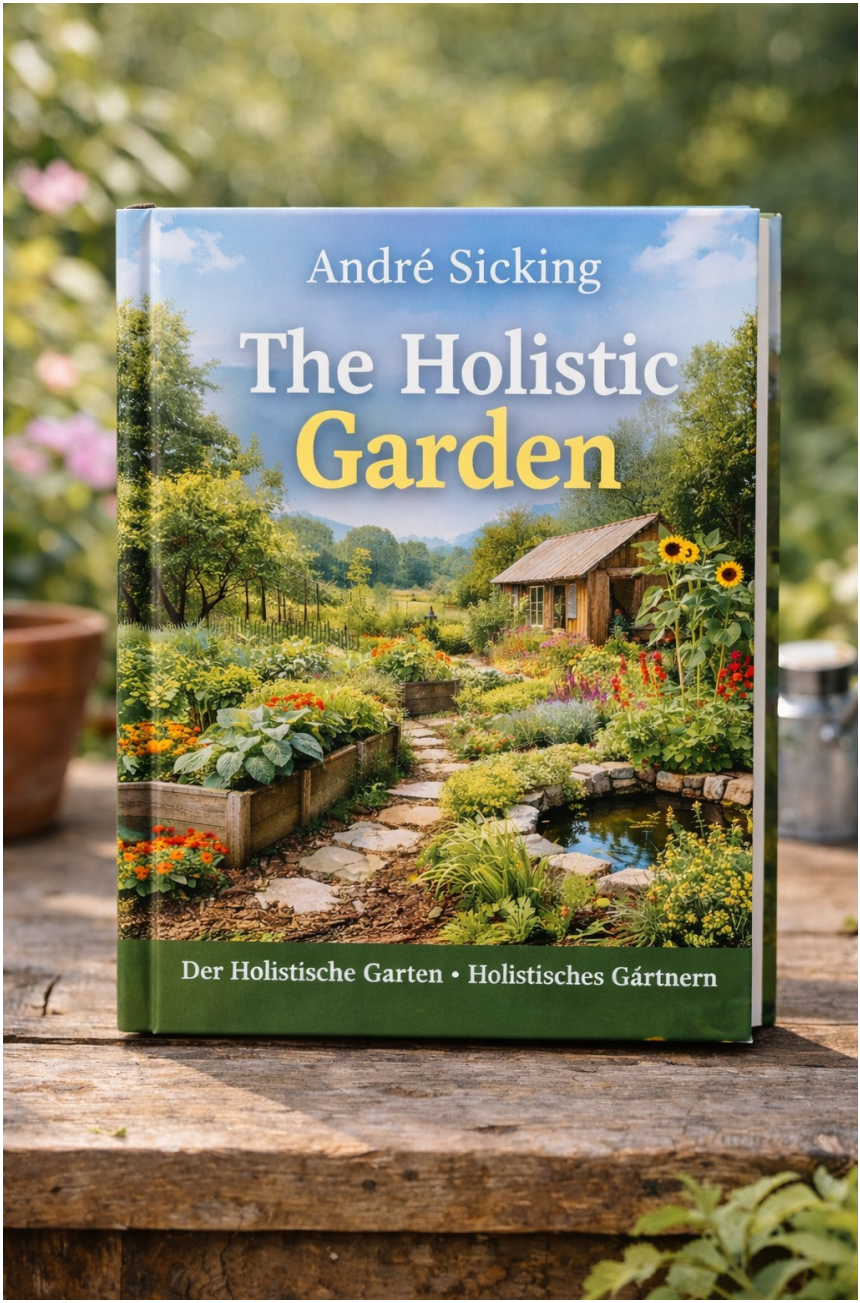
André Sicking
The Holistic Garden
Der Holistische Garten • Holistisches Gärtnern

Holistic Gardening

from André Sicking

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Introduction

"Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food." This famous quote is attributed to Hippocrates. But if we are honest, an important question arises today: Can our food still truly be our medicine? In recent decades, our agriculture has changed significantly. Many foods that we find in supermarkets today may appear perfect on the outside, but they often lack what truly makes food valuable: nutrients, vitality, and liveliness. Plants today often

grow under conditions that have little to do with natural cycles. Artificial fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides – including substances such as glyphosate – shape large parts of modern agriculture. As a result, plants are produced quickly and efficiently, but they often grow in soils that lack many important trace elements.

A plant actually needs a wide variety of minerals and trace elements to grow truly healthy. In conventional agriculture, however, mainly three nutrients are often supplied: nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. This is enough for rapid growth – but not necessarily for real vitality. When plants grow in depleted soils, this is also reflected in their quality. Food then easily becomes mere "food products" – something that fills us up, but does not necessarily truly nourish us. And this is exactly where a problem begins that many people feel today: despite an apparent abundance of food, diseases are increasing. Our body depends on being supplied with a variety of nutrients. If these are missing over a long period of time, the delicate balance of our organism falls out of equilibrium. Weakness, chronic complaints, and many modern diseases of civilization can also be related to the quality of our diet.

For me personally, it often feels strange to buy vegetables with which I have no connection at all. When we grow our own food or at least know where it comes from, a completely different connection arises. We experience the soil, the plants, the seasons – and rediscover what real food means. Everything in nature is interconnected: the earth, the plants, the people. When we become aware of this connection again, our view of food also changes. After all, our body is our only "vehicle" for this life. If we had a car that had to accompany us for a lifetime, we would probably treat it with the greatest care – with good fuel, regular maintenance, and attention. We should actually treat our body in the same way. Perhaps health begins exactly here: with living soils, healthy plants, and a conscious relationship with our food.

One's own garden is one of the most beautiful places in the world. A place where we can ground ourselves, where our thoughts become calmer and clearer, and where we can create and shape in harmony with nature. For me, there is hardly anything more beautiful than walking barefoot through the garden at sunrise in the morning with a cup of coffee in hand. Feeling the fresh air, greeting the plants, picking a few berries or fruits here and there, and

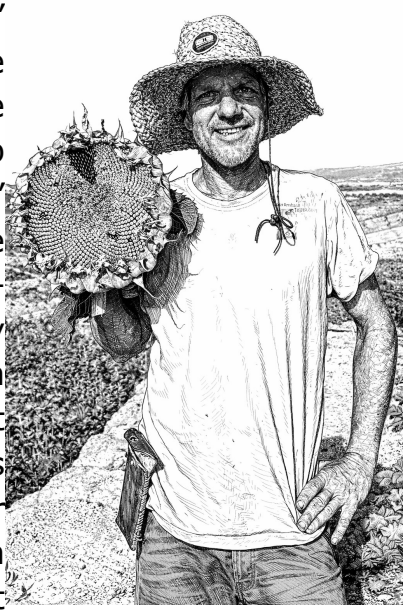
consciously beginning the new day. In such moments, I become aware again and again of how beneficial this connection to nature is. The garden not only provides nourishment for the body – it also nourishes the soul. It brings us back to something original, to a feeling of calm, liveliness, and gratitude. And perhaps that is exactly one of the greatest gifts of a garden: it reminds us how simple true well-being can feel.

A garden that one has created and cared for oneself often gives more than many short-term offers of our modern world. More than the next breathing course, a yoga workshop, or a weekend retreat. All these things can be inspiring, but they are usually only a brief moment. The garden, on the other hand, remains. It grows with us, changes with the seasons, and accompanies us over many years. While a course is over again after just a few days, the garden gives us peace, connection, and liveliness anew every single day.

