

HOW WE GROW FOOD IN BUDDHA GARDEN

Our approach to growing food in Buddha Garden is not a “farming method” based on a set of techniques. It is better described as a “farming practice” which is based on a particular kind of engagement with the earth and the earth’s natural cycles. This way of working has evolved over the twenty years of Buddha Garden’s existence. A way of working which continues to evolve as the people and the farm also continue to develop and evolve.

NATURE AND NATURAL CYCLES

Nature is our template for how to engage with the earth to grow food, but we do not seek to copy nature exactly. We aim to grow food in a way that protects and strengthens the natural processes that sustain our food growing. The first step is to observe and try to understand nature and natural cycles. In nature we find that:

There is infinite variety both in the plant and animal world. Known as bio-diversity this includes the whole variety of life on Earth. It includes many thousands of different living beings and plants, the genetic variation within species and the complex relationships between them. There are many intricate relationships between species and habitats. Even seemingly insignificant living beings may have a vital place and role to play within the whole network of life. Disrupting one small part of a system affects other parts of the system, sometimes with unexpected and devastating effects. For this

reason we need to protect natural diversity, because we all depend on it for our life on Earth. Within Buddha Garden we have found enhancing diversity of everything – microbes, insects, plants – has many benefits from increasing the fertility of the soil to keeping pests in check.

There is constant transformation. Nature renews itself constantly. Nothing is thrown away, nothing is discarded. Everything that is waste at one point of the process is transformed into something which can be used by something else at some other time. In Buddha Garden we try to recycle everything, especially weeds and other organic material that we turn into compost which is food for plants. Our aim is to find everything we need to grow food from the twelve acres of Buddha Garden. Human beings are the only part of the natural system who have ignored this reality and used nature as a dustbin for plastic and other substances that cannot be recycled by nature. In some cases this has had catastrophic consequences for ecosystems like the oceans.

There is constant adaptation. Plants and animals adapt to the environment in which they live and with each other. In Buddha Garden we find that different plants thrive in different parts of the land. Seeds we collect and vegetables we grow have all, over time, adapted to the Buddha Garden ecology. They have adapted so that now they thrive in the conditions of the farm.

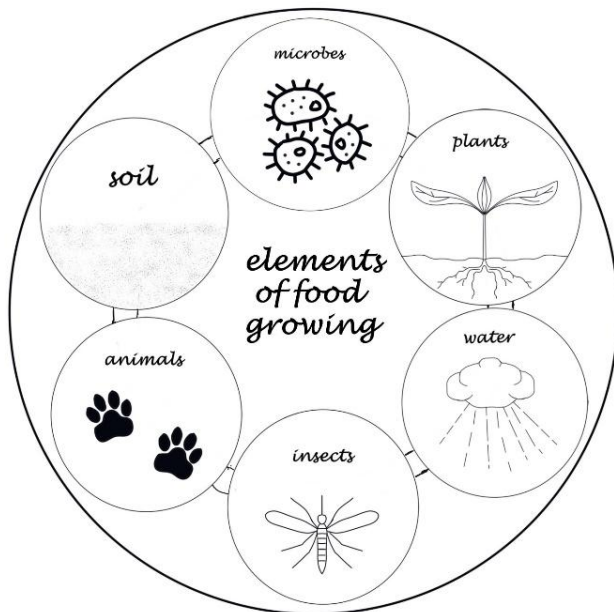
There is a constant cycle of seasons. A season is a division of the year marked by changes in weather, and the amount/intensity of daylight. In temperate and polar regions the seasons are defined by large changes in the intensity of sunlight, large variations in the length of days and large differences in temperature. In tropical and sub tropical areas there is less change in the length of days and intensity of sunlight. Seasons may be defined more by certain types of weather such as monsoon rain or very high temperatures. Local conditions such as height above sea level or proximity to the ocean creates local seasonal variation.

Seasons can also be experienced as periods of the year when only certain types of plant grow and animal events happen. These being determined by the temperature, light, and general weather conditions at different times of the year. Certain plants may grow better and some animals will only reproduce in certain seasons. Most places have an annual cycle of four seasons, but in India, traditionally there were six seasons and some indigenous communities have even more.

Wherever we are growing food, we need to understand seasonal variations. Plants that grow in certain seasons are adapted to those seasons and are known as 'seasonal plants'. When grown in season they do not need extra food or water or suffer too much from pests and diseases. Either they have learnt to repel the pests around at that time or the pests that might attack them are not very plentiful. For these reasons these are good and easy plants to grow for food.

Humans also adapt to the seasons and seasonal foods have always been thought to be good for them. There may be a fruit or vegetable that will mitigate the worst of the seasons' effects like extreme heat or cold. Or maybe a food that bolsters the immune system against seasonal diseases. For this reason, many believe that it is best for humans to eat seasonal local food. As this is the food best adapted to help their bodies deal with the conditions where they live. In Buddha Garden we focus on growing local seasonal food or food that has adapted well to Buddha Garden conditions.

HOW WE WORK WITH NATURE



To grow food we need soil, microbes, water, plants, insects and animals. We call these the “elements of food growing”, each of which comes from the Earth and is sustained and renewed by Earth’s natural cycles. We work with these elements in ways that support the natural cycles. This enables each element to be continuously renewed and thus we can carry on growing food in Buddha Garden indefinitely.

