“And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.” Genesis 2:8

Cover Story

In the End—10
Jerry Travers

We can experience a little taste of Heaven if we follow God’s outline for agriculture.

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Back to Eden method
“Let them each have a piece of ground of their own; and as you teach them how to make a garden, how to prepare the soil for seed, and the importance of keeping all the weeds pulled out, teach them also how important it is to keep unsightly, injurious practices out of the life. Teach them to keep down wrong habits as they keep down the weeds in their gardens. At every stage of plant growth, there’s a lesson to be learned. Each stage offers something new.” (AH 146)

Beginning Steps

- Help children dig a hole, plant a seed, and cover it up.
- Have children water their seed and watch it grow.
- Show children how to weed the area around their new plant.
- Allow them to harvest it themselves.

During this entire time, study the growth cycle of their plant.

THIS TIME OF YEAR, A QUESTION PLAGUING ALMOST EVERY HIGH
school student and their parents, especially graduating seniors is, “What do I want to be when I
grow up?” Naturally that transforms to the next question, “What will my major be?”

In a post modern secular materialistic culture, many in and out of the Seventh-day Adventist
church feel an agrarian lifestyle is no longer relevant—it’s a dead occupation of the pre-19th
century. As a result, it no longer enters into the conversation of future career choices. A friend
shared a story—a conversation he had with someone raised in a city. The individual said that
society no longer needed farmers. My friend pausing asked, “Well, don’t you need to eat? Does
society no longer need food.”

An unknown author penned, “With our abundance of wealth and food you’d think we’d be
thriving, but instead we’re seeing disease, sickness, and obesity rising to frightening lev-
els,” [unknown]. Contrast that to the words of Thomas Edison, “The doctor of the future will no
longer treat the human frame with drugs, but rather will cure and prevent disease with nutrition.”

I believe it’s time for Adventists as a whole to re-examine agriculture. If we followed the
words of inspiration, it would be an integral part of our educational system. But I propose that
it doesn’t just stop there. It is an excellent way to occupy our time on earth. Deep agricultural
roots lie in our own church’s very beginnings; look no farther than William Miller. After mar-
rying in 1803, Miller moved to the town of Poultney, NY and took up farming. Although he
would hold other professions, his occupation was that of a farmer. From that humble environ-
ment, he would impact the world, influencing the birth of the second largest Protes-
tant denomination the world has ever known.

Mrs. White wrote, “Study in agricultural lines should be the A, B, and C of education given in
our schools.” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 179). Like any of Mrs. White’s writings, we
have to ask the question: what do I do with that? Was it something she wrote to an individual?
Was it specific to a time-frame, an event, a place, a country? Or is it something that she wrote as
a timeless principle and counsel?

Genesis 2:8 tells us, “And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there He
put the man whom He had formed.” Matthew Henry, an English commentator and Presbyte-
rian minister, comments on that verse,

The place fixed upon for Adam to dwell in, was not a palace, but a garden. The better we
take up with plain things, and the less we seek things to gratify pride and luxury, the nearer
we approach to innocency. Nature is content with a little, and that which is most natural;
grace with less; but lust craves every thing, and is content with nothing. No delights can be
satisfying to the soul, but those which God himself has provided and appointed for it... God,
as a tender Father, desired not only Adam’s profit, but his pleasure; for there is pleasure
with innocency, nay there is true pleasure only in innocency. When Providence puts us in a
place of plenty and pleasure, we ought to serve God with gladness of heart in the good
things he gives us (Matthew Henry’s Commentary on Genesis 2:8-14).

And so reader, whom I do not know—may the first edition of this magazine inspire you to
take another look at agriculture. Perhaps you, like I was, are at a cross roads wondering what
your next endeavor should be. Perhaps you’re praying, wondering what your children’s future
should look like. Or perhaps you’re feeling a conviction to move to the country. I pray these
pages are an inspiration to you—an awakening if you will—to look at an area you perhaps did
not think to, and ponder. In the very beginning God placed man in a garden (see Gen. 2) and in
the end, we will garden (see Isa. 65:21-22); why not also garden in between? ☝
The Bible provides us with beautiful soul literature, including poetry. There’s a certain sweetness of heart in poetic words, even when expressing lament. David, known as the Psalmist, certainly expressed an array of emotions as a poet-songster-musician. He brought his heart to God in song.

Poetry covers the gamut of expression. All true poetry certainly isn’t religious, yet poetry by its very type is uplifting to the senses, from exquisite wording to the most ordinary. The poem in this article, “God’s Dusty Hands” expresses how God used something as simple as mud in a variety of ways: to create Adam, to bring a son to his senses, and to heal a blind man; all these occasions involved the same substance in different forms called dirt, mud or dust.

When God became man’s Potter, molding a human form; Adam literally emerged from earth dirt. God the Rescuer entered into a stench-filled pigpen, leading the repentant son back home. The man blind from birth, felt God’s healing fingers apply a mud poultice—and when he opened his eyes he saw his doctor: Jesus! Evidences of youth were noted, as Adam walked uprightly in his young-man humanness, the prodigal surely leaped into the air (a common Biblical way of expressing elation) and the blind man? He surely danced because that’s what Jewish men do when filled with spiritual joy and celebrating; all were infused with a young spirit.

God’s Dusty Hands

An awesome thought, is it not? The scene of God kneeling down To pick up dirt to create mankind, Yet he did just that, without a frown, Because of love.

And as He shaped that glob of clay Into a comely form named Adam; He who breathed stars into being Smiled and breathed life into him, Because of love.

Then, another frame of time: God plucked a wayward son from a pigpen, Leading him back home to where A father’s empty arms held open, Because of love.

With a mud poultice, another God scene Found His hands patting blind eyes As the blind one called, “I see!” His faith received sweet prize, Because of love. Don’t you just love God’s dusty hands?

by Betty Kossick

Betty Kossick is a retired newspaper journalist, prolific writer and poet. Betty and her husband, John, live in Apopka, Florida.
When we consider what constitutes origins, we are really talking about going back to the events connected with the creation account of Genesis. God was and is the originator of the gardening idea. He is the first One mentioned in Scripture who planted a garden: “And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden...” (Gen. 2:8).

From the creation account we learn that human origins go back to the soil. We were made from the dust of the ground, and when we die we return to the dust of the ground. Between these two points we are basically sustained by the products that come from the ground. Foremost among these, of course, is food. God designed that we maintain a close connection with the soil through the food we eat.

Since it is evident that the food comes from the soil, it should be also apparent that the quality of the food will be dependent to a large degree upon the care we take of that soil. This may be a reason why man was given the responsibility to “dress and keep” the garden. Soil quality and consequently food quality would be dependent upon man properly exercising his responsibility to care for the soil and the plants.

I believe that there was a divine purpose in God’s act of planting a garden and putting Adam and Eve in it to “dress and keep it.” In reality God planted two gardens—one in the soil of Eden, and one in the soil of the hearts of our first parents. Adam and Eve and their posterity were given the advantage of learning lessons regarding the development of the heart garden as they had opportunity to work in the “dressing and keeping” of the garden and its production.