Holistic Gardening according to André Sicking

What is holistic gardening – and why I wrote this book

My career as a gardener did not begin with training or in a business it began at around the age of eight. Back then, I created my first small garden beds at home. I planted carrots and everything else I could get my hands on. Looking back, that was exactly the path I should have followed my entire life. But school and training taught me something else. They suggested that a "proper" life path meant going to the bank or working in an office having a stable, secure job instead of "hanging around" in the garden. Today, I see this as a form of societal indoctrination. Our strongly materialistic world often leads us away from what truly suits us. It educates us to prioritize security over calling. But when a person finds their true task what



some also call a soul mission everything changes. Suddenly, work no longer feels like work. You automatically become better at what you do because you do it with passion. You feel joy in it and would probably do it even if you were not paid for it.

For me, that task was always gardening. But because this passion was trained out of me over the years, I tried many different paths. I worked as a plumber, as an emergency paramedic, and as a photographer. I ran a wok stand, a small food stall. I produced jewelry, had a company with ten employees, my own shop, a large online store, and sold at markets. I also spent about ten years of my life traveling. All these paths were interesting and educational but essentially, they were detours. Detours that arose because school and training had taken me away from my true dream: gardening. It was only about thirty years later that I realized this. The trigger was something very simple: old photos from my childhood. In them, I stand as a little boy in the garden, full of joy among my beds. In that moment, I realized that I should never have left this path. And I asked myself: What could I have achieved if I had consistently started gardening at the age of 17 or 18?

The Path to Holistic Gardening

My intensive engagement with gardening really began about twelve years ago. At first, I was mainly interested in ecological gardening. I wanted to understand how plants grow, how soils function, and how to cultivate in harmony with nature. During that time, I read over a hundred books on permaculture. I engaged with energy work, learned dowsing to find water veins in the soil, and tried many different cultivation methods. In addition, I watched hundreds of hours of videos on gardening, plant science, soil building, and natural cycles. My knowledge grew constantly.

At that time, I was still running a well-functioning jewelry business. But at some point, I realized that I wanted to follow my true interest. So I sold my company and bought a plot of land of about one hectare in Tenerife. My plan was clear: vegetable cultivation in a permaculture style. And indeed, it quickly turned out that I was very good at growing vegetables. The beds grew, the plants thrived, and the harvests were abundant. Only one thing I could not do particularly well: selling. About 80 percent of my vegetables ultimately ended up on the compost. I had incredible joy in sowing, planting, and harves-

ting but I had completely forgotten distribution. After two and a half years, I was financially at the end. In hindsight, that was exactly my greatest advantage. Because when I had no money left, I could not afford any ready-made systems or "standard solutions." So I began to experiment. I tried methods that did not come from textbooks, but from observation, intuition, and experience. And many of these methods worked surprisingly well. That was my first major aha moment.

Over time, I became aware of something that goes beyond classical gardening teachings. In my experience, a plant is not just a biological organism. It is ensouled or at least "en-souled." Humans have a soul. The plant world also has a form of soul. And both resonate with each other. In German, there is a crude but very fitting saying: "A sad ass produces no happy fart." What this means in the garden is actually quite simple: If you tend your garden in a bad mood, stressed, or with negative thoughts, this garden will rarely truly flourish. A garden responds to the energy of its gardener.

This can also be seen very clearly in new gardens. When you take over a plot of land, certain "weeds" often grow. In my experience, these plants are not

there by chance. They fulfill a task. They often reflect themes of the person who lives on that land. The saying goes: God always gives you exactly what you need. If you have problems with your lungs, ribwort plantain suddenly grows. If you have parasite issues, mugwort may appear. Nature provides us with exactly the plants we currently need. Everything is in resonance with each other: humans, animals, plants, and the place where we live.

This principle became particularly clear to me when I maintained many private gardens. The gardens developed excellently. Everything grew, everything bloomed. But since Tenerife is a holiday island, many owners were only present part of the year. As soon as the owners arrived for three months in winter, something began to change. Suddenly pests appeared. Flowers died. Plants lost their strength. According to my observation, this was often because the owners of the land and the garden themselves did not have a particularly high resonance and did not view the garden with good thoughts or real connection. When the owners left again, the garden slowly recovered. The plants flourished again, and balance returned. That was when I truly became aware for the first time of how strongly a garden resonates with the people who own or care for it.

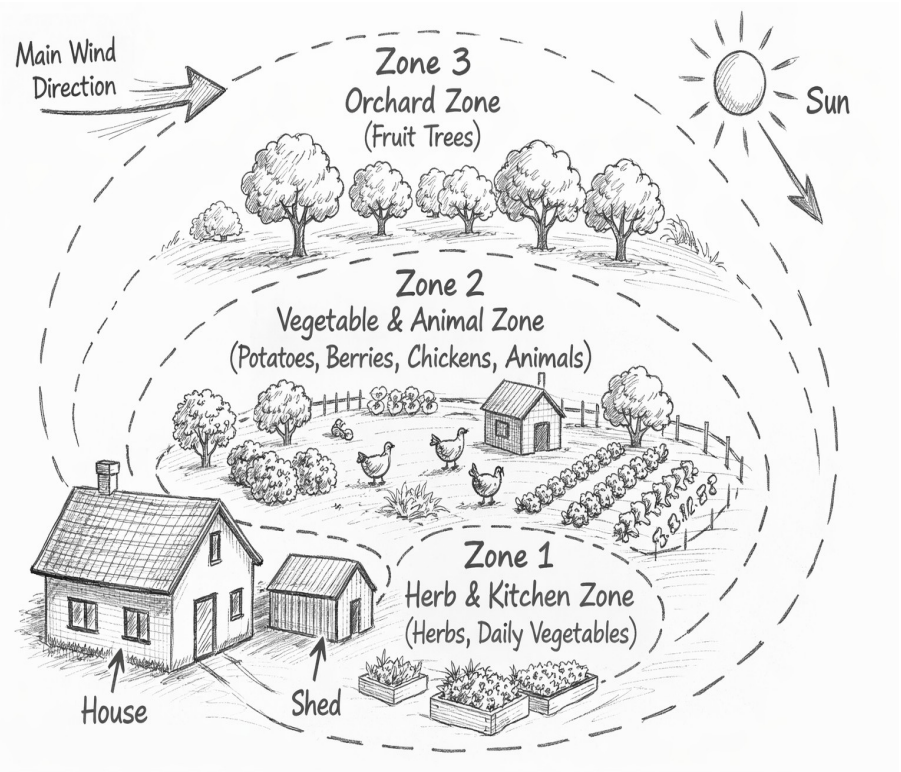
Planning the Garden

Creating a garden plan. First of all, one should think about where the garden should best be located. It should be sheltered from the wind and ideally in a sunny spot. To find out whether you have really found a good place, there is a simple tool. On a sunny and windy day, you simply lie down, preferably in a T-shirt and shorts, where the garden bed is supposed to be created, to check whether you as a person feel comfortable there. Is it calm? Is there enough sun? How do you feel? If you lie there on a summer day and notice that the wind still blows strongly through and it becomes uncomfortable or you feel cold, then the plants will feel the same way there. So just lie down for half an hour where the garden bed is supposed to be created – and you will already get a good feeling for the right location.

