



BEGIN.



*Datura metel*  
From Curtis's Botanical Magazine,  
1812, plate 1440

Hey there! It's a sunny day for the first time in weeks, and I've just felt the inspiration to create this tiny literary event just for you. I don't know who you are, but this is who I am: My name is Emily, and I'm leaving town in about three weeks from now. I'm moving to a tiny island off the coast of Vancouver Island to learn about permaculture and all these other wickedass sustainable agriculture techniques. I'm also gonna learn all kinds of cool shit about plants and how they live and why they're so awesome.

I grew up in a suburbish sort of area of Vancouver, B.C., and like so many other urbanites who discovered the wonders of Nature, I feel a deep wound at the lack of clean green space left in this town and on this planet. What's even more glaringly awful about the urban life is the lack of affordable food that's healthy and SAFE. Do you know how much chemical shit is sprayed and injected into that fruit or vegetable that's sitting in your refrigerator waiting for you to consume it? Let alone what horrible things are happening to the soil the food grew in or how your tomato was genetically engineered with pig or fish genes so that it would transport better without bruising. Yes, some nasty corporation did that in it's attempt to put a stranglehold monopoly on the seed market and totally fuck up the biodiversity of all the useful food plants of your planet. So yeah, that's my deal. That's what this thing is all about, and I hope you read it now and learn stuff and photocopy it and show it to all your friends.



## Community Kitchens and Gardens

### Combat Hunger

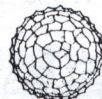
# BLINDING ENLIGHTENMENT

I'm willing to bet that you probably already know lots of reasons why it's better to buy organic food instead of that monocropped, genetically engineered, pesticide laden shit that's in most regular stores. I'm also willing to bet that, nine times out of ten, folks don't buy organic because it really is way too expensive when you're living in the city. In the country there's usually some pretty good seasonal farmers markets that do good stuff for cheap, but let's face it: you're not in the country. I also think the concept of paying for food is ludicrous anyways - eating should be a right.

So now you have 2 choices. Your first one is to run around town in the evenings and dumpster dive most of your food. It certainly is possible, though it often involves sorting through piles of rotting shit or scoring lots of stale donuts that don't taste good