The work of “keeping” the garden seems to include the idea of maintaining and nurturing the garden. This would be true of the heart garden also. They needed to cultivate those attributes and characteristics which most reflected God’s character—ever growing in the ability to understand and participate in God’s great government of service.

In serving the soil and plants, they, in turn, would be served by the soil and the plants. God established the outward garden as an accurate reflection of the inward garden. As illustrated and reflected by the outward garden, the cultivated heart-garden was to bear such fruit as kindness, love and service. It is clear that Adam and Eve were to learn how to “dress and keep” the garden of the heart as they engaged in “dressing and keeping” the garden in Eden.

Sin significantly affected the order of things, but still, God kept the role of the garden in its function of representing the heart of men and women. We read of the curse pronounced upon the ground because Adam’s sinned (see Gen. 3:17-19), and perhaps we are prone to view this as an arbitrary act of God instigated as a punishment for Adam’s sin. But the wording of the Scriptures forbids this conception of the matter.

Notice the wording of the text: “...cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life...” (verse 17). Note the words “for thy sake.” God, here, is telling Adam that He is not just putting a curse on the ground, but rather He is informing Adam of something deeper. Because of Adam’s sin, He is stating that this new condition of being cursed will
be humanity’s blessing. God said, the ground is cursed “for thy sake.”

What was to be the result of the curse? “Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen. 3:18-19). Humans would have to contend with thorns and thistles, and their work would now be more difficult. In fact, God informed Adam that he’d need to exert himself to the point of experiencing a new sensation—sweat on his face—in order to have food.

Both men and women would experience pain as the result of the original sin—Eve in childbearing, and Adam in cultivating the ground and producing a livelihood to sustain them. It seems that ever since man was told that he must sweat in order to sustain himself, he has been looking for ways to avoid sweating and still obtain his livelihood. Yet the exertion that would bring sweat was pronounced to be “for thy sake” or for a particular benefit.

Physiologically, sweating is cleansing and beneficial to the body. But more than that, the exertion of the body has a cleansing and up-building affect on the mind and character. Science now confirms that useful physical activity has physiological effects on the formation of the brain and its ability to function most effectively.

This connection of agricultural pursuits and heart development is discussed at some length in Ellen White’s writings. Note the connections made in the following passages.

To Adam God had said: “Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen. 3:17-19).

Although the earth was blighted with the curse, nature was still to be man’s lesson book. It could not now represent goodness only; for evil was everywhere present, marring earth and sea and air with its defiling touch. Where once was written
only the character of God, the knowledge of good, was now written also the character of Satan, the knowledge of evil. From nature, which now revealed the knowledge of good and evil, man was continually to receive warning as to the results of sin. (Education, p. 26)

Through disobedience to God, Adam and Eve had lost Eden, and because of sin the whole earth was cursed. But if God’s people followed His instruction, their land would be restored to fertility and beauty. God Himself gave them directions in regard to the culture of the soil, and they were to co-operate with Him in its restoration. Thus the whole land, under God’s control, would become an object lesson of spiritual truth. As in obedience to His natural laws the earth should produce its treasures, so in obedience to His moral law the hearts of the people were to reflect the attributes of His character. Even the heathen would recognize the superiority of those who served and worshiped the living God. (Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 289)

As a relaxation from study, occupations pursued in the open air, and affording exercise for the whole body, are the most beneficial. No line of manual training is of more value than agriculture. A greater effort should be made to create and to encourage an interest in agricultural pursuits. Let the teacher call attention to what the Bible says about agriculture: that it was God’s plan for man to till the earth; that the first man, the ruler of the whole world, was given a garden to cultivate; and that many of the world’s greatest men, its real nobility, have been tillers of the soil. Show the opportunities in such a life. The wise man says, “The king himself is served by the field.” Ecclesiastes 5:9. Of him who cultivates the soil the Bible declares, “…His God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him.” Isaiah 28:26. And again, “Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof.” Proverbs 27:18. He who earns his livelihood by agriculture escapes many temptations and enjoys unnumbered privileges and blessings denied to those whose work lies in the great cities. And in these days of mammoth trusts and business competition, there are few who enjoy so real an independence and so great certainty of fair return for their labor as does the tiller of the soil. (Education, p. 219)

Garden activity was intended by God to be a part of our life, and was given for the benefit of all mankind. Not only does it provide direct access to one’s sustenance through direct involvement, but it also engages one in the most beneficial line of manual activity for our spiritual development. Rather than a dependence on other suppliers and distributors, we provide for ourselves. Employment of our time in growing fruits and vegetables was a work given to Adam and Eve before they fell; it was adapted and rearranged for them after they fell. But more than that, it is to be an occupation of the redeemed in the new earth; and we have seen that it is the most valued of all manual engagements we can involve ourselves in at the present time. I encourage you… spend some time in your garden this week! ☀

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4 Keys to Creative Farming

IT’S BEEN SAID THAT NECESSITY is the mother of invention. This statement especially rings true for a small market farmer. On these farms one comes into contact with real problems needing real solutions.

Even though I am new in the farming world, I’ve discovered four keys that are helping me become a more creative farmer.

Key One: Two Heads are Better than One
Most great farm innovations aren’t from just one person but the collective ideas from a multitude of people with similar needs. Surround yourself with resources from people with a burden to see things improve on the type of farm you want to run. The Bible says, “Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety” (Prov. 11:14). There are few statements more true than that.

Chances are, the more people thinking along the same lines the better the idea. As farmers we take a lot of pride in what we do, which can be a good thing, but we must also keep an ear open for advice.

Key Two: Learn to Make It Yourself
Learning practical skills can be a great way to boost your creativity. When you have an idea, one thing that can hold you back is the inability to make it yourself. Ideas are free, but asking someone else to build it can be pricey. Anytime we dish out money for every little thing we want made, it reduces the economics of the farm. Welding, wood working, small engine repair, diesel mechanics, machining, heating and air, and masonry work are just a few of the practical skills that put you ahead of the game.

Now, if you are starting with no skills whatsoever, that’s OK. Give yourself time to grow, but as you gain skill after skill, you gain new perspectives and increase your creativity. For instance, if you only work with wood and then learn how to weld, it opens a new dimension in strength and durability. One great way to learn some of these skills is at a local vocational school during the slow winter months. The money you spend furthering practical skills will be worth its weight in gold.

Key Three: It Is OK To Make Mistakes
Mistake and failure—now those are two scary words! The fear of failure is probably one of the greatest reasons people don’t create. We ponder, what if it doesn’t work, or what if I spend all this time working on it and it fails? An important consideration... try it on a smaller scale before going big. This happens on a lot of farms. The new farmer, filled with excitement, plants an acre or two, then doesn’t know how to sell it. In the final analysis, if you’re not willing to fail, you’re not willing to create. Joel Salatin said, “If anything is worth doing it’s worth doing wrong first.”

If we don’t get discouraged before we finish a project we might just come up with something that may be extremely useful. Thomas Edison said, “I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.” Remember, it is only a failure if you don’t learn from it.

