

Giving Back to the Land

When I first began my journey on the little quarter of an acre land, I didn't expect it to be as much work as it turned out to be. I knew it was going to be hard but didn't realize how hard. Earning money from the land is not an easy thing. It's unpredictable and time consuming. Things can go wrong in a blink of an eye. That's probably why in this day and age so many people resort to taking the "easy way out," using harmful chemicals and machines to do the work for them. Organic gardening doesn't work that way. We have to weed, plant, and work the land using just human power, besides maybe tilling at the beginning of the season like I did. Besides a little bit of tilling, it's all done by hand, and let me tell you it isn't easy.

Most people don't know the real story behind mass production agriculture. When they think of a farmer they think of a man riding up on a tractor, they think of someone healthy and strong, they don't think of a sick body that is barely making it by. I watched a television show once on the American corn industry and that's where I first found out what damage was being done. A corn farmer in Iowa was one of the people whose life was being shown. He was showing the camera crew around the corn field, which had been plowed, then he brought the crew over to a stream near the field. This is where he broke down. You could see residue from the pesticides on the surface of the water. He said that the people in his town were getting sick with various forms of cancer because the town's water supply came from this stream. People he loved were dying. Of these people it also included himself. Only two weeks after the show was shot, he succumbed to cancer. This destruction is very real, and more and more people are starting to realize it, this is the reason I want to do my part to help.

It's amazing how such a little thing can produce such great amounts. Even though I grew on a quarter of an acre, I produced so much food I didn't even know what to do with it. I didn't even use all of the space I could have, and to think that in mass production they use hundreds of acres of land. I produce more than enough to help heal others and myself, while they are producing mass quantities only to make profit and unconsciously harm. Have you ever heard the saying "tastes like a homegrown tomato?" Well homegrown organic tomatoes really live up to that saying. Organically grown tomatoes produce massive amounts of gorgeous red tomatoes, compared to mass production tomatoes whose plants are half the size and the tomatoes that are picked are green and sprayed with an oxidation spray to make them red. The reason for this is that, in mass production the soil is so depleted of nutrients that the plants can't grow to their full size, and don't have the nutrients to form fruit. While in organic gardening we always give back to the soil, never deplete it and give it poison. Homegrown tomatoes taste better because they are packed full of nutrients.

Compost is the number one ingredient in organic gardening, and let me tell you I've used a lot of it. Compost is rich in nutrients and microbes. Another factor that is lacked in mass production is microbial activity. Microbes act as oxygen makers for the roots of a plant. Without enough oxygen roots will be choked. Microbes are microscopic organisms that aerate the soil and break it down into organic matter filled with nutrients for the plants to feed off of. Microbes can also inhabit the surface of the leaves on a plant, protecting it from disease. The pesticides used in mass production kill these microbes, so they just have to use more pesticides. In addition to a couple hundred pounds of compost that I tilled into the soil, I also supplemented my plants with something called compost tea. Compost tea is a nutrient and microbial dense liquid that you shower your plants with. I make my own by taking a 5 gallon bucket; filling it half way with water, add a few handfuls of compost, bat guano, worm castings, and molasses. You mix this together and since the microbes need oxygen to live, I put a fish

tank aerator in along with all the other ingredients. The reason for the molasses is that the microbes feed off the sugar. In about 24 hours you'll have grown plenty of microbes. This stuff works miracles, especially on summer squash. Microbes are essential to a bountiful garden.

When people think of the ground they think of dirt, but when farmers and gardeners think of the ground they think of soil, and the type of soil. What most people don't realize is that soil is filled with amazing amounts of vitamins and minerals, just like in a multivitamin. There's potassium, iron, magnesium, all kinds of vitamins and minerals. Plants need them just like our own body does, and if they don't have the required amount, they suffer. As farmer's we have to keep all of them in balance as if we were taking care of our own body. Sometimes we have to adjust the soil, using natural and organic ingredients. Also like our body the soil has a pH level that needs to be adjusted, and some plants require a higher acidity or alkalinity level than others. You can do a soil sample to test the acid and alkaline balance, or in other words the pH balance. Although I didn't test the soil at my farm I knew some of the nutrients that needed to be added, like calcium phosphate. The soil in my garden was mainly clay so the main thing I needed to add was organic matter, aka compost. When it comes to the nutrients in the soil it can get pretty technical so I kept it pretty simple.

Organic farming isn't something for the weak bodied, or weak minded. It takes a lot of thought, time, hard work, and patience. Most people in today's world don't really know the meaning of these terms. There never use to be a thing called Organic Farming; it was simply farming. Growing the food you need to survive. There was no such thing as chemical fertilizers, combines, and tillers. It was just you, your pitch fork, your hands, and the soil. I don't know if we'll ever see the day that this will happen again, but it's really the way things should be. We are forgetting what the land is and who we really are. Let's go back to what we are here for.