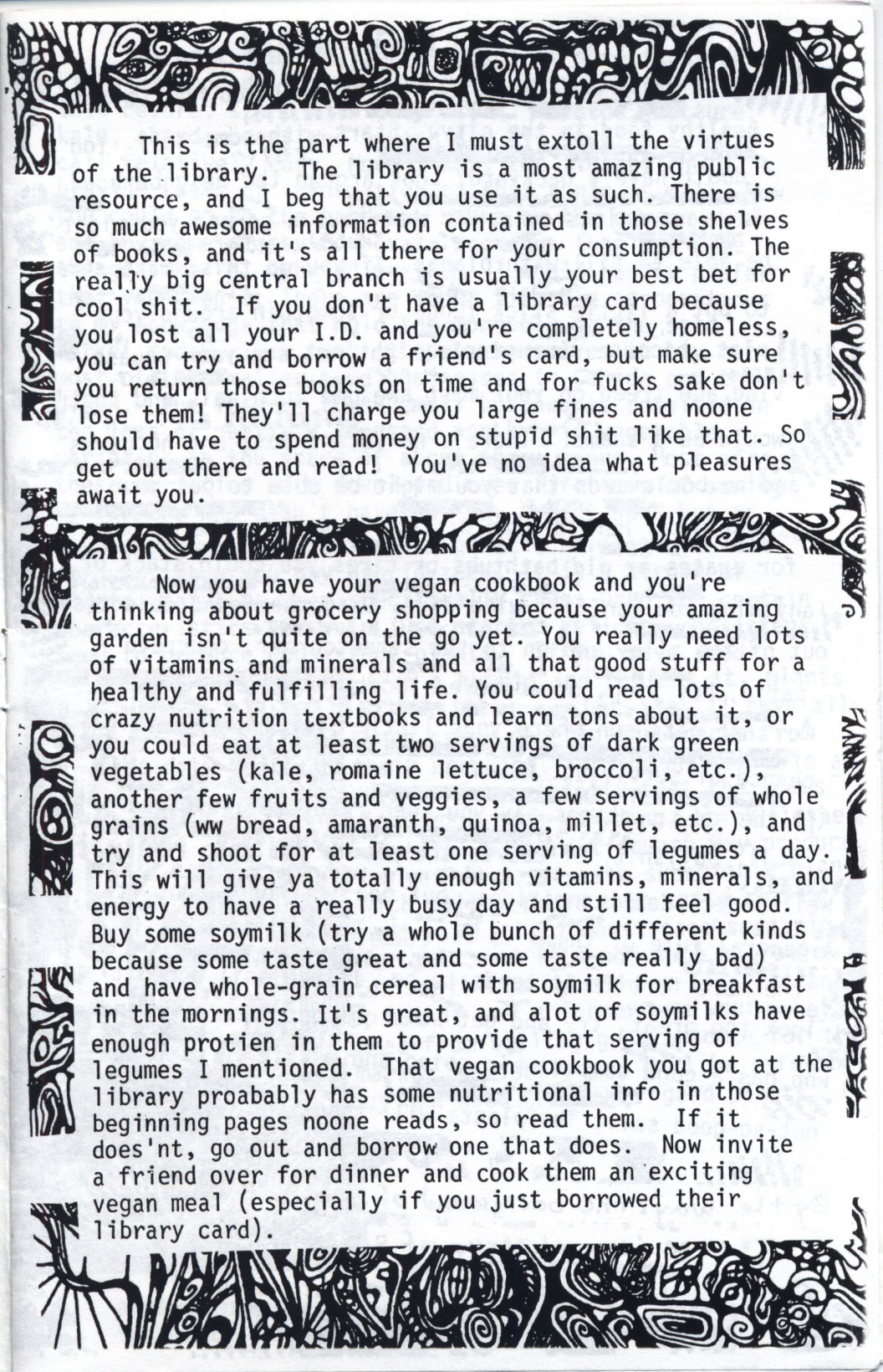
and are seriously lacking in nutritional value. Your second choice is to find some fair soil that gets sun and grow your own food. You probably can't grow enough to feed yourself and all your friends year round at first, but do keep that in mind as a potential outcome.



## WHAT'S SO GOOD ABOUT VEGETABLES ANYWAYS?

If you're anyone who's anyone, you should be aware of nutrition. I happen to be vegan, so I need to be extra careful about nutrition 'cause there's things in milk and meat and eggs that are a bit more difficult to get in vegetables, but don't let that intimidate you because it's still really easy. Also, if you think the chemicals they grow food with are scary, think of the shit they grow animals with. All those helpless creatures are being stuffed chock full of hormones to make them fat for the market quick. There's documented cases out there of boys growing breasts because of all the hormones in the meat and milk they were consuming. Absolutely fucking gross, hey? There's so many reasons to argue for being vegan, but that's a whole other literary endeavor on which I'm not going to embark yet. Get yourself some info on what happens to factory farm animals and prepare yourself for some tears. Once you see a picture of chickens in a tiny cage covered in their own excrement, I hope the reasons become clear for you.

So if you are vegan, your number one worry is probably vitamin B12. B12 is special because people can't process it in their system unless it's been eaten and processed by another organism. That's why it's usually only found in milk, meat, and other places where you get animal protein. Fortunately for you, yeast is an organism that will digest the B12 for us if it's been grown on a B12 medium. The only nutritional yeast I know of that has is called Red Star. You should be able to find it in bulk at most health food stores. All you have to do is sprinkle it on your food and it does the job. It doesn't really taste like anything once it's in the food, so don't worry about it offending your culinary sensibilities. In fact, it can even improve the flavor of various sauces, soups, and other delightful vegan dishes. Go and get a library card if you don't have one and get some vegan cookbooks from the library, they'll tell you where it's at.