Key Four: Don’t Get in the Easy Chair
Don’t be satisfied with the way things are and don’t let the norm say, “Oh, that will never happen.” Thomas Edison also said, “Many of life’s failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.” It’s sometimes difficult to keep from falling into the same rut, but all farmers should make an effort to continue to improve their systems of agriculture. Don’t be satisfied with average, in agriculture there is almost always a better way. For example, one area in which I see the least advancement is fertility management. There are many reasons for this, yet it is such a fundamental part of a successful operation, it’s worth the investment to figure out. Having good soil is where many farms either succeed or fall into the trap of using chemicals (“organic” or non-organic) to keep their crops from being destroyed.

I believe we have a special calling to better understand soil fertility. You might think, that is not being creative, well, sometimes creativity is only finding out what God has already done and then following the laws that were already in place. This is just one of the many areas on a farm we should never be satisfied with, but continue to push further.

So to tie it all together, talk to other farmers, read their books, learn practical skills, don’t be afraid to make mistakes, but try to keep them small, and don’t settle for mediocrity. With the Lord’s help, let us be creative farmers for His honor and glory.

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Many a Christian, writing on the subject of creation, begins with Genesis 1:1. “In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.” At the same time, many fables have been created to try and explain where life began. The word *original* indicates a first example exists, but it implies that many more examples now exist. Confusion can abound as to what is the original, or a changed form of the original.

Today earth is transformed from the original Edenic condition that God gave us. How it got that way, we Christians simply declare, “this is the work of Satan.” But how? Darwin made a good observation when he noted finches on the Galapagos Islands were changing their forms and behavior to adapt to the climate they were in. Observations are true science when the observer has spiritual discernment (see Rev. 3:18). Changes that have altered the original creation, and continue to change things are the result of environmental impact.

Mankind was given dominion of earth (see Gen. 1:26). He was given power to subdue the earth, to change it, whether he observed it or not (see Gen. 1:28). He could have kept earth in its original condition if he tilled the ground and dressed the garden and kept it God’s way (see Gen. 2:5 and 15; Proverbs 14:12). Environmental impact on Earth’s original forms and behavior is our doing. We changed a paradise to what we see today.

Recent studies in genetics show that switches exist on every gene. These switches can turn off or on how the gene expresses itself. Cells don’t have to show the same form or behavior each time they are reproduced. As the cell replicates itself, it changes according to the environment’s impact upon it, i.e. weather. Just as we put on different clothes if it is hot or cold, wet or dry, windy or calm, so do cells appear differently outfitted according to the environmental conditions that the creature finds itself in. As we desertize grasslands, deforest timberlands, and pollute water and air, climate changes. Any change from God’s original form and behavior is worse than the original.

This is the work of Satan guiding us to “keep,” contrary to God’s way, the garden home of which we were given dominion (see Gen. 2:15). We learn “He [God] never made a thorn, a thistle, or a tare. These are Satan’s work, the result of degeneration, introduced by him among the precious things; ...” (*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 186).

The word Eden, in Hebrew (עֵדֶן), means pleasure, delight and delicate. Our planet home was delicately designed to give us pleasure and delight continuously, but only if we carried out our occupations as groundskeepers the way that God directed. All foods would be delicious, all that we smelled would be fragrant, all that we saw would be beautiful, all that we heard would be melodious, all that we felt would bring peace.

Responsibility for how things behave and what they look like, does not imply that we have the power to create. We are responsible for how this earth and its creatures are formed and be-
have. We have been guided by Satan, so that the original forms and behaviors are seldom expressed. But, neither we nor Satan created these expressions. “In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.” All things exist as He designed it. Even when dysfunctional behavior, such as sickness and disease show up, it is God’s original design. He put into genes the changes that would occur, under every imaginable alteration to the gene, that could possibly develop due to our environmental impact. God never loses control of how things are going. These are His judgments, put there to teach us a lesson (see Deut. 28).

The education that God wants to give us is considered meanness by many. Just as a child—untrained in self-discipline—rebels at guidance, so do many balk at God’s leading. Being led is not so much the issue with them. Being led where God wants to lead us, back to Eden, is rejected because in the process, we must be shown the folly of doing things our way. “I did it my way,” is the motto of life that many are proud to be led by.

The study of changes that will repair creation is the need of mankind as we near the brink of extinction. As restorable as earth’s ecosystems have been originally designed, there is still a limit to the abuse that they can take. That we are in the last days of Earth’s history, and that God is coming to judge the world, is a fable to many. Yet, many will agree we are contributing to the destruction of our planet. “What must we do to be saved?” is their cry. We Christians have a responsibility to answer that question for them, by showing them what we are doing to repair earth.

Restoration and repair of our ecosystem is the call of nature. “…for nature’s voice is the voice of Christ, teaching us innumerable lessons of love and power and submission and perseverance” (Testimonies, vol. 6, p. 178). The love of Christ, which gave us a paradise, the power of our dominion over it to trash it or keep it a paradise, the submission we now need to repair it, and the perseverance to get the job done, are what the world needs now. The laws of nature must be learned and obeyed. Psalm 19:7 tells us, “The law of the Lord is perfect, [nature has laws], converting the soul…” This is how God has designed to convert many in the last days. Are we equipped to lead out in this last great evangelistic effort?

Agriculture is ground zero. Every way in which we impact the fragile layer of life—giving soil determines which direction we are headed.

In God’s plan for Israel every family had a home on the land, with sufficient ground for tilling. Thus were provided both the means and the incentive for a useful, industrious, and self-supporting life. And no devising of men has ever improved upon that plan. To the world’s departure from it is owing, to a large degree, the poverty and wretchedness that exist today (Ministry of Healing, Ellen G. White, p. 183-184).

Men were to cooperate with God in restoring the diseased land to health, that it might be a praise and a glory to His name. And as the land they possessed would, if managed with skill and earnestness, produce its treasures, so their hearts, if controlled by God, would reflect His character...

In the laws which God gave for the cultivation of the soil, He was giving the people opportunity to overcome their selfishness and become heavenly-minded. Canaan would be to them as Eden if they obeyed the Word of the Lord. Through them the Lord designed to teach all the nations of the world how to cultivate the soil so that it would yield healthy fruit, free from disease. The earth is the Lord’s vineyard, and is to be treated according to His plan. Those who cultivated the soil were to realize that they were doing God service. They were as truly in their lot and place as were the men appointed to minister in the priesthood and in work connected with the tabernacle (S.D.A. Bible Commentary, vol. 1, on Leviticus 25, p. 1,112).

The Holy Spirit is waiting for Christians to follow His
leading so the transformation of nature can occur. Romans 8:14-23 tells of this transformation. First we are changed, then creatures are changed back to Eden’s delightfully pleasant forms and behaviors (see Isa. 11:6-9). Ezekiel tells us that this change occurs after we receive a new heart and a new spirit (see Ezek. 36:26-38). He tells us that the world will take note of our Eden-restoring activities and flock to us to learn what we have done (see Ezek. 36:35, 36). When will we enquire of God to do this for Him? (see Ezek. 36:37)

Agriculture is usually thought of as an occupation that somebody else does to make money by selling their produce to buyers like us. This is not the original purpose for tilling the ground and dressing the garden and keeping it God’s way (see Gen. 2:5, 15; Prov. 14:12). Commercial agriculture began to serve the first city dwellers. They were so tightly packed together that they had little ground to till or gardens to dress. For those in the country, it was either sell produce to them, or get it stolen by the hungry city dwellers.

