



Gardening for Local Stability

We have to be honest, producing your own food, whether of plant or animal origin, is significantly more expensive than buying produce from the grocery store. It's also a lot of work. You can expect some



heartache when an army of slugs or miner beetles wipes out a garden row overnight. A homeowner or small farm cannot compete with the economy of scale found in large-scale agriculture. When a dozen eggs sells for two dollars, it doesn't make economic sense to buy a sack of chicken feed for \$10, drive to the feed store spending time and fuel, and spend time feeding and caring for the birds. However, considering the cost of hobbies such as golf, bowling, or nearly anything else, the expense of gardening can be viewed as another hobby expense, with the added benefit of grocery bill reduction.

The initial and maintenance costs of home food production can be high. Planting an apple tree means controlling gophers and deer. This means initially installing fencing and anti-gopher measures. Soil amendments such as lime and mulch must be applied. As the tree grows, it must be pruned, which can take four hours with a large fruit tree. However, if disaster strikes our society, that same tree will produce significant fruit for many years to come, even if it is not pruned again. This tree will also provide the previously mentioned benefits. Local food production can



therefore be viewed as a bank account. The food we produce each season is like money that continually flows into our savings or checking account from our paycheck. The knowledge, prepared land, perennial crops, seed bank and infrastructure we have for local food production becomes like our retirement account. If things get bad, we will have a much greater chance to survive. Some of the hidden costs and threats behind relying on our corporate food distribution system, as well as corresponding benefits with local production, include:

- 1) Having an active role in producing your own food, or supporting local farmers, maintains a bank of intellectual capital in local food production and preservation techniques. Suddenly being forced to produce our own food during a catastrophe would create a huge lag time with trial-and-error resulting in many failed crops.
- 2) Producing local food increases the chance of survival in the event our economy or large scale agriculture fails, since at least some of our food requirement is already met on local land.
- 3) Local food production decreases our reliance on a narrow range of mainstream crops and varieties within those crops. The Irish Potato Famine and 1970 United States corn blight have shown us the dangers of relying on one or few crops. The North Korean Famine of the 1990s and the 1970 U.S. corn blight also showed us the danger of relying on the national or global food distribution system. Local farmers tend to use more rare and heirloom crops and varieties. This diversity provides more stable food production, since disease and pest epidemics typically attack a narrow range of crops.

- 4) Since local food production is typically based on the love of working with the land and good stewardship practices, it usually encourages soil and ecosystem health. This translates to healthier people, a healthier environment, and more useable resources locally (such as salmon or clean drinking water).
- 5) Local food production puts more of our money back into our local community, whether you grow it or buy it from another local source.
- 6) Producing food at your residence allows you to harvest and use food when it is at maximum ripeness, nutritional content, and freshness. Although modern shipping and storage techniques are amazing, they simply cannot emulate eating fresh green beans out of your garden.
- 7) Backyard and community food production provides an opportunity for young people to get back on the land and learn to carry on the above mentioned benefits. Gardening is one of the healthiest activities kids can engage in. Modern activities such as television and video games create an apathetic culture that doesn't understand stewardship of our land.
- 8) Buying imported food can often act serve to export environmental degradation. Local food production usually requires much less fuel than shipping produce from other countries. Other countries often have much less environmental regulation, resulting in greater environmental damage, as well as more adverse human health impacts in those regions.
- 9) Producing your own food brings satisfaction from a sense of accomplishment and success.

Options

Urban Agriculture

- 1) Planting a fruit tree (one to several edible plants in your care)
- 2) A residential, mini-farm (small orchard, garden boxes and corn patch, etc.)
- 3) Edible landscaping - food-producing plants in an aesthetically pleasing constructed landscape design, from 1-100% edible
- 4) Typical backyard garden
- 5) Winter garden
- 6) Community garden

Rural Agriculture

- 1) Local farms, farmers' markets, & community supported agriculture (CSAs)
- 2) Locally produced food at grocery stores

Enemies to watch for & work with

Deer, gophers, slugs & snails, birds, pear slugs, aphids, mice & voles

Dangers to avoid

Old pressure treated wood (arsenic), zinc-covered posts, predator or omnivore feces (cat, racoon, etc.)

What to try (aside from the obvious vegetables)

Fruit & nut types

Producers - hazelnut, aronia, serviceberry, black & raspberries + their associated crosses, Meyer lemon, kiwi, fig, blueberry, strawberry, goumi, apple, pear, Asian pear, peach, plum, cherry

Potentials - fruiting ash, fruiting dogwood, sea buckthorn, persimmon, almond, loquat

Wild Plants - purple or red huckleberries, salal, salmon berry, thimbleberry, sheep sorrel, redwood sorrel, plantain, clovers, miner's lettuce

Flowers/herbs - onion/chive/garlic, basil, pineapple sage, dill, pineapple guava, fuschias

Herbaceous plants - rhubarb, artichokes

Feel free to call us with your gardening questions or to schedule a consultation.