This is the part where I must extoll the virtues of the library. The library is a most amazing public resource, and I beg that you use it as such. There is so much awesome information contained in those shelves of books, and it's all there for your consumption. The really big central branch is usually your best bet for cool shit. If you don't have a library card because you lost all your I.D. and you're completely homeless, you can try and borrow a friend's card, but make sure you return those books on time and for fucks sake don't lose them! They'll charge you large fines and noone should have to spend money on stupid shit like that. So get out there and read! You've no idea what pleasures await you.

Now you have your vegan cookbook and you're thinking about grocery shopping because your amazing garden isn't quite on the go yet. You really need lots of vitamins and minerals and all that good stuff for a healthy and fulfilling life. You could read lots of crazy nutrition textbooks and learn tons about it, or you could eat at least two servings of dark green vegetables (kale, romaine lettuce, broccoli, etc.), another few fruits and veggies, a few servings of whole grains (ww bread, amaranth, quinoa, millet, etc.), and try and shoot for at least one serving of legumes a day. This will give ya totally enough vitamins, minerals, and energy to have a really busy day and still feel good. Buy some soymilk (try a whole bunch of different kinds because some taste great and some taste really bad) and have whole-grain cereal with soymilk for breakfast in the mornings. It's great, and alot of soymilks have enough protien in them to provide that serving of legumes I mentioned. That vegan cookbook you got at the library proably has some nutritional info in those beginning pages noone reads, so read them. If it does'nt, go out and borrow one that does. Now invite a friend over for dinner and cook them an exciting vegan meal (especially if you just borrowed their library card).

I digress. My intent is to tell you how to grow healthy food in the city. Start with some soil. You don't have a backyard? Look around the neighborhood for vacant lots or parks that have a corner you might be able to fill with plants. If you do this, make sure to put a little stick fence or somethin around your plot, because some people might not see your squash vine and tread on your most awesome zucchini, and that would be a shame. There's no vacant lots and no parks and no boulevards that you might be able to put your garden into? Here's plan B: Look around in the garbage for crates or old bathtubs or tires you could stack or anything you can fill with dirt. Drag the found object(s) out of the alley and on to the streetcorner, concrete patio, bus stop, or whatever location you can think of that gets sun where your little babies will have a chance of surviving. Now fill that container with soil. All the seed packages say you need rich, well-drained soil. Bullshit. Of course the plants would do really well under ideal conditions, but don't stress about it. A general rule of thumb is that the darker the soil is, the more fertile it tends to be. If the soil doesn't look too great, try and get some compost from a friend who has a good compost bin going and mix it in with the not-so-good soil. The plants will thank you.