If all around was a paradise, why would anyone want to build a city? Genesis 4:12 tells us that the followers of Cain were not very successful at the occupation that God gave them as groundskeepers. The food they produced was not strengthening like it was for God’s people (see Eccles. 10:17). They damaged the ground and weak food caused them to flee from the worn out soil. This made them vagabonds as they repeatedly raped the land, rather than serve it for a lifetime.

Food from plants are to do more than stuff our bellies. They are to nourish us and maintain in us good health. Many are realizing that this does not occur with grocery store foods. Produce measured for nutrient value, using a refractometer, reveals mineral content. Low minerals equals poorly formed proteins, carbohydrates and fats. It also means lowered quantities of these essential nutrients are in the chemically blown up, tough for shipping, cosmetically perfect, imitations of food.

Is organic food the answer?

At the beginning of the organic movement, natural products such as organic matter from vegetation, animal products, and mineral sources were used, similar to how nature operates, to supply plants with needed nutrients. Nutritional results were better than what factory fabricated fertilizers were giving us. Taste told it all. But, now that the federal government has taken over organic regulation, quality has plummeted. What’s the reason?

Plants are designed by God to be served food by microbes. Bacteria harvest nitrogen from the air for protein production. Fungi gather minerals and carry them to the plant. The plant gathers sunlight and makes fuel and building parts for the bacteria and fungi. Nature is designed to demonstrate God’s behavior, that of a servant. All things have many ways in which they serve others in their sphere of influence. Not a plant, nor a microbe, nor insect, nor animal lives for itself. They all can only function healthfully if they are serving one another as designed.

Genetically, all creatures are designed to function so their acts of service are fulfilled and paradise is maintained. As we disrupt the process by working the ground to increase the volume of production, rather than maintain life as God designed, we suffer the curses of God (see Deut. 28). Without a regard for the role of service that microbes play in producing high quality food, we fail at producing food of quality that heals and vitalizes. We cannot improve upon God’s design! Today, the primary need of microbes is air. Compaction of soil is the biggest problem in agriculture worldwide. Some soils are sterile because of the chemicals used, while others have anaerobic microbes dominating the soil profile. Aerobic (air loving) microbes are the servants God put in place to grow healthy plants giving us health imparting food. Beginning here, at aerating the soil, we can start our journey back to Eden.

The original design for earth’s paradise has not changed. It is still genetically the same. Although cursed expressions exist everywhere today, they need not continue. While life lasts, changes for good can be made. The social outlook that nothing can improve unless it is a collective effort is a lie. God will bless our efforts, no matter how small a piece of ground that we serve His way. Think of people with green thumbs whose house plants thrive wonderfully.


WHO ARE WE?

WELCOME TO THE VERY FIRST ISSUE OF ROOTS.

This truly is a journey of faith and conviction that began with a vision. Over the years, several people in various parts of the country aspired to do some kind of agricultural association. In addition, many—Lynn Hoag (CA), John and Edwin Dysinger (Bountiful Blessings Farm, TN), Bob Jorgensen (Medical Missionary Press, NC), Bob Gregory (Berea Gardens, WV), Alan Kennedy (TN), Jerry Travers (CT), David Obermiller, and the list goes on—have been teaching and heralding the agricultural message found in the Spirit of Prophecy for years.

Yet, during that time, there was no Adventist association in existence providing support to gardeners or farmers. Nor was there any uniformity across the country.

The current idea for Adventist Agricultural Association was birthed in 2012 at Uchee Pines Institute. For a number of years previously Bob Jorgensen of North Carolina organized seminars with various speakers instructing Adventists in the importance of agriculture as a means of education, and as a part of the preparation of God’s people for the final events of this earth’s history. I attended Bob’s meetings in 2012 and it changed my life. I went seeking to learn how to grow better produce, but instead left with a new desire and focus—I wanted to grow a better family.

Up to that point I struggled as a gardener; surely I was not alone in this! The thought came, what if there was a network to support, not just individuals, but one to support Adventist institutions and people desiring to put into practice the counsel given through inspiration?

This coupled with the fact that there existed others desiring the same thing, we Adventists needed something—an organization to support, encourage and help struggling gardeners/farmers like me. At the 2013 conference, a break-out session was held inviting like-minded people to meet and discuss the possibilities. This association and thus this magazine is the result of the coming together of these people.

Adventist Agricultural Association’s vision is to bring God’s counsel to everyone desiring an agrarian lifestyle, to provide support and encouragement, and teach scientific methods in line with the guidance God has provided. Like Bob Jorgensen said, “the importance of agriculture as a means of education, and as a part of the preparation of God’s people for the final events of this earth’s history,” is vital,—one we all feel compelled to herald.

We are still in the early stages, but we hope to be a vital networking source for you as you grow as a person and family. Happy Growing! 

Daniel Laflair is a freelance writer and organic gardener with a background in business. He resides in Georgia with his wife and children.

Our God is a Mighty God.

We are weak and frail without Him. Romans 8:14 starts us on our journey. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” As children of God, we must obey our Father’s dictates expressed in His design. Like putting a puzzle together, we cannot change any pieces. We just have to look to see where everything goes. The Holy Spirit will lead us.

All creatures have been subject to our vain behavior, of doing things our way (see Gen. 1:28 and Rom. 8:20). As we let God lead us to repair the environment we control around us, creatures “...shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty...” we will be experiencing under the Holy Spirit’s leading (see Rom. 8:21). Not only are our characteristics changed to be more like Christ’s, but the genetic expression of creatures will be changed back towards Edenic expressions they formerly had. We, and creatures around us, will be more and more like we were originally designed to be.

Ancient Hebrew thinking depicts all creation in a circular movement. Life did not begin somewhere, somehow, and continues in a line to who knows where, as evolution depicts. We have been made by a loving, caring God. We fell into the deception of leading ourselves. He wants to rescue us and redeem us from our folly. He wants to teach us how to be groundskeepers again. We will be doing that for eternity, forever studying His characteristics depicted in creation’s forms and behaviors.

We are trapped in a society not of God’s making. Satan knows that to fill our minds with activity we will not contemplate God will keep us ensnared. Break loose! Don’t listen to your own voice! Go to the country, where nature, “the voice of Christ,” is everywhere. Let Him teach you. Let His mind fill your mind (see Phil. 2:5).

Jerry Travers is the current farm manager for Sweet Birch Farm in Meriden, CT. He has written several books and tracts on understanding God’s lessons in agriculture and nature.

Daniel Laflair is a freelance writer and organic gardener with a background in business. He resides in Georgia with his wife and children.
In 1998 the Lord called our family into farming. We were seeking His direction and will for our lives, and came across this quote, we knew there was no other choice. We wanted the best plan, so we put our hand to the plow and have never looked back. This is not to say it’s been easy; quite to the contrary! But if something is God’s plan, you take the bumps and bruises and press on—knowing His strength is made perfect in your weakness and His grace is sufficient (see 2 Cor. 12:9).

