

A publication of the Ujamaa Cooperative Farming Alliance

SEED CULTURE

We are living the dream...collectively!

Quarterly

Volume 2, Issue 2 Summer 2025

The Thistle Eaters

Self-care for Farmers

**Regenerative Practices and
Traditions On The Bay**

**Home Grown Sweet Potatoes
for Your Garden**

Addressing Food Apartheid



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Remembering Our Elders

By Bonnetta Adeeb

“Reclaiming knowledge from our elders and archiving it now so that our descendants will have access to this wisdom is critical.”

Dear Friends and Growers,



In times of trouble, lessons from the past are more valuable than ever. It feels like so many of us have been losing people we love and needed in our lives. Several have lost a beloved mother or father. In these times, we struggle to figure out how we can breathe, much less cope, with this emotional loss. When loved ones transition, which we will all be doing cause you can't get out of this life alive, I wrestle with the word of comfort to share.

So many of you have become the family members we've chosen. As I reflect on my own journey, it comes to me that our work of honoring the wisdom of our elders and ancestors is one of the best methods for coping in existence. Monuments are built for some great men in history, yet many of our loved ones will live on through our actions and memories. I think of what I want my grandsons, Kai and Jabari, to remember about me. I looked at my memories of big juicy watermelon slices from my grandfather Big Daddy or those incredible delicious tomato sandwiches and strawberry shortcakes with whipped cream from Mamma Celie, my grandmother. We are honoring them by calling their names and telling these simple stories.

In my opinion, reclaiming knowledge from our elders and archiving it now so that our descendants will have access to this wisdom is critical. Don't y'all forget to ask those old folks as many questions as possible and write or record it. Most of you have movie cameras in your pockets. Use them to record Big Mamma and Auntie Millie's stories while you can for oral history and heirloom garden stories. My grand aunties use to bake something delicious every day: a cobbler, nut bread, or Parker house dinner rolls. They spoke of searching the woods for berries, apples, peaches, and wild fruits like persimmons all the time. What did our elders do? They survived and left us ways to do so. I propose that we add fruit, nuts, and berries to our home and community gardens. This is why we are looking to the forest for crops for the future.

Our success with the Ira Wallace Seed School and how this will impact communities in need as we continue our work means that another generation that will carry this mission forward. We had nearly 70 in the class of 2024 and now have just about 140 in 2025. Thank you so much Amirah Mitchell, Chris Keeve, Reggie Blackwood, Nate Kleinman, Veronica Limeberry, Roxanne Masters, and all the other team members that make this happen.

Bonnetta Adeeb,
Owner, Worker and Founding Granny,
Ujamaa Cooperative Farming Alliance

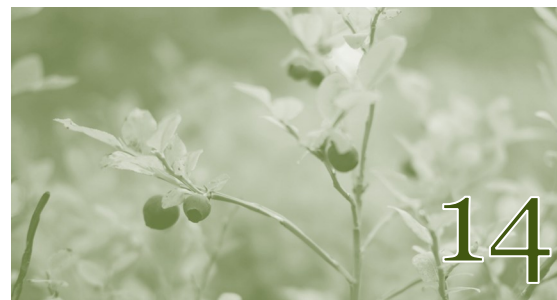
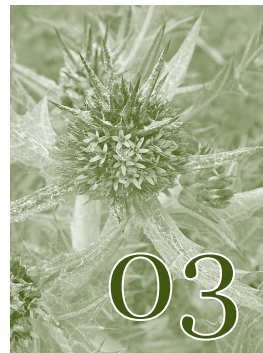
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The Thistle Eaters

A Lesson in Resistance from Palestine



Akkoub

Gundelia tournefortii
near the Zavitan River
in the occupied Golan
Heights, Syria.

Written by Nate Kleinman

Public domain photo by lorsh.

On a bright spring morning eleven years ago, three Palestinian teenagers set off from a West Bank village on a mission to find and harvest the flowering stalks of a spiny thistle-like plant called *akkoub*. The three youths, aged 13 to 18, intended to visit some farmland owned by the family of one of them, 14-year-old Yusef a-Shawamreh, where they knew they would find their quarry. But on that tragic morning, for reasons that begin and end with the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, they never reached their foraging grounds.

Known in Latin as *Gundelia tournefortii* and in English simply as “gundelia,” *akkoub* is a perennial with individuals plants often persisting for many years.

It sends up its vegetative growth in the Levantine winter, flowers during a brief window in early spring,

then promptly dries up into a sort-of tumbleweed by early summer. Its strong roots go dormant during Palestine’s hot dry summers. Though it may look more like a Medieval weapon than food, *akkoub* is a highly prized delicacy that is not only beloved for its taste, but has become a symbol of Palestinian resistance and resilience. Even before *akkoub* foraging was restricted by Israeli authorities in 2005, which necessarily politicized the plant, many Palestinians already considered foraging for this unlikely prize to be part of their birthright as Palestinians.

Because *Akkoub* is only available for a short time in early spring, its arrival heralds a flurry of excitement. People sit for hours amidst piles of fresh *akkoub* — which is said to taste something like its cousin artichoke with notes of asparagus — carefully pruning the flower-buds and stalks of their sharp spines in order to make them palatable. Prepared *akkoub* sold at market can cost twice as much, pound for pound, as meat.

Continued on next page.



The gap in the fence near where Yusef a-Shawamreh was shot one day prior. Photo by Itamar Barak of B'Tselem, March 20th, 2014.

According to a report published by B'Tselem, the widely-respected Israeli human rights organization, on the morning of March 19th, 2014, the three young Palestinian foragers were unable to reach their *akkoub* foraging grounds without passing through a large gap in the imposing Israeli fence that had for years separated their West Bank village of Deir al-'Asal al-Foqa from its traditional foraging and grazing lands. Locals knew that the breach in the fence had been open for two years, so it was not at all unusual for them to use it to access their lands on the other side.

But on that fateful Wednesday morning, just after they crossed through the fence and then over the Israeli patrol road on the other side, three or four gunshots suddenly rang out without warning. Young Yusef was hit in the left thigh. One of his friends helped him back to the road, where the Israeli soldiers who had ambushed them quickly appeared. While also apprehending his friends, soldiers vainly administered first aid to Yusef, then took him by ambulance to an Israeli hospital where a doctor pronounced him dead.

The official Israeli account of Yusef's murder was inconsistent with the story told by his companions to human rights researchers. The IDF spokesperson's statement, according to B'Tselem — a Jerusalem-based non-profit founded in 1989 to document human rights violations in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories — claimed that "troops of the Armored Corps 77th Battalion on a proactive mission who noticed three suspicious Palestinians vandalizing the Separation Barrier began carrying out a suspect arrest procedure. As the Palestinians did not heed the soldiers' warnings, the soldiers fired and one Palestinian was hit."

B'Tselem's report continues: "By justifying the use of lethal fire in broad daylight at youths who posed no danger to any other persons, the above statement conveys a cynical lack of concern for the life of a Palestinian teenager. Israel's security forces in the area are well aware that, for the past two years, Palestinians have been crossing the Separation Barrier at the breach at that particular point at this very season to pick gundelia on their own farmland. In his testimony to B'Tselem, [al-Muntaser Beallah a-Dardun, age 18, Yusef's elder companion] stated that police officers had detained him

and three of his friends at the very same spot two days before this incident. He said that, before letting them go, the police officers beat all four of them and confiscated the plants they had picked."

Continued on next page.



Yusef a-Shawamreh next to the "separation barrier." Photo by 'Abed Al-Hashlamoun, European Pressphoto Agency, published by B'Tselem, The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories.

Since 1977, when two wild plants popular among Palestinians for culinary and medicinal use were first given “protected status” by the Israeli government, foraging has become increasingly dangerous.