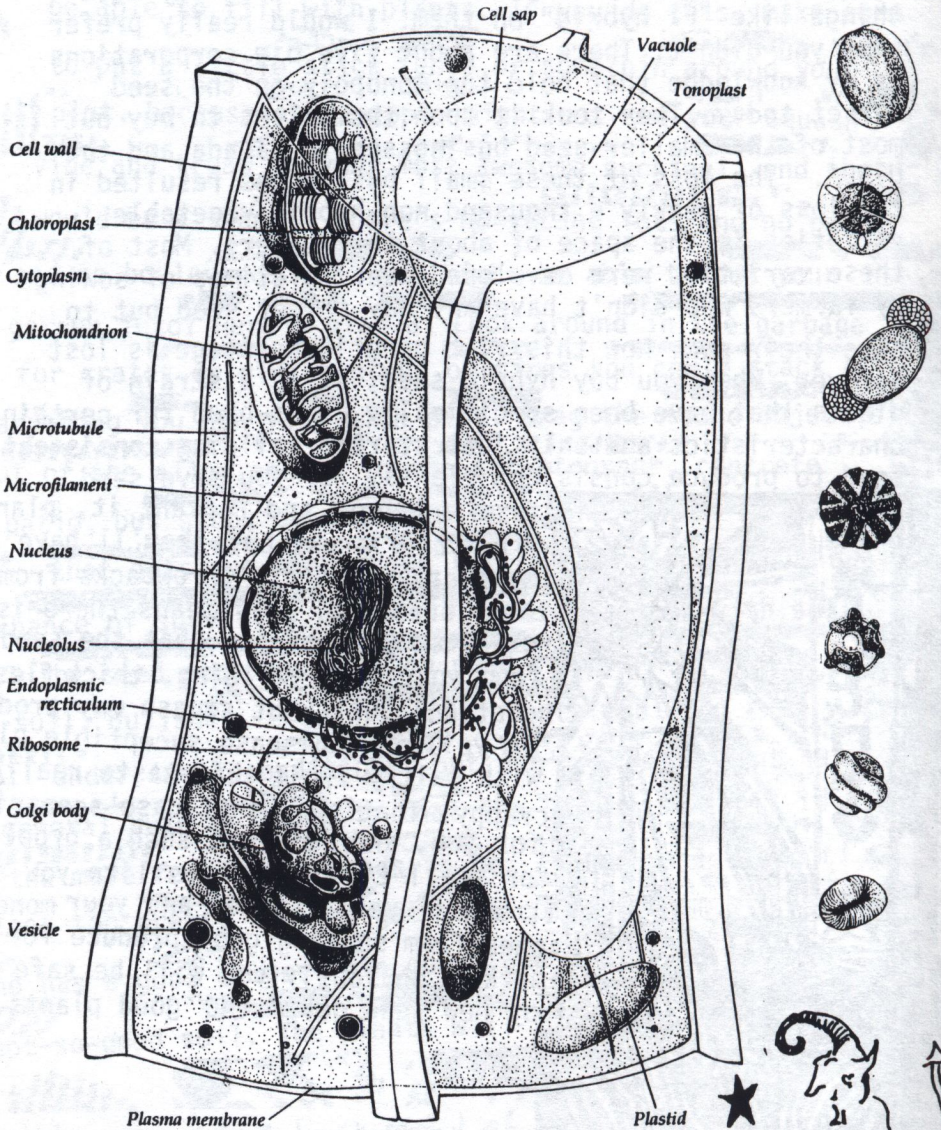
By the way: the background of this page is a close-up of sperm cells in the testis of a moth. Cool, hey?

The next step is finding seeds or seedlings. What kinds of food do you want to grow? If you haven't done this before, start with easy stuff. Potatos, lettuce, kale, chard, beans and squash are all veggies I would call relatively easy. Need I say, the library could provide reams of information on this topic as well. Now you could go to the hardware store or the garden shop and buy some glossy corporate packages that say nice things like "F1 hybrid" on them. I would really prefer that you didn't. There are about five big corporations to my knowledge that hold the monopoly on the seed market today. They took it upon themselves to buy out most of the smaller seed businesses in Canada and the U.S.A. The loss of these small businesses resulted in the loss of nearly a thousand non-hybrid vegetable varieties in the space of about three years. Most of these varieties were developed over lifetimes of sowing by farmers who didn't have any way to get seed but to save their own. Now this rich genetic heritage is lost forever. When you buy hybrid seed, it is a strain of plants that have been specifically cross-bred for certain characteristics and only just started yeilding consistent seed to produce consistent plants. If you save seed

from a hybrid and replant it, plants will still grow, but they'll have all these crazy genetic throwbacks from their breeding. This means there is a very good possibility that the seeds from your high-yeilding, thick fleshed beautiful butternut squash may produce low yeilding, disease suceptible plant with paltry fruit that taste really crappy. That's a worst-case scenario for you, and it's not such a problem for small-time gardeners like you and I, but if yer a farmer and your money\$\$ comes from selling good produce for the market, obviously you will be safe and buy new seed garanteed good plants.