Sixteen years later, I can say we have caught a glimpse of God’s plan for agriculture, but by no means do we claim to understand it fully. We have tasted and seen that if God’s plans are followed (imperfect though that following is), the fruit is sweet!

What makes an agrarian life God’s ideal?
Here are a few of the answers we are discovering:

**Agriculture builds strong faith.**
We prepare the soil and stick the seed in the ground, but then we are 100% dependent on God to make the seed grow. I know of no other occupation where that dependence is so keenly felt.

**Agriculture builds balanced lives.**
It provides the ideal balance between the physical, mental and spiritual. Yes, it’s good exercise (goodbye gym membership), but it’s also incredibly cerebral. Every good farmer is continually conducting experiments, observing minute differences in plants based on a myriad of variables, and cataloging all this in his head. As for the spiritual, in addition to building faith, you get to walk with God in the garden every day!

**Agriculture builds strong character.**
In this imperfect world, it’s either too hot or too cold, too wet or too dry, too hard or... too hard! Farming or gardening has its rewards, but at the end of the day, it’s about a lot of hard work and doing what needs to be done no matter whether you feel like it or not.
Agriculture builds strong families.

Everyone is needed no matter your age or ability, and there is nothing like feeling needed to build strong family bonds. Getting the crops in before the approaching storm or protecting tender plants from the vagaries of nature unites hearts and makes lasting memories. Playing together is important, but working together is doubly so.

Agriculture builds a strong educational foundation.

We are told that agriculture should be the A, B and C of the education given in our schools (see 6T 179). It should not be an elective or an extracurricular activity, but a vital part of the foundation of all true education.

Agriculture builds common sense.

In this day and age of “higher education” and advanced degrees, common sense is becoming very uncommon! There is something about the “down to earth” lifestyle of farming that breeds common sense. Problem solving and adapting to changing circumstances are a way of life.

Agriculture builds bridges to the community.

There is something very exciting about being able to supply others with healthy food. Not only are you providing for their physical needs, but you are also given all kinds of opportunities to offer spiritual and emotional nourishment as well. Our customers become our friends.

And there’s so much more! We are just scratching the surface here. Only eternity will show fully God’s plan for agriculture, but in the meantime, why don’t you pick up a rake or shovel and discover why this is God’s ideal plan for man.

An Old Farmer’s Advice:

- Your fences need to be horse-high, pig-tight and bull-strong.
- Keep skunks and bankers at a distance.
- Life is simpler when you plow around the stump.
- A bumble bee is considerably faster than...a tractor.
- Words that soak into your ears are whispered...not yelled.
- Meanness don’t jes’ happen overnight.
- Forgive your enemies. It messes [with] their heads.
- Do not corner something that you know is meaner than you.
- It don’t take a very big person to carry a grudge.
- You cannot unsay a cruel word.
- Every path has a few puddles.
- When you wallow with pigs, expect to get dirty.
- The best sermons are lived, not preached.
- Most of the stuff people worry about ain’t never gonna happen anyway.
- Don’t judge folks by their relatives.
- Remember that silence is sometimes the best answer.
- Don’t interfere with somethin’ that ain’t bothering you none.
- Timing has a lot to do with the outcome of a Rain dance.
- If you find yourself in a hole, the first thing to do is stop diggin’.
- Sometimes you get, and sometimes you get got.
- The biggest troublemaker you’ll probably ever have to deal with, watches you from the mirror every mornin’.
- Always drink upstream from the herd.
- Good judgment comes from experience, and a lotta that comes from bad judgment.
- Lettin’ the cat outta the bag is a whole lot easier than puttin’ it back in.
- If you get to thinkin’ you’re a person of some influence, try orderin’ somebody else’s dog around.
- Live simply. Love generously. Care deeply.
- Speak kindly. Leave the rest to God.

—Unknown

John Dysinger, along with his brother’s family, is a managing partner of Bountiful Blessings Farm, in central Tennessee.

How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. (Psalm 104:24, NIV)
I believe God has given information to the Adventist church that if rightly used would turn the world upside-down. Not only that, but if the right spirit is present, He will reveal so much more.

Let's explore that statement.

“Then God said, ‘Let there be an expanse between the waters, separating water from water.’ So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above the expanse” (Gen. 1:6, 7, HCSB).

How does one decipher that verse?

Later on it says, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Gen. 1:31, NIV).

What kind of conditions existed? What would something like that feel like?

God placed Adam and Eve in a garden, not a mansion. We’re told it did not rain before the flood, a mist watered the garden (see Gen. 2:5, 6).

I propose some radical thoughts:

1. A water canopy would stop harmful cosmic radiation. Today, there are hundreds of cosmic rays going through our bodies every hour burning a line through us, killing cells. These rays go right through buildings and bury themselves deep into the ground.

2. In a hyperbaric chamber of about two atmospheres (approximately thirty feet under water) wounds can heal in fourteen hours in what would normally take fourteen days.

3. The same increased air pressure increases our IQ’s about eighteen points.

Fossil records provide evidence that pre-flood plants, animals and trees were larger than any now in existence. Fossilized animals like the hornless rhinoceros stood eighteen feet tall at the shoulders and stretched thirty feet long.

According to creation research, thousands of similar examples revealing vigor, strength and size were tremendous throughout that world. This agrees with the average lifespan of 900 plus years (see Gen. 5). Adam, well proportioned with a healthy glow, stood twice the height of men today (see The Spirit of Prophecy, vol. 1, p. 24), roughly putting him at 2,000 pounds. Genesis tells us giants inhabited the land and the women were extremely beautiful (see Gen. 6:2, 4).

Since the world is round and gravity pulls down, could we assume this new created atmosphere was like a hyperbaric chamber? Again, what would something like that feel like?

A water shield would protect life on earth from dangerous radiation just like the water jacket shield (ten to twelve feet thick) surrounding a nuclear power plant stops deadly radiation so employees can work safely.

What if we put water above a growing area, what would be the results?

Science proves that water moderates air temperatures. In the Genesis world, water above the air would diffuse sunlight and therefore moderate temperatures. No rain. Not too hot. Not too cold.

Dr. Calvin Dence of Clifton, Tennessee, curiously tried to recreate these growing conditions.

He built two greenhouses; the first was round, thirty-seven feet in diameter made of straw bale with eight to twelve inches of water above—no added heat or electricity. This was held up with large beams and metal wire. His large doors allowed tractor entry.

All incoming sunlight to the greenhouse passed through eight inches of water and a clear plastic barrier in the roof before reaching growing areas. His results were spectacular! After conversing with him, I sent him several Honduras papaya seeds. In January, he sprouted papaya seeds inside his
home. Once the weather warmed, he transplanted ten outside and three inside the water canopy greenhouse.

He shared in June of that year, the ones planted outside did well. They grew twelve to fourteen inches tall with good coloring. However, the three in the water-canopy greenhouse grew six to seven feet tall with seventy-two papayas already formed. His observation: most everything grew as much as ten times faster and bigger.

He achieved similar results in other trials. Does this seem to agree with pre-flood conditions with the water above the air?

Would an environment like this increase the lifespan and intelligence of the antediluvians?

Another thing that water does is moderate temperature.

