

We find ourselves blessed; for we belong to a new piece of this Earth. As you may know from December's issue of Global Tea Hut, a beautiful piece of land was donated for us to build a permanent center in the mountains. In the Native American sense, it is actually we who have been donated to the land. Ownership of anything, let alone land, falls subject to the Laws of Nature: Change and Impermanence. What devas, sprites and fairies know of such land ownership? They are the Guardians of the land and have been so since the beginning. We are mortal guests. Therefore, if there is to be any sense of Land Guardianship on our part, it must begin with the feeling that we belong to the land and not the land to us. If we are to be deemed caretakers of the land, we must responsibly court Her, and with gratitude, accept the resources She so freely offers; space to build a physical center, a river to fetch water and mountainside soil from which to grow food.

Let this article be an informal request on my part, asking permission of the Land, its spirits and all its intelligence to grow food. Please grant me Your rich medium in the form of life-giving soil, so that we may responsibly, organically and sustainably cultivate Your land, thereby nourishing ourselves and all passersby with an abundance of healthy food. May we establish a perennial relationship and a harvestable crop of joy, a raised-bed of consciousness and a renewal of surrender, and may we wax and wane between Love and Gratitude. Please allow us the impetus required to burst forth towards the light, bearing deep roots, and thus breaking the illusion that we are separate from this land.

As you may have guessed by now, we would like to grow much of our own food at the new center, and ultimately progress towards self-sufficiency. Naturally, we want to be stewards of the land, exercising sustainable and organic agricultural practices stemming from a rich variety of environmentally driven farming methods, such as Biointensive farming, Natural farming, and aspects of Biodynamics and Permaculture. I briefly spoke on Biodynamics in Decembers' GTH. In a similar manner, I would like to discuss each topic here as it pertains to growing food at our center. Please keep in mind that I am no expert on any particular field of farming but that my thumb is green and my mind open.

Sustainability

This month I'll begin by touching on sustainability with respect to our garden project. Sustainability is the ability of a system to support itself. That means over the course of its life, a sustainable system should produce energy equivalent to or in excess of the energy consumed. With the cost of food and energy on the rise, and as resources become scarcer, an efficient food system able to sustain itself is on the great perennial path. Essentially, what we take we must replenish and that's why a significant portion of our food system will be allocated to compost crops: crops used mainly for composting. If our garden bed is to sustain itself we must supply it with nutrient-dense, humus-rich compost to replenish the soil. In a time when modern agriculture wages war on our arable land depleting soil





fertility, growing soil through composting and proper land management/guardianship will play major roles in achieving a high degree of sustainability.

In our garden we will include simple and effective techniques to reduce, reuse, and recycle. For example, crop rotation, companion planting, supplying compost, mulching and cover-cropping are all means of reducing water consumption and protecting the soil. Redirecting greywater, rainwater and discarded water from tea sessions (of which there shall be many!) is a simple approach to reusing more water when needed during the hot subtropical summers in Taiwan. Pollution is nothing more than an unused resource. Of course, composting will be our main method of recycling raw materials and food scraps, transforming dead and inorganic matter into life-giving humus.

We are also very lucky to have ample access to bamboo from the surrounding groves, water from the nearby riverbed, and rocks which permeate and penetrate the mosaic-like land to which we belong. Bamboo in particular is a wonderful mascot for sustainability in terms of its perennial nature, speed of growth, multi-functional use as food, tool, and building material, and its ability to endure. I cannot imagine this garden project, in terms of practicality and sustainability, without

the use of bamboo as material for raised beds, fences, trellis, water catchment canals, boundary markers and agriculture tools, to name only a few of its potential uses.

Sustainability requires observation, planning, preparation, and action. It's a long time coming before our food system will actually materialize. Things will adapt and change until that time, but let these simple articles lay a strong foundation, enclosing a space open to a wide variety of environmental content. For now, please envision not some dainty and neatly fashioned vegetable garden, row by row, but an intensively packed, naturally chaotic, well-designed food system. It will optimize space and resources and will replenish the soil; it will flow, rotate and change with the seasons; it will yield fruits, vegetables and herbs, of which colors, shapes, and sizes will abound, and the soil will be black as the darkest Sheng Puerh. It will promote biodiversity and generate a welcome space for insects, weeds and unpredictable weather patterns; it will strive towards being a self-sufficient closed system not reliant on external input; it will start small and progress naturally; and it will work with rather than against Nature, as should we all...