Please try to find seed labeled "heritage" or "open pollinated". These seeds have had a much more natural life. Better yet, ask around and see if any of your keener gardener friends saved some of their own. If they have a good amount, they'll probably be happy to share the wealth. We all know how evil the corporations are, and it sure feels good to avoid them wherever we can.

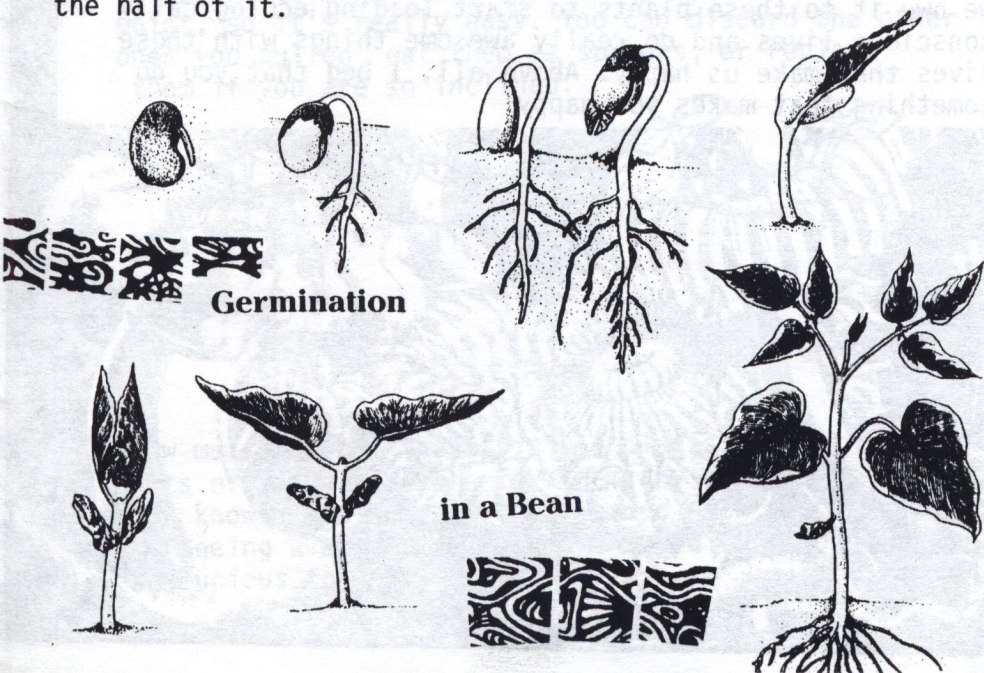


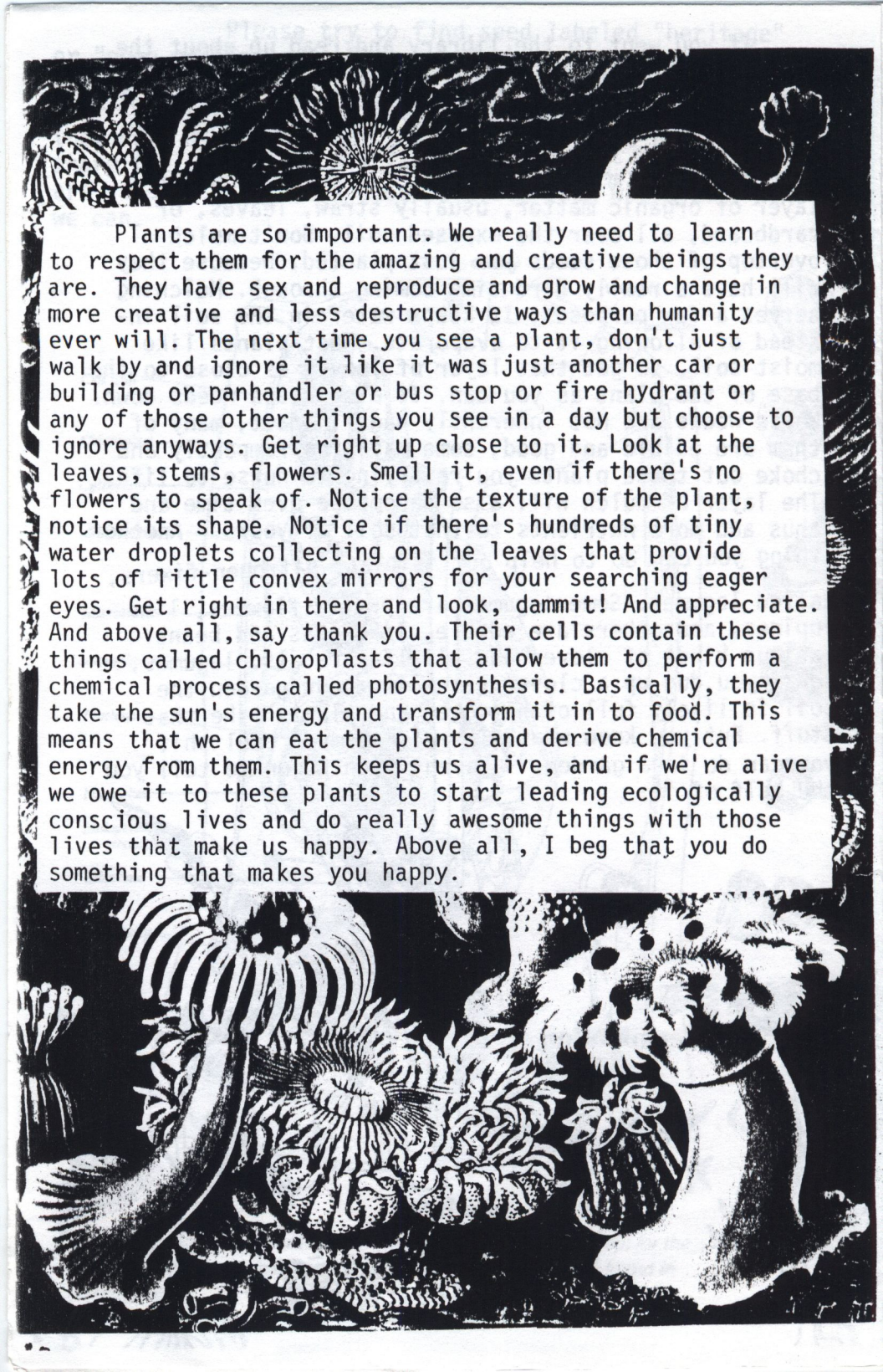
A drawing of a typical plant cell showing the various parts. Except for the cell wall and chloroplasts, most of the other structures are also found in animal cells.



If you went to the library and read up about the needs of your various veggies, you can probably sow your seeds now and tend to them with a minimal amount of care. There are some things you can do to reduce the amount of care your plants will need. First and foremost in my mind is mulching. To mulch, you put a layer of organic matter, usually straw, leaves, or cardboard, all over the exposed soil. Don't mulch overtop of those seeds you just planted, because they will have a really hard time coming through. Mulching serves a few purposes; It keeps water in the soil instead of allowing it to evaporate. Most plants like moist soil, so get that layer of leaves as close to the base of the plant as you can. It also keeps weeds down. While weeds are not inherently bad, in fact, many of them are edible and good, some may grow rampantly and choke out those plants you're trying to nurse to life. The layer of mulch will also decompose over time and thus add more nutrients to that soil of yours. Another thing you can do to help out is plant nitrogen-fixers,

called legumes. Some legumes are pretty flowers, like lupines, and others are edible, like peas and beans. Various kinds of clover and alfalfa are also legumes, so if you dug up a clover patch for your garden the soil is likely full of nitrogen and plants like that stuff. But you know what? There's so much cool shit you can do in a garden, I haven't even begun to tell you the half of it.





