



The Garden in Venice and Living My Ideals

*Watching gardeners label their plants
I vow with all beings
to practice the old horticulture
and let plants identify me.*

—Robert Aiken Roshi in *The Dragon Who Never Sleeps*,
verses for Zen Buddhist practice

"I had a farm in Africa, at the foot of the Ngong Hills." So opens Isak Dinesen's now-famous book *Out of Africa*, her own story of how she married Baron Blixen and lived in Kenya, falling in love with Africa and its people. The book made a profound impression on me as did the movie. I strongly identified with Karen Blixen and her process of transformation from an uppity spoiled brat into an independent, loving, and courageous woman. I wanted that change within myself.

When I first heard Meryl Streep's Danish accent intone

those haunting words, I remembered that once I had felt that way about a place. It wasn't as grand as her coffee plantation in Kenya, but I loved it just the same. I had a farm in Venice, California, at the foot of the Santa Monica Hills.

Actually, my "farm" was a house with a garden, on a well-traveled alley overlooking the Pacific Ocean. It had the distinction of being the first house in Venice, just over the Santa Monica-Venice border. Situated high on a hill in an urban beach town with an Italian namesake, at that moment in my life it was my idea of heaven.

I rented the top floor of a two-story thirties gem. It boasted polished hardwood floors, arched stucco passageways, and a room lined on two adjoining sides with wall-to-wall windows looking out to the sea. Right off the kitchen, out the back porch, a dilapidated, yet well-thought-out, garden lay in shambles at the foot of the stairs.

A retired policeman had planted it when he occupied the place. He had died ten years before and it was clear no one had loved this garden since. Yet, this triangular patch of green, measuring roughly seven hundred square feet, qualified as the only clump of nature in sight.

A knobby old oleander tree grew in the center of it, surrounded by a lawn in sorry shape. A concrete carpet of Bermuda grass, a choking and unrelenting weed, covered a strip alongside the alley planted with rosebushes. I counted twenty-one rosebushes stunted and gasping amidst the mess. Various shrubs and vines grew next to the back of the house including an ancient blue hydrangea in dire need of cutting back and a purple wisteria that wrapped itself around the porch.

On the fence that bordered the adjacent property there lived two huge shade-giving apricot trees with a stand of white Cala lilies underneath. In the evenings, an overgrown Nightqueen shrub filled the air with a sticky, sweet scent I recognized from my travels in India.

A separate garage was almost hidden by gobs of orange lantana running rampant across its roof. Even though this vining shrub was out of control, the posylike flowers lent a cheerful accent to the ramshackle nature of the garden.

A broken-down picket fence, which may have once protected the plot from cars, people, cats, and dogs, had been smashed into so many times by neighbors and tourists parking where they shouldn't have that it was barely functional. When I moved in, the garden was a refuse dump for lazy locals on their way to the beach.

My attitude was one of judgment. As far as I was concerned, everyone who disrespected the garden needed reforming, and I presumed to be the one to convert them. Without even being conscious of it, I had a pious missionary and a sanctimonious zealot closeted in my psyche. I didn't know yet that I was the one who needed conversion.

Two years had passed since my divorce. I had recently moved to California from Manhattan, and I believed I was lucky to have a plot of green that looked to me like a tiny piece of country plunked down amid the asphalt. By the appearance of the place, no one could call it a dream house in the woods, but the apartment was spacious and sunny and renting it gave me my first chance to play outdoors in a garden.

I worried that I didn't know what I was doing and that I

needed experts to help me revitalize the plot. However, I wanted a vegetable garden more than I wanted to indulge my fear and nagging self-doubt, so I resolved to plant something wonderful. I'd simply learn on the job. I summoned up my latent moxie and went to work.

Maybe I could bring back the roses, I mused. That meant digging up the formidable amount of hardcore Bermuda grass. "You'll never do it," native Californians cried. "The roots are impossible to extract." I decided not to listen to them. Never listen to negative gardening advice. You don't know what is possible until you try.

