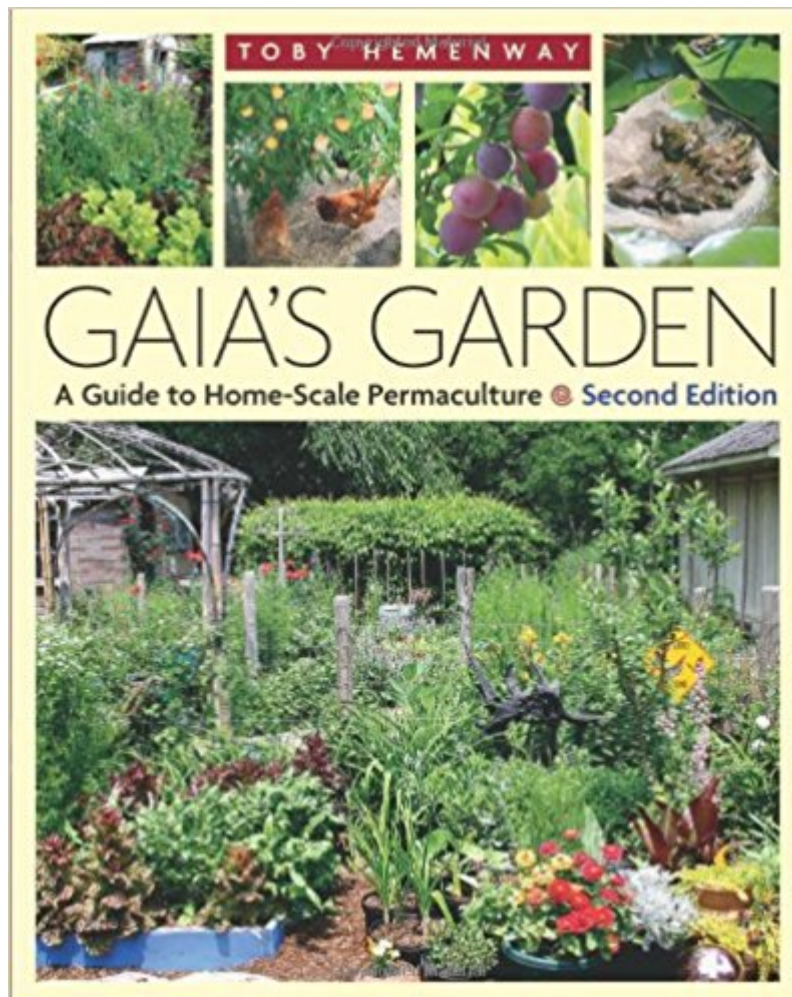


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# Gaia's Garden: A Guide To Home-Scale Permaculture, 2nd Edition



## Synopsis

The first edition of *Gaia's Garden* sparked the imagination of America's home gardeners, introducing permaculture's central message: Working with Nature, not against her, results in more beautiful, abundant, and forgiving gardens. This extensively revised and expanded second edition broadens the reach and depth of the permaculture approach for urban and suburban growers. Many people mistakenly think that ecological gardening "which involves growing a wide range of edible and other useful plants" can take place only on a large, multiacre scale. As Hemenway demonstrates, it's fun and easy to create a "backyard ecosystem" by assembling communities of plants that can work cooperatively and perform a variety of functions, including: Building and maintaining soil fertility and structure Catching and conserving water in the landscape Providing habitat for beneficial insects, birds, and animals Growing an edible "forest" that yields seasonal fruits, nuts, and other foods This revised and updated edition also features a new chapter on urban permaculture, designed especially for people in cities and suburbs who have very limited growing space. Whatever size yard or garden you have to work with, you can apply basic permaculture principles to make it more diverse, more natural, more productive, and more beautiful. Best of all, once it's established, an ecological garden will reduce or eliminate most of the backbreaking work that's needed to maintain the typical lawn and garden.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