After that, you should create a plan. Where is my house? Where should the garden be? What is the main wind direction and what is the position of the sun? From which side does the sun come? Then the garden beds should be aligned, ideally facing south. You draw a plan with your own house, the property boundaries, and mark where trees are located, how the main wind direction runs, and how the course of

the sun is.

Afterwards, the garden is divided into three zones.



Zone 1 is close to the house. In this zone, plants are placed that you need to access frequently. So plants that require a lot of care or that you use daily. For example, herbs. These should be as close as possible to the kitchen so that you can simply open the window and have direct access. You do not want to

walk half a kilometer through the garden just because you forgot parsley.

Zone 2 is a bit further away. There you plant things that you need once a day or regularly, but not constantly. These include, for example, potatoes, berry bushes, or also animals such as chickens or rabbits.

Zone 3 is the area that is furthest away. This is where things go that you rarely need to take care of. For example, fruit trees or a larger orchard.

The Energy of a Place

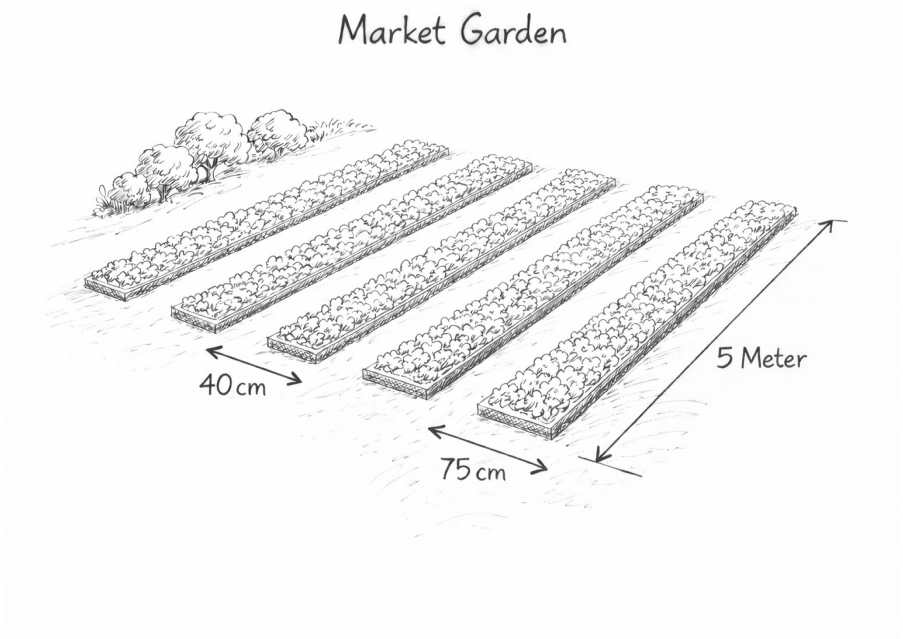
I would also recommend paying attention to the "energy" of a place. In German, there is the saying "Nothing grows there anymore," which expresses that in some places seemingly nothing grows well. It may well be that in the past, things happened on a piece of land that have an influence on the present energy. Perhaps there used to be a cemetery there, or a battle took place. Such events can affect the surroundings and lead to plants not growing optimally.

However, these energies can also be cleansed or neutralized. The exact explanation of these methods would go beyond the scope at this point, as this

book is intended as a beginner's book. I will write a separate book on this topic at a later time, in which I will deal with it in detail.

Measuring and Standardizing Beds

When you measure your garden, the width of the beds should be 75 centimeters. This has great advantages because you can easily reach the plants from both sides. If you want to get to another bed, you can simply step over the beds. This saves a lot of time and work.



The paths between the beds should be at least 40 centimeters wide. If small children or older people are working in the garden, the paths can also be 50 centimeters wide, because this makes working and harvesting much more comfortable.

It is a great advantage if you standardize the length of the beds. In my example, I take five meters. If you decide on a length, try to make all beds the same length. If you make one bed five meters long, then all beds should be five meters long. If you make them ten meters long, then all beds should also have this length.

This has several advantages. First, you can use materials such as covers or sheets everywhere without having to check each time whether they fit. Second, if you work with seeds or use a seeder, you can calculate exactly how much seed you need, since all beds have the same area. Third, you can compare your yields much better. If all beds are the same size, you can see exactly how much you have harvested and whether you have been able to improve your yield.

I would always standardize the beds because it saves a lot of work in the long term. To measure your beds precisely, you only need a mason’s string and a

measuring tape. With these two simple tools, you can mark out your beds quickly and accurately.

Loosening the Soil

Once everything is measured, you need to loosen the soil to a depth of about 30 centimeters. There are various ways to do this. You can loosen the soil with a spade, for example. This also works very well with a digging fork or a broadfork. Alternatively, you can use a motor tiller – but only once. Our garden beds are loosened only once at the beginning. After that, the soil is never dug again.

The reason for this is that we do not want to destroy the soil structure. If we regularly dig the soil or – as in agriculture – plow it, we destroy many important soil organisms. These include earthworms, microorganisms, and fungal networks in the soil (mycorrhiza). However, these organisms are crucial for healthy and fertile soil. Therefore, a simple rule applies in this system: loosen once – then leave the soil as undisturbed as possible.

Preparing a Garden Bed – Step by Step

1. Loosen the bed. First, loosen the bed to a depth of about 30 centimeters.

2. Apply the first layer of organic matter. Add about 8 centimeters of organic matter to a new bed. Suitable materials include: compost, well-rotted horse manure, well-aged cow manure, goat manure

3. Caution with chicken manure. Chicken manure is very strong and should be used with caution.

4. Work in the first layer. The first 8 centimeters of organic matter are worked into the top 15 centimeters of soil. You can simply do this with

a rake by lightly mixing the organic matter with the top layer of soil.

5. Rake the bed smooth. Then rake the bed smooth again so that a nice, even surface is created.

6. Apply the second layer of organic matter. Now add at least 10 centimeters of organic matter on top of the bed.

7. Do not work in the second layer. This top layer is not mixed with the soil. It simply remains on top of the bed.

8. Level the surface cleanly. Finally, you can lightly rake the top layer once more so that the bed looks neat.

The organic matter serves as food for: earthworms, fungi, microorganisms. In this way, you gradually build up a living, fertile soil. The advantage of compost is that it usually no longer contains weed seeds. During the composting process, high temperatures develop, which destroy many seeds and germs. However, this also has a disadvantage: if you use purchased compost, it is often heavily heated or processed. As a result, it is often biologically rela-

tively sterile. This means that it contains only few microorganisms, fungi, and other soil organisms. Therefore, we need to biologically activate the compost again so that healthy soil life can develop in the soil.

Activating Compost – Step by Step

If you use compost, I would proceed as follows:

1. Water the compost well. First, water the compost for four to six days every day. You can simply do this with a garden hose or a sprinkler system. It is important that the compost and the soil underneath become really well moist.

2. Add effective microorganisms. After a few days of moisture, add effective microorganisms (EM). These can easily be ordered online.

3. Add old compost. In addition, you can spread mature, old compost over the area. This contains many natural microorganisms and helps to activate the soil life.

A combination of both works best: effective microor-

ganisms and old, living compost. Afterwards, you can water everything lightly again so that the microorganisms distribute well.