My boyfriend, Bob, had just moved in with me, so I enlisted his aid to start digging. He was skeptical and had to be coaxed, exhorted, and finally begged to help me. The physical labor was beyond any expectation of "difficult" we had imagined. The Bermuda grass certainly lived up to its cranky reputation. As Bob pointed out so cogently, when he was sweaty and whipped by the work, "These roots stretch to China!"

But we kept at it for a week, becoming obsessed with it, compulsively ripping out every last smidgen. At this point in my education as a gardener, it didn't occur to me to give notice to the smothering Bermuda grass. I just wanted to get rid of it. Interspersed with the weeds were caseloads of nasty rocks that also had to be sifted out of the soil and removed. When we were done, the feeling of accomplishment was fantastic. I stood on the newly turned plot, grabbing the hoe in my hand as if I had just reached the top of Mt. Everest and was claiming it for my country. I was beginning to feel like a bona fide outdoor gardener.

"At last," I exclaimed, "the roses can breathe again." We dug deep wells around each bush to hold the extra water they craved and added some homemade horse manure tea to feed them. I looked forward to watering time with great anticipation, when I would scan the roses for new growth and urge them to bud.

It was quite a moment when all the roses bloomed. By midsummer, we were cutting bouquets for the house, choosing from twenty-one varieties. There were the classic red ones (Abe Lincolns), yellow, orange, orange-red (which smelled the best), silver (which reminded me of funerals), and pure white. I was beside myself with happiness.

The *pièce de résistance* was the kitchen garden. There was plenty of space to put in vegetables and herbs. I read Rudolph Steiner, the Austrian philosopher and educator who started the Anthroposophical Society in 1923. He touted a philosophy that embraced a spiritual view of the human being, asserting that humanity (*anthropos*) has the inherent wisdom (*sophia*) to transform both itself and the world. Steiner taught a series of lectures called "The Agriculture Course," in which he outlined Biodynamic Gardening, a method of intensive soil preparation and organic planting that employs planetary influences, cosmic rhythms, and sensitive observation to grow a healthy and abundant garden.

I particularly liked that he said to put all of yourself, including your thoughts and your determination, into what you do in your garden. He believed everything in the physical world is suffused and molded by your will and

your spirit, so what comes out of the soil is a reflection of what you have put into it of yourself. I had yet to realize that this theory also works in reverse. The garden would grow me.

I took an adult gardening course at the local Waldorf School, where they educate children according to Steiner's theories. My teacher combined Biodynamics with French Intensive gardening, employing an arduous method of preparing beds called double-digging. An integral part of the gardening class consisted of a hands-on experience every weekend at each one of the classmates' homes when we all pitched in to double-dig their beds.

Double-digging intensive beds loosens and aerates the soil twenty-four inches down. These beds create a growing medium that enables the plant roots to easily penetrate the soil and receive a consistent supply of organic nourishment.

The weekend we came to my house, we dug four long, narrow beds of varying sizes using this elaborate method. First we spread compost, horse and steer manure, cottonseed meal, bone meal and live oak leaf mulch over the appointed area. We dug a trench one foot deep and one foot wide across the width of each rectangular bed, moving the displaced soil to the other end of the bed. Then we loosened the next foot down in the trench with a spading fork to break up clumps and compaction. We proceeded to the next square foot trench, carefully moving each spadeful of dirt forward, mixing the soil layers as little as possible. When we completed our task, the initial square foot of soil was used to fill the last trench at the other end.

By the end of the day everyone was exhausted, but the teacher said this initial stage demanded the most work. Digging the beds was certainly labor-intensive, he conceded, however, future maintenance and weeding would be minimal.

There was so much to learn about the Biodynamic method. I knew it would take time, so I did what I could and ultimately told myself that anything I did was better than nothing. That spring I stopped worrying about doing it right and just did it, period. It was very liberating.

I planted everything we loved to eat: collard greens and mustard; white wax beans and spinach; arugula and three different kinds of lettuce: oak leaf, bronze, and Bibb. We put in a border of nasturtiums so we could add the pungent edible orange flowers to salads and companion planted bushes of sweet basil with the tomatoes to keep us in pesto. Steiner recommended planting seven specific herbs and flowers to enhance the growth of the garden so we made sure we had borage, chamomile, stinging nettle, yarrow, calendula, comfrey, and dandelion.