What I really love about this book is how much Mr. Hemenway goes into the "reasons" that these methods work. Call me obsessive, but I like authors to provide a good reason their techniques work

and not just say "OMG, look at this harvest, just do exactly what I do!" Mr. Hememway gives us beautiful, well-thought out tables of different nutrients certain plants accumulate, what kinds of bugs they attract, plants that can tolerate drought or provide mulch on the spot, plants that have "spiky" roots that break up tough top-soil and plants that can provide structure or shade to other plants. It's about using the attributes of different vegetation to do the work for you in a way that doesn't adversely impact the land. Armed with this information, you can create your own "guilds" and areas of companion plants that work best for your location. Outside of a textbook, this is the most complete information on gardening I have ever come across. The author even presents the downsides of the methods in, what I feel, is a very even-handed manner. No one style fits every need and Mr. Hemenway addresses that. This is my favorite gardening book, period.

I knew literally nothing about Permaculture gardening when I bought this book - my mother mentioned it to me and said to check it out, so I came to where the description intrigued me.....fast forward 3 weeks later and my front water guzzling lawn has now been sheet mulched in preparation for a wonderful, sustainable, garden, and I have 5 baby chickens being delivered next week!! I'm not kidding when I say that this book was transformational in my views on gardening - I live in the city with very limited space, and our lawn was the best in the neighborhood. I have a raised bed for a garden in the back, and did produce some good veggies, but not near enough to eliminate buying any items at the grocery store. My first 10 minutes with this book I learned what I was doing wrong in my raised bed - and as I dug deeper it was one "Aha!" moment followed by another. I am a scientist, and I can't believe none of this had ever occurred to me! The book is very in depth and gives wonderful examples with specific plants (not just general concepts) - the only thing I would have liked to see more of was pictures of actual permaculture gardens. I'm a very visual person and like to have something to imitate when designing my own project, so I'm still searching for design examples to incorporate (once again with specific plants). Just know that if you get this book you're going to be inspired to make some drastic changes in your landscape - as evidenced by my "Bomb Proof Sheet Mulched" lawn - the recipe in the book for this was extremely helpful! I will admit that my first initial thought upon opening the book was - oh no, this is too in depth and not being a professional gardener, I'm never going to understand - trust me when I say, pick a chapter that sounds interesting to you and start there - that is what I did, and it migrated to many of the other chapters and just kept going!

I have read nearly every permaculture book written, and I have visited with thousands of people

about permaculture. I have to say that this is the book I recommend the most often, but it is also the book I quote the most. If a person is going to get just one permaculture book, this is the book to get.

I have to agree with other reviewers that this is a readable, approachable book. It has excellent charts, graphs and visuals, and covers the concepts of permaculture in much less space than Bill Mollison's permaculture guide, which is currently running over a hundred dollars, so for these purposes, this is a decent book. That said, I decided to try his advice out in my own garden, and here is what I am experiencing thus far. For background, I am an experienced gardener of 25+ years, who has spent the last ten or so years transitioning over to the organic and sustainable approach. Last year my 80x30 garden and two hoop houses were entirely planted in rows - monoculture. Upon reading Toby's advice, I have planted all of them this year with broader raised beds, with "key hole" type paths to reduce the traffic and compaction areas. The improvement has been from 50% to now being at least 70% plantable space. Very good. I also did the multiple layer mulching that he details, and followed his instructions very closely. Here is where the garden encountered some very real problems. Toby suggested that the mix of seeds be directly sown - scattered more like - into this top layer of mulch. What I am discovering is that the germination and survival rate for the seedlings is abysmal due to the high acidity of the mulch. What I found is that if I start the seedlings separately, and then plant them deeply enough to enjoy the compost layer, the plants do well. If however, they were direct sown seeds that have not penetrated through the mulch layer, they are struggling for nutrients, remaining stunted with pale color. I have been liming the garden to correct for PH, and have also been adding kelp meal and other nutrients from above to try to compensate, but it just can't approach what dirt provides a plant. As a result, it is now mid June and we have no tomatoes yet, although in previous years, our plants were always bearing by now. The plants are smaller and some are still stunted. The larger ones have gone through the multiple layers of mulching and are finally taking off. The same has occurred with the cabbages and beans. The pepper plants ALL still look stunted, and only one plant out of 20 has a blossom. Under all these layers, we have the most gorgeous soil, with large healthy earthworms in abundance. This is definitely building a good environment for them - the shortcoming is the top mulch layer and the fact that out of the cupfuls of seed that I scattered only a few have come up. Yes, I have kept them moist, yes, they are germinating fine in starter trays, etc... It is a much prettier garden, having departed from rows of monoculture. Instead we now have meandering paths that look more like an Elizabethan Garden. Instead of just working or harvesting in the garden, it has now become a destination in itself, with new things to look at around each bend. We have also planted permanent

