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Epilogue



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A Warm Welcome to a Sustainable Farming Adventure

To manage a 74-hectare farm was something completely new to us when we moved in to our 170-year-old farmhouse. Julia had previously spent many years living in London and Carl had had his base in downtown Stockholm while travelling extensively. Both of us had lived fast paced lives in city environments. Neither of us had grown up at a farm.

In 2010 our son Leopold was born. We had just built a nice house near Stockholm and lived there for a year, but getting a child gives perspective on things. We started to think about where the world was heading and how so many environmental development curves pointed in the wrong direction. What would the world look like when our son turned thirty? We could not really work it out. We saw a lot of challenges and complexity and we saw things moving too slowly. But as we thought more about it we also started to see opportunities to contribute to the solution.

We decided to leave our comfortable house and embark on a project of a bigger scale. We had a dream to create a wonderful place where our children could grow up, a place where we would be quite self-reliant when it came to food and energy. But also a place that could serve as a farm retreat and an inspiration centre where we could experiment with sustainable solutions for the future and open up a meeting place where new thoughts, learning and meaningful conversation could arise.

We found the right place outside of Nyköping, 120 km south of Stockholm. The farm is located at the end of the dirt road in a beautiful

countryside landscape with forest, lake, fields and pastures surrounding the farm centre. Time had been standing still here for a long time so during the last four years we have taken many steps to restore, renew and develop the farm into a more abundant and rich ecosystem. Sometimes it feels like we take two steps forward and one step back, but if we compare where we started and where we are today it is satisfying to see that there is a great difference.

In this book we would like to share our journey so far with you. We would like to share something about how we are working to create a more organic and diverse and productive ecosystem, how we work with soil, plants and animals to infuse more life and system connections everywhere. We would also like to share our thoughts for the future, as we are now ready to move on towards our vision by transforming the farm's old red barn into a green demonstration building and farm retreat.

The book is organized as a farm discovery tour where you will experience the different parts of the farm and learn how we develop them and how we see them contributing to the richness of the whole farm ecosystem. We hope that you will get a lot of inspiration along the tour. We also believe that many of the things we have done can be applied on any natural system level, from a balcony sized growing bed or a villa garden, to a large-scale operation.

Once again, a warm welcome to our farm!

Julia & Carl



THE VEGETABLE GARDEN

There is something magical about the whole process of planting a seed, nourishing a plant, waiting, waiting, waiting and then finally savoring the reward.



“...and is it not amazing how much more taste that you get in the veggies you grow yourself compared to the ones you find in the supermarket?”

What can be more delighting than eating sun warm tomatoes right of the twig or making a pesto for the pasta from a bunch of aromatic herbs harvested just a minute ago? There is something magical about the whole process of planting a seed, nourishing a plant, waiting, waiting, waiting and then finally savoring the reward. And is it not amazing how much more taste that you get in the veggies you grow yourself compared to the ones you find in the supermarket?

We have two veggie gardens at the farm. The smaller one we established immediately to produce vegetables for family, farm helpers and guests. The larger one we are right now developing in front of the big barn. It will supply fresh

produce to our future farm restaurant, directly from soil to table. Here the chefs will be able to choose from great tasting veggie varieties that you could never find in a store.

Getting Ready to Plant

The garden in front of the barn is now in the same state as the smaller vegetable garden was three years ago. The smaller garden, today a colorful vegetable oasis, used to be nothing more than a green lawn.







“...you establish the beds in such a way that nature does the work for you and you do not have to turn the soil every year.”



To quickly convert the lawn to fertile soil ready for seeding, we let Olga and Olivia do all the hard work for us. We did not have to pay them. They loved it and just could not stop working. Olga and Olivia are pigs of the heritage breed “Linderödsvin”. They quickly turned the soil and ate all the grass including the roots. Looking out of the kitchen window, it was a happy sight to see our “pig tractors” in action and after a couple of weeks there was no trace of the lawn. Instead we had got perfectly turned soil with natural fertilizer included.

