticides, herbicides, car exhaust, heavy metals, chemical fertilizer, toxic runoff and so on. There is certainly reason for concern here. However, once we regain our common senses by establishing a relationship with the land, we learn how to read it and have accurate ideas as to what areas and which plants are relatively unpolluted or are quite polluted. This does take some reconnection to master, however, starting is quite easy.

One must also ask when questioning the safety of foraging so greatly, if they have potentially put too much false trust in the food industry and potentially have an ingrained fear of Earth through the indoctrination of our dominator society? Do you really know what's on and in the food from the store, even if it is organic? Foraging creates critical thinkers, and when critical

thinking is applied, what seemed in the past incomprehensible now seems quite natural and flowing. I invite you to come to foraging in this way.

Now, I am going to speak for myself here, because that's the safest thing I can do in this scenario, as I do not have rules that I follow, but rather my own ethos. And this is an ethos that many other foragers follow.

I embrace that I live in an impure world, with pollutants having reached almost everywhere on Earth. I accept that I will be exposed to some of these in many facets of my life. I will be exposed to them through foraging as well. And so it is.

Yet, I am going to do what is reasonably within my limits and in my best interest to avoid unnecessary contaminants. Thus, I avoid foraging in any sites that are potentially heavily contaminated from multiple years of pollution, including "brown sites" like where a gas station or chemical processing plant formerly was or currently is. I avoid foraging along interstates and areas of congested traffic, with some exceptions. I avoid current construction sites. I avoid municipal utility fence lines that are often sprayed with herbicides, as well as power lines. I avoid harvesting from low lying and aquatic areas that may be a receiving site for contaminated runoff, such as ditches along the side of the road. However, I will still forage from these places if the time is right. I will choose to have access to a food medicine, if I believe that the potential benefits outweigh the potential costs. That is a personal judgment call that I make and that we all have to make ourselves.

If I am harvesting large quantities of food or medicine, then I will focus on harvesting from the cleanest sites that I can find. If I am harvesting snacks and small amounts, then I have far less discernment. I harvest a very substantial amount of my food along the roadside and generally stick to local highways where the speed limit is 55 or less and uncongested city roads. I also learn which plants and what parts of the plants are more likely to be contaminated. I understand that toxins are less commonly stored in fruits, since this is the plant's offspring and they have a natural intelligence not to concentrate pollutants that might diminish their species in the future. I harvest fruits on the side of the road in great quantities. However, in general, I am always going to be wary of roots that are immersed right in contaminated soil. Mushrooms I especially prefer to harvest away from roads and contamination. I avoid harvesting from low-lying areas on the side of the road, because heavy metals fall there and runoff concentrates there. Instead, ideally I harvest uphill from roads.

As far as the concern of eating food that has been sprayed with pesticides or herbicides, I generally feel confident that I avoid most spraying. First, I look for biodiversity and unkemptness. If an area has a lot of biodiversity and seems



unmaintained, it's much less likely to have been sprayed. A lawn full of "weeds" and flowers is the lawn I will always choose over one that is a monocrop of grass (there's not much to forage there anyway). I watch for patches of brown plants where everything else is green. That can be a sign of spot spraying, where they are spraying for a particular plant, rather than a blanket spraying where they douse the whole area. With these basic practices, I have close to no concern in this realm, and I accept that I expose myself to some pesticides, just as I do when I eat most food from the store.

As far as legality goes, in my complete transparency, I do not concern myself much with the legality. I follow Earth Code first and foremost, which includes respect to Earth, the plants and animals in the space and the humans who use and steward the space. I follow laws that holistically serve humanity and our fellow Earth inhabitants and I disregard the ones that are destructive to our potential to live in harmony. Thus, I forage where it may not be legal, as long as my foraging is doing no harm. I do not forage in areas where foraging is prohibited, if the prohibition is of true benefit to the plants and the people. That said, in most spaces foraging is completely legal. It is the exception where it is not legal. For those who do not want to deal with the law, it would be in their best interest to inform themselves of any codes in their area and to follow them as desired – which can mean learning the best times and ways to forage within them, or not foraging in these locations – depending on your desire.

## Ethics of Foraging

For most of us, the daunting feeling of concern over not knowing how to harvest in a way that does not harm the plants or Earth comes in part from a place of respect. However, more so this concern may come from a place of separation. There is nothing inherently wrong with foraging. Earth wants us to forage. Earth is providing the food for us and asking us to please eat her gifts. And she is resilient enough that she can tolerate us making some mistakes in the process. In fact, to not forage due to concern as to whether you can do it sustainably, may be more harmful to Earth than to forage and make some mistakes. To take this one step further in response to the common concern, "what would happen if everyone started foraging?" Well, if everyone wanted to forage, it would mean that we had transformed as humanity, and along with our change in actions, there would be a change in the way that we relate to the land and the plants that we are foraging. We would not only be foraging, but we would be stewarding. Some of the general guidelines I follow to harvest sustainably include:

Focusing on being a steward of the land. Striving to be a giver as I am the receiver, whether in that moment of harvest or as a part of my overall approach to harvesting.

Foraging what is widely abundant, where there is no concern about overharvesting. I also learn which plants are not abundant and are more likely to thrive by my not harvesting them.

Foraging in a way that does no unnecessary harm to the plant, to the best of my abilities. And with many plants I learn how to help them reproduce or thrive through my harvesting.

Eating a lot of “weeds.” The very plants that other people kill and seek to eradicate are my foods and medicines.

Focusing on harvesting species that are not native to the region and are doing damage to the ecosystem, thus providing an ecosystem service through my harvest.

Thinking of others – both humans and animals – that may also be eating these plants and acting in a way that I believe balances all our needs.

Getting to know the land and water to facilitate a deeper understanding of the space and my place within it.

Entering into relationships with the plants, not one way interactions or quick drive-bys.

If the land is “owned” by someone, I give respect to them, but I also remember that ownership is an illusion. I acknowledge this illusion, but I do not make it my sole guiding force. I ask for permission where I feel that it is beneficial and I harvest without if I feel that it is not needed. To some this may sound insincere, but remember there is no black or white. When I walk past a fruit tree that is dropping its bounty onto the sidewalk where it is rotting, I will harvest as I desire.

To forage with ethics is to think critically. It is to seek to understand and enter into relationships. It is to act with compassion. It is to take a holistic approach. It is to remember that nature doesn’t have the same rules as humans do.

## Where to Forage

Plants do not confine themselves to the separation mindset that many of us humans have adopted. Plants grow everywhere! I harvest my food from a wide range of spaces and I invite you to as well. Front yards, backyards and side yards. Medians along the sidewalk. Public parks and public spaces in the city. Empty lots and wild patches of land. Gardens and farms (eat the weeds!). Along rural roads. On others’ land with their permission. The forests, fields and the edges between the two. Edges are often the most biodiverse spaces. The shorelines and

transition spaces around lakes, rivers, ponds and oceans. Disturbed soil sites, where many species thrive. Preserves, State Parks and National Parks. Basically, wherever plants grow!

## Urban Foraging Tips

Look for fruit with the bounty falling to the ground. I find the most fruit by looking down at the sidewalk, not up in the trees.

If you are concerned about others getting their share, pick the fruits and plants that are harder to access, leaving the easily reachable foods for people with less physical ability or skill. For fruit harvesting, a fruit picking pole or ladder can increase your harvests greatly.

All too often I see people leave behind the harvest, not wanting to be greedy, and then I see it all go unharvested. It really comes down to being sensible and thinking critically. In some scenarios, it makes sense to harvest the entire bounty and other scenarios call for leaving some behind.

Think of the animals, too. Learn what creatures share this food source and find the balance of how much you leave for them. When it comes to birds, they can reach the fruit at the top of the tree while we take what we can access.

If the food is on someone's property, ask for permission. Of all the doors I've ever knocked on, very few people have ever said no. The majority have greeted me with enthusiasm. In my experience, most people don't know the food is even edible. In these cases, it is an opportunity to awaken them to the bounty at their doorstep. I invite them to learn about the food with me. Often people compare the fruit on their trees to what they are used to from the grocery store, considering it too sour, too fibrous or too hard to open and thus they are happy for me to take it all. On some occasions, especially with the mangoes in Florida, people found the fruits to be a burden, attracting insects and rats and were grateful for me to harvest the bounty. I've even had people who feel guilty about letting it go to waste and thank me for helping them to feel better about the situation.

My typical approach is, "Hello, I was walking past your yard and I noticed there are a lot of apples falling to the ground. I'm wondering if you are going to eat them, and if not, if perhaps I could? I'd be happy to clean up the sidewalk for you as well." I start with asking just about what has fallen and feel out the situation about harvesting what is on the tree. I love this opportunity to be of service to a community member, sharing knowledge, inspiration and connection. If the resident is an elder or has limited physical capabilities, I'll ask if they'd like me to harvest some for them. I am always polite and considerate, no matter the response.