plants for shade and variety, such as columnar apples (Jung seed) Nanking bush cherries, rose trees and bushes and perennial herbs. The honey bees visit the "bee bath" in the center and the ambiance is much improved over those boring old rows. I am deeply concerned about his nonchalance toward invasive species of plants, even preferring to give them a new name "opportunistic." He casts blame for their existence on practices that made their survival possible. Having a large property with natural forest, I can assure Toby that the Kudzu has come up on enormous oak trees (slowly killing them) that have not been disturbed for Only Lord Knows How Long. The mountain olives are pushing out and taking over natural grassland areas, but this does not seem to disturb the author. As even the movie Planet Earth states, grasslands feed more animals on this planet than any other type of covering, and Toby's deep love for trees seems to exclude recognizing the importance of grassland areas for feeding indigenous species such as deer, grouse, wild turkey etc., which CANNOT survive with only the mast crop of the forest. He also seems unwilling to cast blame where it really lies, with the various department of natural resources (pick your state) that have imported these things ON PURPOSE as various experiments. My personal "favorite" was when the local DNR decided there were too many wild turkeys. Their solution was to import rattlesnakes to this area (no kidding) who would eat the eggs and drop the population. Well, rattlesnakes, being equal opportunity kind of guys, don't discriminate between turkey, quail, grouse, eggs. We haven't seen a grouse in almost 10 years. So, in sum this is a good book for charts, graphs, etc, but for real life application I would suggest Sepp Holzer, who has been working with the plants and actually using these practices before people were even calling it permaculture. While Gaia's Garden is a good book, I would not rely on it exclusively. I will give an update on the garden in the fall and share the results. I am giving it three stars for now because a gardening book should help to get a garden off to a start where seedlings thrive. With the top acid layer of mulch problem, it leaves an additional step for the gardener to have to work out. More soon. July 18, 2012

Update Yesterday I planted our hoop house for fall harvesting, yet to date we have harvested exactly three tomatoes from our main garden, a serious disappointment, although there are finally large clusters of green tomatoes on the vines. The early setbacks we experienced have seriously delayed harvesting food. What we are able to harvest are those plants that send their roots down deeply, so carrots and turnips are doing well. Another problem that has arisen is pests. Now we've been growing organic for years now and are accustomed to a certain number of pests, but this is ridiculous. The author mentions problems with slugs in the early stages of the mulching, and he did not exaggerate. They are everywhere. His "solution" is to plant more than you'd consume so that the slugs do the "thinning." Not working - they have pierced every delectable plant with holes - none

are without. His other "solution" is to make metal rings for each plant - does he realize this would number in the hundreds? The other plants have beetles and pests that I have never encountered before. Amazed about this I went to Eliot Coleman's book Four Season Harvest again and was reminded about this: "The scientific evidence indicates that the effect of stress on a plant - whether from lack of nutrients, excess or deficiency....is to inhibit the synthesis of protein in the plant. When the protein synthesis is inhibited the plant accumulates increasing levels of free amino acids (also called free nitrogen) in its aerial parts....insects thrive on plants high in free nitrogen and are thus attracted to and feed upon those plants." page 148. So something about the sheet mulch layers that created this early failure to thrive has now stressed the plants to the point that they are insect candy. This has also been a very expensive venture. In addition to losing cup fulls of seeds early on (the author pointed me out to his sidebar with the advice about scattering seed, but perhaps this advice SHOULD be in the chapter where he actually discusses planting the seeds, FOUR chapters later), we had to purchase many replacement plants at the garden center - which I normally never do since we start our own seeds in trays here - but this year it was too late, so we ended up at the garden center. We also have about \$160.00 in ultra fine mulch. With these considerations, we could have bought a lot of organic produce at the grocery store for the money. But I don't think that actually growing much is this author's concern. In one section he states that his tomatoes planted in the shade don't yield as much, but that's OK. hmmm. I think that if you follow Eliot Coleman's advice about building soil, you'll end up with healthy soil that yields, with no less destruction of the environment. I strongly suspect that this author is part of the "rewilding" groups that want to restore more of human inhabited places back to nature. If that's your thing, this book is perfect for you. If you want to put food on the table, you can expect much better crops from Eliot Coleman and Barbara Damrosch. More in the fall about the time of first frost....