With “conservation of natural resources” as a pre-text, even elderly foragers, out filling small baskets with wild herbs for personal use, risk harassment or worse from Israeli soldiers, police, and self-appointed vigilantes. This kind of violence is particularly chilling because foraging is so isolating, bringing people alone or in small groups to areas outside of population centers, where crimes against them are much more likely to go unseen, unrecorded, and unpunished.

The restrictions began in the 1970s with wild sage and *za’atar* — commonly called “wild thyme” in English, but actually a name used for a range of local species of savory (*Satureja* genus), oregano (*Origanum*), and thyme (*Thymus*). But even when foraging for plants that are not restricted by the Israeli government, such as wild mallow (“*khobeizeh*”), mint (“*nana*”), dandelion (“*elik*”), or sumac (“*summaq*”), and even when foraging on land that is not separated from their homes by an Israeli fence or road or wall, Palestinians still risk deadly confrontations with Israelis every time. The problem has become especially acute with the rise of extreme right-wing politicians in the Israeli government, like Itamar Ben-Gvir, the national security minister who brags about distributing hundreds of thousands of guns to Israeli settlers.

It is sickeningly commonplace for Palestinians to be attacked, beaten, arrested, jailed, or even killed for the simple, timeless act of foraging, despite their doing so on the same land their ancestors foraged for untold generations. Lest we forget, ancient foragers in Palestine are responsible for turning a couple wild grasses into wheat and barley, and some wild vetches into lentils, fava beans, and chickpeas. They took wild figs and olives and turned them into the life-sustaining crops they are today. The tradition of foraging for wild food plants in the lands between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea has no doubt been carried on since human beings first left Africa.

While it’s not unreasonable for governments to take measures to protect endangered species from overharvesting, Israel’s restrictions on *akkoub* in

particular are transparently targeted at Palestinians. Since *gundelia* requires difficult and often painful labor to both harvest and prepare — bloody fingertips are a small price to pay for something so delicious — it is one of the only traditional Palestinian foods yet to be appropriated by Israelis and rebranded as “Israeli food,” making its use a uniquely Palestinian practice. It is also, again, a perennial plant with deep roots, so the harvesting of flower buds and stalks does not prevent plants from regrowing the following year. And it’s no coincidence that *akkoub* foraging was banned in 2005, around the end of the yearslong “2nd intifada,” at a time when anti-Palestinian sentiment in Israel was intense.

When viewed in the broader context of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and the oppression of Palestinian people, it’s no surprise that even foraging is strictly controlled, because *every* aspect of Palestinian life is strictly controlled. Israel restricts Palestinians’ water use, while taps flow freely for Israelis. They deny Palestinians freedom of movement, and claim the power to prevent Palestinians abroad from ever returning home. They routinely confiscate Palestinian land, demolish Palestinian homes, and uproot or burn Palestinian orchards. Sometimes they even spread salt on Palestinian farmland — just like the wicked Biblical king Abimelech did to the lands around Shechem after quelling a rebellion there and burning the city to the ground — the ultimate act of domination against a subjugated foe.

But like the *akkoub* itself, Palestinian roots run deep. Even in the face of accelerating genocide — the terrifying climax to 77 years of dehumanizing repression — Palestinians steadfastly refuse to give up on themselves. So every spring, when the *akkoub* awakens from its slumber and stretches toward the sky, even as bombs drop in the distance and well-armed thugs menace at every turn, Palestinian foragers just like Yusef a-Shawamreh still take to the hills in search of that fleeting taste of their birthright.

Reference:

www.btselem.org/firearms/20140326_killing_of_yusef_a_shawamreh_deir_al_asal

SELF-CARE

for Farmers

Written by Bonnetta Adeeb and Karen Bowlding

At a recent workshop, Devonne Horsley taught us how to take care of our backs while farming, how to pick up items, and exercises for our lower back. She often speaks of how much better a job we need to do in taking better care of farmers too. Without them we couldn't survive a day, but many consumers don't give a nod to the folks that provide life for them on a daily or hourly basis.

Stand and take a bow, you beautiful growers. However, as a society what actions should we be considering. How can we make sure that Tomia MacQueen gets a healthy lunch when she leaves the field. How do we guarantee that Michael Carter, Jr., in all his considerations, continues to spread the word about African food but gets that good meal after a long day of heat, bugs, fences, and other pressures. We must fight for respect and remember self-care is a must.

How, as farmers, can we do our own self-care?

We must prioritize ourselves...emotionally, mentally, and physically.

Emotionally and Mentally

Nurture your self by connected with “safe” like minded people. Call a friend, family member, or a supportive person to vent or share your good news. Leave the conversation in a great emotional place.

Don't forget to take breaks. One day off the farm will not hurt. The sun and rain will take provide and plants do grow on their own. Or, while you are working at the farm, take a dance or song break to release any stress. Or, take an hour to enjoy a hobby and go back to work when are good and ready.

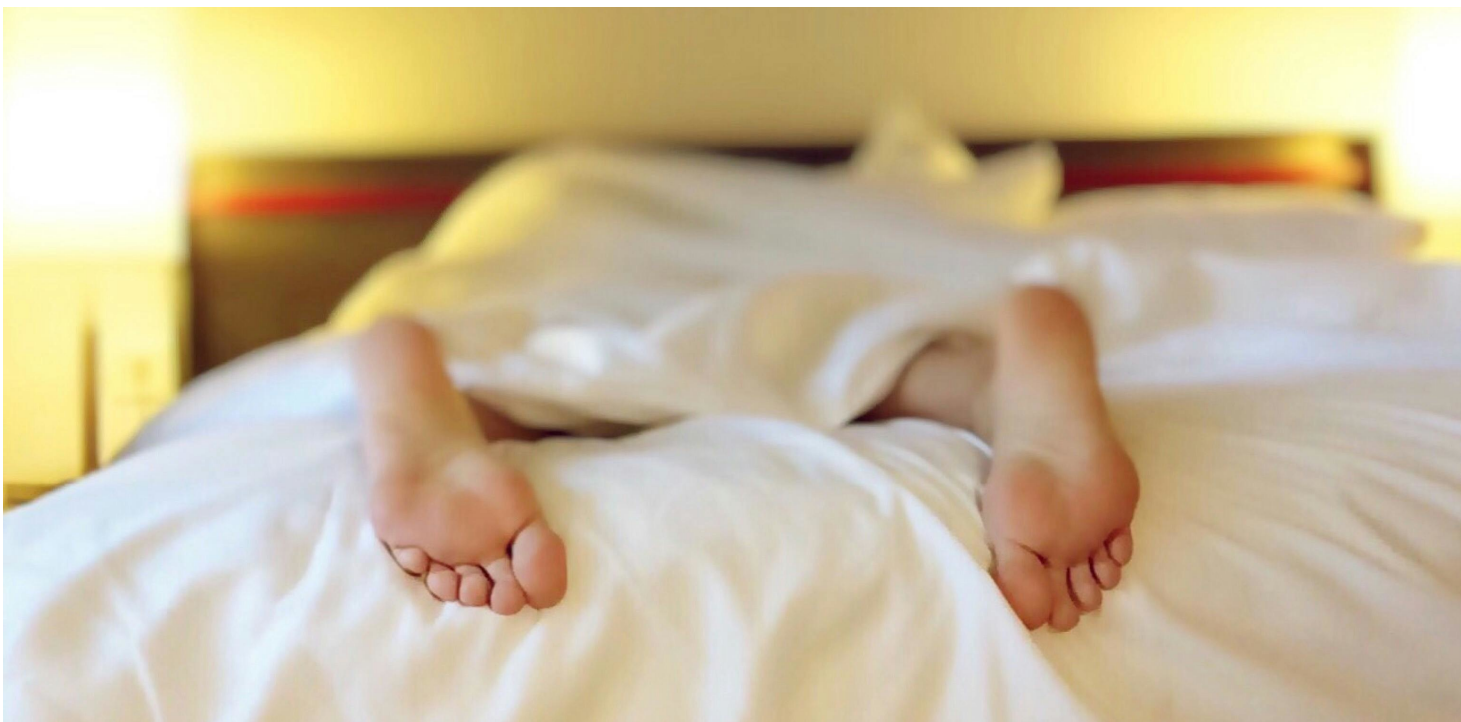
Setting boundaries is a must. Sometimes, you must decline invitations to do more work or help someone out of a bind. When your cup is empty, you cannot fill someone else's. Recharge, fully, then you will have some room to help others.