Another option is to harvest to distribute to community members in need, keeping some for yourself and distributing the rest. This can allow you to be on a community mission, increasing your confidence and comfort level.

## My Top 50 Wild Edibles

This list is based on the plants that I find in most abundance and enjoy the most consistently. At the same time, they are some of the easiest to find, identify and harvest sustainably (with a few exceptions marked with [\*]).

### **Greens**

stinging nettle  
wood nettle  
garlic mustard  
lamb's quarters  
mustard  
watercress  
wintercress  
dandelion  
purslane  
mulberry leaves  
plantago

### **Fruit**

apples  
Juneberry  
mulberry  
aronia  
chokecherry  
bramble berries  
autumnberry  
wild grapes  
elderberry  
nannyberry  
highbush cranberry

### **Herbs/Teas**

mint  
bee balm/monarda  
wild onion/garlic  
bramble berry leaves  
cedar  
goldenrod  
sumac  
spicebush  
sweet fern\*

### **Mushrooms**

king boletes  
hen of the woods  
chicken of the woods  
chanterelles  
reishi  
turkey tail  
puffballs  
chaga  
lion's mane

### **Nuts**

coconut  
chestnut  
hickory nut  
black walnut

### **More**

manoomin\*  
wild yam  
poke stems  
milkweed pods  
wild radish pods  
burdock roots  
smilax

Runners-up: persimmon, pawpaw, plums, black nightshade, Kousa dogwood, blueberry, black cherry, ginkgo\*, plantago, sochan\*, dock, chicory, wild lettuce, wood sorrel, basswood, saffrafras, wapato\*, parsnip\*, hazelnut\*, Jerusalem artichoke\*, oyster mushrooms

Florida specific: loquat, Suriname cherry, wild citrus, banana, mango, sea purslane

## How to Eat a Lot of Wild Food

Are you motivated to take your foraging to the next level and really harvest the abundance of the land? Here I share a few of my key practices that have allowed me to eat up to a 100 percent foraged diet. Focus on the plants that produce a lot of food and are efficient to harvest. Become proficient at processing and storing these foods. Adjust your palate (and your mind) to love whatever is most bountiful and nourishing. Put real time and energy into your foraging practice!

Freshly harvested greens: Make horta. Bring together a big mess of wild greens, sauté them in oil or fat, add vinegar and salt.

Snack on the trail! Keep your eyes open for food whenever you are driving, cycling or walking. Harvest wherever you are, even on your way to work, school or to see friends.

Fruits: Gorge when they are in season and forget about the grocery store fruits. Freeze, can and dehydrate the bounty. Jams, jellies, juices and sauces galore.

Mushrooms: Seek the big hauls and be ready for when you find them. Eat large fresh quantities cooked and dehydrate the bounty for soups and stews all winter long.

Dehydrate greens into a green powder, which can be added to just about any meal. Make cooking herb blends from bountiful herbs. Drink herbal and medicinal mushroom teas daily from the herbs and mushrooms you harvest and dehydrate. Dehydrated foods can easily be traveled with, bringing your wild food to even the most unwild spaces.

Harvest deer that are hit by cars (see the next page) and utilize the parts of the animal that hunters are not using.

“Eat something wild every day,” as I’ve heard my friend Eric Joseph Lewis say dozens of times. Even if it’s just a handful of greens or a few herbs.

See my extensive Foraging Guide for New Foragers at:  
[robingreenfield.org/foraging](http://robingreenfield.org/foraging)

## How to Harvest a Car-Killed Deer

As much as I never thought that I'd be the one writing about how to harvest a deer from the side of the road and process it, here I am. In the many talks I've given and the many classes I've led on *Food Freedom*, this question always comes up. So many are intrigued to know more. The media feeds on this story, too. I've come to see that this skillset and resource is far too valuable not to share, and it is not widely distributed information. I know what I share here will be of value to many people.

First, I don't call it roadkill. I call it a deer killed by a car. If a human gets hit by a car, they are still a human. They aren't considered roadkill. This deer was a deer before it was hit, and afterwards it still is first and foremost a deer, a deer that has been killed by a car. The perception most people have of a car-killed deer is not based on experiential knowledge. It is based on assumptions and narratives driven by stories seen on television. These stories are told via lenses of preconceived notions and without reverence to the deer and the life they led up to that point.

Eating car-killed deer is far more of an "all American" thing to do than most would assume. In fact, I'd guess that millions of US Americans alive today have eaten meat from a car-killed animal; deer, moose, elk, bear, grouse, pheasants, turkey, raccoons, possums, alligators and many others. But let's keep the focus on deer today.

In fact, there are even systems across the nation for communities to harvest car-killed deer. In many counties, the standard practice is to call the sheriff if a deer is hit and if the deer is in harvestable condition, the sheriff then calls the first person on the sign-up list of people who would like to go harvest it. If they don't answer, they call the next. And this list cycles deer after deer. In other regions, the animal is brought to a processor, who takes care of the deer and then the meat is delivered to members of the community who are food insecure.

To harvest a car-killed deer takes intention, and generally foresight. Most of us don't just see a car-killed deer and for the first time in our lives think "I'd like to harvest this deer." No, there is thought, intention and perhaps preparation.

What to carry: a sharp hunting knife, old cotton sheets, a couple hand towels and a jug of soapy (biodegradable) water. If you drive, carry these items with you whenever you are driving on roads where deer are hit. I have harvested deer while being a passenger in a dozen vehicles and I am often traveling with these items. This is for harvesting on the spot. If you pick up the whole deer, then just a tarp will do and if you're in a pickup truck then nothing is needed at all.

Now you are prepared to harvest a deer and you'll need to know what to do when you arrive at the deer. These instructions are designed for finding a deer you haven't hit yourself. If you've hit the deer, your considerations are much simpler.

First, decide whether the deer is still harvestable. To do this, regain your common senses, if you've lost them. This involves your senses of sight, smell and touch.

First, you look. There's absolutely no harm you can do to yourself by looking. An ideal deer looks like it is taking a nap. There is little blood, the stomach is not ruptured, there are few insects and the deer is not bloated. Yet, none of these visuals mean that a deer is not harvestable. Everything I share here is a guideline, not a rule. Critical thinking is of the essence. I have harvested meat from over a dozen deer and am confident in what I'm sharing. From here on, I am sharing solely from my own experience. I take responsibility for my words and I ask you to take sole responsibility for how you use them. Here is what I am viewing to get a gauge of how long the deer has been there and if it is likely viable to harvest.

**Blood:** If the blood is still fresh, it is a very recently hit deer.

**Bloating:** Bloating is a sign of bacteria in the gut starting to reproduce substantially. On warm days, no bloating means the deer is likely quite fresh (or the stomach is ruptured). I've harvested many bloated deer.

**Eyes:** Clear eyes are freshest, cloudiness shows at least a couple hours of sitting, moisture in the eyes is preferred and eyes eaten out is not a reassuring sign. Most deer I harvest have cloudy eyes.

**Insects:** Some flies are not an issue, however maggots mean the deer has been there long enough for flies to lay eggs and for them to hatch. I don't recall ever harvesting a deer with maggots, but it is not unlikely that I have.

**Animal scavenging:** Few people harvest a deer once other animals have started to eat it, with the most common exception of just the eyes having been pecked out. However, I did take a fresh fawn away from a few vultures in Richmond, Virginia once.

**Impact damage:** Some deer will just obviously not be harvestable due to the damage inflicted by impact. Others will be questionable and many will be clear. A deer hit only in the head is ideal, because the body is often undamaged. In my experience usually at least one of the four shoulders (quarters) will have been hit and damaged. As long as a portion of the deer is not damaged, the deer may be harvestable. Deer hit on highways and roads with a speed limit of 55 miles per hour tend to have the least damage, although I have harvested from the interstate.

**Ruptured stomachs:** Not ideal, but not necessarily a sign of an unharvestable deer. I have harvested numerous deer with ruptured stomachs. As

long as the rupture can be kept separate from the area that I'm harvesting, I feel comfortable to harvest.

Discoloration of skin: This takes multiple days and I've never harvested from a deer at this point.

If the deer passes your sense of sight, now move on. Next you touch. In truth, before you even get to touch, you'll have already smelled it. If you are walking up to the deer and you smell it before your eyes are upon it, that's a big signal. I've never harvested a deer in that scenario. Foul smell is not a "no go" though. Our farts smell, but that doesn't mean our bodies are foul. The smell could just be gas leaking out or ruptured intestines. But I'm leaving the ultimate smell test until after touch.

Hair: When the hair is pulled, what I'm looking for is the hair to stay intact. If the hair pulls out easily, the deer has been dead for some time and is likely not harvestable.

Feeling for broken bones: I feel the four quarters for impact damage. I'm seeking quarters that do not have broken bones and damaged muscles.

