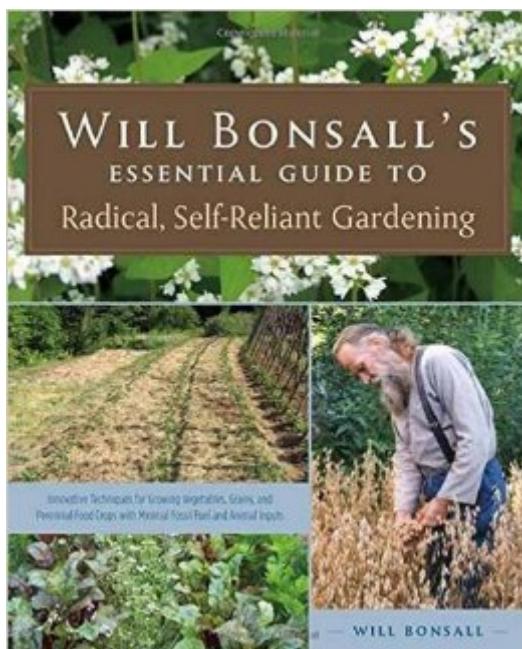


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Will Bonsall's Essential Guide To Radical, Self-Reliant Gardening: Innovative Techniques For Growing Vegetables, Grains, And Perennial Food Crops With Minimal Fossil Fuel And Animal Inputs



Synopsis

"Society does not generally expect its farmers to be visionaries." Perhaps not, but longtime Maine farmer and homesteader Will Bonsall does possess a unique clarity of vision that extends all the way from the finer points of soil fertility and seed saving to exploring how we can transform civilization and make our world a better, more resilient place. In Will Bonsall's Essential Guide to Radical, Self-Reliant Gardening, Bonsall maintains that to achieve real wealth we first need to understand the economy of the land, to realize that things that might make sense economically don't always make sense ecologically, and vice versa. The marketplace distorts our values, and our modern dependence on petroleum in particular presents a serious barrier to creating a truly sustainable agriculture. For him the solution is, first and foremost, greater self-reliance, especially in the areas of food and energy. By avoiding any off-farm inputs (fertilizers, minerals, and animal manures), Bonsall has learned how to practice a purely veganic, or plant-based, agriculture—not from a strictly moralistic or philosophical perspective, but because it makes good business sense: spend less instead of making more. What this means in practical terms is that Bonsall draws upon the fertility of on-farm plant materials: compost, green manures, perennial grasses, and forest products like leaves and ramial wood chips. And he grows and harvests a diversity of crops from both cultivated and perennial plants: vegetables, grains, pulses, oilseeds, fruits and nuts—even uncommon but useful permaculture plants like groundnut (*Apios*). In a friendly, almost conversational way, Bonsall imparts a wealth of knowledge drawn from his more than forty years of farming experience. "My goal," he writes, "is not to feed the world, but to feed myself and let others feed themselves. If we all did that, it might be a good beginning."

Book Information

Paperback: 400 pages

Publisher: Chelsea Green Publishing (June 10, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1603584420

ISBN-13: 978-1603584425

Product Dimensions: 8 x 0.8 x 10 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (27 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #92,909 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #11 inÂ Books > Science & Math > Agricultural Sciences > Soil Science #21 inÂ Books > Science & Math > Agricultural Sciences >