As a next step we created garden beds. We wanted to do it the “no-till” way, which means you establish the beds in such a way that nature does the work for you and you do not have to turn the soil every year. Is that not a relief?

This requires an initial investment of heavy work that you cannot really delegate to the pigs. We use a method called ”double digging”, which loosens the soil two layers down to improve drainage and aeration. The plants can then develop a deeper and stronger root system,

which provides the plant with more nutrients and water. The result is that we get healthier and faster growing plants without the heavy work of turning (and disrupting) the soil every year. There is basically only one holy rule in our veggie garden: do not step on the garden beds. We really want to keep the soil loose so we do not have to do that digging again.

The garden season in Sweden is relatively short. We usually start seeding the first crops indoors sometime in March. In May the days finally get warmer and we can start to seed and plant outside. However the chance for night frost is not completely over until early June.

The garden season ends sometime in October. This time of the year we harvest vegetables like pumpkins, kale, jerusalem artichokes and winter lettuce. The leek we can leave all the way to the first snowfall. The garden beds are now prepared for winter, and we kind of tuck them in for a long sleep with a gentle cover of autumn leaves, sheep wool and excess straw and hay.

Secret and Sacred Veggies

At the farm we only grow organic. This means that we do not use any synthetic fertilizers or chemicals like pesticides, fungicides and herbicides. The seeds we use are also organic and some of them we harvest ourselves at the farm. To take your own seeds are easy for a number of vegetables, for instance tomatoes, chilies and cucumbers. The seeds you harvest yourself are of course free of cost, but more importantly, after just a few veggie generations the seeds start to adapt to the local soil and weather conditions and you get more resilient and productive plants. Just watch out for the hybrid seeds that the big seed companies have developed. The plants coming from these seeds now lack the ability to produce seeds that actually will grow.

A fun and meaningful thing to do is to help preserve our vegetable heritage. The seeds originating from old varieties are a real treasure to explore and take care of. Have you for instance ever seen a purple carrot or maybe a pink potato? Then they are likely to be of an older vegetable variety. These beautiful but almost secret crops may often have other shapes, forms and tastes than what you are used to. They may sometimes give a lower yield, but they often adapt much better to a rough climate and they are excellent to use for seed production.