October 16, 2012 Update We had our first frost the other night, so it's time for the third and final installment. I have revised my rating from three stars to two, having thought it through completely, and based on the assessment of this year's garden. I can't stress enough what problems I have had with insects, including some that I have never had before, and cannot even find identification for on google searches. We have had tomato pinworms, squash beetles, japanese beetle, potatoes beetles, aphids, slugs, cucumber beetles (two kinds) and blister beetles, which were also newcomers to our garden, and ate every bit of chard they could get ahold of, at least when they were done eating the potato leaves. This strange new beetle was even eating the jerusalem artichokes, and I have NEVER seen any bugs eat those. The trouble is, the keyhole approach does not give you good access to all sides of plants as rows do, and so going through the plants for insects, which I do regularly, is not nearly as

effective because one is bound to miss some. It also means having to step into those mulched beds instead of staying on the path. This system may work in the future as the multiple layers of mulching break down and the soil regularizes itself. In the meantime, as I pointed out above, my plants became insect candy, and the harvest was pathetic. Out of all of those broccoli, califlower, and cabbage plants I bought, we ate NONE. I mean it, NONE. Those relentless beetles took over and devoured the plants. They eventually even went and took over the turnip tops after they had consumed every other brassica. To that, some members of my family finally had a sigh of relief - they were tired of turnips, even with huge amounts of Romano cheese. The tomatoes eventually produced, and the carrots have done extremely well. As a matter of fact, every time I pulled a bug-infested plant out to destroy it, I sowed carrot seeds. So the only remaining greens in the garden are the frilly tops of carrots, and the volunteer fennel plants. This book just does not cut it. Having read Bill Mollison's bible, as well as Sepp Holzer's I find that they have more practical advise. Look objectively at the picture on the cover, pretty, but lets be honest, messy too. Imagine trying to pick around that to find invading pests, or even the cucumber vine that trailed under the tomato plant, and now the cucumbers are setting seed.....frustrating. (And the lettuces in front are bolting, possibly from overcrowding?) Weeding was also a challenge, due to the keyhole beds, In order to hoe, once again, you have to get in the beds. If you are looking to restore some very neglected parcel of land, and have several years in which to do it, this book would be helpful, although you may as well go to the Master, Mollison, himself. For putting food on the table, this method is counterproductive. I go with my earlier statemnet, that Eliot Coleman provides the best advice for growing food. I know there are lots of initiates to permaculture that get excited when they read this book, and the author certainly is engrossing and upbeat. But this book does not perform and therefore perpetuates the need to have produce brought in, and keeps the demand for fuel going. One Friday, I actually bought vegetables at a produce stand - green beans, squash, beets, pumpkins - all items I TRIED growing in our garden. This book goes back on the shelf.

This book is a wealth of information. It teaches how to design and grow a home garden using permaculture and ecological gardening techniques. These techniques are designed to minimize input regarding fertilizers, pesticides and time, by imitating nature. Nature shows us that many different species of plants perform better together than one species. In permaculture each plant has more than one purpose. Not only will the plant provide food, but it may also shade another plant or attract beneficial insects. In Gaia's Garden you'll learn how to implement these ideas to create your own sustainable food forest.

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