In nature we see that the fertility of the soil is sustained by the microbes in the soil that break down organic matter into plant food. In our garden we use this process for making compost. The organic material we use to make our compost heap is broken down by soil microbes to make plant food. Every time we plant we add more compost to the soil so it retains its fertility. We see that the healthiest plants in Buddha Garden are those that are native to the place and which grow in season. We protect the natural plant diversity by growing and using our own seeds. This has the added benefit that our plants become adapted to and thrive in our place. We understand that water is a precious resource that is needed by all living beings. In our garden we use it carefully and protect the cycles that bring water to us by planting trees and making ponds that stop water from taking soil away from our land.

This approach is particularly important when we are faced with things like pest attacks that hamper our food growing efforts. Any action we take has to both deal with the problem and support the natural processes. If we kill pests with powerful pesticides we might kill other beneficial insects as

well as damaging our own health. We know that the number of beneficial insects such as bees that pollinate and termites that help break down compost far exceeds the number of pests that we have. We do not therefore seek to eradicate pests. Instead we take a range of measures to stop them being a nuisance. This includes things like crop rotation (to stop build up of pests in the soil), increasing the diversity of insect species (which our research shows limits the number of pests) and planting pest resistant (usually local) plants in season.

Since we are a small farm we do not have many animals as these need a large amount of land and a lot of care if they are to live well. We only have a few chickens that we feed from the land and which we use mainly to make very powerful compost, although from time to time we also enjoy their eggs. We are also visited by many wild animals, and as we have done for insects, have found ways to stop them being a nuisance. We make sure we pick the corn as soon as it ripens before the parrots get to it. If squirrels start eating one of our bottle gourds we leave it for them to finish off so they don't eat any more bottle gourds on the plants.

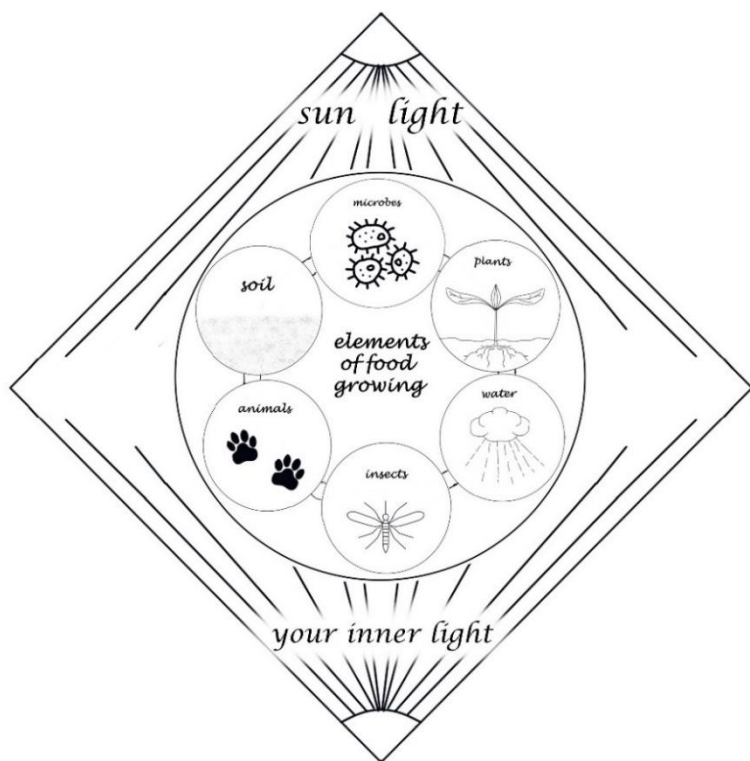
BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

The way in which these elements are brought together into an interlocking whole depends on many things. The practical needs of the grower for food and income, the availability of water, seasonal variations that limit what and how much can be produced. It also includes the human resources that are

available. Maybe help and support can be obtained by cooperating with other food growers as well as from the community for whom the food is being grown. Manifesting a particular philosophical or spiritual focus might also be important.

Given the infinite variety of people and places there is not a mechanical way of implementing this kind of practice. No two people grow food in exactly the same way. If someone else had come to the land of Buddha Garden it would have evolved into a very different place from what it is now. Over the years a large number of different people have lived and worked in Buddha Garden. Over time we have watched carefully to see how our earth engagement has affected our food growing. Any action we have taken balances the need to protect our food growing with the need to protect the natural cycles on which our food growing depends.

Understanding each of the elements, the natural processes that support them and how best to work with them is a lifelong learning process. There will always be more to learn--from books, internet, teachers and other farmers, but the most profound learning is rooted in the practical food growing process. The sum of this learning is what I call "the inner light". The sum of our evolving knowledge, understanding and awareness about the best way to grow food in our place at any one time. It balances the outer light of the sun under which we grow food in Buddha Garden. We work to sustain the earth as the earth sustains us.



EARTH FRIENDLY FOOD GROWING

WAYS OF STAYING IN TOUCH

If you would like to stay in touch with our evolving practice you can do so in the following ways:

YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/@earthfriendlyfoodgrowing>

Weekly video on **Earth Friendly Food Growing**, Priya's YouTube Channel and Facebook page. Videos about Buddha Garden, Chempaka Kuning, wherever Priya happens to be.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/earthfriendlyfoodgrowing>

Instagram (reels and pictures)
[earthfriendlyfoodgrowing](#)

You can find out more about **Buddha Garden**, what we do and how to visit, here:

<https://buddhagarden.earthfriendlyfoodgrowing.org/>