If it passes your sense of touch, the next step is harvesting.

Most of the deer I have harvested have been lying on the roadside for anywhere between five and 24 hours. Most commonly I harvest a deer in the late morning that was hit the night before or a deer late in the day that was hit in the morning. I have harvested deer that had been out from 6 p.m. until 3 p.m. the next day with a daytime high in the seventies. Spring and fall are ideal times for harvesting as the weather is cooler. Extreme heat makes for much quicker spoilage.

Ideally the deer is in an area where I can drag it into the woods or behind a structure or landscape to a space where nobody can clearly see me. The car is pulled fully off the road to create as little disruption to other drivers as possible.

To start, I position the deer on its four knees. I take my sharp knife and cut into the skin right along the spine. I run my knife from the inside of the skin, not the outside, along the spine from the neck to the rump and pull the skin aside a couple inches. I then drag my knife along the vertebrae on one side. I reach my fingers in and roll the backstraps out with just my fingers and the palm of my hand.

Lastly, you smell it. Again, there's no harm you can do to yourself by smelling, except for experiencing a moment of displeasure.

Ideally the meat will smell sweet. If someone had described this to me without my experiencing it, I don't know if I'd have understood. But the meat smells sweet when it is fresh. Some deer, especially bucks in mating season, can have a stronger scent and still be harvestable and I have harvested deer that had a bit of an unpleasant smell that makes me think of hormones. However, I think there's always some element of sweetness there.



The backstraps are the easiest to harvest. On numerous occasions, I have harvested only the backstraps (as long as I wouldn't be fouling a deer that someone else would have harvested more substantially). The backstraps are almost never damaged by impact.

From here, I will harvest whichever of the four quarters are still harvestable. I cut around the areas of broken bones and substantial blood from impact. I'm always amazed at how little blood there is. In fact, it's not even a bloody process. Muscles are amazingly compartmentalized, meaning there is minimal need to cut into them. The front quarters are attached only by a ball and socket joint and pop off entirely. The skin peels away from the meat quite easily with the knife blade and my fingers. Minimal hair gets on the meat by keeping the knife on the inside of the skin and cutting outwards when cutting through. After the quarters, I will often harvest the neck, which is the hardest part to do with a deer on the ground. A bonesaw is another tool that is very helpful.

While harvesting, I have soapy (ideally warm) water to wipe off my hands and the knife as needed, keeping them generally clean. I have my hand towels to wipe off my hands and the knife.

As I am harvesting, I am taking each piece that I remove and wrapping it into cut out sections of old cotton sheets. Generally, the backstraps go into a piece, each quarter goes into a piece and any large chunks of meat such as a part of the rump goes into a piece. Ideally, I have pieces large enough to wrap each item a couple times.

Hanging a deer allows for easier harvesting and the ability and potential to harvest much more meat. I have never done this. I have never harvested organs from a car-killed deer and I have always avoided any area that comes in contact with the inner cavity. Bacteria that can make us sick are most present in the digestive system. In a hunted deer, this is not an issue at all, however, this is the precaution I take when harvesting car-killed deer. If I ever was in a car that hit a deer or was called to a freshly hit deer, I would harvest substantially more than I have to to date.

I don't worry about getting all of the meat, as I am already giving respect to the resource by harvesting it, and doing my best in a sometimes difficult circumstance. After harvesting what I feel content with, I drag the animal to an area where it is able to return to Earth, being eaten by animals and decomposing back into the soil. If water is near, I drag it away from the water, ideally into a wooded area. I give my thanks to the deer for nourishing me and to all that gave life to that deer.

The deer wrapped in cloth does not need to go into a cooler or a refrigerator right away. In fact, it is standard practice to hang a deer in the open

air to age the meat. I always keep the meat dry, not directly on ice. From here, I generally get it into a refrigerator or cooler within a few hours. In the fridge, I leave it wrapped in cloth for up to a week. I generally feast, share with others and store the bounty. I freeze, pressure can and dehydrate the meat. I make broth from the bones.

There are many online resources that teach butchering and I learned in part from the YouTube Channel, “Deer Meat for Dinner.” They can do a better job of teaching this material.

As much as I keep my eyes open for deer as I’m on the road (and yes, I have harvested a deer by bicycle) my success often lies in others having their eyes on the road. I talk to my friends who spend substantial time on the local highways and ask them to contact me if they see a deer. Ideally they can stop and take a quick photo, but I never ask more of them than what they are joyful to do. I have also posted successfully in community Facebook groups and on craigslist.

When I set out to write this guide, I planned for two pages max. Here we are eight pages later and I have even restrained myself from including numerous details and many relevant stories. I am hesitant to discuss this topic because I know how some of society perceives me (as “that guy who eats roadkill”) and I worry about losing my credibility in a society that is afraid of stepping outside of the norm. But, I share because so many of you have asked and I see such incredible value in this skill. Harvesting car-killed deer has changed the lives of many people, providing access to highly nourishing meat, at no financial cost. I know many people who care deeply about animals and Earth who see eating car-killed deer as the pinnacle of eating meat while doing no harm.

Along with the knife, old cotton sheets, hand towels and soapy water, I invite you to keep this book with you in your vehicle. It would be a meaningful gift if you would email me when you harvest your first deer.

## Introduction to Herbal Medicine

Herbal medicine is considered to be the oldest system of medicine practiced by humanity. By following basic practices and the guidance of herbalists, anyone can embrace herbal medicine safely and effectively. Many of the herbs worked with are the most common plants right outside our doors – mint, lavender, sage, elder, chamomile – which makes sense since humanity has been in relationships with these herbs for thousands of years. Common herbal remedies take form in teas, syrups, salves, oils, poultices and other simple forms. From preventative healthcare to treating common illnesses like cold and flu to far more specific and threatening illnesses, herbalism is here to serve humanity. Most herbalism is highly accessible and requires little to nothing more than the items you'd find in a standard kitchen. Whether you'd like to make your own herbal remedies or source from other herbalists, the opportunities are endless.

- Herbalism Schools offering online and in-person classes: Florida School of Holistic Medicine, Chestnut School of Herbal Medicine, California School of Herbal Studies, People's Medicine School and many more.
- Educational Resources: American Herb Association, American Herbalists Guild and many more.
- Herbal Conferences: Florida Herbal Conference, Women's Herbal Conference and many more.
- Sources of Herbs: Support local herbalists and source locally grown and foraged herbs whenever possible! Frontier Co-op and Mountain Rose Herbs are nationwide resources with high integrity.
- Ayurvedic herbal medicine: The Ayurvedic Institute
- For books: See Chestnut School of Herbal Medicine's article: "Our Favorite Herbalism Books." [chestnutherbs.com/our-favorite-herbalism-books](http://chestnutherbs.com/our-favorite-herbalism-books)

I am deeply inspired by Amanda David, founder of People's Medicine School, which puts a strong emphasis on decolonizing Western herbalism and liberation of BIPOC folk through herbal medicine. At the heart of her school – offered both online and in person – is the forming and fostering of deep relationships with nature, plants, self and community. Linda Black Elk is an herbalist and forager who can find medicine growing wherever there are plants. Her teachings show us just how accessible and exciting herbalism can be and she serves as a source of constant inspiration and motivation to many of us.

## How to Compost

Are you new to composting and planning on starting? If, so I am very excited for you. Composting is one of the keys to regenerating our communities and our relationship with Earth and to personal empowerment! There are many options for composting: at home, through a community composting program or through a city composting program. If you can compost yourself, I highly recommend it versus passing it off. But if you are passing it off, keep it neighborhood local and small-scale, if possible.

To compost at home, no plastic bins or electronic gadgets are needed. Having your compost pile directly in contact with the earth is ideal, but if you only have a patio or concrete area, then a contained bin will do. A highly effective compost pile is a minimum of four feet wide and none of the plastic bins really allow for this. The systems that I recommend require close to no skill to create and can be made for free with salvaged materials or very inexpensively with materials from the local hardware store or sourced secondhand. Here I share three options:

Three pallets put together into a u-shape with the front section open. A gate on the front is optional. Metal wire or basic metal hardware can be used to attach the three pallets at the two back corners. Heat-treated pallets are free of chemicals (look for the HT sign burned into the wood) and I always choose these pallets, which I get for free in the dumpster area of stores.

A more ideal system utilizes seven pallets to make three bins. On one side is the actively used bin. The carbon material is stored in the center bin. The bin on the other side is the pile that is being left to process into mature compost.

A 17-foot piece of chicken wire or hardware cloth formed into a circle makes a very effective compost bin. Having two of these facilitates having one that is actively being used and one that is composting into finished compost.

Another passive compost system is a banana circle, in which no materials are needed to create. Simply plant banana plants in a circle and then compost inside of them once they are large enough.

