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## **Go Garden!** ~ *Brian Crumblebulme*

A '70s gardening book in my possession claims that by careful planning and intensive cultivation the average family can become self-sufficient in produce on 700 square feet of growing space. That's a smaller footprint than the average garage. Assuming this does not include rice, wheat, tea & coffee, it's still impressive, some might suggest wishful thinking.

Enter the Dervaes family of Pasadena California. In 1995 this family of four decided to convert their 50 x 150ft suburban lot complete with house and garage into a vegetable garden; within a couple of years they were self-sufficient, a couple of years after that found them selling their excess to friends and local restaurants. Today the enterprise employs the whole family, provides all their produce and meat (from chickens, ducks, and rabbits), and pays the annual electricity and gasoline bills. For the record, the top sellers this year are morning-picked salad mix, heirloom tomatoes, unique herbs & garnish, and fresh duck eggs. Not bad for 50 feet of raised beds and a roof-top water collection system.

There was a time not so long ago, when most families were self-sufficient in terms of produce. Today a little historical and geographical perspective would suggest that the prevailing North American marketing of off-shore produce is really just a tottering aberration.

This spring my wife and I were privileged to visit the Island of Crete where we ate local food, drank local wines, and peered over garden walls. One friendly family invited me to examine their 100ft lot complete with chickens, rabbits, goats, a couple of pigs, rows of vegetables, and a small orchard. They also had shares in a vineyard. Over homemade raki, oranges, and slices of apple, we talked gardening.

In Cretan terms, living implies engaging with the land, the salaried job paid for the family car and trips to Europe.

In Canada, there are many regions blessed with what I call extreme climates, when it's not too hot, it's too cold. Even under these conditions, it is still entirely practical to raise fruit, vegetables, and even animals on a small lot.

Here in the Salish Sea it is almost criminal not to exploit the four seasons for a cornucopia of healthy, fresh produce. Such was the case only a couple of generations ago, and now it's happening all over again. We watch delighted urbanites park their SUV's as they discover that potatoes need to be dug out of the ground and that apples do grow on trees.

A while ago I read yet another US economist auger the cultural changes precipitated by the current oil price fiasco, According to James Howard Kunstler, 'We will be living in a far less affluent society.' Airports will be a shadow of their present size and the majority of us will be working the land. Simple economics will dictate that the most valuable thing a person can own is soil not oil. From Havana to New York roof-top gardens, community plots and raised beds are not a fashion but a necessity, a way of life. Family-plot owners quickly free themselves from the mainstream economy. Even small growing areas create a quality way of life, initiate independence, and they make the smallest ecological footprint relative to their yield.

Once again we are witnessing the reinvention of the wheel of life as media gurus ponder the wisdom of small. Small is anathema to multinationals and the governments they control. But small businesses still create 80% of the new jobs in this country. And—coming to a lot near you—independent cottage gardens could make the supermarket irrelevant. ☞

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