How do we promote self-care for farmers?

We can be a source of encouragement, wisdom, truth, and access to resources.

- Encourage your local farm to rest and eat well.
- Take a farmer out to lunch or dinner.
- Find out how to alleviate their stress.
- Buy produce and meat from your local farmer to alleviate financial stress.
- Join a community supported agriculture (CSA).
- Help during busy seasons, like planting and harvesting.
- Provide free marketing support.
- Check in and offer a listening ear.
- Share resources such as tools, grant prospects, and farmer's market registrations.
- Spread the word about their farm on social media.
- Give a farmer a self-care basket with tea, stress balls, candles, journal notebook, treats, etc.
- Gift a stamp for egg cartons, paper bags, gift card, stationery, transportable deep freeze cooler, thermos, hat with lamp, seeds, moisture control socks, etc.
- Bring a homemade meal.
- Remind them often why they do this work.
- Provide self-care workshops.



“Boundaries help us to define what is not on our property and what we are not responsible for.”

- Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend

To promote mindfulness before you move, relax by sitting still with positive thoughts, a form of meditation or practice relaxing a technique like yoga. Look at your farm and relish the good work you have done and the delish veggies you will provide for yourself and others.

Worrying? For what? Sometimes we have to allow things to play out. Your squash got aphids? Your seeds didn't germinate, plant some more. Clean with soapy water? The money you needed didn't come through. Ask for financial help. No shame in doing so. We have options for any problem. So, stop worrying and find a solution that works best for you.

Physically

We must get enough rest, eat well, and engage in regular exercise.

Too many times, we overwork ourselves, thinking we could handle just one more task before we call it a night. Then we are exhausted, knowing full well we have to get up early in the morning. Overexertion

doesn't bode well for our bodies. Get in your seven or eight hours.

We should be eating what we are growing. Going to a fast-food joint to satisfy hunger after a hard day's work is not wise. Bring a healthy lunch and plenty of fluids to the field or nosh as you go. Whenever at UCFA Seed Farming Learning Center at Taymen Field, Kathy Anderson has a cooler full of water and Mama Bonnetta has a load of healthy snacks in the truck.

Doing farm work is not enough proper exercise. It's exertion without a clear goal or direction for specific parts of the body. Schedule stretching and exercise routines and focus on what must be strengthened to effectively do farm work. And, before we even engage in bending, lifting, carrying or walking on farm day, we should stretch our muscles. Then, we can go out in the field, decreasing the risk of injury.

Handling someone else's load before your own is doing too much!

PALIMPSEST

something reused or altered . . .

but still bearing visible traces of its earlier form

By Christian Keeve



Figure 1



In this article UCFA member, Christian Keeve reflects on seeds, chaff, and the traces that plants leave in us, and the residues and resonances that we leave in the landscapes we call home. We feature here a series of cyanotypes and gelli prints that Chris created in 2022-2023 with a friend, Lindsey Funke, in Lexington, Kentucky.

The idea is that sunlight hits chemical-treated paper, so everything that covers the surface, blocks the sun, and if you leave it there for long enough, it produces a negative. It's a study of shadows, of things



Figure 2

left behind. Through the photographic techniques cyanotype printing and gelli printing, my friend Lindsey and I used seeds and chaff left over from the previous season and arranged the discarded materials to see what they would produce.

Above (See Figure 2), we created a gelli print by covering a gel block with ink, which then becomes our blank canvas. Then we arranged layers of plant materials, such as some amaranth

seed heads, seeds, and leaves. Then we rolled on top a blank sheet of card stock. When we pulled the cardstock away from the gelli material it revealed a negative image of the plant materials, similar to Figure 5.

To the right, in Figure 3 corn tassels and tulsii stems get to live again and tell a different story. They are preserved together as a record of plants cultivated, food grown, seeds produced, and seeds scattered.

Christian Keeve, pictured below, is a PhD Candidate in Geography, at University of Kentucky. Presently Keeve is a Carter G. Woodson Predoctoral Fellow at the University of Virginia.