Plants are so important. We really need to learn to respect them for the amazing and creative beings they are. They have sex and reproduce and grow and change in more creative and less destructive ways than humanity ever will. The next time you see a plant, don't just walk by and ignore it like it was just another car or building or panhandler or bus stop or fire hydrant or any of those other things you see in a day but choose to ignore anyways. Get right up close to it. Look at the leaves, stems, flowers. Smell it, even if there's no flowers to speak of. Notice the texture of the plant, notice its shape. Notice if there's hundreds of tiny water droplets collecting on the leaves that provide lots of little convex mirrors for your searching eager eyes. Get right in there and look, dammit! And appreciate. And above all, say thank you. Their cells contain these things called chloroplasts that allow them to perform a chemical process called photosynthesis. Basically, they take the sun's energy and transform it in to food. This means that we can eat the plants and derive chemical energy from them. This keeps us alive, and if we're alive we owe it to these plants to start leading ecologically conscious lives and do really awesome things with those lives that make us happy. Above all, I beg that you do something that makes you happy.

## TO PLANT A SEED

1) If the seed has a hard coat, try soaking it in water for a day before you plant it. This will soften the seed coat and facilitate germination.

2) Sow the seed approximately one and a half times the width of the seed. (ie, if the seed is one centimeter in diameter, plant it one and a half centimeters deep in the soil.)

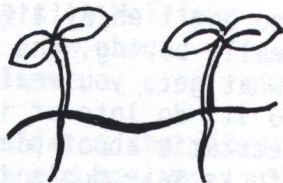
3) Water your newly-planted seeds well. Monitor them closely over the next week or two so that they don't dry out and perish. Now is also a good time to meditate on your plants and send them good, healthy vibes, if you do that kind of thing.

Actually, anytime is a good time to meditate on your plants. It will give peace of mind and clarity for you both.

4) Once your seeds germinate, you'll probably see many clusters of tiny green plants in the row you planted. If they're too close together they will have trouble growing to their full size, so now you go through your plant clusters and space them. Spacing is where you pull out most of the plants in a cluster, leaving the best ones room to grow some more. The roots are just tiny at this point, so it's really easy. You can discard the other ones you pulled, eat them as sprouts, or replant them if you are so inclined.

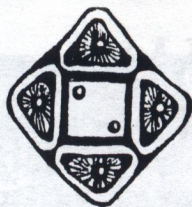


Cluster



Space


5) Now mulch around those visible plants, send them lots of love, and care for them any other ways you know how. You will be rewarded with the pleasure of seeing a new life flourish, and with a bounty of luscious food if you're lucky.



Now you're growing your own food and that's great! But don't stop there! There's so much to know. After you've converted the vacant lot down the street into a flourishing community garden, start learning to identify the native species of flora and fauna in your area. There probably used to be a whole forest of life right where you're standing now. Believe it or not, it's very possible to re-create that forest, and I thoroughly encourage this practice, among other things. Find out about seed collection from the wild (always collect with care not to take too much from the forest's natural supply) and replant a mini forest at the site where your garden is. Better yet, take a sledgehammer and a few friends and tear up your driveway, or the concrete at the bus stop, or part of that horrible, useless concrete playground for kids at the park, enrich the soil that's bound to be underneath and plant the area. Presto! Instant greenspace. Even if you don't plant it, Mother Nature sends out millions of wind-borne seeds all year that will happily colonize this newly liberated peice of earth. Everything you dream of is totally possible. There's no reason you can't do it, and you should because if you don't, nobody else will. Apathy is overrated.


The way I see it, there's no point in doing things if you don't enjoy life because of them. Doing nothing is really boring, and that's not enjoyable either. So find out what gets you really stoked if you haven't already and go do it, do lots of it, and enjoy your life. Just because I'm ecstatic about plants doesn't mean you have to be. And for fucks sake don't take any crap from all those unhappy jealous people who'll try and tell you that what makes you happy sucks. Some people just don't get it, and they never will, so don't worry about it. Just go along your merry way without a second thought and give thanks for what you have. And don't forget to have love, that's the most important ~~part~~ part.