By the time we harvested our crop, the garden had grown so tall and dense, I had to push back massive amounts of bumper to bumper plants when I walked into the thick of it to pick our food. I had never seen borage grow before. It protected the tomatoes and its tiny purple-blue flowers tasted delicious and looked like shooting stars. The dandelion made a terrific green salad, stinging nettle attracted butterflies, and the soft orange calendula flowers, known medicinally to soothe skin irritations, practically glowed in the dark.

Even though I was gardening according to spiritual methods, my attitude toward the people around me was decidedly base. I thought I was so holy planting the garden yet I hated the people who crashed into the fence, threw beer cans into the tomato patch and flicked burning cigarettes onto the roses. Certainly I was better than they were. I was healing the earth; they were slobs. On the outside I was "nice" but on the inside I was seething. I was trying to create a thing of beauty while the neighbors couldn't have cared less.

To fend off outsiders, I delineated the property line with flowers, vainly hoping for a twenty-foot wall to grow. I lined the sagging fence with tiny cosmos I had planted from seed, determined to cover up the distinct lack of charm. Dutifully, I picked up cigarette butts and fast-food wrappers every day, pacing up and down the length of the alley muttering under my breath in disgust.

Beer bottles abounded, diet soda cans and empty wine jugs appeared on a less regular basis. At least if there had been some beer left in the bottles, I could have used it to catch the snails, I grumbled to myself. Drunken snails are helpless to suck the life out of plants after they've been imbibing beer in a shallow pan all night. It bugged me that I had to buy beer for my snails while I got the bottles and cans for free, courtesy of unthinking passersby.

Every time I planted something new, I could almost guarantee that the next day I'd find a local dog had made its mark right next to it. Besides being incensed at having to clean up other people's dog excrement, it irked me that

the roaming dogs would know exactly when to crush a newly planted seedling or a recently sprouted seed.

This negative internal attitude did me no good when my "party animal" neighbors drove by, blaring their car radios and oblivious to the toil going on over the fence. It didn't help me, either, when we manured the vegetable beds and the man across the way complained bitterly because "the place smelled like shit." Didn't he know it was clean shit?

My resentment ate me up inside, and I ranted self-righteously at the dinner table every night. Bob chastened me, saying, "Judy, that man's the Buddha, too, you know." But, at the time, I didn't understand that God lived within my snide and obtuse neighbor, too. Sure, I knew God was in everybody, but only theoretically. How could God be inside *that* body?

I was being brought to my knees. Nothing was changing on the outside. However, I began to get the message that whatever I did, I did for myself and because I wanted to do it. I couldn't expect everyone else to kiss my feet because I thought I was right. I told myself, "You may plant the seeds but *you* don't make them grow. Somebody else does that." I needed to lighten up. So, I went about my business in the yard, wrestling like Jacob with the angel, coming face-to-face with my spiritual arrogance and petty self-righteousness. Instead of looking out, I needed to give myself to the garden.

Underneath the oleander tree, I planted margarita daisies that soon swelled to bush size and encircled the trunk like a sash of flowers. I began to see that in California

people took oleander for granted. Noted for its hardiness and imperviousness to exhaust fumes, it is used as a common shrub for massive plantings along the freeways. Our tree, with its heavy bark trunk, looked spectacular when it bloomed a truly innocent pink.

From the bedroom and our office, I could almost touch the tree. I'd look out onto it and get lost in the swirling mass of sensuous blossoms, surveying the garden proudly from a bird's-eye view. I remember that room in which I wrote with great nostalgia. It shimmered like a bejeweled garret in the sparkling blue sky of California ocean light. The omnipresent sea breeze made me feel as if I were on perpetual vacation.

Eager to add plants to our home, I scanned the newspapers often for garage sales. One day I drove to Pacific Palisades for a moving sale featuring garden items. Ironically, the woman was returning to New York and selling everything she had. For forty dollars, I walked away with rare old begonias, unusual bromeliads, and a staghorn fern that resembled giant antlers, the kind you'd see hanging on a wall in an old hunting lodge.