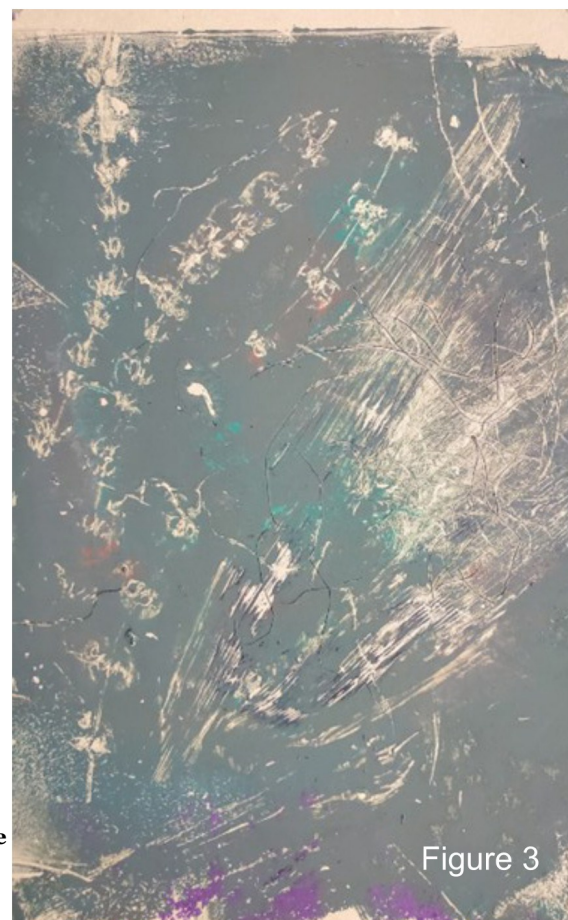


Figure 3

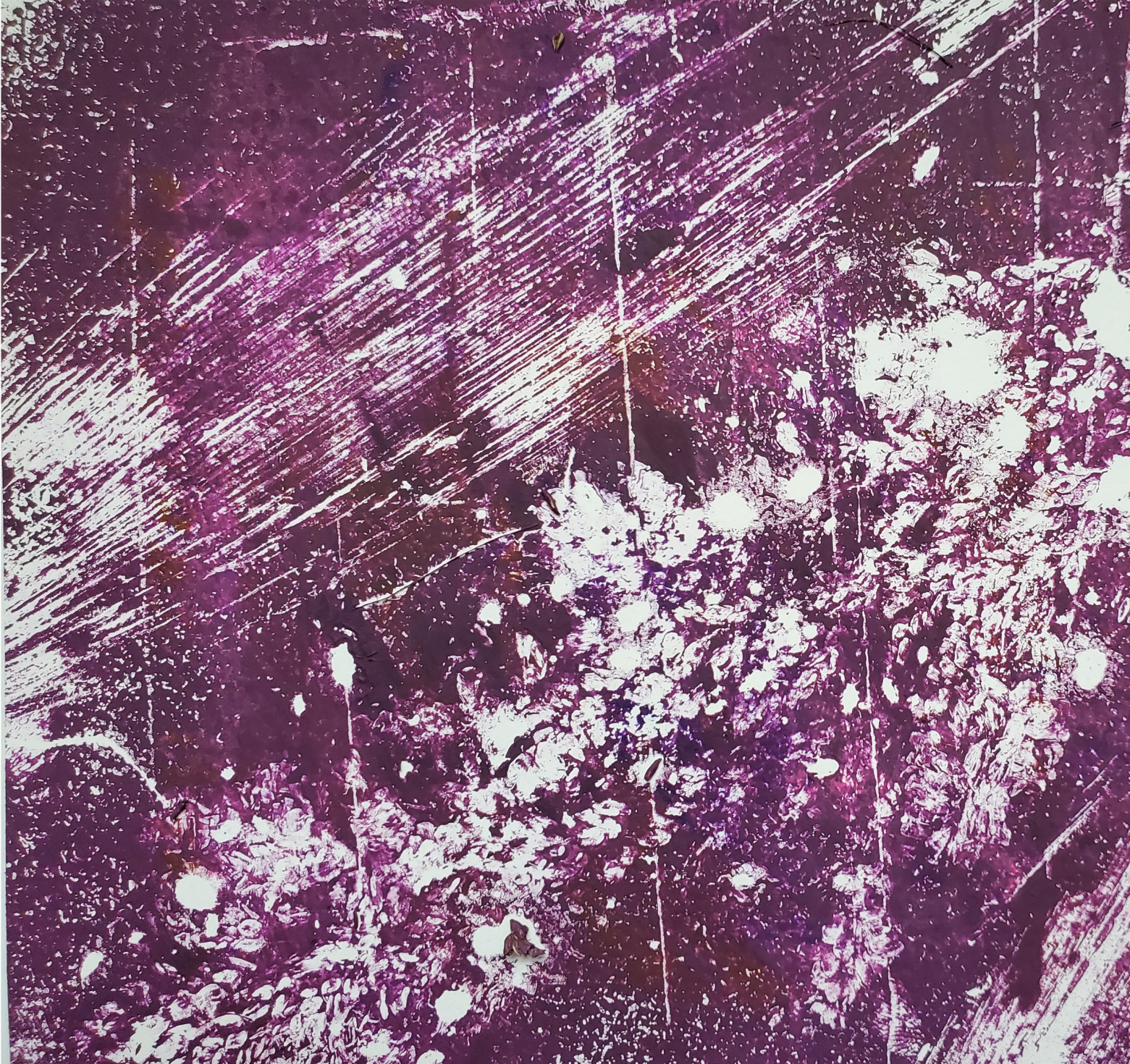
Okra pods (Figure 4) are a little trickier to press down. Dry and tough, they resist the process, refusing to be flattened into a two dimensional reproduction.

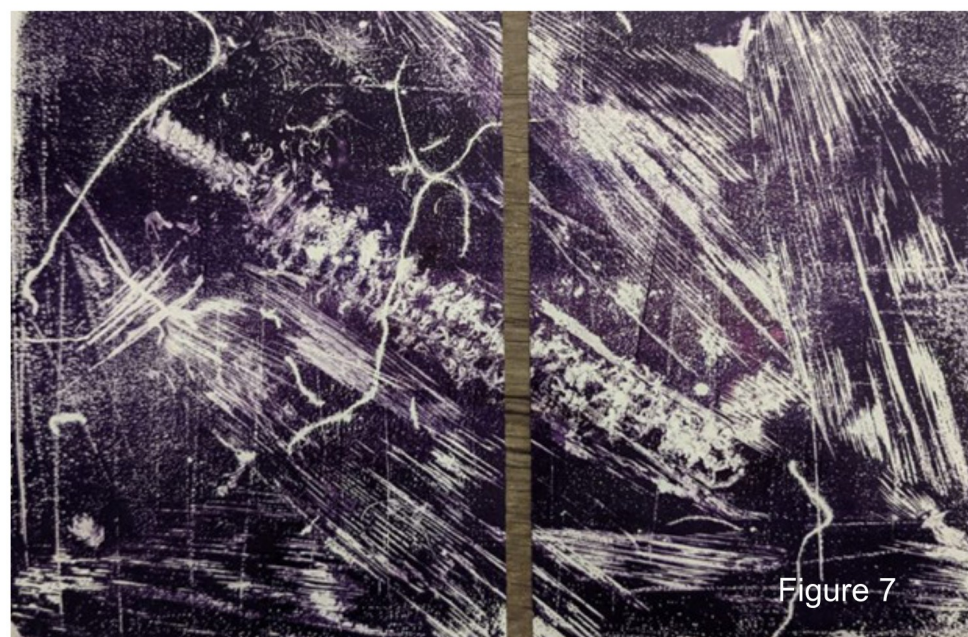
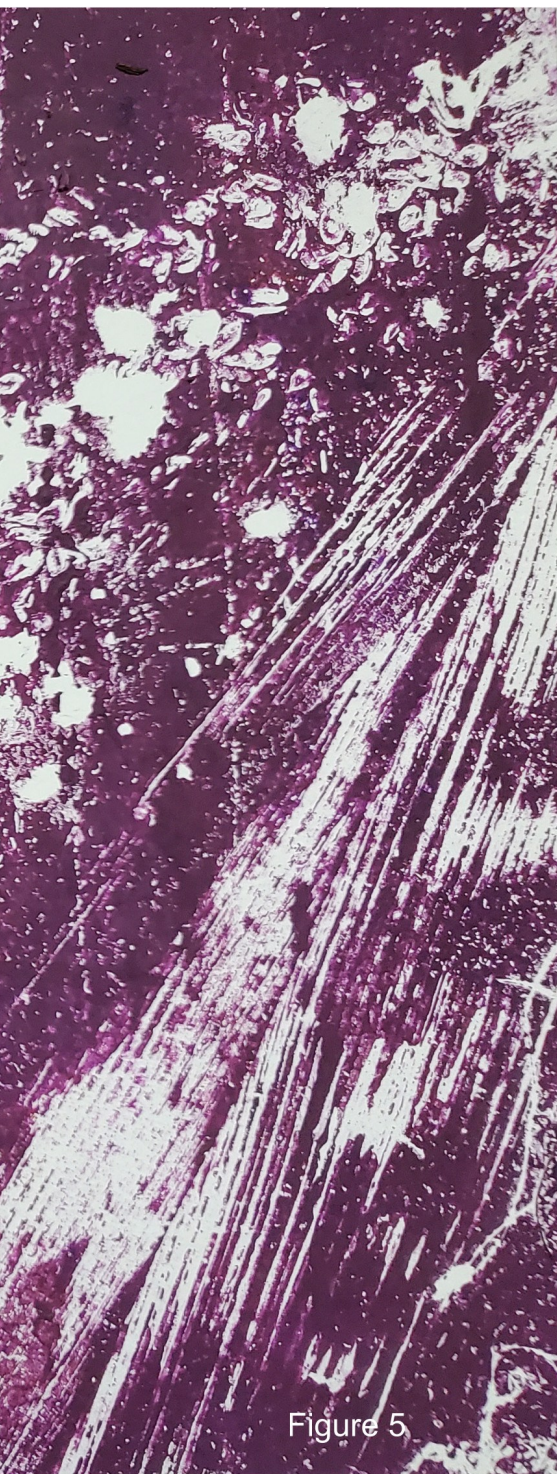
Below, in Figure 5, chaff produced these scratchy records in ink, a lasting reminder of materials that would otherwise be discarded. In other similar gelli

prints, sorghum seed head became a galaxy and the seeds become stars, leaving behind impressions and patterns of textures, of light, and negative space.