Many people bury their kitchen scraps directly into their garden. Although I occasionally do this, my opinion is that composting utilizes the resources and builds the soil more effectively.

The key to composting is to let Earth do the work. The Earth has been composting for longer than humans have been around and knows how to compost just as well today. There are some basic practices to helping the Earth along that I share here, along with basic tips to make composting more enjoyable and effective.

There are five ingredients to composting: greens, browns, water, air and living organisms.

Greens include all food waste, fruit and vegetable scraps, animal poop and plants that are still green/not brown yet.

Browns include dead leaves, twigs, newspaper, cardboard, wood chips, straw, and wood ashes. Greens are the nitrogen source and browns are the carbon source. Add the right balance of “greens” to “browns” for an effective and healthy compost pile. For every bucket of food waste I add to the pile, I add two buckets of dry leaves or mulch.

Make sure to shred anything that is large to increase the effectiveness and speed of composting as well as to help to “bulk-up” and aerate the compost pile. Also, make sure to keep ample carbon on site, right next to your bin so you can easily add it every time you add nitrogen.

Any organic matter can be composted, which means any plant or animal or any part of a plant or animal. This includes anything that comes from the human body. This includes paper, napkins/tissues/paper towels, cardboard, plants from your yard, all kitchen scraps and plate scrapings, whole foods and ultra-processed foods, egg shells, bones, meat, dairy, coffee grounds, farm animal poop and more. There are some items that need a more particular balance such as oil, fats, meats and citrus peels and these materials biodegrade much better in a compost pile like I recommend, versus plastic bins.

A properly functioning compost pile will be kept moist, the consistency of a wrung-out kitchen sponge. In dry climates, sometimes piles need to be watered to keep them moist. Moisture is needed for the microorganisms to break everything down, but if you have too much you might get a smelly pile.

Air is needed in a compost pile because aerobic bacteria depend upon oxygen to do their work. That said, compost piles do not necessarily need to be stirred or turned. Many veteran composters will share many different strategies. Personally, I generally do not do much stirring or turning.

And, of course, the pile will have trillions of bacteria, plus fungi and insects helping to decompose the materials into a finished compost. A compost pile is ALIVE!

What I like to do is keep a five-gallon bucket in my kitchen and once that bucket (or even a couple buckets) is full, I add them to the compost pile. To do that, I dig into the top to make a hole large enough for the contents I’m adding, and dump the buckets in. Adding large quantities of nitrogen at once brings the temperatures up, which is what we want. Then I cover the freshly added materials with twice the amount of carbon.

I aim to have no food waste visible, keeping the pile covered with carbon.

This reduces smells and insects greatly. A properly functioning compost pile will have no smells, very few flying insects (they can't access the food) and few rodents. If your compost pile smells much, this is not an issue with composting overall, but with your practice.

By keeping the lid on the five-gallon compost bucket in the kitchen, and rinsing it out after each use, it is possible to have minimal to no insect issues.

Generally in the active season (not the winter), compost takes about three months to complete and be ready to add to your garden. It is possible to finish compost in under a month with more active systems. In cold climates, a compost pile can be added to all winter long, where it will sit largely dormant until spring (or active if you design the system for it!).

Put the compost to use and grow some food.

Take your knowledge further:

Composting Guide and resource: [robingreenfield.org/composting](http://robingreenfield.org/composting)

Find a composting site near you: [makesoil.org](http://makesoil.org) and [sharewaste.com](http://sharewaste.com).

How to compost humanure: [robingreenfield.org/humanure](http://robingreenfield.org/humanure) and *The Humanure Handbook*

How to Start a Community Compost Program: [robingreenfield.org/cc](http://robingreenfield.org/cc)

## How to Turn Your Yard into a Garden

Are you ready to turn your yard into a garden? Or how about that empty lot in your neighborhood? Or the lawn at your school, church or public park?

In the days just before my year of Food Freedom ended, I filmed a video in my frontyard garden sharing the process that I undertook to transform the sandy lawn into an abundant garden. Since then, I have created an extensive written guide and video series that teaches the process in more depth. In this series, I share the step-by-step process that you can follow to transform any yard into a garden – with accessibility, cost-effectiveness, utilization of waste and sustainability at the heart of it all. There are just seven ingredients needed: cardboard, mulch, compost, soil, seeds/plants, water and sun. It's a very simple process and I invite you to join me!

Transforming an entire front yard alone can be quite a lot of work. I recommend making it a community project and this guide includes tips for that.

Go to [robingreenfield.org/yardintogarden](http://robingreenfield.org/yardintogarden) to learn more and get started!

Many people who reside in an HOA (homeowners' association) live under restrictive standards of what they are allowed to grow. If you live in an HOA and are looking for support on how to grow food within the restrictions, see my online guide for tips and examples of others already doing it.

## Gear and Tools List

This list shares the items that I have used for growing and foraging my food. Many of these items I did not have during the year and some I borrowed for the short periods that I needed them. Note that these categories overlap and do not include all small items that are commonly in a kitchen. Items marked with [^] have been the least necessary for me.

### Food Processing

pressure canner  
water bath canner^  
fruit strainer^  
nut mill^  
grain mill^  
meat grinder^  
kraut crock^  
5-gallon buckets  
canning jars  
canning lids & rings  
window screens  
Piteba Press^

### Kitchen items

pots  
pans  
glass baking trays  
metal baking trays  
wood cutting board  
kettle  
large mixing bowls  
colander  
sieves  
knives, scissors  
nutcracker/picks  
tea strainer

### Food Storage

jars, lids & rings  
gallon pickle jars  
gallon jugs  
5-gallon buckets  
baskets  
cloth bags

### Electronic Items

Vitamix blender  
deep chest freezer  
food dehydrator  
food processor  
Instant Pot/crockpot

### Garden Tools

shovels (2)  
pitchforks (2)  
wheelbarrow  
hand pruners  
loppers

### Foraging Items

baskets  
cloth bags  
old cotton sheets  
buckets  
hand pruners

### More

Berkey water filter  
Books  
Bicycle  
Bike rack and bags  
Bicycle trailer

5-gallon buckets  
275-gallon IBC totes  
55-gallon drums  
hori hori or trowel  
trays

knife  
scissors  
fruit picking pole  
rope  
fishing gear

For jars: quarts, pints, half pints and half gallons all are useful with quarts and pints being the most commonly used. I prefer widemouth jars.

Materials of choice: stainless steel, glass, wood and ceramic



For wild ricing: canoe, ricing sticks, pole, paddles

For overnight foraging trips: backpack, tent, sleeping bag and sleeping pad

The bike trailer I used was a heavy-duty cargo bicycle trailer made by Bikes at Work [bikesatwork.com](http://bikesatwork.com) that can carry up to 300 pounds.

## Where to Get Seeds

Find a seed library or seed network in your area through [seedlibraries.org](http://seedlibraries.org) and [communityseednetwork.org](http://communityseednetwork.org). Seed Savers Exchange and Organic Seed Alliance are also great online networks. Many public libraries have a seed library with free seeds, and local gardening groups host seed exchanges.

Seek out local seed companies before sourcing from nationwide seeds producers. Sow True Seed in Asheville, North Carolina is a beautiful example of a local seed company.

Top recommended nationwide seed companies: Johnny's Selected Seeds, Seed Savers Exchange, High Mowing Organic Seeds, Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, Baker Creek Heirloom Seed Company. Many seeds companies provide donations of last year's seeds to community organizations who request them.

Florida-specific seed companies: Southern Heritage Seed Collective, Seed The Stars (on Etsy), Whitwam Organics

Black- and Brown-led seed companies offering culturally meaningful seeds: Sistah Seeds, UJAMMA SEEDS, Truelove Seeds

Indigenous Seed Sovereignty: Sierra Seed Cooperative, Indigenous Seedkeepers Network, Indigenous Seed Initiative

Seeds for the People offers the Grow Your Own Food Seed Pack and the Community Pack both on a scholarship and donation basis. See the Grow Your Own Food Seed Pack page.

See [robingreenfield.org/seedsources](http://robingreenfield.org/seedsources) for more ideas on how to get seeds.

## Gardening Guide for Beginners

I am here to help you to start your gardening journey or to take your next steps if you've already begun. The information I'd love to share could create an entire Empowerment Manual, so instead, I'd like to direct you to my online step-by-step guide and video series. The guide is downloadable and printable to accompany you in the garden.

This step-by-step guide teaches you how to grow your own food – from planning the garden, to planting the seeds, to tending the garden, to harvesting the food! This guide is accessible for all, whether you have never grown food before, or whether you have just a balcony to grow food on or a whole front yard!

The written guide can be used alongside our Demonstration Garden Video Series. In this 11-part video series, I, along with Elise Pickett from The Urban Harvest, walk you through the entire process of growing food.

