

NATURAL GROWING

THE VEGANIC MODEL

By George Laundry

‘Veganic’ is just another name for natural farming. It means that only vegetable matter is put into the soil. It is one of the oldest methods of farming and is used by many careful gardeners who are probably unaware of the word ‘veganic.’

Pastorale

George & Flo Laundry
Salt Spring Island, BC

Soil: Dark to black loam

Growing zone: 9A

Frost-free days: ~285

Feeds: About six families receive boxes, plus some door sales

Crops: Twenty or so different types of greens, plus a full range of root crops, edible flowers, crucifers, wheat (small amounts), and a large orchard

Preservation:

- All-season gardens;
- Stonehouse (which holds 40–50 boxes of apples plus root crops);
- Four freezers full of fruits and vegetables;
- Vacuum-packed dry storage;
- Small amount of canning and dried herbs



COG member George Laundry tries to treat Pastorale as a closed energy system; he moves nutrient-rich organic matter from other parts of the farm to the gardens.

Our ‘Pastorale’ is on the site of my grandparents’ farm. It is not so much a farm as a statement of quality of life. Our goal is to produce as much of our own nutrient-rich food as possible with low-energy usage, in an ecological and environmentally valid manner.

The starting point

All growing must begin with the soil. We try to treat Pastorale as a closed energy system. This is not totally possible because we drive cars and bring some food on site. In a closed system, you can move energy around but theoretically the total remains the same. I use a ‘hinterland’ from which we can take energy to our gardens. This is land used as a source of nutrients and organic matter that is separate from the gardens, such as alder groves, hay fields and lawns. For example, we take leaves from alder trees to our gardens.

Spending most of my life in physics gives me an awareness of the second law of thermodynamics: “there is no free lunch.” This gives us the prime environmental laws which we try to apply to the best of our abilities.

Feeding the soil

We do not use manure. I suppose it’s not too bad if it is very well aged, but immature

manure forms salts with soil minerals which then wash away. The excessive use of raw manure and chemical fertilizer is one of the main reasons for the depleted soils around us. It is necessary to have some understanding of the carbon-to-nitrogen ratio. Raw manure can drive the C:N ratio up to maybe 300 or so; the optimum growing condition is a C:N level of about 14–17. Old farmers used to tell me to look at the weeds which indicate soil quality. For example, chickweed grows in good soil and is also a nutritious salad green.

Our spring garden, or “Garden of Eat’n,” is a high energy garden which may undergo a number of plantings each year. In the fall, I coat it with several inches of alder leaves to decompose over the winter. After the heavier frosts of, say, February drive worms lower, I hand-dig. Then I mulch with well-rotted hay. The acidity of the leaves is easily adjusted with ashes—not lime.

If the soil doesn't have the minerals, the plants can't produce the vitamins and minerals our bodies need.

Putting plant material directly into the soil is estimated to be four times as efficient as it would be to run it through the cow first, so we cut out the ‘middleman.’ According to Earthsave International, one acre of green manure (for example) put directly into the soil provides the same energy as about four acres of land (and animals) producing manure.

In addition, a great deal of nitrogen and trace elements are retained that would otherwise be lost through the manure.

In the spring, I place worm holes around the gardens—holes about one cubic foot in size filled with vegetable scraps—then insert a pod of worms, which I grow in a compost pit. Worms provide seven times their body mass in nutrients in their lifetime. An old theory says that you need about two or

this is where I plant my soft crops—plants that don't stand up well to a full day of direct summer sun—such as lettuce and broad beans. I start the broad beans in November, and plant again in February and every few months up until July; this gives us broad beans from early June until about December. They freeze well in vacuum-sealed packages and are great steamed or used in soups throughout the winter.

I place worm holes around the gardens—holes about one cubic foot in size filled with vegetable scraps—then insert a pod of worms.

more pounds of worms per cubic foot of soil for it to be healthy.

My large summer garden has eight sections, six of which are rotated each year. I both plant a pattern and allow self-seeding; soon the garden is a jungle of edible flowers and plants. One method of ‘weeding’ is to eat the plants that are in the wrong place.

Along with worm holes and mulching, I use a bit of sub-cropping (overseeding with green manures) once the plants are established. White clover is my favourite sub-crop, particularly between the corn, squash and crucifers, such as broccoli and cabbage. With the squash and crucifers, I mulch the clover with hay to provide a low green mass for water retention and other great features. The rotation and sequence are designed to maximize benefits. This method of sequential planting can be found in some of Eliot Coleman's writings.

The other two sections have some shade in July and August, so

Then it's onto the winter garden. I can hand-dig this one. It is a little higher and more sheltered with rich black and warmer soil. About twenty different types of plants grow in it. One third of this is allowed to self-seed in late summer, then the soil is raked and soon the carpet of vegetables emerges. These do not do well over the winter but explode in early spring, just as the

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winter crops are getting tired. The three gardens provide an intermeshed system of constant food production.

There are two other gardens. One is a small field which alter-

nates between wheat, oats and sometimes golden flax. The other is a specialty garden where we grow seed plants and try new crops. For example, I'm experimenting with a reverse cross between amaranth and lamb's quarters, which I call "Lamaranth." The result is a crop that readily reseeds, grows tall, is colourful like amaranth and produces a useful seed head.

Give your immune system the tools it needs to protect the body.



Pastorale's salad mix featuring the rainbow theory of nutrition.

We use no manure, no bone meal, no artificial additives, no propane for weed control—just natural plant material and worms. No fish fertilizer or peat moss. This is not so much for safety as for ecological reasons. As a well known biologist said, "Under each frond of seaweed lies the habitat

for twelve distinct species." It wouldn't take many farmers very long to destroy the ecology of all our beaches.

Nutrient-rich food all year long

If the soil doesn't have the minerals, the plants can't produce

the vitamins and minerals our bodies need. We grow plants that we can eat in their natural state every day of the year. As of January, the broccoli, which had an outstanding year, is still producing side shoots. Apples keep in my stonehouse all year until the next harvest. We eat them every day, often in the form of juice.

Walnuts, greens such as kale and sorrel, and potatoes keep all year. It doesn't take much land or effort to produce a year's supply of potatoes. I do my first planting in October. Then I use multiple plantings of short-term White Rose throughout the year and one major planting of Pontiacs for winter.

To store our food, we have four freezers with generator back-up. These are full of vegetables, herbs and tons of blackberries. We vacuum seal the freezer bags to reduce oxidation in the vegetables.

We do some canning; raw dilled beans are a delicacy in winter. Drying is limited, so far, primarily to herbs and nettles. Nettle seeds



Stonehouse for storage of apples and root crops.

make a high-energy, cleansing tea in winter.

We play a game of having a seven-course meal for friends in the middle of winter—everything from our property (the exceptions being salt and honey).

For a number of years now, I have been on a self-imposed nutrient-rich health system based, as best as I can, upon Gerson Therapy. The theory is simple: “give your immune system the tools it needs to protect the body.”

The “tools” mentioned are high quality, toxin-free, nutrient-rich, fresh foods. I think veganic growing provides the best basis for all of these qualities.

Further reading

The New Organic Grower (2nd ed.). Eliot Coleman, Chelsea Green, 1995.

The Gerson Therapy. Charlotte Gerson, Morton Walker Kensington Publishing, 2001.

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