If your organic matter is horse manure, cow manure, or goat manure, I recommend the following process:

1. Water the manure well. First, water the area thoroughly for five to six days, preferably daily. The manure and also the soil underneath should be thoroughly moistened.

2. Add microorganisms. Then apply effective microorganisms (EM) to the area. In addition, you can spread mature, old compost on top if you have any available. This introduces many beneficial microorganisms into the bed.

3. Water lightly again. Afterwards, you can water everything lightly again so that the microorganisms can distribute well.

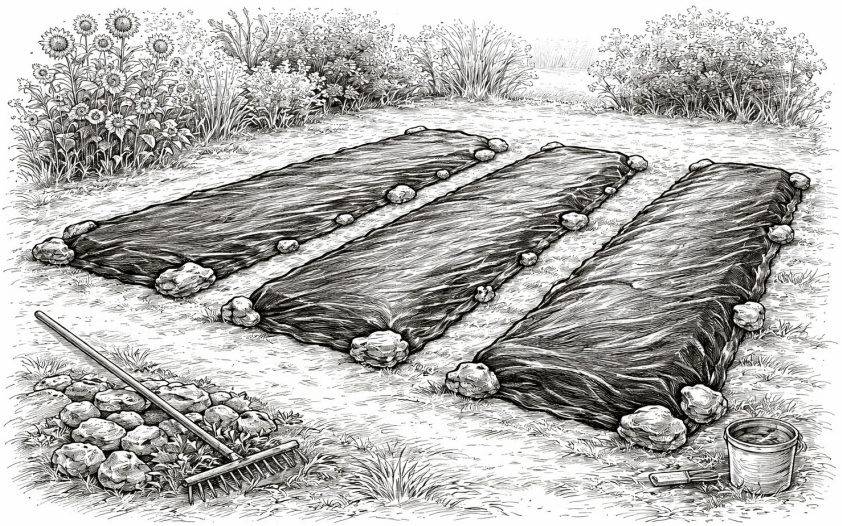
4. Cover with a black sheet. Now place a large black sheet over the bed. A sturdy silage sheet is best suited for this.

5. Weigh down the sheet. Weigh down the sheet

at the edges with stones or heavy objects so that it is not blown away by the wind.

6. Leave the sheet in place. The sheet should remain on the bed for one to two months. During this time, many weed seeds begin to germinate because it is warm and moist under the sheet. However, since they do not receive any light, they die again.

Ideal timing. This method works particularly well over the winter. When you remove the sheet in spring, you will have a new, prepared bed that is largely weed-free and already biologically active.



Alternative: Flaming Weeds

If you cannot wait one to two months, there is a faster alternative. After you have watered the manure and applied effective microorganisms as well as old compost, you can skip the black sheet.

1. Keep the area moist. Keep the bed slightly moist for the next 10 to 14 days. This causes many weed seeds to begin to germinate.

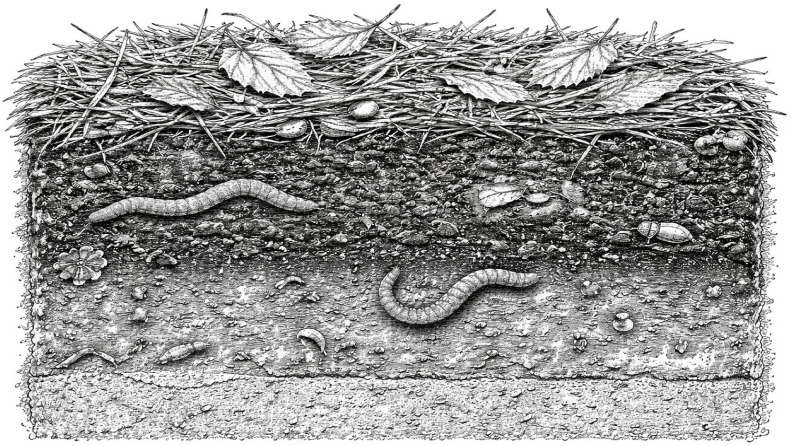
2. Flame the weeds. As soon as the small weeds become visible, you can remove them with a flaming device (gas burner). For this, a large gas bottle with a burner is usually used, as is also used for flaming or sealing roofing felt.

3. Go over the surface briefly. Move the burner slowly once over the surface of the bed. The young weeds are burned and then no longer pose a problem for the bed.

It is important: The plants do not have to be completely burned. It is enough to heat them briefly so that the cell structure is destroyed. After that, they dry out on their own.

Mulch and Irrigation

Mulch is a very important component in the garden. Once you have set up your system, including drip irrigation, you can apply mulch to your beds. Mulch has many advantages: it improves soil life, protects the surface from drying out due to sun and wind, and creates a habitat for many small soil organisms.



At the same time, mulch suppresses the growth of weeds.

As mulch material, you can use various organic materials, for example wood chips, straw, hay, grass clippings, or also leaves from the forest. Mulch should be applied about 5–10 cm thick. A disadvantage of mulch is that you have to remove it briefly during direct sowing so that you can sow cleanly. Also note that straw and hay often contain many seeds and are sometimes contaminated with chemicals, especially conventional straw. One should be careful here or avoid it.

Very important: Mulch is never mixed with the soil,

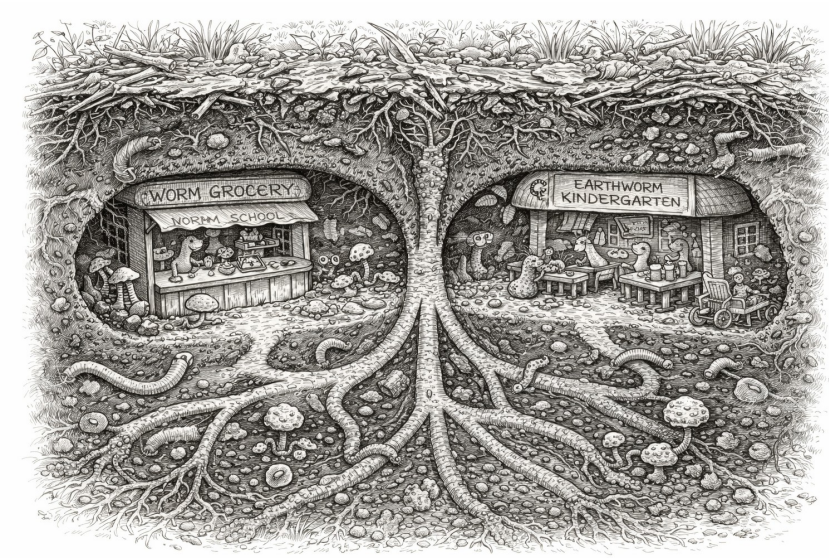
but always placed only on top of the surface. If you want to work in the bed, you simply push the mulch aside. Wood chips in particular remove nitrogen from the soil if they are worked in. I made this mistake once and could not grow anything for several months afterwards because nothing grew anymore.

Covering Paths with Wood Chips

It is a very good idea to cover the paths between the beds with wood chips or wood chippings. It is best to apply them five to six centimeters thick. This has several advantages. First, the garden immediately looks more orderly and structured. Second, the growth of weeds is greatly reduced because under a thick layer of wood chips, hardly any light reaches the soil.