We have designed this guide using the *Grow Your Own Food Seed Pack*, which we have provided to over 40,000 people at no cost or by donation. These seeds are available to you! Plant your seeds right along with us and use this guide and video series as a reference for your gardening journey ahead.  
[robingreenfield.org/guide](http://robingreenfield.org/guide)

Note: This guide focuses on typical annual veggies. For my guidance on perennials and food forest style gardening, see the Food Forest Starter Bundle and the books listed in the Empowerment Manual.

## Grow Your Own Food Seed Pack

Since I launched Seeds for the People in Orlando in 2018, we've provided the *Grow Your Own Food Seed Pack* as a gift to 40,000 individuals and families facing financial barriers to access nutritious food as well as to thousands of community programs. We now also offer the pack on a donation basis to those with financial means to donate, as a way to be of service to all new growers while funding our mission.

The *Grow Your Own Food Seed Pack* includes a variety of 20 healing greens, hearty veggies, tasty herbs, and a mix of beautiful and fragrant flowers for our bee, butterfly and pollinator friends. There are enough seeds to densely plant two 4' x 8' raised beds and to produce over \$400 worth of food and medicine.

I have personally selected the easiest-to-grow plants from seed, catered specifically to new gardeners. The pack comes with a step-by-step guide and video series, which teaches all the basics – from planning the garden, to planting the seeds, to tending the garden, to harvesting the food – using these exact seeds. This guide also teaches you to produce and save your own seeds year after year to become seed-sufficient! All of the seeds we provide are high quality, non-GMO, and most are open-pollinated.

I have put hundreds of hours into designing this pack and the accompanying guide, with one central goal – to make growing food accessible and stress free for new gardeners. What I've come up with is the best way I know how to do this, and it is my offering to you! Learn more, support our mission of providing Seeds for the People and request a pack here: [robingreenfield.org/seeds](http://robingreenfield.org/seeds)

## Food Forest Starter Bundle

In Florida, I was connected to a community where I had access to all the plants I needed. Throughout this book, I have shared ample resources to help all residents of Florida access these same resources. Yet, I felt like I could do more to be of service. I wanted to create a system that would help people to transform their yards into abundant food forest-style gardens. I wanted it to be highly accessible and affordable, in hopes of getting thousands of people to grow enough food to break free from the grocery store. In 2023, I designed the Food Forest Starter Bundle and created extensive written educational guides and videos to accompany the bundle.

The Food Forest Starter Bundle is a package of cuttings and seeds of plants that we provide through the mail. We have designed this bundle with the most productive, easy-to-grow foods in Florida. These plants: provide substantial yields of food and medicine, require the least maintenance and time to manage, have the fewest “pests,” need the least water and fertility and are some of the most likely plants to thrive even if neglected. Each of the plants is easy to propagate so that recipients of the bundle can effectively grow their gardens and share plants with their community. I also call this “The Survival Bundle.”

Along with these plants, we provide a step-by-step guide on how to plant and care for each plant within the bundle and how to build, care for, and maintain a food forest.

We provide this bundle on a suggested donation basis as well as on a scholarship basis for community programs. This is my offering to you to help you break free from the grocery store. Learn more, support our mission and request a bundle here:

[robingreenfield.org/foodforest](https://robingreenfield.org/foodforest)

## Grow Your Own Toilet Paper

Grow your own toilet paper and break free from store bought TP!

Ever since I planted my own toilet paper with the two cuttings Tyler gave me in Orlando, I have been on a mission to help others grow their own toilet paper. Not only is it a step in breaking free from dependence upon corporations and their destructive practices, but it is also a true joy and pleasure!

Blue Spur flower produces leaves the same size as toilet paper squares, to be conveniently plucked off the plant. The leaves are softer than most store-bought toilet paper, yet are very durable. *Plectranthus barbatus* is in the mint family, so it has a wonderful minty smell. Plus, it puts out purple flowers that hummingbirds also enjoy! The Toilet Paper Plant is resilient and easy to care for.

When I had my gardens in Orlando, I gave cuttings freely to every person who requested one (and even many who didn't ask). Now, without a garden in Orlando, it is a bit more challenging, but that hasn't stopped me from providing cuttings to nearly 1,000 people by mail! I'd love to provide you with the cutting to grow your own toilet paper, too!

We offer them on a suggested donation basis (with scholarships for those who can't make a contribution) along with detailed planting and care instructions. Blue spur flower is a semi-tropical plant and we also offer seeds of Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) known as the "Toilet Paper Plant of the North," for those living in colder climates.

Learn more and request your plants at [robingreenfield.org/tp](http://robingreenfield.org/tp).

All contributions fund our food sovereignty initiatives.

## My Ideal Diet

Although I do not believe there is a single diet that is ideal for the global population, I do believe there is an ideal diet for me. I have yet to find every aspect of the ideal diet, but through many years of experimentation and exploration, I have made some progress. My physical and mental health is only one aspect of my ideal diet and is not even the top priority. More important is the health of the plants, animals and humans that are involved in my diet directly and indirectly and the ecosystems in which they live. In short, the health of Earth and the life upon it is the top priority.

Here I share my ideal diet, with you in mind, starting with some basic tenets. This is my ideal, not what I consistently accomplish, however, I am usually within the realm of this ideal. My diet varies depending on the region in which I'm living or traveling and the focus of my passions.

At my highest ideal, 100 percent of my food consists of food grown and foraged within my bioregion. This food is grown regeneratively and is completely unmonetized. A community exists around this food and I have a relationship with each plant and animal in my diet.

A scenario that I am quite content with given the balance of my other aspirations and priorities, includes a substantial amount of food that I and my close friends forage and grow. The vast majority of the food is local but nutrient dense concentrated items like dried herbs, spices, teas and grains, as well as oil, come from other regions where it is in alignment with my ethos. All fruits, vegetables, fresh produce, meat, eggs and dairy are local and sustainably raised.

Bulk food sections at food co-ops or health food stores, farmers' markets and farm stands play a central role when foraging and growing are not as prioritized. Absolutely no food, ingredient or "medicine" would enter my body if I don't fully recognize it and understand it as food. Processing that enhances nutrition or naturally preserves food is the only processing that would take place.

Time efficiency, purchasing cost, ease of storage and enjoyability all play roles in selecting the individual foods. Diversity and aliveness are at the core of this diet. Strong flavors including bitters, sours, astringents and spiciness are part of the daily regimen.

Items marked with [F] are always foraged or are almost always foraged, with [A] are listed specifically for low price and accessibility in bulk, with [C] are mostly sourced in the bulk section of the food co-op, with [H] are less ideal for health but are part of a relatively accessible/sustainable diet, with [Q] are flagged for not generally being able to source within my ethics or needing to be in the

appropriate region, with [\*] are less ideal for health, but I can easily forage in quantity, with [<sup>R</sup>] are more aspirational than reality at the time of this writing, but experience with all.

Fruits: a wide variety of fresh fruits with a focus on diversity of color. A priority for low glycemic fruits such as bramble berries, blueberries, mulberry, autumnberry. A balance of high-sugar fruits like bananas, mangoes and pawpaws<sup>R</sup>. Bountiful citrus when in a citrus region. Lemons and limes<sup>Q</sup>. Also dried fruits (raisins<sup>A</sup>).

Vegetables: a wide variety of fresh vegetables, with strong, dark leafy greens making up a substantial proportion. Root veggies as a staple. Green powder as my go-to when I don't have fresh greens. Seaweed<sup>F</sup> ideal, is but I'm yet to make this a staple<sup>R</sup>.

Starchy vegetables: sweet potatoes, winter squashes, cassava, taro/cana edulis<sup>R</sup>, sunchoke<sup>R</sup>, wapato<sup>R</sup>, wild yam\*. Potatoes as a last choice, unless heirloom variety.

Grains<sup>C</sup>: Manoomin<sup>F</sup>, millet, tartary buckwheat, brown rice<sup>A</sup>, oats<sup>HA</sup>, all ancient grains, whole wheat flour, heirloom corn flour/masa, quinoa<sup>Q</sup>. Bread only when it is sourdough/wild fermented, and in moderation<sup>R</sup>.

Legumes<sup>C</sup>: lentils, dal, split peas, chickpeas, etc. and heirloom soy fermented into nato, miso, tempeh.

Nuts: high fatty nuts and easily accessible wild nuts. Foraged: hickory, black walnut, chestnut, coconut, hazelnut<sup>R</sup>, acorn<sup>R</sup>, pecan<sup>R</sup>. Bulk at co-op<sup>CQ</sup>: walnut<sup>A</sup>, coconut shreds<sup>A</sup>, macadamia, almond, pecan.

Seeds<sup>C</sup>: flax<sup>A</sup>, sesame<sup>A</sup>, sunflower seeds<sup>A</sup>, pumpkin seeds<sup>A</sup>, chia, hemp.