This staghorn fern had a blatant animallike personality. When I got it home, we arranged it outside on the front porch, overlooking the street. After a while, I thought it was lonely out there and didn't look very comfortable. So, during a cold spell in December, Bob and I brought it inside—not an easy task, since it was so big. As we lugged it around a corner of the hallway next to the inside staircase, we lost our grip and the staghorn toppled down the stairs onto its face.

"Oh, my God," I moaned, "we've killed it." I ran down the stairs to pick it up and held it next to me, rocking it, apologizing for being so clumsy, beseeching it to live. Bob soothed me, saying he was certain it would be all right.

"When it warms up a little, we'll hang it in the garden under one of the trees. That's where it belongs," he assured me. So we lived with it in the hallway, spraying it with water once in awhile until the cold spell passed, and then carried it out to the apricot tree when the frost was over. We ceremoniously hung it on a protrusion of the apricot's trunk and wished it well.

To make it feel at home and to celebrate its anthropomorphic presence, I planted some of my favorite annuals underneath it: Johnny-jump-ups, pansies, and Crystal Palace lobelia, a flower that has one of the most remarkable blue-violet colors that exists in the plant kingdom. When it grows in large blocks, the effect is eye-popping. Medicinally, it was listed in my herbal book as an antispasmodic, so I figured that a calming influence emitted from its sheer presence.

I took special pleasure in watering these flowers. I splurged on a device called a wand. When I held it in a certain way, the water made an arc, simulating natural rainfall and gracing the plants with a softer and more delicate shower than the usual hosing.

By the time I moved three years later, the staghorn fern had tripled in size and had wrapped itself around the trunk of the apricot tree in a massive hug. It guarded the elegant calla lilies and the odoriferous Nightqueen and spread its protective wing over the violas and the lobelia. The staghorn re-

ceived so much attention and affection as the focal point of this shady moist section of the garden, it flourished.

Doris, the long-term tenant downstairs, told me that the two old apricot trees hadn't borne fruit in ten years. I had been so busy loving the flowers underneath them, I hadn't paid much heed to the trees. My neglect became a lesson in the power of indirect love. The apricots reaped the benefits from the attention I gave the flowers.

One day, I looked up into the trees and noticed they had blossoms. When the apricots formed, I was delirious and Doris was incredulous. We picked enough apricots to fill three laundry baskets, and no matter how much jam I made or how many pies I baked, we couldn't eat all the fruit, so we gave away apricots to the neighbors and heaped them on friends.

Giving away food from the garden awakened new feelings in me. A generosity of spirit, a desire to nurture others with nature's bounty and a sense of what it meant to be "Mother Earth" all surfaced within me. Something was changing. Everything I loved about gardening—the messiness, the abandon, the abundance—was happening to my spirit.

One day in March, I noticed tiny green points peeking up through the soil on both sides of the garden path. Walking back and forth from the garage to our back stairs, we diligently followed their progress. Before we knew it, we were knee-deep in narcissus. It was a lavish surprise to be so inundated. We cut bunches and bunches of narcissus, filling every room in the house with their almost cloying sweetness. We gave away armfuls to neighbors and loaded up friends whenever they came to visit.

The garden was uncontainable. Funny, I thought, how they call gardening in pots "container gardening." They should call gardens in the soil "uncontainable gardening." I worked on the garden and it worked on me. I couldn't maintain my rigid world view, my black and white thinking, and still garden. After all, in the garden, a weed is just a weed. It's not good or bad. It's just a plant in a place you don't want it. The awareness didn't happen overnight, but during that time, the seeds were planted within me for work I would do on myself for the rest of my life. As the garden grew, I couldn't stand still.

Once, a friend from San Francisco paid us a call. We sat in that room, the one above the garden that elicited such magic in my own mind, and as he looked out the windows he said, "You think this is beautiful? Don't you think all those telephone poles are ugly?"