To the far right in Figure 6, mustard leaves were layered over multiple attempts, so you get this kind of photographic after-

image effect, like a palimpsest writing and rewriting onto the canvas. Creating images from corn cob and begasse (See Figure 7 to the right) was a little more chaotic, just like the garden itself. Just like our relation with each other and with land. It's this multidirectional cacophony of different ways of moving, growing, and being together.





We are irrevocably altered season by season as we write our stories and seeds into the landscape and they write their stories into us. But in the end you still have chaff, you'll always have chaff, however transformed or altered. Just like you'll always have seeds and dust and detritus from the floor that you don't know what to do with, but still collect every year and try to find

some creative use for. Just like hopefully you'll always have friends to help you along the way. And hang out in your backyard in the middle of the city and process seeds and sometimes make art with all your chaff and dust and detritus. Leaving traces of this place you once called home.

Regenerative Practices and Traditions On The Bay

Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act

Written by Mariah Davis



My story as a nurturer and protector of the land began when I was young. Most days were spent outside with my dad planting trees, shrubs, and flowers in our yard. His hobby and passions led him to grow a backyard food forest. While my dad was farming, I pursued a career in environmental advocacy and policy. Over the course of my career I've advised nonprofits, policy-makers, and government agencies on issues more pressing to marginalized communities. I landed a job with the State of Maryland as the first Environmental Justice Officer and worked closely with Black, Brown, and Indigenous farmers across the state.

One of my proudest moments was working with UCFA and other BIPOC growers to define regenerative agriculture in state law.

On May 13, 2025, Maryland Governor Wes Moore signed into law the Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act. This omnibus bill will not only boost local economies, it will improve the health of the Chesapeake Bay by incentivizing agriculture initiatives. This legislation promotes “regenerative practices and traditions” on state owned land. It offers a new opportunity for farmers to obtain long term, 10-year leases to regenerate the soil. This will create new pathways for Black, Indigenous, and People of color to manage and lease agriculture land, who have once been deprived of such opportunities.

The agriculture industry in Maryland provides

350,000 jobs and contributes \$8 billion annually to the economy, yet 1% of those farmers are Black. Furthermore, the bill defines “regenerative practices and traditions” as a form of land management and stewardship approach that draws on traditions from African, Indigenous, and Original Land Stewards, promotes culturally important food and climate justice programs, and enhances the land and ecosystem. It celebrates and commemorates the work that African and Indigenous Peoples have been doing to heal the land and feed people since the beginning of time. This bill is an opportunity for Maryland farmers to reclaim the work of our ancestors, while increasing economic opportunities for first and multi generation farmers.

In addition, the legislation establishes the Leaders in Environmentally Engaged Farming Pilot Program (LEEF), which allows the Maryland Department of Agriculture to recognize and further incentives sustainable land management practices. Farmers will be rewarded for implementing best management practices (BMPs), such as riparian buffers, nutrient management, land preservation, donations to food banks, on farm research, and participation in farmers markets. It will provide a consistent, tiered measure to showcase the environmental and community stewardship of diverse farmers and incentive operations through a tiered system to increase innovation practices.

While I had many great accomplishments working for the state, I was unfortunately let go after serving as a Political Special Appointee. After some soul searching, I felt it was time to start a farming and consulting business of my own. I wanted to give back to the land who has given so much to me. As a new UCFA grower, I am excited to continue lending my policy expertise, while providing accessible and affordable food for those in need.

www.davisstrategiesllc.com

RECIPES

Summer Sips

By Kathy Anderson and Karen Bowlding

Organic Lemonade with Ashwagandha or Hibiscus

Lemonade

- 1 cup of lemon juice (3-4 good sized squeezed organic lemons, clean with aluminum-free baking soda)
- Granulated sugar
- Filtered water

Syrup: In a sauce pan, add 1 cup each of water and sugar, and cook over medium heat until sugar has dissolved. Set aside to cool.

In the glass pitcher, add syrup and lemon juice, remaining water, ice, and stir.

Ashwagandha Tea

- Dried ashwagandha leaves
- Filtered water

Heat 16 oz. of water for five minutes. Use a tea strainer, add one teaspoon of dried leaves, and steep for 10 - 15 minutes. Allow to cool.

Hibiscus Tea

- Dried hibiscus flowers
- Filtered water

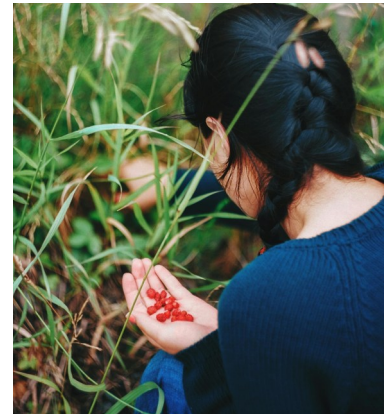
Add a teaspoon dried flowers to a pan with water. Simmer for 15 minutes. Strain and allow to cool.
For additional zing, add cinnamon and clove.

Add equal parts of either in a glass to organic lemonade and enjoy!



Let's Grow a Food Forest

Written by Karen Bowlding



A food forest is primarily made up of perennial edible plants. Our food sources can come from fruit and nut trees and vines, fungi, roots, and mycelium, and herbs and shrubs. We can eat the leaves, roots, stem, and seeds; however, to avoid becoming ill from wild plants, we must know what we plan to consume.

Within a food forest there are eight distinct layers, but all work together within one ecosystem to the benefit of each layer. Lots of food with more cooperation and less competition.

Growing a food forest isn't as hard as you might think. If you have land with trees, no matter the size, consider adding

8 Canopy Layer/Crown: highest layer of large nut and fruit trees.

7 Sub-canopy/Understory/Large Shrubs: area below canopy and above the ground consisting of small immature trees fruit trees and large shrubs.

6 Shrub Layer: woody vegetation, smaller woody shrubs

5 Herbaceous Layer: soft-stemmed plants herbaceous plants like herbs, flowers, ferns, and grasses.

4 Ground Cover: plants that grow close to the ground.

3 Root Layer/rhizosphere: plants with deep roots (carrots, parsnips, and other root vegetables)

2 Climbing /Vine Layer – climbing plants like grapes.

1 Mycelial/Fungal Layer- mycelium that connects roots of plants.



Now is the time! Social safety nets are being assaulted, and farmers are losing the battle against aid and grant dollars. We are also fighting with huge agriculture companies for food sovereignty. We must food-proof ourselves against the whims of the political decision-makers by growing and securing our own food.

To set up a food forest in your yard, first start researching what plants are native to your area. Create a list of trees, shrubs, vines, and herbs you want to have in your forest. Consider each plant's needs in designing the layout.

Your food forest, we can grow up, down, or outward; however, be patient because it will take a number of years to be fully established.

Continued on next page.



Steps to Building Your Food Forest

- **Site Assessment:** take into account the size of the space, at least, 1/10th of an acre, sunlight conditions, existing trees, soil type(s), drainage, and fertility or productiveness, and previous pesticide or herbicide use.

Soil Test: get a test to determine suitability for specific plants, nutrients in the soil, and if the area needs to be cleaned by removing layers of soil.

Layout Plan: determine how you want your forest to appear, with consideration of the size of plants at maturity and sunlight needs. Mimic the natural forest as much as possible.

Plant Selection: select species that are native to your area or are suitable for your climate and USDA hardiness zone. Avoid planting any invasive species.

Prepare Land: clear out any weeds and grass. To preserve the structure of the land, do not till.

Build Forest Floor: to create the most natural base, enhance soil, and inhibit weeds.

Also add a copious amount of mulch, including compost, leaves, straw, and wood chips.