Herbs and spices: a wide variety of local herbs both fresh and dry and contentment with sourcing from the bulk section of the food co-op. I gravitate to many Indian spices, including curry powder. Cinnamon, nutmeg and cardamom are a blend in my pantry, as well as an Italian spice mix. Fresh turmeric<sup>Q</sup>, ginger<sup>Q</sup>, garlic and onion are staples.

Herbal Teas<sup>C</sup>: daily herbal teas varying at different times of the year and for different health needs. Sourced by foraging, local herbalist or bulk food section of co-op. Medicinal mushroom tea is my current blend of foraged reishi, turkey tail, hen of the woods, chaga (and lion's mane, if I find it).



Mushrooms<sup>F</sup>: a wide variety of edible mushrooms, usually foraged, but some farmed and always thoroughly cooked – eaten fresh or dehydrated.

Meat and food from animals: venison<sup>F</sup>, wild animals sustainably harvested<sup>F</sup>, grass-fed/pasture-raised beef, pork, goat, lamb, chicken. Organ meat, bone broth and fish broth. Fish<sup>F</sup>, with an abundance of high fatty fish such as mullet, trout, salmon, whitefish, mackerel<sup>R</sup>, anchovies<sup>R</sup>, sardines<sup>R</sup>. A focus on fish lower in the food chain and younger fish. Cooking fats including cow fat, pig fat, bear fat<sup>F</sup>, ghee and butter. Raw milk, raw yogurt and raw fermented cheese (the stinkier the better) made from A2/A2 dairy. Eggs from pasture-raised chickens.

Plant oils: olive<sup>QA</sup> and coconut<sup>QA</sup> as top choice from industry, hickory<sup>F</sup> or acorn<sup>F</sup> as top choice foraged, also avocado.<sup>Q</sup>

Vinegar: apple cider vinegar and any fruit vinegars for incorporating into meals and swishing. Fire cider.

Sugar: honey or maple syrup<sup>F</sup> from within the region only, and used medicinally only and ideally fermented. (My sweet tooth is my greatest struggle, so this is an aspiration for me.)

Ferments: a substantial amount of wild fermented veggies including lacto-fermented veggies, sauerkraut and kimchi. This incorporates a diversity of bacteria and yeast into the diet. Home fermented beverages such as kombucha and jun long-term fermented and drunk in moderation.

Insects: wild rice grubs in ricing season<sup>F</sup> and acorn grubs in the fall<sup>F</sup>. I'd like to eat more insects.

Condiments made from whole food ingredients, mustard being my most accessible. Salad dressing made of oil, vinegar and herbs.

Some other foods I eat and love that are not necessary are dark chocolate<sup>Q</sup>, stove top popped popcorn<sup>C</sup>, nutritional yeast<sup>CQ</sup>, tamari/liquid aminos<sup>CQ</sup>.

### **Other key aspects to this diet:**

- Grains and legumes ideally soaked overnight (with a bit of ACV) and rinsed for digestibility. Some are ideally pressure cooked. Sprouted grains, legumes, nuts and seeds are wonderful.
- Pairing vinegar or lemon with my raw greens.

- Intermittent fasting (eight-hour window of eating, 16 hours of fasting).
- Day-long fasts weekly or at least monthly.<sup>R</sup>
- Three-day fasts at each season.<sup>R</sup>
- Breaks from carbs for several weeks at a time.<sup>R</sup>
- When consuming sugar, eat a salad first, then fats and proteins, and lastly sugar with an acid.<sup>R</sup>

Foods to avoid: ultra-processed, refined sugars, refined grains, refined oils, rancid oil, factory farmed foods. Also peanuts, but that is probably not happening anytime soon<sup>R</sup>.

For all who share time with me, I invite you to help me live out these ideals. Also, if you invite me over to dinner now you have some ideas for what to make.

**The 100 Percent Local Diet:** My list of the most accessible and likely ways to attain a fully localized diet. [robingreenfield.org/localdiet](http://robingreenfield.org/localdiet)

**The “Sustainable” Diet:** An accessible list of foods, including industrial food from the grocery store, that makes a complete diet, while being minimally destructive to Earth. [robingreenfield.org/sustainablediet](http://robingreenfield.org/sustainablediet)

## On the Usage of Plant Names and Language

In the years following the completion of this immersion in food, dozens of people recommended that I read *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Had I read *Braiding Sweetgrass* in 2017 before this immersion began, you would likely be holding a substantially different book in your hands right now. Robin's teachings have been some of the most profound and influential in my life and as I write today I can say that my relationship with plants transformed a measurable level through her wisdom sharing. Robin relates to plants not as things but as relatives. Those who followed my work prior to 2020 have likely noticed a shift in my language. Today I too see plants as relatives, enough so that I feel genuine and authentic in speaking to the plants on my walks and calling myself a messenger of our plant relatives. Yet, I still refer to many plants as "it" which is not how we refer to a person. This is me still growing. In the dominator culture this all may be perceived as absurd, but plants and humans have been in deep relationship long before the English language that I am writing in today was formed. I no longer think it is absurd to speak to the plants or speak for the plants to humanity. Robin has been one of my greatest influences and inspirations on this path. I extend a heartfelt gratitude to her.

In *Braiding Sweetgrass* Robin has notes titled "A Note on the Treatment of Plant Names" and "A Note on the Treatment of Indigenous Language" and I am following her in this gesture to the plants and to you.

At the same time I could not speak on the topic of language without bringing in the practice of Nonviolent Communication (NVC), also called Compassionate Communication. NVC, created by Marshall Rosenberg, is considered a language of life. Although I have never heard Marshall speak of plants directly, this language has transformed my relationship with plants greatly. Through the embrace of NVC I have made the practices of gratitude, presence, mindfulness, empathy and celebration of life central to my being. When we come to the world with these traits at our core, our relationship with all living beings transforms. Now that I have been immersed in this new language for three years, much of my writing from 2017-2019 during this year of Food Freedom, no longer fully represents my approach to life. I did edit some of my language to reflect my developed consciousness, however the dominator culture likely comes through in this book more than represents me today.

The primary reason I share this is to bring to your consciousness that another way of speaking is possible from what the mainstream society claims

as the only “right” way. Our speech comes from our thinking and our being. I myself am on my own journey of breaking free from the dominator culture and the dominator language. Robin Wall Kimmerer and Marshall Rosenberg are substantially further along in this regard than I am and I encourage you to read their books thoroughly to get the true essence of my thoughts and beliefs, that I have yet to put onto paper as fully as I would like to.

With all that said, I’d like to address a few elements of my language in particular.

In this book, I refer to a plant as Poison Ivy, which is the most commonly used name for *Toxicodendron radicans*. It is likely one of the most well-known plants in North America because so many fear the pain and itching that can come from contact with the oil of this plant. Today I rarely refer to this plant relative as Poison Ivy, but rather as Sister Ivy. This is a name made popular by ethnobotanist Frank Cook and passed to me by fellow forager, Eric Joseph Lewis. I refer to this plant as Sister Ivy because I do not see this plant as an enemy or something to fear. Rather I see this plant for its whole self, the poison only being one aspect of the plant. Although I wholeheartedly think of this plant as Sister Ivy, I do still refer to the plant as Poison Ivy at times, for the sake of people understanding me and for the sake of brevity. At the same time, it is difficult to navigate speaking about plants with full integrity to much of society that has lost its connection with our plant relatives. There is a balance that I walk in the language that I use to reach the masses with the highest level of truth and integrity that I can. I humbly ask for patience from fellow plant lovers as I am still on my journey of reconnecting with our plant relatives and still hold much of the dominator language within me. I have much to unlearn and relearn.

Beyond plants, many of the ways in which we refer to land and our fellow humans is also based on the dominator language, which I was raised as a part of and am working to overcome.

You may have noticed that I do not refer to fellow citizens of the country I was born in as Americans, but rather as US Americans. This is a change in language that I made in ~2017 after numerous people from South and Central America expressed that by calling myself an American, they felt that they were not being seen or heard as Americans as well. I was resistant at first, but made this change in my language, not as a means of appeasing others, but out of a desire to break free from the dominator culture of the US that believes ourselves to be more important than other cultures and nations and so frequently erases others through our actions and our language. I no longer call this country “America” because it is only one of the many American countries. I simply call it the USA, US or United States of America.

To take it a step further, I see the entire concept of any America, whether North or South, as part of the dominator language. Instead, I primarily see diverse biomes, thousands of species of plants and animals interacting and cultures of people existing within these spaces and holding relationships with land. I see the concept of the approximately 200 nations as largely a delusion that has existed for a short period of time and will likely end at some point. The plants and animals surely do not acknowledge these lines we've drawn on our maps. Yet, I still use these names and these languages due to not having developed my language enough yet and also for the sake of being able to fluidly speak within a society that does not share this viewpoint with me.

