

Sepp Holzer's Permaculture: A Practical Guide to Small-Scale, Integrative Farming and Gardening

Josef Andreas Holzer

Mag Claudia Holzer

Sepp Holzer

Anna Sapsford-Francis, Translator

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Despite a history of being fined and threatened with prison for his adherence to natural farming methods, farmer, author, and international consultant for natural agriculture Josef “Sepp” Holzer continues to practice what is now called permaculture on the high-altitude Austrian mountain farm he took over from his parents in 1962. A pioneer in the use of ecological farming methods, the so-called “rebel farmer” works as a permaculture activist and advisor, and was the subject of the film *The Agricultural Rebel*.

“Working towards a natural life and natural agriculture is difficult in a time when people in agriculture, science, and politics only have their eyes on ‘progress,’ whilst showing no consideration for nature,” writes Holzer, whose life and work are a living demonstration of farming and living in cooperation with nature; not only for the natural world, but also for human beings to enjoy vital, healthy, and prosperous lives.

Appreciating that nature has already perfected methods for guaranteeing healthy plant and animal life, Holzer observed the conditions that each type of living thing required and replicated them on the steep mountainsides of his farm, 5,000 feet above sea level in an area called the Siberia of Austria. His self-sustaining landscape produces and nurtures high-quality vegetables, fruits, mushrooms, nuts, fish, poultry, pigs, cattle, and even citrus fruits—without irrigation, fertilizers, pesticides, weeding, or tilling—in an intricate, efficient, and beautiful system of terraces, ponds and waterways, raised beds, and paths, utilizing land that monoculture-based methods could never cultivate. Readers will find it obvious that Holzer’s insightful and creative growing methods, derived from careful observation of nature and experimentation on his own land, not only are environmentally sound at every level, but also, once established, mean much less work for the farmer or gardener, and result in much less strain on the ecosystem.

Holzer’s beautifully designed and illustrated book is essential reading for all who care about the land and the vast interrelated web of living beings who inhabit it, and it is especially timely, since small and organic farmers in the United States are being threatened by agribusiness, chemical companies, and others who view nature as something to conquer and ravish rather than honor and learn from. Large- and small-scale farmers, home gardeners, and even those who only have room to grow in a few pots on a city balcony will find Holzer’s methods applicable and effective, his reasoning and knowledge impeccable, and his spirit pure and honest.

KRISTINE MORRIS (July / August 2011)

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