After a few seasons the straw bales deteriorated and required removal. Dr. Dence built a second greenhouse, this time using cement blocks. Measuring 18’ x 36’, he buried roughly half of it for added insulation. This time, he used plate glass on the roof with only four inches of water above.

In nine years of operation the lowest temperature inside was 45°F. That’s when the outside temperature was 15°F. Dr. Dence also shared, he thought the highest temperature inside was 85°F. That means no additional heating or cooling is necessary for operation. Dr. Dence then dismantled the roof and took out the water and rebuilt it with polycarbonate panels in an A-frame style. In summer, with all the windows and doors open, the temperature reached 160°F. The following winter plants froze inside the greenhouse.

In my own personal experiments to best utilize the principals from the Bible, nature, and Ellen White’s writings, I came up with my own method—Omega Greenhouses. Probably the most important thing I teach is the Ellen White Planting Method. I’ve applied these principals along with Dence’s research to my own Omega greenhouse and the plants grew the biggest, most nutritious and healing foods I’ve ever tasted.

Some who utilize my method have told me they’ve grown as much as twenty times more tomatoes per plant compared to traditional methods.

Ellen White writes:

“There is need to much more extensive knowledge in regard to the preparation of the soil. There is not sufficient breadth of view as to what can be realized from the earth. A narrow and unvarying routine is followed with discouraging results. Let the educated ability be employed in devising improved methods of work. This is just what the Lord wants”.

There is need of intelligent and educated ability to devise the best methods in farming, in building and in every other department, that the worker may not labor in vain. God, who has made the world for the benefit of man, will provide means from the earth to sustain the diligent worker. The seed placed in thoroughly prepared soil will produce its harvest. God can spread a table for His people in the wilderness…” (“The Relation of True Education to the Farm,” The Advocate, March 1, 1901, paragraph 15).

Agriculture, perhaps, could be an opening wedge, a part of the health message, opening hearts and doors. The message of the Great Controversy is God’s effort to restore mankind, to save him from this sick, out-of-whack, sin-filled way of life. Think of the possibilities!

When God’s principals are used to unselfishly provide for people’s needs, their hearts and ears open, standing ready to listen to the possibility of spending eternity in happy, loving companionship with Him.


Lynn Hoag teaches the Ellen White Planting Method as well as other gardening methods. www.suncountrygardens.com
In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty...

(Genesis 1:1 - 2, NIV)

T
his very familiar passage presents two facts: 1) God made the heavens and the earth. 2) The earth was formless and empty.

Simple. Straightforward.

As the chapter unfolds, the creation story is recounted. Step by step the earth goes from empty to full; from lifeless to teeming life of all types—animals, birds and fish. And as the crowning achievement, man is installed at the apex of created beings with the commission to “rule over... all the creatures” (see Gen. 1:26).

It’s all so idyllic; so perfect. Creation has ended. Everything has been pronounced “very good” by God Himself. The man has a mate and a Sabbath rest commemorates the completion and perfection of creation.

Now chapter two begins. The author of the book of Genesis writes, “…the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up...” (Gen. 2:4-5, NIV).

Wait a minute! Doesn’t that seem almost a little odd? Similar conditions as described in Genesis 1:1 are repeated along with two similar facts. The first is almost an exact rewording of Genesis 1:1, “God made the earth and the heavens.” But now note the second part. “No shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up.” Instead of merely saying that the earth was empty, Genesis 2:5 defines the emptiness: there were no shrubs or plants.

Over the next verses the creation of the world is again chronicled—but this time from a very different perspective. The earth goes not just from empty to full, as described in Genesis 1, but from empty of plants to full of plants—the Garden of Eden.

Fascinating! This part of the creation account is often overlooked, yet it provides some interesting and meaningful insights into our purpose as humans.

Meeting Needs
Another way to describe this: Genesis 1 recounts creation from the perspective of how the earth—and more specifically, the Garden of Eden—was created for man, the ruler of the earth.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to serve it and provide for its needs.

But in Genesis 2, God presents creation from the perspective of how man was created for the Garden of Eden.

The Garden had needs and man was designed to meet the needs of the garden. This expresses the principles of God’s government—His law.

“The greatest among you will be your servant.” (Matt. 23:11, NIV)

“...the one who rules [should be] like the one who serves.” (Luke 22:26, NIV)

In the following sequence God outlines this concept:

1. “...there was no one to work the ground...” (Gen. 2:5, NIV)
2. “The LORD God formed the man from the soil of the fertile ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” (Gen. 2:7, NET)
3. “…the Lord God...planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.” (Gen. 2:8, NIV)
4. “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (Gen. 2:15, NIV, emphasis added)

The Hebrew word translated “work” (לַעֲבָדָה le-’a-ve-dah) in Genesis 2:15 means “to serve, to make oneself a servant” and the definition of “care” (עֵלָשָׁה u-le-sha- me-rah) is “to look after and provide for the needs of.”

Genesis 2:15 could accurately be
translated:
“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to serve it and provide for its needs.”

Yes, it is God who imparts life-

Today, as never before, there are serious reasons for agriculture.

giving energy to plants and soil causing them to grow. But the same God knew that the garden would also need intelligent management. There must be a vision for what the garden could become and in the quest to achieve that vision, challenges and obstacles would be encountered. As a result, He gave humans the power of imagination to create a vision; problem solving skills to find ways and means and tools and organizational skills to manage.

God had no intention for a garden He pronounced “good” to stay only “good.” His plan was higher than the highest thought could reach, and He imparted to man the privilege of not only enjoying the fruit of the garden, but being a co-worker with Him in creating an excellent garden.

How about today? Carefully note the following statement:

In the beginning, God looked upon all that He had made, and pronounced it very good. The curse was brought upon the earth in consequence of sin... But the earth has blessings hidden in her depths for those who have courage and will and perseverance to gather her treasures. (Fundamentals of Christian Education, p. 326-327)

“How hidden in her depths...”

In a way, each garden today is a micro-replica of the original earth at creation: “without form and empty” and like the first creation process shows, the garden is to benefit us and we are to serve it. We are to have a vision for what agriculture can be; we have to find ways and means and tools to achieve that vision and organizational skills to manage it.

Today, as never before, there are serious reasons for agriculture. “Never was any previous generation called to meet issues so momentous; never before were young men and young women confronted by perils so great as confront them today” (Child Guidance, p. 169)

Working the soil provides the essential preparation for this generation to meet these issues and perils. It gives health benefits, spiritual benefits, and family benefits, too. But in order to obtain them, agriculture needs to be
practiced. However, fewer farms exist today than ever in American history; fewer farms and fewer farmers. And within those ranks, the farmers are aging.

Why?

Farming has been pronounced unprofitable. People say that the soil does not pay for the labor expended upon it, and they bemoan the hard fate of those who till the soil...Many say, “We have tried agriculture and know what its results are...” (Child Guidance, p. 356)

It’s easy to see the grandeur of the creation account as recorded in Genesis 1. The picture of a garden that does wonderful things for me; that provides a perfect family environment, health, and spiritual enrichment offers great appeal. The problem is that to experience these benefits, one must farm. That’s where the “rub” comes; in most cases people will tell you that farming doesn’t pay—or startup is too costly.