I now often refer to this land commonly called North America as "Turtle Island", however, throughout the book you'll have generally seen me use the commonly used names of the dominator language. Turtle Island is a name that many Indigenous cultures have given the land, and I generally prefer to honor their relationship and languages that date back long before the dominator culture ever arrived on this land and decided to use a new name and dispose of all other names that the land had in relation to hundreds of cultures. The same goes for the locations I have referred to as Florida, Wisconsin, etc. I discuss this more in my Land Acknowledgment.

In most circumstances I capitalize Indigenous, Black, Native and Brown when speaking of race, ethnicity and culture. Many of my colleagues do this as a "symbolic and powerful way of acknowledging our past and honoring our present." I am following their lead and support this action.

Sometimes my language may come across as clunky. Sometimes people who are seeking to understand me may struggle to do so. This is me growing out of an old language and finding a new one that facilitates speaking and existing in integrity. I encourage you to self-reflect on your own language and to make shifts to bring the level of integrity you desire to your words. You will likely experience some awkwardness in this process. Know that I am here with you, along with millions of others in this state of awkwardness as we rebuild our language together.

# My Commitment to Indigenous Sovereignty & Land Acknowledgment

I was born in a town that they told me was Ashland in a “state” they told me was Wisconsin. Although my roots are there, my parents are from land that is currently called Chicago and Michigan and they moved to Wisconsin just shortly before they gave birth to me.

Long before it was Ashland and long before it was Wisconsin, it was land that Anishinaabe/Ojibwe people lived in reciprocal relationship with for hundreds of years. The Anishinaabe people have remained stewards and continue to be stewards of this land today. I was born and raised on Lake Superior, or *Gichigami* in Ojibwemowin. Each year I return to the small town of Ashland, located on land between The Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and The Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. The Anishinaabe creation story shares that they arrived to this land after following a Megis shell to the food that grows on water. This food that grows on water is Manoomin, also called Wild Rice or The Good Berry.

*Note: Chippewa and Ojibwe are names in the English language for Anishinaabe. Ojibwemowin is the language of the Anishinaabe.*

Indigenous people from other Native nations also reside in this region of Wisconsin and Minnesota and have contributed to making this region what it is today. I frequently visit the city of Minneapolis, *Mni Sota Makoce* (Minnesota) which is part of the homeland of the Dakota people. I also often visit Madison and I attended university in La Crosse; both of which are located on the homeland of the Ho-Chunk people. *Mni Sota Makoce* means ‘land where waters are so clear they reflect the clouds’ in the Dakota language.

From 2021-2024, I have lived on the traditional lands of the GWYᏔ SGHᏌY (Tsalagiyi Detsadanilvgi, the Eastern Band of the Cherokee People or the EBCI), the S’atsoyaha (Yuchi) and the Miccosukee – near what is currently commonly called Asheville, North Carolina.

For five years, I lived in what is by much of society called San Diego, California, and I return to visit this land along with the city commonly called Los Angeles. These are the traditional lands of the Kumeyaay/Kumiais Nation in the San Diego region, and of the Chumash and Gabrieleno/Tongva in the Los Angeles region. There were, and still are, many cultures of Indigenous people who lived here. These are only a few of the more recognized peoples.

I also spend much of my time in the “state” many of us call Florida on the traditional lands of the Seminole, Miccosukee, Mascogo and Tocobaga in the often called Orlando and Tampa Bay regions.

In all cases, this land was stolen from the Indigenous people through colonization and genocide. This acknowledgment is of both the present and the past, because the past is part of the present. The colonization by the early settlers has shifted in form but is active today in the US government from national to local level, military, prison system, police force, corporations and many everyday societal structures.

I am committed to publicly acknowledging these truths in my personal life and in my service to society. I am committed to supporting – through utilizing my resources, finances, energy and time – efforts of Indigenous self-determination and reclamation of Traditional Ecological Knowledge, language and food sovereignty. Here is what I commit to doing to support Indigenous communities: (*Note: I share what I am doing out of a humble desire to lead by example for change within the communities that I walk in.*)

- Using my platforms to share the messages of Indigenous people.
- Donating 100 percent of my media income and profits from this book to grassroots organizations, primarily Indigenous and Black women-led.
- Supporting Native-led resistance to Treaty Rights violations and extractive projects threatening Native lands and lifeways.
- Prioritizing the resources I have available to Native people and seeking out opportunities to do so, including providing free attendance to my classes and workshops and providing the resources I have through Community Fruit Trees, Seeds for the People, Gardens for the People, Compassionate Communication classes and other programs I am involved in.
- Making the community events I am involved in more accessible and inclusive and supporting Indigenous, Black and Brown folks to be involved when they’d like to.
- Educating myself about important issues in Native communities. This includes reading books by Native authors, reading Native media and following Native people on social media.
- Crediting Indigenous people where it is due, as often as I can and to the best of my ability.
- Supporting Native-owned businesses and being diligent to never purchase items that are culturally-appropriative.
- Supporting Native-led efforts to remove harmful mascots, place names and statues.

- Listening to Native people when I am called out or called in, especially when I feel uncomfortable or resistant. After listening, I will take time to reflect on what I heard and see if there are changes that I can make. I will then work to create those changes.
- Continuing to live outside of exploitative and oppressive systems. I have made a lifetime commitment to noncooperation with federal taxes and to instead provide my financial resources to organizations that truly represent the people, especially the people who are less provided for by our mainstream societal systems.

From a wider lens, I am striving to be supportive of Native peoples in the work they are doing to liberate themselves and the land they have traditionally stewarded. This includes returning public lands and waters to the stewardship of Native people and removing it from the hands of corporations and governments that have exploited, polluted and destroyed the land. Free and prior consent for decisions that impact Native peoples, including what happens to their land, people, their own bodies, spiritual beliefs and languages. Dismantling systems of white supremacy that have been created to maintain their land being stolen from them.

It was only in 2011 that I woke up to the inequity and injustice that I was living and it was not until 2016 that I started to understand my privilege. It was only 2018 that I started taking stronger action to support Indigenous communities. I am still learning and growing. There is much that I still do not know. I aim to walk humbly and speak gently and be here to learn. Everything I shared above, I intend to continue doing with deeper alignment with the desires of the Native people that I am grateful to be in friendship and collegueship with in service to Earth, humanity and our plant and animal relatives.

I welcome being called out or called in. I will do my best to receive the words gracefully and use the moment as a learning opportunity. In fact, the reason that I have made any progress is that I was called in. In 2016, I was giving a talk in Washington, D.C. when Nevada Littlewolf approached me afterwards to discuss my privilege. I am forever grateful to Nevada.

I share my gratitude and honor the Indigenous people, past and present, who steward Turtle Island and all land on our shared home, Earth.

Chi Miigwech (thank you) to the many powerful Anishinaabe women who have boldly stood in the face of colonization and who have inspired so many including myself – Winona LaDuke, Tara Houska, Tammey Skinaway, Simone Senogles, Awanookwe Bratvold and Tashia Hart, to name a few. My gratitude to Linda Black Elk, who spoke so passionately with such integrity and truth at



the 2018 Florida Herbal Conference and shook me to my core. Linda initiated a pivotal moment of understanding the concept of colonization and how it is alive today in the foundation of our society. She has been a guiding force for me since. My gratitude to Christinia Eala for sharing a very special moment with me at Standing Rock and being a dear Sister since then. My gratitude to Lyla June Johnston for her life of dedication to the foodways and lifeways of her people and her advice to me. My gratitude to Nedahness Rose Green, Mike Forcia, Jordan Marie Whetstone and Awanookwe Bratvold for their collegueship and sharing of knowledge.

Chi Miigwech to the Anishinaabe people who I have had the honor to spend time and space with. Our time together has been some of the most healing moments in my life. Deepening our connection to Earth together is what gives me the strongest reason to live and to be of service to humanity. Thank you for being teachers, listeners, colleagues, friends, fellow humans and lived examples of your traditional ways.

For white people and people of privilege and ability, I encourage you to make an action plan with concrete steps to support Indigenous communities, including a timeline of when you'll make these steps.