Build Initial Forest: Create a diverse habitat and ecosystem by adding native plants grouped together with enough room to grow and dense enough for rapid growth, mimicking natural forest patterns. Plant nut and fruit trees and saplings of various heights, shrubs, ground cover, and root layer plants. Watch to see how they thrive. While trees are young, mulch to retain moisture,

Maintenance: water during the first few years until the trees are established. Prune trees as necessary and consistently remove weeds.

Patience: It will take several years to fully establish. Once a healthy food forest is established, the food forest ecosystem will become self-sustaining with low maintenance. Enjoy the fruits of your labor!



Leek Seeds
Photo by Kathy Anderson

SAVE THE SEED!

Written by Karen Bowlding

“Seeds are living links in an unbroken chain reaching back into agriculture’s antiquity.” - UCFA

Selecting Healthy Parent Plants

When selecting the best parent plant for saving seeds, always use open-pollinated varieties instead of hybrid. The open-pollinated plants produce offspring that resembles the parent plant, however, with the hybrid, each plant varies from generation to generation. You will not know what you will get when you choose a hybrid.

Select the healthiest plants from your stock. Healthy plants germinate well and grow quicker than weaker ones.

AVOID

- Plants with wilting leaves
- Plants with yellowing leaves
- Diseased plants
- Plants with pest damage
- Plants with leggy growth
- Plants with inconsistent vegetation
- Plants with weak and broken stems
- Plants with thin, brown or squishy roots

Always select parent plants for saving seeds that are healthy, free from disease, and true to their variety!

Homegrown SWEET POTATOES FOR YOUR GARDEN

Written by By Mama Ira Wallace

Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, author of *Vegetable Gardening in the Southeast* and *Grow Great Vegetables in Virginia*



SWEET POTATOES are a wonderful garden and farm crop. They are delicious and can be served in numerous ways, including eating the tender growing shoots and leaves raw or cooked. They are nutritious, being low in fat and sodium but high in fiber, carbs, potassium, manganese, and vitamins A and C. Sweet potatoes are easy to grow in most places and are also high-yielding. Many sources say 200 pounds per 100 row-feet. Folks wanting to grow and store their own food appreciate that sweet potatoes can be stored for months without refrigeration. They catch customer attention at farmers' markets. Sweet potato vines have attractive foliage and make an interesting container plant. You can grow sweet potatoes for winter greens indoors in a sunny window. You can even feed them to farm animals. Here at Acorn Community we grow them for the pure enjoyment, but they're also an important part of making our farm more self-sufficient.

Planting & Growing from Slips

Sweet potatoes are a tender, heat-loving vine that generally needs at least 4 months of frost-free growing. Even early varieties need at least 90 days from when the slip (young plant) is transplanted until the full size tubers can be harvested.

Most gardeners start with slips purchased from a local garden center or reputable mail order source.

Southern Exposure Seed Exchange sells certified organic slips of varieties that grow well in the Mid-Atlantic and Southeast, as well most regions of the U.S. Growers with short growing seasons should choose varieties with fewer days to maturity and will need to practice season extension.

We recommend black plastic mulch for pre-warming the soil. You can apply the plastic to your prepared beds 3 weeks before planting, remembering to plan ahead for watering or irrigation. You are trying to raise the soil temp to around 65-70°F at a depth of 4". Use a soil thermometer to check. (A soil thermometer is inexpensive and useful for many other crops in your garden.) The plastic will suppress weeds until the sweet potato vines really take off and shade out weeds as the season progresses.

Sweet potatoes prefer loose, well-drained soil that's not too fertile, with pH of 5.8-6.2. They will tolerate pH from 4.5-7.5, which is a pretty impressive range, but we suggest a soil test if you haven't had one lately. Sweet potatoes don't like wet feet.

Compacted, heavy or lumpy soil can result in misshapen, undersized tubers.

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If you have clay soil or drainage problems, work in lots of compost and make raised beds or planting ridges 8 to 12 inches high. As with other crops, a three or more year rotation is a good idea to control disease.

It's important to plant your slips quickly after they arrive, but wait for warm soil and warm, settled weather before planting outside. If the weather or the soil is still too cold or your garden is not ready to plant, heel in the slips (loosely plant them) in a warm temporary location (in a flat or nursery bed) for transplanting later.

Don't worry if your slips don't have roots, with good care new roots will develop rapidly. Transplant your slips outdoors with 2-4 leaf nodes below ground (with the leaves pulled **or cut off?** off the nodes). That's about 2-4" deep. Leave at least 2 leaves above ground. More is better. Space plants 10 to 18 inches apart in rows at least 3 feet apart (to make room for the sprawling vines). Plants spaced closer together will tend to produce smaller tubers; wider spacing produces larger ones, **esp over a long growing season**. Commercial growers pay a lot of attention to spacing in order to maximize growing the most marketable size and shape tubers.

If you are using black plastic, cut a hole for each plant and make some other small holes for rainwater to get in.

Transplant in the evening and water them immediately. (Water the soil before planting as well if the weather is warm and dry.) You must keep the soil moist for the next few days as the plants get established.

Cover each plant with something temporarily if sun/heat is intense?

Once they really get growing, sweet potatoes are fairly drought-tolerant. However, it is very important to maintain sufficient moisture for at least the first 20 or so days while roots are developing. Everyone agrees that, as with most of your garden, you will get a higher yield and better quality tubers if your plants get about one inch of water a week, whether from the sky or from the hose. If you are growing lots of plants with black plastic, drip irrigation is the first choice.

Keep the plants free of weeds until they are established and can shade out competition. Cultivate carefully to avoid damaging shallow roots. Side dress each plant with a shovel full of compost for better yields and larger sweet potatoes (but sweet potatoes generally produce well with low fertility).

Deer are fond of sweet potato vines, so protect your plants from browsers.

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Harvesting

You can harvest sweet potato leaves and young shoots for cooking greens at any time during growth (just don't take too much at once). The sweet potatoes are ready to harvest as soon as they reach your preferred size.

If you are growing enough for eating and for storage, you can carefully dig small quantities of tubers well before the crop reaches its full size.

To determine when to do your main harvest, Try digging one of your plants when your crop reaches the recommended growing time for the variety (generally between 90 and 120 days.) If the tubers are still too small for your liking, try again in a week.

It's best to harvest on a sunny day when the soil is not too wet. Reduce or cut back watering for the preceding few weeks. Begin by pulling aside the vines so you can see where you're digging. Using a garden fork (or a shovel or spade), begin digging 12 to 18 inches away from the center of the plant to avoid damaging the sweet potatoes. Go straight down about 6 inches, then angle toward the center and gently lift the sweet potatoes out of the ground. Separate the sweet potatoes and let them dry in the sun for no more than one hour. Handle freshly dug sweet potatoes gently to avoid bruising.

Sweet potatoes left in the ground will continue growing until frost, although growth slows as the weather cools. **Add row cover to protect from unusually early frost.** For best storage quality, harvest sweet potatoes before the soil temperature drops below 55oF.

Curing & Storage

Curing allows for healing of any scratches or other damage to the sweet potatoes, develops their sweetness, and improves storage quality. Immediately after harvest, let the sweet potatoes fully dry, then shake off excess soil. Do not wash the sweet potatoes! Cure by keeping them at 90 percent relative humidity and 85oF for seven to ten days. A furnace room or space heater can provide the right storage condition.

For long term storage after curing, choose firm, round, bruise-free, well-shaped sweet potatoes with fairly even coloring. Store in a cool (over 55oF), dry, well-ventilated area away from light. Do not refrigerate sweet potatoes unless they are already cooked. Cold temperatures will give sweet potatoes a hard core and affect the flavor. Properly cured sweet potatoes should store for five to twelve months unrefrigerated.

Enjoy Your Sweet Potatoes!