Customer Reviews

This is *the* book. There are a lot of other fine books out there but if you want to achieve food self-sufficiency living off your own land, particularly if you won't be adding animal inputs for any reason, this is a very straightforward, well-organized and well-written guide. Bonsall's practices are a result of decades of research and experimentation. Because he lives in mountainous west-central Maine, his book is tailored to the short growing season and acidic, rocky, forest-derived soils of the area. He doesn't have the fertility of midwest soils, or the long growing season of the west. Bonsall has discovered how to maximize fertility for a difficult growing region, using the most inexpensive equipment and inputs. Everything in this book is directly relevant to what I personally need to know to produce well on my own property, including unusual self-sufficiency subjects like how to grow grain in a garden plot, how to construct a very efficient composing system, how to fertilize with available inputs like leaves, how to neutralize acid with available inputs like wood ash, how to choose the right cover crop, when to plant, what tools to use, I could go on and on. Bonsall is much in demand in his region for lectures because he is an engaging, entertaining speaker and this comes through in his book. In person, he answers a straight question with a straight answer, and that is how his book is. He gets to the point, doesn't dither, gives you concrete, practical information born of a boundless curiosity and long experience. What's more, all his decisions are backed by an essential desire to work with nature and not against it, to farm ethically and eat ethically. You could love his book for his philosophy alone. Bonsall is known for his Scatterseed Project, which makes sure that plant diversity is maintained in an era when a few corporate seed giants have virtually eliminated thousands of plant varieties. The danger of our food sources being reduced to only a few breeds is that this threatens a food with extinction if a disease or insect should wipe out the breed. Bonsall's Seed Saver's network is literally behind ensuring that we and our progeny will have food in the future. This is only relevant to the book in that he mentions certain varieties of vegetables and grains that work with various climatic or soil challenges. He demonstrates that the choice of plant variety alone can make you productive when the industrial seeds do not work in your region. Get this book. It's terrific.

All actions are the results of thoughts. This well thought book offers a glimpse of the path Will Bonsall has taken. It is a book-journey I would highly recommend and felt privileged to read. He has embarked (no pun intended-ramial) on a minimalist traverse of this world. Fortunately he has given

a written record before like all of us he returns to earth. Like any visionary his path of life and sustenance deviates from the majority opinion. There is much to learn from his musings and dry humor. One can see he has made his Garden of Eden and has well tended it. I loved his chapter on tools showing what little he needs and pictures of the same well used. In our lives filled with ticky tacky he reverently seeks the necessary, renewable and sustainable. His spirit and passion is zealous and this is a writing to read. There is much to be learned in his writing and I wish him well. Hopefully there is more writing to come. ER Lindsey

In the tradition of "nothing is too crazy for Yankees," this guy gives you a taste. This is not a text style book nor is it hypothetical. Like all Yankees - I live with one - this guy has a list of modern conveniences that piss him off. He seems to live and eat pretty well within those boundaries. It's a fun read and bon mots to anyone who gardens in godforsaken, rock infested Maine.

Most gardening books are written based on information from other gardening books - I never realized that until I read this book. It isn't that he disagrees with conventional information, it is that he seems to have developed his knowledge and skills in a vacuum. Every chapter contains ideas that blow my mind. For example, composting books all talk about manure, manure, manure. In chapter one, this author points out that manure is less efficient than just taking the same grass and composting it. It is obvious, but it provided a totally new perspective to me. In chapter two, he casually gives a run down of green manures (cover crops) and each of their individual strengths and weaknesses that is better than anything I have read elsewhere. In chapter three, he makes a very strong case for just using shredded leaves as a primary fertility builder for a garden, rather than smaller amounts of richer fertilizer - again, something I had not heard of before or seriously considered. He goes on like this, chapter after chapter. Part of the reason his viewpoint is so unique is precisely because he is so radical. He still uses an outhouse and based on his writing style, I think he is probably a very uncompromising man. Plus, he is in Maine, so anything that works for him will probably work anywhere. I have read a lot of gardening books, and this is a rare masterpiece.

Every time I think I've read all the gardening/farming books I really need, an amazing one comes along. This book is both unique and practical at the same time. Will Bonsall is a person that most people would consider radical, with radical solutions for a lot of problems our world is facing. It will take creative, hardworking people like Mr. Bonsall to help many of us out of our overconsuming, undernourishing, addicted-to-convenience-and-luxury rut. I like his way of thinking out-of-the-box,

and will be implementing some of his ideas.

This is a great book... for growing FOOD... what everyone needs to survive, not just tickle the palette. So many ingenious ideas, inventions, processes, perspectives... from a unique thinker. Plus, his loooong years of experience, etc. I love it ;)

I found it very informative and i have been raising all my own vegetables for several years. After reading this book I feel confident to start raising my grain now as well. I had been questioning the raising and keeping of animals for a couple years, this book definitely convinced me to start making some serious changes.

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