Also Keep the Surroundings Clean

It is equally important to remove the weeds around the garden beds that are already present. If they remain, their seeds can get back into your beds. If you prepare the beds as I have described, you can build a garden that is almost weed-free. And because you no longer dig the



No-Dig Garden – No More Digging

The City of Organisms Beneath the Soil
Our garden will be a so-called no-dig garden. This simply means: we no longer dig the soil. Instead, we place organic matter on top of the beds once or twice a year without working it in. This can be compost, for example, or manure from various animals such as horses, cows, or goats. The reason for this is soil life. In the soil live earthworms, microorganisms, and fungi that constantly work together. If we want to have healthy and strong plants, a stable balance must develop between these soil organisms. However, this balance can only develop if we stop

turning or plowing the soil every year.

You can imagine it like a small city in the soil. The soil organisms build a complex system of tunnels, connections, and habitats there. When we dig the soil, this entire structure is destroyed. The soil organisms then need at least six months to a year to recover. Fungal networks in the soil sometimes even need three to four years to fully rebuild. Therefore, regular digging is very harmful to the soil and should be avoided as much as possible.

Advantages of a No-Dig Garden

If we no longer dig the soil, several major advantages arise. First: the soil remains permanently loose and crumbly because earthworms and microorganisms are constantly working in it. Second: water is absorbed and stored much better. Third: plants grow stronger and healthier because they are continuously supplied with nutrients. Fourth: significantly fewer weeds appear. When digging, old weed seeds are repeatedly brought to the surface from deeper soil layers, where they can germinate. However, if we no longer move the soil, these seeds remain deep in the ground and can no longer sprout.

The Soil Is More Important Than the Plant

As you can see, in this system we take more care of the soil than of the plants themselves. If the soil is healthy and contains sufficient minerals, nutrients, fungi, microbes, earthworms, and other soil organisms, the plants grow almost by themselves. The plants are of course also important. But if the soil is right, usually everything else is right as well.

When I bought my land about six years ago, my neighbor, who is also a farmer, told me that there are no earthworms in Arico. Half a year later, we went together to my property, and I showed him the soil. There were earthworms everywhere. The difference was simple: my neighbor worked with chemicals, glyphosate, and other substances. I did not use any of that. My plants were significantly stronger. My lettuces and my cabbage were sometimes twice as large as his. With onions, I had almost 20 kilograms per square meter, while he harvested only about four to six kilograms with his chemical system. At the same time, I hardly had to weed because the system worked with the soil.

For a family of four, by the way, about 15 square meters of net garden bed is often enough to supply themselves very well with vegetables.

Minerals in the Soil

There are several ways to improve the soil so that you achieve significantly higher yields than in a normal garden. One important method is to add minerals and trace elements to the soil. For this, you can buy so-called mineral or trace element mixtures. These often come from volcanic rocks and contain many important minerals such as magnesium, calcium, manganese, and other trace elements. A 20-kilogram bag usually costs about 50 to 60 euros and is sufficient for a large area.

If you think about it, this is actually very logical: the human body needs 80 to 90 different trace elements. Many people regularly buy dietary supplements for this. However, if these minerals are already present in the soil, they automatically enter the plants – and later also our food. Therefore, it makes sense to regularly incorporate these minerals into the soil. If the minerals are present in the soil, the plants can absorb them. And if they are in the plants, we also absorb them when we eat. Because one simple rule always applies: what is not in the soil cannot be in the plant.

The Foodhole – Feeding Soil Life

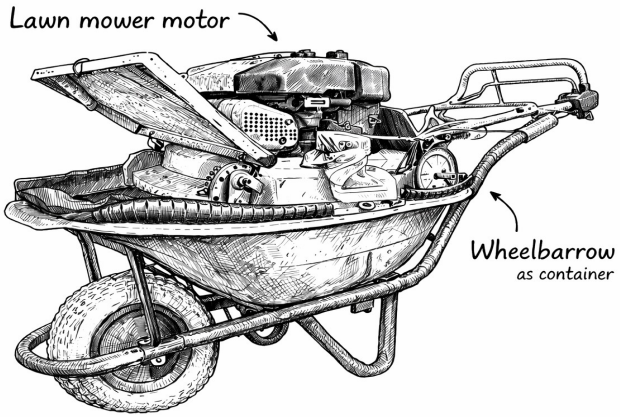
Another way to strengthen soil life is a so-called foodhole, a "food hole" in the garden bed. For this, you make a small hole in the bed with a spade and remove about five to ten liters of soil. Into this hole, you can put organic kitchen waste, for example vegetable scraps, fruit peels, or other uncooked foods. It is important that these are uncooked and, if possible, untreated. You can collect kitchen scraps for several days until about five liters of organic material come together. Then you put everything into the hole and cover it again with the previously removed soil. A little water can also be helpful so that earthworms and microorganisms begin decomposition more quickly.

You do not have to make this foodhole constantly. It is completely sufficient to create a new hole about every four weeks. You can simply move from bed to bed and make sure that the holes are well distributed, sometimes at the beginning of a bed, sometimes in the middle or at the end. In this way, soil life regularly receives food without everything being concentrated in one place.

Smoothies for Soil Life

A real gamechanger is a method made known by the author Herwig Pommeresche: smoothies for the soil. For this, you use organic kitchen waste – that is, fresh, uncooked, and preferably untreated foods. You can collect these for two to three days, as long as they are still fresh and do not start to rot. Then you put the leftovers together with some water into a blender and mix everything into a smoothie. You then distribute this smoothie over the garden bed and work it lightly into the top three to four centimeters of the soil. You can do this every two to three days.

Due to the strong breakdown, earthworms, microorganisms, and fungi can decompose the material much faster and use it as food. Herwig Pommeresche applied this method in Norway and reported exceptionally high yields – for example 20 to 30 kilograms of onions per square meter.



Large Plant Blender for Soil Smoothies

I also use this method here in Tenerife. Instead of a small blender, I have built a larger solution: a wheelbarrow with a mounted lawn mower, with which I can produce about 60 liters of plant smoothie at once. Of course, this is only necessary for larger areas. For most gardens, a normal kitchen blender is completely sufficient. If you blend your kitchen scraps fresh every day or every few days and lightly work them into the soil, it is hardly any additional effort. You can also add effective microorganisms to further accelerate the process. After a few months, you will notice that many earthworms and microorganisms have settled in the soil and that the plants grow much better.

Algae as a Natural Source of Minerals

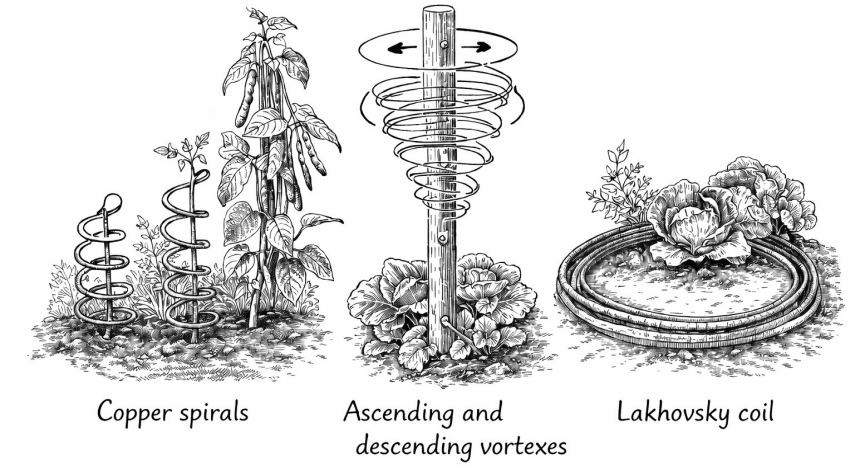
Another very interesting source of minerals for your garden is seaweed. In many soils today, important trace elements are missing, including lithium, because they have been leached out over many years or consumed through intensive agriculture. Lithium in particular is often only present in very small amounts in normal garden soils. Lithium is a trace element that is also interesting for humans because it is associated with positive thinking, emotional stability, and mental clarity.

