

Permaculture in Practice

Get fit, grow rich, find bliss while saving planet

I grew up on the seventh floor of an elevator bank on the Island of Manhattan where my food-gardening experience pretty much consisted of that classic, toothpick-impaled avocado pit, half-submerged in a glass of water on the kitchen windowsill. For a few weeks, the poor stone would grow a couple of green, flaccid shoots, but nothing ever resembled *avocadoness*.

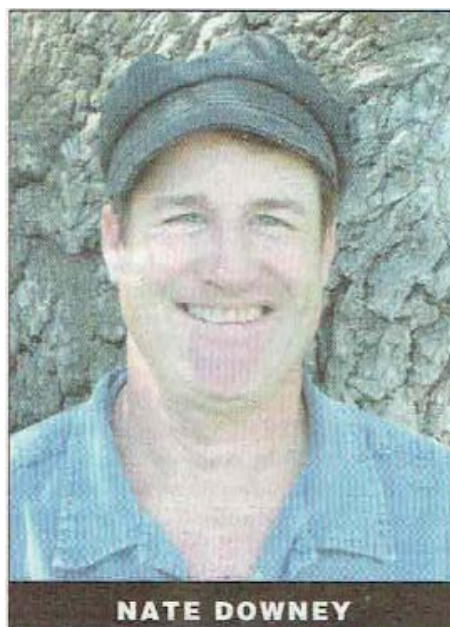
Inevitably, the tail of our enthusiastic beagle, Dusty, would hook the pitiable start. Thanks to some heavy-duty guardrails, Dusty's wag would always thwack the glass back onto the nearby linoleum and not launch the latent grenade to an abrupt explosion on the concrete 2.6 seconds below.

It wasn't until five years after moving here that I discovered my innate love for gardening. With ten thousand years of agriculturally inclined code coursing through my DNA, it's not that surprising to see a city boy turn country after a morning of shucking horseshit. Still, I think the story somehow offers hope.

Gardening vibrates in our marrow. It's imbedded in our soul. It's what we are programmed to do. Meanwhile, gardening provides some awesome incentives. It can shrink your waistline, enhance your sense of inner peace, and fatten your wallet. *But that's not all:* it can help you save civilization from itself.

Waistline-wise, one hour of gardening equals 207 calories or one candy bar (says calorie-count.com). Now, the average American (according to Al Gore) watches four hours and 35 minutes of television per day (or about four and a half Snickers). This means that if we spent as much time gardening as we spend on TV, we'd each shed about 1,000 calories per day.

Along the avenue to inner peace, gardening can be an expeditious expedition because there is clearly something divine about growing things — especially food. First, you resemble the creator when you start a seed. Second, you show respect for the creation by consciously buying less food from eco-unfriendly sources. Third, by learning about the patterns of nature, you work with creation on a highly productive level, and this can bring with it spiritual bliss.



Although working your land might not seem cost-effective, it can be. From a real-estate-appeal standpoint, trees are an excellent investment. With trees, you can turn a property with road noise, ugly views, exposure to neighbors, unbearable winds, and too much sun into a shady, fragrant, calm, quiet, and private property with great curb appeal. With a few trees, assuming your species are properly selected and your specimens are effectively placed and maintained, in five to 10 years you can increase the value of your home substantially with little money down.

Finally, gardening can help save civilization from itself by making your tiny corner of the globe slightly more sustainable. However, here in the desert, the only high-water-use gardens that we should allow on a residential scale are edible gardens. Anything non-edible should be, with few exceptions, xeric.

So even if you don't feel the need to become slim, happy, and/or rich, you might want to start planning your garden today. Then, after you get your patch of mini-sustainability going, you'll be better positioned to look your grandchildren squarely in the eye and teach them how to do even more.

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