REALLY AWESOME BOOKS THAT YOU SHOULD READ!!!

- 1) Seed to Seed by Suzanne Ashworth  
-a comprehensive, easy to understand guide to seed saving. Lots of cool info, too.
- 2) The Secret Life of Plants by Peter Tompkins  
-this book is just fucking weird. It'll blow your mind.
- 3) The New Laurel's Kitchen by Laurel Robertson, Carol Flinders, and Brian Ruppenthal  
-this isn't a strictly vegan cookbook, but it is vegetarian, whole-foods oriented, and has an awesome section on nutrition that everyone should read.
- 4) The Laurel's Kitchen Bread Book by those same authors previously listed  
-now that you grow your own food, try making your own bread. It's really not that hard, and this is the best book I've ever seen to tell you how to do it.
- 5) Introduction to Permaculture by Bill Mollison  
-everything ya ever wanted to know about organic gardening and permaculture.



All these books are readily available at the library. To quote my friend Sacha, "That should get you started, punk. Now get out there and grow some fucking food."



Everyone likes to read about other people's lives, so here's an excerpt of mine. I have a confession to make to you, dear reader. So as I write this there's only fifteen days left until I leave this town, tuck most of my life away and head off to the unknown wilds of Cortes Island. In a lot of ways it sounds like paradise, exactly what I've been wanting for so long. I'm a city kid, no question about it. I've spent some time living in small island communities, I've spent some time bumming around, I've spent most of my time in town.

Me and all my other goofy friends are often talking about how much we would like to be in the country, what we're gonna do when we get there. Hard work and fresh air, that's where it's at. But how to emotionally prepare yourself for when the crunch comes and you're going to leave everything familiar and grow and change and go on to bigger and better things? I'm starting to have this problem. I'm really, really busy right now, I've got so much to do, and I'm finding out that I'm loving it. Upon reflection, I find out that my longings to be out in the proverbial countryside come when I let myself be bored. For so long I've squirreled myself into one corner of my city, one corner of my life. Now I'm challenging myself every day and taking the bus all over town and doing loads of art and creative writing, being fully active with my life and personality. I have a totally urban experience every day. My problem is that I'm falling in love with it all. I'm falling in love with the city, I'm falling in love with the dirty alleys filled with anonymous collections of objects that someone sees as garbage but I'm beginning to see as living, breathing, life-sized art exhibits that I can walk into without paying and totally hear voices telling me stories about the space, and the coolest part about it is that it never ends. Hidden alleyways, vacant lots, chain-link fences, barbed wire coils, all of these things are just the edges to define the different rooms of my art gallery, variations on a theme, so to speak.

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And while my heart is reaching out to all these inanimate objects, randomly placed in the whirlwind of surrounding concrete, my eyes and my ears are recording information from certain people I hardly know in many ways, but have known forever in so many others. I'm trying not to lose them. I don't want them to change and be something else when I come back, if I come back. But at the same time I'm trying to distance myself from these few special personalities because it hurts too much to hold on to them and I'm trying not to fall in love with them again now only out of

necessity. Some of those people are going to be reading this, and so I want you to know that I'm crying right now, and I guess that my biggest confession is going to have to be that, try as I might, all these warm, salty tears are falling all over my mouth and my shirt and I've already fallen in love with you and I'm never going to really say it to your face like I can here because it hurts too much.

If my love is like the red, red Rose (that's newly sprung in June), then the hand of my anxiety right now is fixatedly clinging to it while the thorns stab into my fingers and give me cause for distraction. I can just dig them out of my skin later, but in the meantime, that flower really does smell sweet.

thanks so much for reading this thing. I hope You've enjoyed yourself. If you want to drop me a line, you're welcome to do so. send it:

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I love you too.