This brings us again to Genesis 2. The Garden of Eden needed the intelligent management of an intelligent man and woman. Today, after six thousand years of degeneration, it needs it even more.

It’s time for a new commitment, a new beginning in agriculture.

Men were to cooperate with God in restoring the diseased land to health, that it might be a praise and a glory to His name. And as the land they possessed would, if managed with skill and earnestness, produce its treasures, so their hearts, if controlled by God, would reflect His character... (S.D.A. Bible Commentary vol. I, p. 1112)

Byron Smith runs the family-owned business, Sunizona Family Farms in Arizona, with his wife, Janice, and their children.

Psalm 65
A Farmer’s Psalm

1Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion, and to you shall vows be performed.
2O you who hear prayer, to you shall all flesh come.
3When iniquities prevail against me, you atone for our transgressions.
4Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts!
We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple!

5By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness, O God of our salvation, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas;
6the one who by his strength established the mountains, being girded with might;
7who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples,
8so that those who dwell at the ends of the earth are in awe at your signs.
You make the going out of the morning and the evening to shout for joy.

9You visit the earth and water it; you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide their grain, for so you have prepared it.
10You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.
11You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with abundance.
12The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.

Footnotes:
a 1 Or Praise waits for you in silence
b 9 Or and make it overflow
ESV® Text Edition: 2011
The Missing Element

IT SEEMED TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE!
A skin disease declared incurable by doctors, plaguing me for nearly thirty years, suddenly disappeared. Stress, late nights or unhealthy food triggered a Seborrheic dermatitis outbreak on my face—a red rash followed by an orange crusty scab. Toxic prescription shampoo kept this curse in check for the most part, but even then my face broke out from time to time without any apparent reason.

Disease is not a part of God’s original plan! At creation, God instituted a perfect environment insuring health and happiness. A careful analysis easily reveals that if we, as much as humanly possible, tried to emulate the components of that perfect environment, our health could be restored. Even in this fallen world—one racked with six thousand plus years of sin—a return to health and happiness is possible.

The esteemed NEWSTART program encompasses the main ingredients for good health. The acronym stands for Nutrition, Exercise, Water, Sunlight, Temperance, Air, Rest and Trust in God; all part of the perfect environment at the beginning.

Several years ago, I transitioned to a different form of ministry—a calling perhaps. It opened my eyes to missing elements of better health and happiness, a missing part of God’s original plan: Agriculture! Farming has become the most rewarding occupation of my life. Agriculture, in and of itself, and without effort, encompasses all the NEWSTART principles.

Nutrition: Growing our own food has supplied my wife and I with more nutritious, fresh, organic produce than we would otherwise afford.

Exercise: Daily my muscles are engaged in physical activity. Undeniably, exercise is a necessary part of life. Agriculture, without any thought or planning, easily fills that need; all accomplished without the expense of a costly gym membership.

Water: Anyone who has ever done physical work outside knows they will sweat. Since the adult body is roughly sixty to eighty percent water, it only makes sense that one must replenish what was used with pure clean water. This daily flush of water, too, takes no planning or thought. It is naturally craved after and relished. No other so-called thirst quencher even comes close to filling this need. Scientific research confirms the benefit of sweat which releases stress and toxins, cleansing the body of impurities.

Sunlight: Sunlight is almost always available during daylight hours. Research has overwhelmingly proved the benefit of sun-derived vitamin D. The agricultural lifestyle allows this essential vitamin to seep into my bones every day, no supplements needed!

Temperance: Ironically, when one becomes familiar with and used to nutritious foods and pure water, cravings for flavorful (and I include deceptive) substitutes are much easier to keep in check. With such a range of satisfying, nutrient-dense delights, being temperate is not the burdensome struggle many imagine.

Air: My lungs fill with fresh, ionized air throughout the day. I don’t need to go and walk outside for deep breaths to flush out stale indoor air; I am already there.

Rest: At night I lie down and close my eyes, feeling like I blink and the morning is here. Rest is so enjoyable and invigorating. No more mornings dragging by, but reenergized through the night, I move on to the task at hand like a well-oiled machine.

Trust In God: The 5000 and more are fed by an unseen hand germinating and bringing to life a dead seed, thrown into the ground and in slow motion multiplying it to meet their needs.

The farmer sees and knows all these things. His everyday life is NEWSTART on steroids. Miracles happen every day and the reality of a God who cares is seen continuously.

But even so, following these principles didn’t make a difference to my situation. Initially my overall health and well-being saw slight but not significant benefits.

So, what finally made the difference? All of the above, I’m sure, contributed to the unexpected healing, but it was not enough. Sometimes, because of sin, additional components may be needed. Much of the food grown today is deficient in trace elements and minerals. Eating foods grown in soil containing these missing elements met some unknown deficiency and chased away a disease uncured by any other means.

This came about by returning, as close as possible, to Earth’s original environment. We were created from mineral rich soil containing every element present in our bodies. Plants grown in this environment will replenish our deficiencies.

What a spiritual lesson! As we return to our “roots,” we are more able to meet the needs of a world deficient in the elements created by God for man’s health, and then to introduce them to the True Source of eternal happiness and well-being.

Darren Greenfield is an organic farmer, teacher, engineer, and pastor who lives and works at Weimar Institute, CA.
Ask the Farmers

“Someone sent me the video of Back to Eden gardening. Can you tell me if I should be doing that? I heard people are getting really good results.”

Alan

The problems I see with the method are 1) it is not Edenic because there was no death there; 2) there is more to soil nutrition than just wood chips; 3) it has a tendency to lock up soil nitrogen if you’re not careful; 4) you can’t top dress your crop with compost after you plant it or any other element for that matter; and 5) it’s very difficult on a large scale to obtain that much organic matter.

Pros: 1) it helps hold soil moisture which is a great idea if you have an orchard; 2) over a long period of time it will improve soil texture; 3) it will add some elements, but this will take a long time because of the carbon to nitrogen ratio; and 4) while it is not practical for an intensive cropping system, it is a good idea for berries and orchards.

Bob

The video seems to suggest that putting layers of woodchips on the garden works well, leading many to believe it’s that simple. However, there are a number of factors often being overlooked. Having experimented with woodchips and sawdust for years, I can respond regarding the use of wood-chips in heavy clay soil environments with higher levels of rainfall. Please keep in mind the gentleman showcased in the Back to Eden video lives in areas with high mineral volcanic soil, and rainfall of only 15-18 inches a year. Compare that to the East Coast (i.e. western North Carolina) soil that is heavy clay with an average annual rainfall of 45-50 inches.

It must first be noted: woodchips were not a part of the environment of Eden. I’m not sure from where the name Back to Eden originates. Secondly, woodchips are not what collects under trees in the forest, but rather leaves. Thirdly, garden plants require a different environment than trees in order to best thrive.

The vast majority of people who I’ve worked with, who’ve tried that method ended up with serious problems, often losing a whole year’s (or more) production. One family paid a considerable sum hauling in tons of wood chips; they lost that year’s garden. The next year they spent removing chips to regain use of their garden.