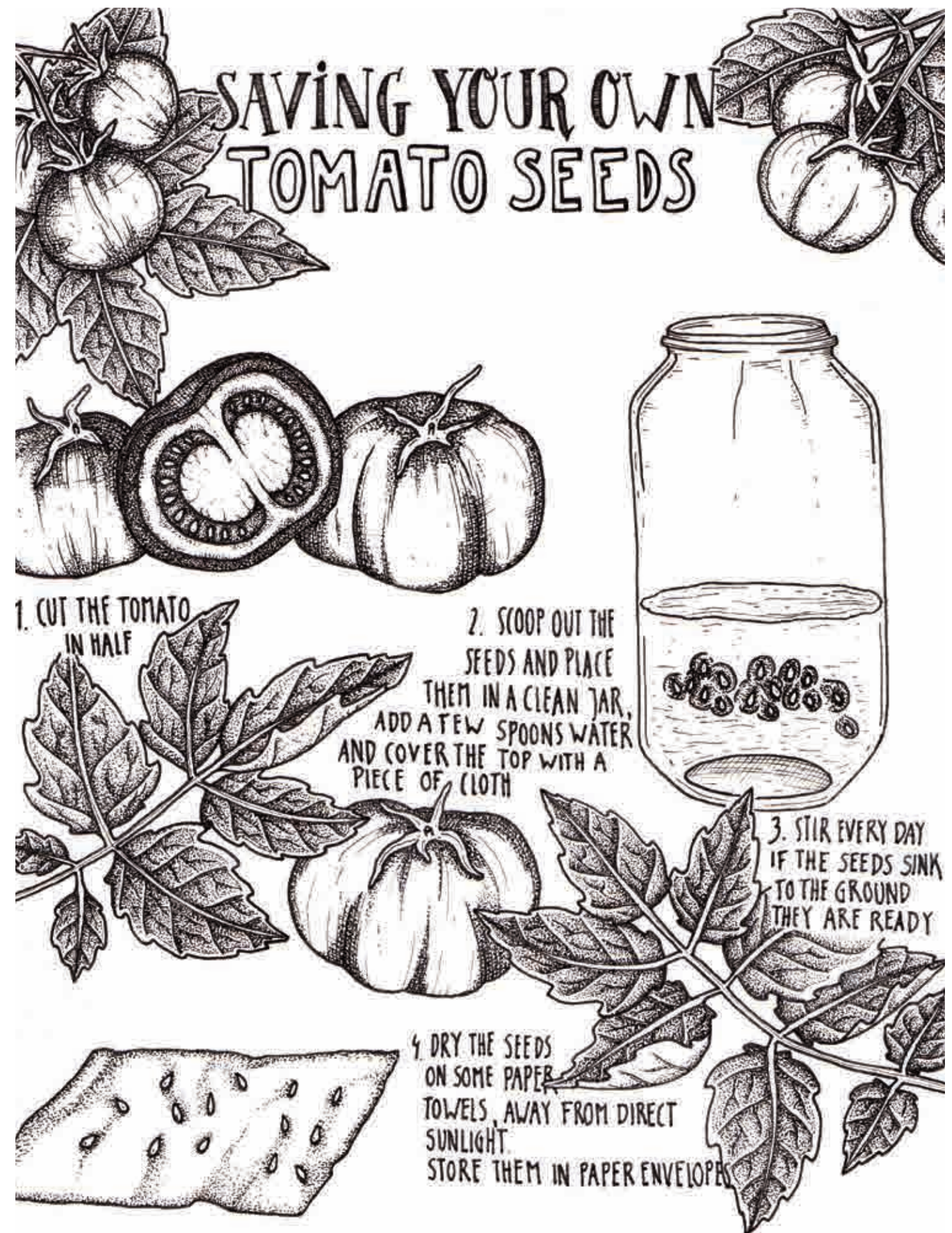


Is it not crazy by the way that you can buy a hundred different toothpastes in the store but often only one type of carrot? That is like having access to one kind of wine that should go with everything always. Through the generations we have been growing so many different types of carrots with different sizes, shapes, colors and tastes. There are probably thousands of varieties.

But we can only choose the one variety that has been developed to maximize volume production and transportability. What about choosing a carrot for its unique taste or for its beautiful appearance, like a wine? The same story basically goes for all vegetables and many fruits and berries too. At the farm we find great joy in moving in the completely different direction – to maximize edible plant diversity.

Building a Living Soil

During the year we provide extra nutrients for our plants using nettle water, our own compost and mulch. To mulch is to cover the soil with organic material that breaks down and provides the plants with nutrition and organic matter. We mix straw from the animal beds and compost. We also use autumn leaves and grass clippings. This covers the whole vegetable bed, in a 10 – 20 cm thick layer, except where the plants are popping up of course. It works exactly like nature. If you walk in a forest you will see that the ground is always covered. Nature continuously protects and enriches the soil.



30 DAY

COMPOST



Anytime you take your garden practice closer to how nature would do it you save energy and get more efficient. Mulching is a great tool to do just that and probably the most underestimated garden activity there is. It reduces the watering needs dramatically, basically takes away the whole boring thing with weeding and it gradually releases nutrients to the plants. It also creates a great meal for our dear friends the earthworms that help us aerate the soil.

One of the biggest challenges at the farm when it comes to vegetable production is the heavy clay soil that we started off with. It is especially difficult for the root vegetables to break through the soil and to develop enough roots for healthy growth. An important task is therefore to transform the heavy and hard clay into a loose soil, rich on organic matter. Next to the mulching, the composting plays a big role in this development.