If you want to bring more lithium and other minerals into your soil, you can use algae from the sea. If you live by the sea or are on vacation at the coast, you will often find large amounts of washed-up algae on the beach on stormy days, for example at the North Sea or the Atlantic. You can collect these algae and take them home. In the garden, you simply place them on top of the beds, similar to mulch. As they slowly decompose, they release many minerals and trace elements into the soil, including lithium, which naturally occurs in seawater and marine plants.

Alternatively, you can also – as described before – blend the algae with some water and distribute

them as a kind of plant smoothie on the soil. Due to the breakdown, earthworms, microorganisms, and fungi can absorb the nutrients more quickly and incorporate them into the soil. In this way, you naturally bring more lithium, minerals, and trace elements back into your garden soil, which can contribute in the long term to healthier plants and more active soil life.

Electroculture



Another interesting aspect in the garden is electroculture. This is about directing natural energies from the environment – often also referred to as energy

from the ether – to the plants. This can increase the life energy of the plants as well as the activity in the soil. If the soil is alive and energetically active, the plants also benefit from it. And when we eat these plants, we in turn absorb part of this life energy.

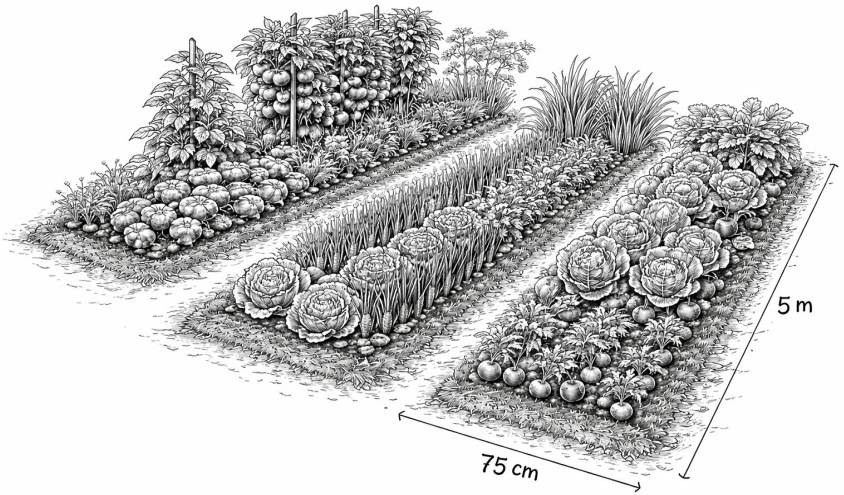
It is important to understand that freshness plays a major role. If possible, vegetables and fruits should be eaten as soon as possible after harvest. Storing a lettuce or other vegetables in the refrigerator for two days already significantly changes the quality.

There is a simple test that you can try yourself. Go into your garden and cut a broccoli, for example. Put it in the refrigerator for one day. The next day, go back into the garden and pick a fresh broccoli. First try the broccoli from the refrigerator and then the freshly harvested one. Most people immediately notice the difference: the broccoli that has just been harvested tastes more intense and feels significantly fresher than the one that has already been in the refrigerator for a day.

Electroculture was already used in the 18th century in France, sometimes even on a large scale. Over time, however, this knowledge has largely been lost. Modern agriculture often relies on chemical means instead. Many gardeners who work with electrocul-

ture report significantly stronger plant growth. In some cases, growth increases of up to 300% are even reported.

However, the topic of electroculture is very extensive and would go beyond the scope of this book. I myself have been working with various methods of electroculture for about seven years, including ascending and descending vortices, but a detailed explanation would go too far here. Perhaps I will dedicate a separate book to this fascinating topic one day.



Companion Planting in the Garden

I would recommend planting several different types of plants on one bed at the same time, so-called plant guilds. Different plants can support each other and help create a healthy balance in the garden. Some plants, for example, keep certain insects away or improve the growth of their neighbors. A simple example: if you plant onions between cabbage, this can help keep the cabbage white butterfly away.

By combining different plants on one bed, a more stable system is created in which the plants support each other and the garden becomes more resilient overall.

However, if you want to operate your garden commercially, I would rather advise against mixing too many different plants on one bed. In professional gardens, a large part of the work consists of harvesting and post-processing, meaning washing and preparing the products. This work can account for up to 70% of the total working time. If many different plants grow mixed together and you first have to search for where each plant is located, harvesting becomes significantly more labor-intensive and it becomes more difficult to work economically. In

practice, it is usually sufficient to combine three to four different types of plants on one bed. A mixture of heavy feeders, light feeders, and plants that repel insects, such as onions or herbs, works particularly well.

Companion Planting – Good and Bad Neighbors

Carrot: good onion, leek, lettuce | bad beans
Onion: good carrot, lettuce, cabbage | bad beans,
Leek: good carrot, celery | bad beans
Garlic: good tomato, strawberry | bad peas, beans
Tomato: good basil, lettuce, onion | bad potato
Cucumber: good beans, dill, lettuce | bad tomato
Cabbage: good celery, onion, dill | bad strawberry
Broccoli: good celery, lettuce | bad beans
Lettuce: good almost everything, especially carrot, **cucumber** | bad parsley
Spinach: good cabbage, strawberry | bad potato
Beetroot: good onion, cabbage | bad spinach
Radish: good carrot, lettuce | bad cucumber
Beans: good cucumber, corn | bad onion, garlic
Potato: good beans, cabbage | bad tomato
Celery: good cabbage, tomato | bad corn

Light Germinators and Dark Germinators

If you want to sow vegetables, a basic distinction is made between two categories of seeds. The first category is dark germinators. These seeds must be covered with soil in order to germinate. They are therefore placed a few millimeters to a few centimeters into the soil.

The second category is light germinators. These seeds require light to germinate and are therefore only placed on the soil and covered at most with a very thin layer of soil of about three millimeters to a maximum of half a centimeter.

Moisture for Light Germinators

It is important for light germinators that the seeds never dry out, otherwise they will not germinate. Therefore, it is important to keep the surface of the soil constantly slightly moist during the germination phase. There are a few simple tricks for this.

One option is the use of vermiculite, for example when sowing lettuce. Vermiculite is an expanded volcanic rock that stores moisture very well while

still allowing light to pass through. This keeps the seeds moist for longer and still allows them to germinate. Another simple method is to place a thin film or cellophane over the area after sowing. This keeps the moisture in the soil and prevents the seeds from drying out. As soon as the first seedlings become visible, the film should be removed again so that the plants receive sufficient air and light.