I felt physically shocked by his words, as if he had wielded a blow to my chest. I had developed a maternal love for my garden. It felt as if he had just impugned the looks of one of my children. "Sure, my kid has a few pimples on her chin," I thought to myself, "but I don't notice them. Look at her eyes and hair and those long, shapely legs." Like a mother with a child, I had been interacting with a living organism day after day. Didn't he know that that creates love?

For me, what had happened in the garden was like falling in love with a man who, upon first impression, isn't good-looking, but becomes beautiful after his character reveals itself and you see his soul. It wasn't love at first sight between me and the garden, but as I interacted with it, I grew to love it unconditionally.

After that time, I realized that the experience of growing a garden was different than I had thought in the beginning. I was gardening not to create a garden; I was gardening simply to garden. The process yielded the joy; the results were secondary. As Alan Chadwick, himself a master of the Biodynamic/French Intensive method, once said, "The gardener does not make the garden: the garden makes the gardener."

I poured heavy doses of physical and psychic energy into the garden. I was out in the alley every day watering, weeding, digging, and planting. For my birthday, Bob gave me a statue of St. Fiacre, the patron saint of gardens and gardeners. Dressed in a cowled robe with a rosary hanging from his braided belt, he had a meditative air about him. He held a shovel in one hand and a book in the other and silently blessed the garden from his niche in the oleander tree.

I looked up his name in an old herbal book and learned that during the Middle Ages, St. Fiacre gave up the worldly life as a prince of Ireland to live as a monk in a hermitage situated on the edge of a forest near Meaux, France. So many people came to him for healing that he began cultivating herbs and flowers to aid those in need. His reputation as both a gardener and a healer spread.

He built his own monastery at Breuil, where he continued to nurture his beloved plants as well as the people who flocked to see him. His little statue was my inspiration-in-residence, attesting to the importance of putting love into the neighborhood as well as into the garden. I was learning in a humbling way that I couldn't pour love into my garden and stop it at the front gate. My love had to overflow. I

was going to have to coexist with the dogs and the cats, the neighbors and the tourists, without trying to change them. All I could do was work on myself.

By summer, the garden started to pop. The lettuces headed, the tomato plants hung heavy with fat juicy beefsteaks, and the nasturtiums gushed with brilliant color. The neighbors began to notice something different next door. They leaned over the fence, now camouflaged by the cosmos, and started to ask questions about what was what. I enjoyed talking to anyone who showed an interest and handed them a head of lettuce or a fistful of flowers when they went on their way.

Neighbors who had never met before engaged each other in conversation. Frank, the man in the apartment complex across the alley who used to complain about the smell of the garden, said now it made him feel good and that it hadn't looked this nice since John, the retired cop, lived there. It turned out that Frank, the man I had previously written off as snide and godless, liked flowers, so I gave him a bouquet. As for the fence, it wasn't so easy to crash into anymore now that such beauty beamed out from its boundaries. Word about the garden spread throughout the neighborhood. Soon, other gardening aficionados came by with cuttings and to swap plant stories. Tourists stopped and perused the place on their way to the beach. The garden became an oasis of friendliness, an excuse to talk with people, a chance to stop in a busy day and shoot the breeze. Gardeners love to talk about gardening, and I was available to gab.

What I had wanted to achieve, then had relinquished as

a goal, happened anyway. The garden humanized the community, and that included me. It gave us a spiritual center, a reason to connect and interact. It became a "town square." It also became clear that I had to be fanatically careful not to become a fanatic.

In my heart, I moved to the country that summer. I indulged my farm-girl fantasies, reveling in dirt and mud and water and feeling close to the earth in the midst of a city. Farm girls know their neighbors, and I got to know mine. By the end of the summer, we had a sense of community.

I lived to be in that garden. I became so connected to it that one night I had a dream. I was looking out my bedroom window, onto the double-dug beds, and saw a tiny cosmos rise up out of the soil. I watched it grow, as in time-lapse photography, from a tiny seedling to a blooming flower. I knew that flower was me and I was watching myself grow. When I awoke, I told Bob my dream. I asked him if he thought I was psychotic. He just said, "You're the Buddha, too, Judy."