ADDRESSING FOOD APARTHEID

Through Justice-Centered Nutrition and Agricultural Initiatives

Written by Chimene Castor and Bonnetta Adeeb



In the film *Farming While Black*, viewers can gain an in-depth understanding of the concept of food apartheid, which is defined not merely as a lack of access to grocery stores, but as a systemic form of racial and economic oppression that intentionally limits Black and brown communities from accessing nutritious, affordable, and culturally relevant food.

Food apartheid is a stark manifestation of structural inequality, extending far beyond the passive notion of “food deserts.”

Unlike food deserts, which suggest a natural or incidental absence of resources, food apartheid highlights the intentional and historically rooted exclusion of low-income, Black, and brown communities from equitable access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally relevant food.¹ This exclusion is driven by systemic forces such as institutional racism, environmental injustice, and long-standing socioeconomic disinvestment.²

These structural barriers have sustained disparities in food access and contributed to the disproportionate burden of diet-related chronic illnesses, including obesity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease—among historically marginalized populations.³ In addressing food apartheid, it is

necessary that we move beyond superficial or short-term interventions toward a justice-centered, systems-level approach. We are actively working to dismantle inequitable food systems and redistribute power to communities, enabling them to reclaim sovereignty over their food environments.⁴ In partnership with Ujamaa Seed, a grassroots organization rooted in African diasporic traditions and dedicated to food sovereignty, cooperative economics, and sustainable agriculture, we are co-developing transformative, community-driven strategies.

These strategies promote public health, environmental sustainability, and social equity, ensuring that the community’s nutritional needs are met while providing access to healthy foods.

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Nutrition must be understood not only as a clinical or public health matter, but as a fundamental issue of human rights and dignity.

The lack of access to nutrient-dense foods is not a matter of personal choice but of structural injustice.⁵ Policy decisions that prioritize commercial profit over population well-being have left many communities dependent on ultra-processed foods while lacking the infrastructure to produce or obtain healthy alternatives.⁶ Through this collaborative initiative, we are advancing solutions such as urban agriculture, seed preservation, and culturally responsive nutrition education—tools that empower families to grow, prepare, and consume nourishing foods in ways that align with their heritage and values.⁷

Our approach is grounded in participatory practices that honor the voices, experiences, and leadership of those most directly impacted by food injustice. Community members possess intimate knowledge of their neighborhoods' assets, challenges, and traditions, making them essential partners in designing responsive and sustainable interventions.⁸ By bridging the efforts of local farmers, registered dietitians (RDN), public health professionals, and youth leaders, we are cultivating a movement that champions health equity, environmental stewardship, and intergenerational empowerment.

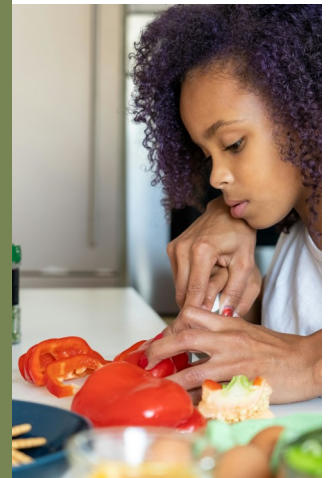
The dismantling of food apartheid cannot be achieved in isolation; it requires coordinated, cross-sector collaboration and a shared commitment to justice. **Healing is fostered through reconnection—to**

the land, to nutritious food, and to one another. Our partnership with Ujamaa Seed reflects this holistic vision, planting seeds of transformation, both literal and symbolic—within communities that have long been excluded from food systems designed to nourish and uplift.⁹

Lastly, food justice affirms that all individuals, regardless of race, income, or geographic location, have an inherent right to food that supports physical health, honors cultural heritage, and protects ecological balance.

Dismantling exploitative food systems and creating equitable, community-centered alternatives is both a moral and public health imperative.

By advancing this work in collaboration with the Ujamaa Cooperative Farming Alliance, we reaffirm our commitment to making justice not only a vision but a lived, daily reality, restoring dignity, resilience, and health one garden, one table, and one community at a time.



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The Ira Wallace Seed School

Scholarship Fundraiser



A SPECIAL INSERT



OUR FOOD SYSTEM IS UNDER SEVERE THREATS

Over the past century or so, there has been a seventy-five percent decline in agricultural biodiversity, meaning many varieties of edible plants are no longer available today. This is mainly due to the rise of industrialized agriculture. Once lost biodiversity for food and agriculture cannot be recovered.



Of some 6,000 plant species cultivated for food . . . only nine account for 66 percent of total crop production.

"Of some 6,000 plant species cultivated for food, fewer than 200 contribute substantially to global food output, and only nine account for 66 percent of total crop production. . . . Less biodiversity means that plants and animals are more vulnerable to pests and diseases. Compounded by our reliance on fewer and fewer species to feed ourselves, the increasing loss of biodiversity for food and agriculture puts food security and nutrition at risk."



"Biodiversity is critical for safeguarding global food security, underpinning healthy and nutritious diets. We need to use biodiversity in a sustainable way, so that we can better respond to rising climate change challenges and produce food in a way that doesn't harm our environment."

José Graziano da Silva, former
Director-General of the Food and
Agriculture Organization of the United
Nations (FAO) from 2012 to 2019

The IRA WALLACE SEED SCHOOL: Expanding Agrobiodiversity

They call her the godmother of southern seeds. Lovingly many refer to her as Mama Ira. Gardener, author, and teacher, Ira Wallace is notably associated with the cooperative heirloom seed company, Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, where she serves in a managerial capacity. Wallace's work extends into the realm of seed conservation, focusing on heirloom and open-pollinated seeds, which are pivotal for biodiversity and sustainable agriculture.

The Ira Wallace Seed School (IWSS), is an initiative of the Ujamaa Cooperative Farming Alliance (UCFA), a program of the nonprofit STEAM ONWARD. The IWSS is dedicated to nurturing the next generation of ethical seed practitioners, with a focus on empowering BIPOC farmers through knowledge, skills, and a moral framework rooted in historical and political understanding of food sovereignty and sustainable agriculture.



Change Starts With Seeds

Seeds are the foundation of our food system. But over the past decades the corporate consolidation of seeds has diminished the agrobiodiversity of our food crops.

Preservation

Preserving a diverse supply of climate adapted culturally meaningful heirloom seeds and crops supports a more resilient food system — one better equipped to withstand climate change and ecological disruptions.

Ecological Adaptations

Heirloom varieties often have unique adaptations to pests, diseases, and climate stressors. The traditional ecological knowledge of BIPOC farmers helps in maintaining and expanding this genetic diversity.



Approximately half of the students enrolled in the IWSS are only able to pay partial tuition. Your donation will help fund full and partial scholarships so that tuition is never a barrier for aspiring seed stewards. For our 9-month course, *Introduction to Ethical Seed Breeding*, the tuition is \$650. In addition, we offer a mini course for \$300 entitled *Seed Ethics*.

Support for BIPOC seed farmers contributes to a more diversified and a more resilient food system.

YOUR GENEROSITY WILL HAVE A PROFOUND IMPACT

Please consider making a contribution to the Ira Wallace Seed School Scholarship Fund. We hope you will join us in honoring Ira Wallace's legacy of cultivating a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable agricultural future.

Every dollar you donate to our scholarship fund ensures that a student, committed to the preservation of heirloom seeds and sustainable farming, can receive the training they need to succeed.

DONATE NOW!

And remember, your **tax deductible donation** doesn't just fund a scholarship—it helps rewrite the future of farming. Thank you for being part of this transformation.



Thank you for considering a gift to support this important work. To learn more and to donate use the QR Code to the left. You can also go **online** to GOFUNDME.COM, then type "Ira Wallace" in the search bar. Or send a check payable to STEAM ONWARD/UCFA with "Ira Wallace Seed School Scholarship Fund" in the memo line.