Light germinators: sowing in multi-cell trays with vermiculite and film

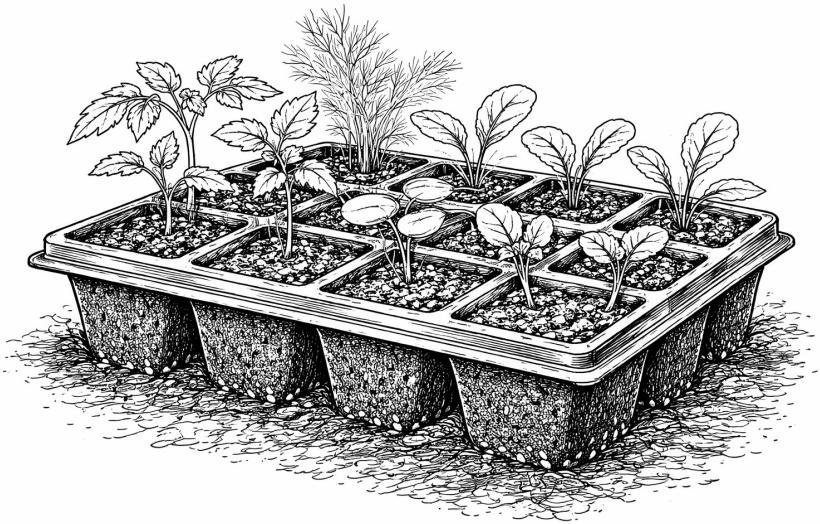
Seed Overview

Lettuce: light germ. | depth 0–0.5 cm | temp. 10–20 °C | duration 5–10 d | harvest 30–50 d
Arugula: light germ. | depth 0.5 cm | temp. 10–20 °C | duration 3–7 d | harvest 25–40 d
Spinach: dark germ. | depth 2–3 cm | temp. 5–20 °C | duration 7–14 d | harvest 35–50 d
Carrot: dark germ. | depth 0.5–1 cm | temp. 10–20 °C | duration 10–20 d | harvest 70–90 d
Radish: dark germ. | depth 1 cm | temp. 8–20 °C | duration 3–7 d | harvest 25–35 d
Daikon: dark germ. | depth 1–2 cm | temp. 10–20 °C | duration 4–8 d | harvest 50–70 d
Beetroot: dark germ. | depth 2–3 cm | temp. 10–25 °C | duration 7–14 d | harvest 55–70 d
Chard: dark germ. | depth 2–3 cm | temp. 10–25 °C | duration 7–14 d | harvest 50–60 d
Kohlrabi: dark germ. | depth 1 cm | temp. 15–20 °C | duration 5–10 d | harvest 50–70 d
Broccoli: dark germ. | depth 0.5–1 cm | temp. 15–20 °C | duration 5–10 d | harvest 70–90 d
Cauliflower: dark germ. | depth 0.5–1 cm | temp. 15–20 °C | duration 5–10 d | harvest 80–100 d
Kale: dark germ. | depth 1 cm | temp. 10–20 °C | duration 5–10 d | harvest 60–90 d
Chinese cabbage: dark germ. | depth 1 cm | temp. 10–20 °C | duration 5–8 d | harvest 50–70 d
Tomato: dark germ. | depth 0.5–1 cm | temp. 20–25 °C | duration 5–10 d | harvest 70–90 d

Pepper: dark germ. | depth 0.5–1 cm | temp. 22–28 °C | duration 10–20 d | harvest 80–100 d
Chili: dark germ. | depth 0.5–1 cm | temp. 24–28 °C | duration 10–20 d | harvest 90–120 d
Cucumber: dark germ. | depth 2–3 cm | temp. 20–25 °C | duration 4–8 d | harvest 50–70 d
Zucchini: dark germ. | depth 2–3 cm | temp. 20–25 °C | duration 4–8 d | harvest 45–60 d
Pumpkin: dark germ. | depth 2–3 cm | temp. 20–25 °C | duration 5–10 d | harvest 90–120 d
Beans: dark germ. | depth 3–4 cm | temp. 15–25 °C | duration 5–10 d | harvest 50–70 d
Peas: dark germ. | depth 3–5 cm | temp. 8–18 °C | duration 7–14 d | harvest 60–70 d
Onion: dark germ. | depth 1–2 cm | temp. 10–20 °C | duration 10–20 d | harvest 90–120 d
Leek: dark germ. | depth 1 cm | temp. 15–20 °C | duration 10–14 d | harvest 120–150 d
Fennel: light germ. | depth 0–0.5 cm | temp. 15–20 °C | duration 7–14 d | harvest 80–100 d
Celery: light germ. | depth 0–0.5 cm | temp. 18–22 °C | duration 14–21 d | harvest 120–150 d

Direct Sowing in Beds and Growing in Multi-Cell Trays

There are several ways to grow vegetables. One option is direct sowing in the bed, where the seeds are sown directly at their final location in the garden. The second option is growing in multi-cell trays. In this method, the seeds are first pre-grown in small pots, for example in a greenhouse, on a windowsill, or in a protected space.



The advantage of pre-growing is that you can start earlier in time. While there is still frost outside or temperatures are too low, many plants can already grow indoors or in the greenhouse. Typical examples are tomatoes, cucumbers, or zucchini. As soon as it is warm enough outside, the young plants are then transplanted into the prepared garden beds. This gi-

ves you a clear growth advantage and often allows you to harvest earlier than if you were to sow the plants directly into the bed.

The advantage of multi-cell trays is that you can control the plant spacing very precisely. This is especially useful for larger plants, for example cabbage, beetroot, or fennel. Pre-growing in multi-cell trays can also be helpful for light germinators, as these seeds are often a bit more sensitive and do not always germinate evenly.

For smaller plants, however, I would rather recommend direct sowing in the bed. Plants such as carrots, parsley, or spinach can usually be grown more easily and quickly directly in the garden bed without pre-growing them in multi-cell trays.

For sowing in multi-cell trays, you can either use classic seed-starting soil or well-sieved compost. A very good mixture is created by mixing compost with some perlite and sand. Perlite ensures that the soil remains loose and stores water well, while sand improves drainage. This allows the roots of the young plants to develop more easily and the seedlings grow more evenly.

A small hack that I often use: If you notice that your

young plants have germinated but are not really growing, look slightly yellowish, or you may have left them too long in the multi-cell trays, you can help them very easily. Take green plants – this can also be normal weeds – and put them together with some water into a blender. Mix everything well and then strain the liquid so that in the end only the green water with a lot of chlorophyll remains. You can then water your young plants with this green liquid. In many cases, you will see that the plants look significantly greener and stronger again within three to four days.

Direct Sowing

For direct sowing in the bed, the easiest way is to work with a stick or rod. Use it to draw light grooves in the soil, as shown in the drawing. The seeds are sown into these grooves and then lightly covered with soil again. It is important that the bed is kept constantly moist during the first 14 to 15 days so that the seeds can germinate reliably.

A small trick is to place an old potato sack over the bed after sowing, for example. This helps to retain moisture in the soil and makes germination more even. If you are cultivating larger areas, it can be useful to use a small seed drill. This allows you to work faster and the seeds are distributed more evenly.