Biodynamic Gardening and the French Intensive Method

Practical activity nowadays is an empty routine devoid of spirit; but anything that truly does come from the spirit is always preeminently practical.

—Rudolf Steiner, 1924

Already in 1924 in Germany, Rudolf Steiner was asking the kind of questions that have become more and more common here in the United States. In his series of lectures called *Agriculture*, he posited, "Why, for instance, is it no longer possible to find potatoes as good as the ones I ate when I was a boy? . . . Potatoes like those are simply not found anymore, not even in the places where I used to eat them." Steiner's biodynamics focuses on farming and agriculture, but it is also applicable to all types of gardening. Biodynamics at its core is the marriage of science to a spiritual worldview he called Anthroposophy.

Steiner described his ideology as "awareness of one's humanity." Anthroposophy looks at human potential as the source of hope and regeneration that can lead us out of planetary crisis. It is through human consciousness that we can heal our relationship to the earth and to each other.

Biodynamic agriculture is one aspect of Anthroposophy in action. It draws a direct connection between the quality of food, human health, and human awareness. Rather than a static body of knowledge and a presentation of practical techniques, Biodynamics is a lifelong study of human interrelationship with nature through precise observation, clear thinking, and spiritual insight. There are basic tenets and instruction, but the path is infinite and open at all times to new and miraculous individual discovery precisely because it depends not on dogma but on human interaction.

Biodynamics involves a complete restoration of the soil, the foundational element necessary to yield high-quality food rich in nutritional value, vitality, and good,

sweet taste. The earth (soil) and the plants are in a symbiotic relationship. The roots of a plant reach down into the earth for the minerals to sustain and nourish. Through water, the roots take in minerals from a healthy, well-balanced soil and feed the plant. The connection between the plant and the soil is vital. By feeding plants soluble chemical fertilizer, we have de-toured this relationship. Essentially our food is disconnected from its true source. The plants are no longer feeding off Mother Earth, but instead being artificially boosted. The soil has simply become a medium for chemically prepared liquid nutrients. No matter what kind of gardening we do, the plants and the earth need each other both physically and spiritually. Think about it. If you cut off the connection between a parent and a child, there is an emotional deprivation that occurs. Symbolically, the same can be said of the food we eat and the way we grow it. How can we expect food to taste good and nourish us properly if it has lost its rightful connection to its source?

Chemical fertilizers kill earthworms and deaden the soil. Soil should be alive, a living system, loaded with beneficial microorganisms that help plants use the nitrogen from the air, and fat, juicy earthworms that provide castings rich in nutriment. Building a well-balanced soil through correct composting is the goal. Incorporated in this philosophy, Steiner insisted that we must put our spirit, our mind, our heart and soul, into a garden. We can do this consciously through our efforts and our intention. What we get back will be a reflection of what we have put in of ourselves.

Steiner taught that by including the cosmos as a di-

rect influence upon what happens on the planet Earth, we can have a balanced garden. He pointed out that all living things are interrelated, so we cannot garden in a vacuum, focusing purely on what is occurring with one plant or one pest. Everything is connected. Aptly stated, Steiner explains:

I have said many times that if you have a compass needle, which always points in the same direction—one end toward magnetic north, the other end toward magnetic south—people would find it childish if you said the reason for this lay in the needle itself. They would tell you that it is . . . Earth's magnetic north pole and south pole that determine the needle's alignment. You have to look away from the needle itself and take into account the entire Earth in order to explain how the needle behaves. People will think you are quite childish if you believe that what you see in a plant depends on what science discovers in the immediate surroundings of that plant. In fact, the whole starry heaven is involved in the growth of plants.



So the basis of Biodynamics is an attitude shift from compartmentalizing plants and seeing them out of context from the environment to expanding our view of them to include all the forces of nature such as the light of the sun, the movements of the moon as it passes through the constellations, the position of the planets,

the rotation of the earth on its axis as it makes a complete revolution each day, as well as the deep currents of life within the earth itself.