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GARDENING & BIODIVERSITY

Gardeners play a vital role in preserving and expanding plant diversity by choosing to grow heirloom seeds. Heirloom vegetables and flowers—typically defined as open-pollinated varieties passed down through generations—offer a wider range of shapes, colors, flavors, and fragrances than many modern hybrids. By selecting heirloom seeds, gardeners are not only cultivating plants with rich cultural and historical significance, but they are also actively contributing to agro-biodiversity, which is critical for the resilience and sustainability of food systems.

Expanding Diversity in the Garden

Heirloom seeds give gardeners access to thousands of unique plant varieties that are often unavailable in commercial seed catalogs. Unlike hybrid seeds, which are bred for uniformity and commercial traits like long shelf life or mechanical harvesting, heirloom varieties reflect regional adaptations, cultural preferences, and culinary traditions. This allows home gardeners to grow purple carrots, black tomatoes, lemon cucumbers, and speckled lettuces—all with distinctive tastes and characteristics.



In the flower garden, heirloom blooms like fragrant sweet peas, richly hued zinnias, and long-stemmed hollyhocks provide beauty and diversity that support local ecosystems. This variety not only enhances garden aesthetics and productivity but also gives gardeners a sense of connection to ancestral traditions and local food heritage.

Heirlooms & Biodiversity

Agro-biodiversity—the variety and variability of plants used in agriculture—is essential for food security, climate resilience, and ecological health. Heirloom seeds help maintain and expand this biodiversity by preserving genetic traits that might otherwise be lost through the industrial consolidation of seed stocks. These seeds often carry

resistance to pests, diseases, or environmental stresses that are region-specific, which becomes increasingly important in the face of climate change and shifting weather patterns. By saving and sharing heirloom seeds, gardeners become stewards of living genetic libraries, each plant representing a unique adaptation or story.

In short, when gardeners grow heirloom vegetables and flowers, they are not only enriching their gardens with diversity and flavor, but also participating in a broader movement to safeguard plant genetic resources. This grassroots action strengthens agro-biodiversity, supports pollinators, honors cultural foodways, and creates more resilient communities from the ground up.



“The future of the planet concerns all of us, and all of us should do what we can to protect it.”

Wangari Maathai

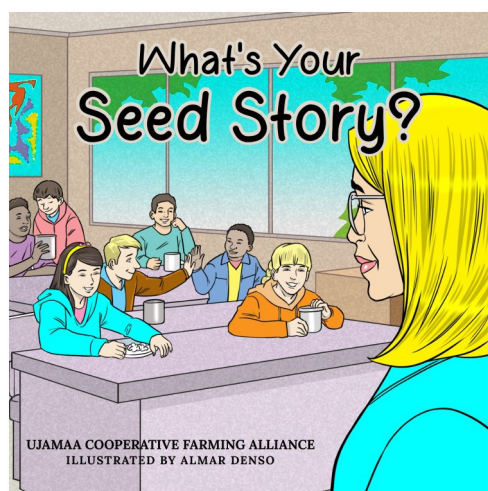
CHILDREN'S CORNER



Ella and Earl in the Collard Patch is a rhyming book for young children to learn about the growth of a Green Glaze collard plant.

Kathy Anderson, UCFA member, penned this book for young sprouts. She told the story of sister and brother, Ella and Earl, learning how to grow Green Glaze collards. This book will surely delight readers as they learned the process from planting seeds, watering, watching them sprout and grow, harvesting collards, and seed collection.

This book was illustrated by Bishop McNamara High School student, Mekena Bliss.



Everyone has a seed story. These are the special things that start the life of a plant. With love and care, they can grow into something magical. And they show up in each of our lives and cultures in different ways.

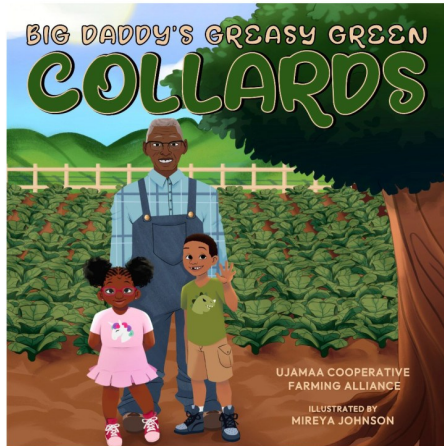
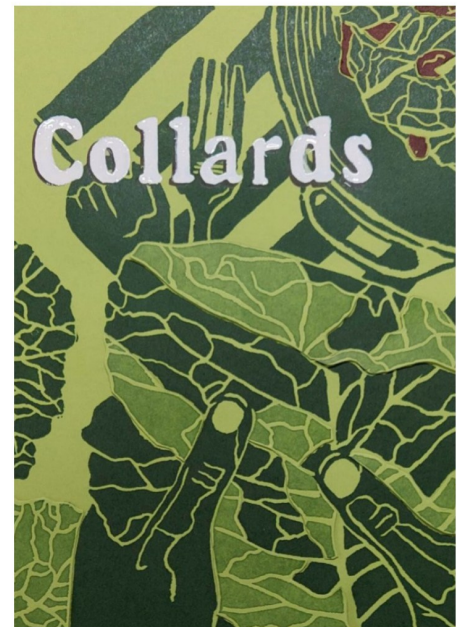
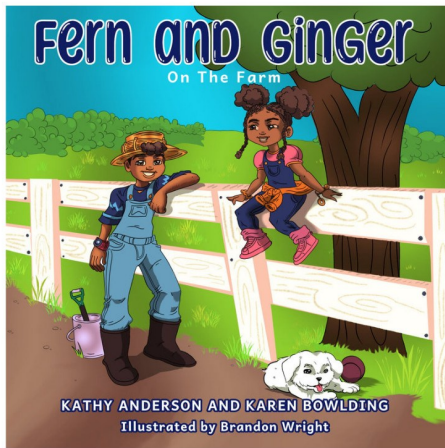
Read as the students of Ms. Tessa's 3rd grade class try to answer the question: "What's Your Seed Story?" In an exciting classroom Seed Show and Tell, the students shared how special seeds show up in their lives. Through presentations, they told us why it is important to care for seeds that are special to you and your culture. From growing and cooking with them, these are stories you do not want to miss!

Written by Aishwarya Swamidurai, Emery Jones-Flores,
Dashram Pai, Cole Strupp, and Noemie Veillette

This project started through the Service Focus initiative at Princeton University. The Food Justice Cohort of the initiative, led by Tessa Lowinske Desmond, brought together a group of Princeton University second-year students to learn about and practice food justice in communities. According to Professor Desmond, *"We worked to harvest seeds at Princeton's local Seed Farm, and met with community partners on their cultural farming practices, which inspired the creation of this project. When we learned about how seed stories were passed down generationally, we wanted to create our own way to preserve and tell some of these stories. Hence, our book was born."*

All proceeds from Ella and Earl in the Collard Patch and What's Your Seed Story will support Steam Onward / Ujamaa Farming Cooperative Alliance for STEM, environmental, and agriculture education for children.

**Purchase your copies and other children's books at:
ujamaaseeds.com | Youthful Goods & Gifts**



UCFA GIFTS & GOODS

Discover meaningful, mission-driven products in the **Gifts & Goods** and **Youthful Gifts & Goods** collections at ujamaaseeds.com. Whether you're shopping for a seasoned gardener or a curious young sprout, our selections offer something special for everyone — from seed-saving tools,

books and apparel, to fun educational gifts that inspire the next generation of growers. Each purchase supports Ujamaa Cooperative Farming Alliance's mission to uplift BIPOC growers, preserve heirloom seeds, and build a more just food system.