Our favorite way of making compost is the

30-day compost. As the name indicates the soil should be ready after only thirty days, if you get the blend and the process right that is. As farmer novices we thought it would take forever to get the soil we needed, or at least a year, but we have seen that you can greatly speed up this process.

Like a cake, this compost is made up of layers placed on top of each other adding up to a big pile. We bake with straw and other dried organic materials from our garden, fresh green material such as leaves, grasses and clovers, a magical manure mix from cow, sheep and chicken, and some woods shavings from the chicken house. The art of composting consists of finding the right ratio of carbon rich materials such as the wood shavings and nitrogen rich stuff like manure. If you hit the 25:1 carbon-nitrogen ratio you are off to a promising start.

Once complete, the pile is watered and then

covered with a tarp. After three days we turn the steaming compost all over and water more if needed. The pile gets extremely hot in the middle. You can actually use the compost pile to heat water for your shower if you put a pipe through. We keep turning the pile a few more times and after about a month we have perfect dark compost, loaded with nutrients and helpful microorganisms ready to get to work in vegetable beds.

A Garden of the Senses

To us a vegetable garden is so much more than a simple production area. Gardening is like a therapy for mind and soul. It is a place to get centered and practice awareness of nature and yourself. The perfect vegetable garden is a place where all senses get stimulated. Imagine losing the sense of time and space, completely absorbed in colorful arrangements that catch your eye.

And as you bend down to take in the scents of aromatic herbs, or pick a dark red beet, you hear the sound of bees, insects and birds all around. You get intensely aware of how everything is alive and connected.

In our garden we mix edible flowers, aromatic herbs and vegetables. We also choose vegetables that fascinate with beautiful colors and forms. You can see chard in poppy pink, golden yellow and dark red next to carrots in orange, yellow or white.

The vegetable garden can become a celebration for all senses if you blend and mix taste, scent, form and color. This is what we are striving for. Every new season we try to surpass the garden of the previous year and we have great fun experimenting.

Good Neighbors

In the garden you can find radishes next to carrots, spinach between the parsnip lines and tagetes next to cabbage and kale. Just like humans thrive in the company with the right partner, so do the vegetables. The right veggie partner can help the companion in many ways, for instance to confuse pests and to provide shelter and nutrients.

So far we have discovered that these plants like it next to each other:

cabbage & tagetes
radishes, carrots & spinach
TOMATOS & GARLIC
onions & beetroot
PARSNIP, CHARD & SPINACH

Over time we have set a stronger focus on growing flowers in our vegetable garden. Not only because we think they are beautiful but also because they are delicious in a meal. Did you for instance know that all the flowers from our common kitchen herbs are edible?

Nowadays we use flowers in our food most days during summer. We let our lunch salads become an even greater feast for the eye and the mouth as we decorate with rose, thyme flowers and calendula. Some of our other favorite edible

flowers are dahlias, monks cress, borage, sunflowers, tea mint and mallow.

We also dry flowers and have them as tea in the winter. They give you hope on a rainy, dark and muddy day. But flowers are good for so much more. For instance tagetes and summer savory are perfect as bed border. A lot of pests do not like their scent, and keep away. With more flowers in the garden we also welcome butterflies, honeybees, bumblebees and other useful insects. Here they can find a home and plenty of food.

Amazing Herbs

You can find all sorts of herbs in the garden.

Some of these aromatic herbs stimulate the mind with their enchanting scent. Others look simple but carry strong healing powers. Like edible flowers, herbs also attract bees, butterflies and other insects. The vegetable garden is one loud buzz during a warm summer day.

We really enjoy using the herbs. It is a complete treat to start the morning gathering some fresh lemon balm, mint or parsley for a green smoothie. We also use fresh or dried herbs in tea.

Every summer we dry lots of herbs and fill up the spice cupboard for winter. We also preserve them in oil and make herb salves. Besides what would a real farmers garden be without herbs and their healing powers. Nettle and birch leaves for spring detoxing, wormwood, chamomile and mint for stomach troubles and thyme, sage and hyssop to beat a cold.