According to Biodynamics, the four elements—earth, water, air, and fire, respectively—influence the development of the roots, leaves, flowers, and fruit-seed. These elements are reflected in the twelve signs of the zodiac. The earth signs are Taurus, Virgo, and Capricorn. The water signs are Cancer, Scorpio, and Pisces. The air signs are Gemini, Libra, and Aquarius. The fire signs are Aries, Leo, and Sagittarius. The moon is the conduit through which the earth receives the elemental forces of the constellations as it passes through each sign during its twenty-eight-day cycle.

The earth element affects the growth of the roots. This is easy to see, simply by the fact that the roots penetrate the soil. The water element, through the phases of the moon and its gravitational pull, influences the development of the leaves. This can be seen by the water retained in vegetables. As soon as they are cooked or pressed, water is released. The water accounts for juiciness. When watering a garden appropriately, watch what happens. The plants perk up considerably after watering, becoming bouncy and turgid, full of water. The air element influences the development of flowers as they open out into it. Fire influences the development of fruit-seed. The warmth of the sun contributes to the ripening of fruit and the maturing of seeds.

Although this may seem far-fetched to some, Steiner's followers have conducted extensive scientific experiments to prove the efficacy of their theories.

Maria Thun, a German farmer, has done the most notable research in the field for the last forty years. Sponsored for ten years by the West German government to carry out observations and tests on an experimental farm, Thun publishes a yearly agricultural calendar that makes the data tracing these cosmic rhythms available to farmers and gardeners around the world through the efforts of the Biodynamic network.

Central to Biodynamic farming and gardening are what its proponents call the Biodynamic preparations. These combinations are prepared from chamomile, yarrow, dandelion, oak bark, and stinging nettle. They are used at certain times of the year, directly on the earth to stimulate the life in the soil, in the compost pile, and on the leaves of plants to encourage their intake of light.

Biodynamics is a rich scientific and philosophical discipline that people spend their lives studying. They live it within themselves and in their farms and gardens. It is impossible to give a comprehensive overview of it in the scope of this book and do it justice. But, through reading, and particularly through doing, the concepts grow on you, so to speak, and take on a life of their own. The spiritual philosophy sets it apart from other gardening methods. At whatever level you may choose to pursue the principles, it will broaden your perceptions to deeper levels of relationship to the plants and the wonders of gardening.

A garden teaches in the most basic and elemental way. It broadcasts a silent but articulate curriculum that is easy to understand simply by showing up and paying attention. Alan Chadwick was a man who knew this in

every cell of his body. An Englishman who drew a great deal on Rudolf Steiner, Chadwick brought together Biodynamic gardening with the French Intensive method when he was invited by the University of California at Santa Cruz to teach in the 1960s. The student garden he developed on four acres of land grew out of a hillside with poor clayey soil. The only thing that grew there was poison oak. In two to three years, without the use of machines, Chadwick and his students returned the barren soil to a high level of fertility, growing beautiful and fragrant flowers and tasty healthy vegetables in yields four times greater than those produced by commercial agriculture.

Chadwick was an artist and a formally trained English actor. He showed students how a garden can be an artistic and creative endeavor, nourish a meditative inner life, and bring the soul closer to its primal connection to the earth through building a living soil. He taught the combination of two agricultural movements started in Europe. One was Biodynamics and the other, French Intensive gardening, developed outside Paris in the late 1800s. There, they grew plants in eighteen inches of manure. Planted closely together in such an intensive space, the foliage touched and provided a canopy of living mulch that kept down the weeds and kept the moisture in. The growing medium was so rich and friable, the practitioners of the French Intensive method grew many crops a year with high yields. During the winter, large glass bell jars were placed over plants such as lettuce, to keep them warm and to protect the new seedlings from frost. They even grew melons during the coldest months of the year.

Both Biodynamics and the French Intensive method share similar gardening procedures such as raised beds, companion planting (pairing plants that encourage each other's growth and health), and crop rotation. In his book *How to Grow More Vegetables Than You Ever Thought Possible on Less Land Than You Can Imagine*, John Jeavons (of Ecology Action) brings together these two methods to make this type of gardening accessible to everyone. He, too, was influenced by Chadwick and continues to work to encourage community-based farming and gardening in Willits, California.