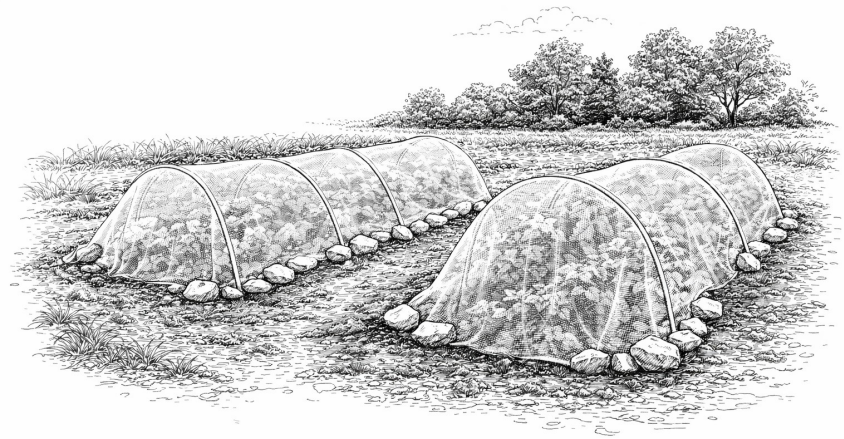
Protection from Predators in the Garden

Every animal in nature has its own role, even if we do not always know exactly what that is. Of course, we must protect our plants to a certain extent from predators, because if everything is eaten, nothing remains for us in the end. However, it is important not to use any chemical products – neither insecticides nor artificial fertilizers. These substances destroy the entire soil life in the garden. Artificial ferti-

lizers in particular are basically salts that can severely damage or even completely destroy soil life within a few days.

When this happens, problems with pests and diseases often arise in the first place. However, if you build up your soil in a healthy way, as I have described in the previous chapters, you will find that pests are hardly a problem anymore. Healthy plants are resilient. In nature, insects and other animals often remove weakened or diseased plants. If the plants are strong and healthy, usually nothing happens or only very little.

In my garden here in Tenerife, I rarely use any kind of protection. The plants still grow excellently. Of course, it can happen that three to five percent of the plants are eaten by caterpillars or snails, but that is completely normal and usually does not pose a real problem.



Insect Protection Nets

One of the simplest ways to protect plants in the garden from predators is insect protection nets. Since our beds are 75 cm wide and standardized, these nets can be used very easily. The big advantage: every net fits every bed.

The easiest way is to buy netting by the roll. A width of about 1.50 meters is suitable so that the 75 cm bed can be completely covered. The hoops for the net can be made very easily yourself. For this, you buy galvanized steel wire with a diameter of about 5 mm. Cut pieces of about 1.70 meters in length. This can be done, for example, with an angle grinder or sturdy pliers. Then simply bend the wire into a hoop.

These hoops are then inserted into the ground on the left and right next to the bed, the net is placed over them, and weighed down on the sides. You can use stones or simple camping pegs for this. This keeps the net securely in place and reliably protects your plants from many pests.

Create a Bird Paradise

A very good method to support the natural balance in the garden is to create a bird paradise. Birds help to reduce many insects and pests in the garden. Therefore, hang up some nesting boxes near the garden so that birds can settle there. The more birds live in your garden, the more natural helpers you will have. You can also plant sunflowers, but not directly in the garden bed. Sunflowers prefer to grow somewhat isolated and often allow little other plant growth around them. Therefore, it is better to plant them one to two meters next to the beds, for example on the left and right edges of the garden.

Let the sunflowers bloom and later go to seed. The birds will gladly eat the seeds and visit your garden regularly. This creates a natural balance from which your entire garden benefits

Natural Helpers in the Garden

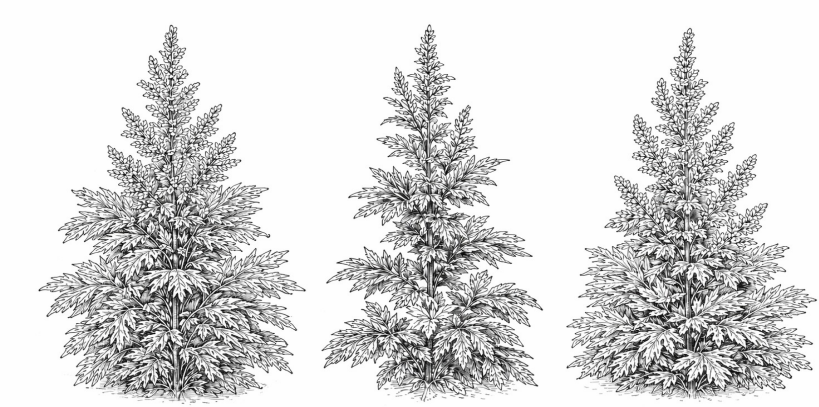
When I was still growing vegetables professionally and managing about 220 garden beds, I had planted a row of sunflowers about every ten beds. The idea behind this was very simple: the birds come because of the sunflower seeds. After a few weeks, however, the birds have had enough of the seeds and be-

gin to look for other food. Then something interesting happens: a bird discovers, for example, a small hole in a lettuce leaf, lands on the bed, and looks underneath. There it may find a caterpillar or a worm. Other birds see this and also fly there. It often takes only one to two hours until entire beds are freed from caterpillars. Without birds, these caterpillars would often not be discovered at all.

I had a similar experience about ten years ago in Tenerife. On my balcony, I had a herb bed that was suddenly full of small green caterpillars. However, near the city there are fewer birds, but I had geckos. These small geckos that stick to the walls usually eat flying insects. So I caught two geckos and temporarily placed them in a terrarium. There I fed them with the caterpillars from my lettuce. After about a week, they had learned to accept these caterpillars as food. Then I released them again. And believe it or not: three weeks later, there was not a single caterpillar left on my plants. The geckos had learned that these caterpillars are edible. When they later have offspring, they pass on this behavior. In this way, a natural balance can develop in the garden, completely without chemicals.

Making Natural Insect Sprays

Many insects recognize plants mainly by their smell. A good example is the cabbage white butterfly, which specifically flies to cabbage plants, lays its eggs there, and from which caterpillars later emerge. You can use this mechanism by making natural



Artemisia canario *Mugwort* *Wormwood*

plant brews that mask the smell of the plants.

In Tenerife, I use Artemisia canario for this, for example, a plant that grows wild here. For this, I pick the Artemisia and boil it for about 10 minutes in approximately 10 liters of water. Then the brew is filtered through a sieve so that only the liquid remains. I then spray this liquid over the plants, especially over

cabbage plants. The bitter smell of the Artemisia ensures that the cabbage white butterfly no longer clearly recognizes the cabbage as cabbage and therefore no longer flies to it. This treatment should be repeated about every two weeks.

However, it is important to stop about three weeks before harvest, as the brew can otherwise make the taste of the plants somewhat bitter. Those who live in Europe and do not have access to Artemisia canario can instead use mugwort or wormwood. Both plants have a similarly strong smell and work in a similar way.

Closing Words by André Sicking

In this book, I have tried to introduce you to the basic principles of holistic gardening or permaculture in simple and understandable steps. Of course, there are many more methods, tricks, and connections that I could show you and would also like to show you. A book can always only convey part of this

knowledge. If you want to go deeper into practice, you are welcome to attend a **gardening course** with me on my finca in the south of Tenerife. These courses take place at regular intervals, both for beginners and for advanced participants. I also give lectures on permaculture and holistic gardening in El Medano. If you are interested, you can also book me for lectures, workshops, or **personal consulting** for your garden or your orchard meadow. I am happy to come by and help you transform your garden into a living, healthy, and productive ecosystem. If you have any questions or would like to get in touch, simply contact me.

Bestregards
André Sicking

Mail: evergreenheaven333@gmail.com
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