For non-native people on Turtle Island, you can learn whose stolen land you are on and begin establishing a connection with the Indigenous peoples of the land. Native Land is a resource to help with this: [native-land.ca](http://native-land.ca)

Beyond Land Acknowledgment Resources from the Native Governance Center: [nativegov.org/resources/beyond-land-acknowledgment-a-guide](http://nativegov.org/resources/beyond-land-acknowledgment-a-guide)

LANDBACK is a movement that has existed for generations with a long legacy of organizing and sacrifice to get Indigenous lands back into Indigenous hands. Currently, there are LANDBACK battles being fought all across Turtle Island, to the north and the south. [landback.org](http://landback.org)

NDN Collective is an Indigenous-led organization dedicated to building Indigenous power. Through organizing, activism, philanthropy, grant making, capacity building and narrative change, they are creating sustainable solutions on Indigenous terms. [ndncollective.org](http://ndncollective.org)

**A Selection of Books for Education:**

*An Indigenous People's History of the United States* by Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz

*Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer

*Everything You Wanted to Know about Indians But Were Afraid to Ask* by  
Anton Treur

*Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* by Dee Brown

*Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming* by Winona LaDuke  
(and more books by Winona)

Read my full writing and find more resources: [robingreenfield.org/landback](http://robingreenfield.org/landback)

## On My Privilege

I invite you to explore privilege with me more deeply through my extensive online article. In this, I share the gradual awakening to my privilege and my initial resistance due to having grown up low-income and having worked very hard to get where I was. I share how my privilege plays a role in my ability to carry out my day-to-day actions and step outside of societal norms with relative ease – walking barefoot, dumpster diving, living with only 44 possessions, earning less than the federal poverty threshold by choice and having no form of ID. Yes, outside of societal norms, but I do all of this in a society designed for the benefit of white men where I often receive the benefit of the doubt.

I share how many of my immersive activism campaigns and adventures – cycling across the country, traveling internationally with no money, going deep into nature alone – are far more attainable to me with my needs for safety and security largely met. I share the importance of understanding and acknowledging my privilege as an activist and community leader. Lastly, I share the shifts I've made in my life since coming to understand my privilege and my intentions moving forward and my commitments to using my privilege as a tool in my service.

Yes, I have worked hard for what I have and I still work very hard today. And no, I have no guilt or shame for being who I am, as many people assume when seeing me address this topic.

I address my privilege, not to appease others, but because I am a seeker of truth and integrity. To ignore my privilege would be to ignore that this nation was built on the enslavement of millions of Africans, the genocide of hundreds of Indigenous cultures and the mass exploitation and oppression of our global humanity, and that these systems of exploitation are still occurring today. To be silent would be to play into the strategy of the dominator culture that I am dedicated to playing a role in dismantling. I do not take responsibility for the generations that came before me or for the nation in which I live. I take responsibility for myself.

Exploring and understanding my privilege is an act of personal liberation and, by extension, support for the liberation of us as a society. My belief is that we all suffer under the dominator culture, even those who benefit most from the domination.

Now that I know my privilege, what do I do? I continue to listen. I seek to understand. I embrace and celebrate diverse ways of thinking and being. I lead with compassion and empathy. I remember at all times that people are

doing their best and that we are all suffering. I continue to self-reflect and to reprogram my mind, shifting my thoughts, words and actions. I share my advantages to humanity's advantage, rather than to my own gain. I use my privilege to be of service. I share my resources in a more equitable manner. I create my educational content to be accessible to people from different levels of privilege. I create representation in my offerings and opportunities for people with less privilege.

To all of my friends, family and colleagues, especially those who are white, I invite you to explore your privilege with me. [robingreenfield.org/privilege](http://robingreenfield.org/privilege)

Related read: On Exploring and Overcoming My Racial Bias  
[robingreenfield.org/racialbias](http://robingreenfield.org/racialbias)

## My Return to Robin

Most of you know me as Rob Greenfield.

After 25 years of going by Rob, I have returned to Robin.

While my mom was pregnant with me, there was a robin nesting outside our small house in the countryside near Lake Superior. As this mother robin was nurturing her babies, so, too, was my mom nurturing a Robin of her own.

At the age of 12, a friend started to call me Rob. At the time, I desperately wanted to fit in and the name Robin was a constant reminder that I was different from my friends who had names like Pat, Paul, Kyle and Dane. Robin was a “girl’s name” to my peers and we were all afraid of being labeled as gay for doing anything considered feminine. Robin was also the sidekick to Batman, not a hero. So, I embraced Rob wholeheartedly and for the rest of my childhood and through my twenties, all I wanted was to be Rob. I even hid my true name from most people. All this to belong and to be accepted in the dominator society that believes “normal” is best.

In 2011, the delusions of “normalcy” I had bought into started to crumble and I realized that the last thing I wanted was to be “normal”. Yet, at the same time, I held onto a certain level of normalcy in the public eye. As a budding environmental activist, I knew that if I wanted to have my ideas of change embraced by mainstream society, I would need to package them in a way that society would be receptive to. Eating from the dumpsters, going a year without showering, biking across the country on a bamboo bike... I thought packaging all this as a “typical” looking guy with a “typical” name like Rob was my best strategy, so Rob it continued to be.

In my thirties, I grew to love Robin. I could now love Robin because I no longer saw a polarization of the feminine and masculine. I had shed much of my own homophobia. I had overcome most limiting social norms. I was becoming whole and complete within. I was truly starting to love myself, just as I was.

The name Robin is not just a placeholder for me. I was named after the robin bird because of my mother’s love of Earth and the plants and animals we share this home with. At the age of 35, I decided to return to Robin.

The robin is one of the first birds to return in the spring. After a long winter, they are a harbinger of joy and a sign of hope through their presence and song. The robin is gentle, doing no unnecessary harm, yet they do eat insects. The robin is modest, although the male robin has a flashy red chest, they live humbly. They are one of the most common birds, with a widely spread habitat and easily accessible to spread their joy. They blend into their surroundings, but in their own little way, they stand out.

To return to Robin is a gentle reminder to myself to embody the characteristics of the robin.

To contribute to the well-being of others, bringing joy and hope to my community in difficult times. To live in celebration of life through my thoughts, my words and my actions, which are my form of singing. To be gentle on our plant and animal relatives, yet embrace that I am a living being, part of the natural cycle of life, and that death is part of this life. To live in harmony with Earth, embracing the way of the robin to “do no unnecessary harm.” To live simply. Their homes are made of twigs, grass and mud. So, too, can my tiny home be built from Earth and designed to return to Earth. To live humbly. Although I, like the robin, have gifts to give, I remember that each of us has our gifts and each of our gifts are equally meaningful. To spread my message far and wide and to ensure my message is easily accessible. To stand out in appearance just enough to be seen, but to remain of the people.

I have returned to Robin.

## About the Author

Robin Greenfield is a truth-seeker, activist, social reformer and servant to Earth, humanity and our plant and animal relatives. He lives simply and sustainably to be the change he wishes to see in the world. Through living closely connected to Earth, he rejects the status quo of consumerism and demonstrates a way of being in gratitude, mindfulness and presence. His life is an experiment with truth and integrity.

Robin's public activism involves dramatic actions designed to provoke critical thought, self-reflection and positive change. His activism creates nuanced conversations on the critical issues of our time, with a focus on solutions for living in harmony. His life's work has been covered by media worldwide and he has been named "The Robin Hood of Modern Times" by France 2 TV and "The Forrest Gump of Ecology." Robin donates 100 percent of his media earnings to grassroots nonprofits and has committed to earning below the federal poverty threshold for life and keeping a minimal net worth.

Learn more at [robingreenfield.org](http://robingreenfield.org).

And yes, in case you are wondering, Greenfield is his real last name!

## Books by Robin Greenfield

*Food Freedom: A Year of  
Growing and Foraging 100% of My Food* (2024)

*Be the Change: Robin Greenfield's Call to Kids –  
Making a Difference in a Messed-Up World* (2022)

*Zero Waste Kids: Hands-On Projects  
and Activities to Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle* (2022)

*Dude Making a Difference:  
Bamboo Bikes, Dumpster Dives and  
Other Extreme Adventures Across America* (2016)



## Notes

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## NATURE / ENVIRONMENT / FOOD

Ten years ago, Robin Greenfield awoke to the destruction of the industrial food system. Since then, he has been deeply exploring the food we eat, often through immersive activism, which led to one of his most burning questions: could he step outside of the food system completely and grow and forage 100% of his food?

In *Food Freedom*, he shares his adventures of living without grocery stores or restaurants. Nothing packaged, processed, or shipped; not even multivitamins, supplements, or spices. Within the city of Orlando, Florida, he turned lawns into abundant gardens, with a biodiversity of over 100 plant species. He foraged 200 species of plants and mushrooms from nature, experimenting with food as his medicine. Follow Robin on an emotional journey as he explores:

- Growing food and foraging to deepen his connection to local food and establish a relationship of reciprocity with the land
- The industrial food system that likely brought you today's meal
- How communities are taking control of their food and creating food sovereignty
- How you, too, can grow your own food and forage to gain food freedom

The good food revolution is not a lonely path. Millions have embarked on the journey and are waiting for you to join them.

Question your food. Uncover the truth.

Liberate yourself through relationships with our plant community!

"The Robin Hood of Modern Times"

- *France 2*

"The Forrest Gump of Ecology"

- *Mr Mondialisation*

"The Man Who Defies Supermarkets"

- *Tout Compte Fait*

"A Modern Day Adventurer"

- *Discovery Channel*

"Different"

- *LA Times*

"The English language may need a new noun to define Robin Greenfield"

- *Mountain Life Magazine*

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