Woodchips will furnish beneficial, organic matter when broken down, but the key is when broken down. All high carbon materials require extra nitrogen in order for microbes that break them down to operate. Apart from all other negative factors affecting heavy clay, high rainfall soils, sufficient nitrogen must be available both for decomposition to take place and for plants growing in the same vicinity of the woodchips, otherwise the plants become nitrogen starved.

Nearly forty years ago I experimented with using course sawdust (like super small woodchips) as a mulch layer on some rows in my garden. The plants turned yellow and quit growing. I did not know what the problem was at the time, but after doing some research I discovered that all high carbon materials (straw, sawdust, woodchips, etc.) require additional nitrogen for decomposition in order to not draw the nitrogen out of any nearby plants. I got some nitrogen fertilizer and side dressed the plants with it. They soon turned green and started growing. This same effect will be experienced where wood chips are used fresh or only partially decomposed, unless some additional nitrogen source is furnished.

Calcium nitrate is an excellent source for this purpose. Some might object that it is a chemical fertilizer, and therefore toxic to the soil. As a matter of fact, it is not toxic to the soil any more than salt is toxic to the soil. Salt or any other substance is not toxic if it’s meeting a nutritional need, is used in proper quantities and applied appropriately. Calcium nitrate is a pure substance that is much safer than the cottonseed meal, soybean meal, and animal manures permitted in organ farming. Microbial life and activity is significantly benefited with applications of calcium nitrate in such situations as high carbon organic matter that is intended for composting. Other nitrogen sources may be used such as alfalfa meal (be careful of GMO sources or herbicide treated sources), fish emulsion such as Neptune’s Harvest, etc.

One problem that a number of people have encountered with woodchip applications on heavy clay in our environment east of the Mississippi is that the ground stays more soggy and anaerobic, causing putrefaction rather than decomposition. The formaldehyde and methane gases can be detected from the sewer-like smell that comes from the layers of organic matter at the bottom when you scrape back the upper layers. This indicates that there is not enough aeration of the soil below the chips. This will be the case anywhere you uncover organic material that is not able to get enough air for decomposition. Instead, the process of putrefaction will take over and the toxic gasses produced are an additional negative factor for trying to grow any suitable garden crops.

So lack of nitrogen and lack of sufficient aeration are two major handicaps, particularly when applying fresh woodchips on the garden. The more dense and heavy the soil in the garden, the greater the liability from putting down even small layers of wood chips.

The best approach, if one desires to use woodchips for the garden, is to pile...
up the woodchips, mixing enough calcium nitrate (15% nitrogen) or other nitrogen source to obtain a ratio of carbon to nitrogen. Sawdust and woodchips can be estimated at 40% carbon and almost no nitrogen.

Woodchips cut from green trees including foliage, during the summer, will have a little more nitrogen and will decompose faster (if there is enough air and moisture through the pile) than woodchips from dormant wood during the winter. When the woodchips are at least 75–80% decomposed (more black dirt than woodchips left) then they may be safe to use to a depth of 2 to 3 inches in the garden. It would still be well to supplement with a little nitrogen. If using calcium nitrate (which also supplies needed calcium), the proportion needs to be roughly 9 lbs. calcium nitrate for every 100 lbs. of wood chips (or sawdust). It’s important to keep your pile moist, mix thoroughly and occasionally turn the pile allowing adequate aeration.

**John**

Caring bare soil is a very good thing; that is God’s design. All of nature will work to cover itself if you leave the soil naked. Clearly the gentleman in the video is obtaining good results from this method. My concern with the video (I’ve only watched it once) is that it might make people think woodchip mulching is the “silver bullet” to all their gardening challenges. Things are rarely that simple. For those in the Eastern US, hardwood chips, depending on soil conditions, take a long time (sometime years) to break down. If the chips are inadvertently mixed into the soil, you can develop serious nitrogen deficiencies. Finding wood chips can also be a challenge. My advice: Use wisdom and discretion whenever you try something new. Experiment on a part of your garden and observe the results first before covering the entire area. Experiment with other types of mulches—grass clippings, leaves, old hay or straw. Different kinds of plants respond to different mulches. One of the best methods many market gardeners use is intensive planting so that the leaves of the growing plants make a “shade mulch.” God will give wisdom and understanding as you walk and work with Him in the garden.

**Darren**

The video never should have been called Back to Eden. The method is comprised of two main ingredients: wood chips and compost, neither of which were present in Eden. Both derive from dead plant material.

Most soil is mineral deficient. Adding compost to soil provides two benefits: 1) a concentration of minerals, and 2) an influx of microbial life which works to make minerals available to plants. Worms digest compost and turn it into wonderful life-giving fertilizer, immediately available to plants.

Unlike compost which has a percentage of nitrogen available, wood chips contain little and are mostly made up of carbon. Wood chips only start decomposing when in contact with nitrogen-rich soil. Wood chips consume what little Nitrogen is available in the soil. Thus plants are deprived of a vital nutrient, resulting in yellow leaves, stunting, and pests.

When soil is in its most fertile condition, the ratios of minerals come very close to that of our blood. We need to understand the mineral make-up of our soil and supplement as needed. To do this, soil needs to be sent to a lab for analysis.

For instance, at Weimar Farms, we use a product called Sea-90 containing 90 elements which replenishes many lost minerals from soil.

Compost can be used, when minerals are supplemented, if it has been analyzed and added to the equation. In doing this we have experienced much better results. Overuse of compost results in phosphorus buildup to excessive amounts resulting in a binding effect on other minerals vital to the health of plants. This is just one of a list of other complications compounded when compost is used excessively. The best money we have spent on the farm has been for soil tests. The health of the plants, their resistance to disease and even pests is testimony to this being a better approach. Additionally plant yield and flavor are increased.

Successful gardening is a work of cooperation with our Creator. The closer we come to Him and His redeeming love, the more we will see that His ways are higher than our ways. He promises to teach us if we are willing and obedient.

**Daniel**

The very term Back to Eden gives one the impression that they are returning to something lost. But, quick thinking will reveal that there existed no death in the Garden of Eden. Woodchips personify death. A tree or trees had to die to provide the chips. I’m sure others will delve into the issue of nitrogen, moisture rot, etc. I believe the gentleman is trying to address an issue as best he can. Allan Kennedy of TN has taught for years that after the flood, the soil was depleted, if you will. Many of the elements found in the rich soils were washed away. As farmers, through soil analysis, we endeavor to replenish those lost elements. The woodchips we obtain, even after they’re broken down may not necessarily replenish the missing elements. It’s true they provide organic matter, but sometimes that’s pretty much it. My suggestion: Do a soil test, and add the missing elements. If you need a mulch or ground cover, look into organic mulches, plastic mulches, straw, or hay. But, be careful to research where your material comes from, and what potential chemicals they may contain.

If you have a question you would like us to address, please submit it to info@adventistag.org.

Include in the subject “Roots Q&A.”
Returning to Our “Roots”

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Garner Creek Retreat Center
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- “What is God’s plan for agriculture in these last days?”
- “How do we successfully incorporate agriculture into our daily lives, or in our educational and health institutions?”
- “We know families have made a living farming, but can they ‘make a living’ in agriculture following God’s principles?”
- “How do I build healthy soil?”
- “How do I start a garden?”