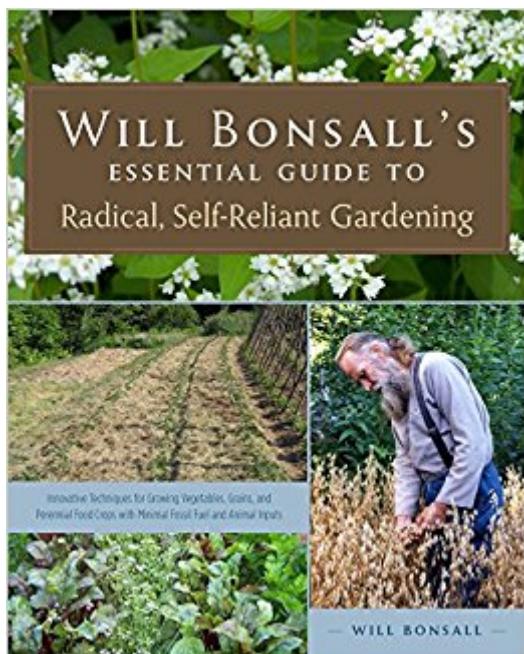


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# Will Bonsall's Essential Guide To Radical, Self-Reliant Gardening: Innovative Techniques For Growing Vegetables, Grains, And Perennial Food Crops With Minimal Fossil Fuel And Animal Inputs



## Synopsis

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

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Publishers Weekly- "Homesteader, organic farmer, and visionary Bonsall offers a thorough, albeit apocalyptic, farming guide to surviving the current times and, if need be, the end times. The title is misleading; the book is not so much a gardening guide as a set of survival instructions, and not for the casual gardener. Drawing on 40 years of personal experience growing his own food, Bonsall emphasizes three principles: economic exigency that requires making do; planning to survive a future catastrophe; and transforming civilization. To this end, the book focuses on staple foods, including grains, dried legumes, and oilseeds, as well as the usual greens and root crops, while discussing such fundamentals as assessing soil fertility, composting, using manure (including human), mulching, grafting, pollinating, seed saving, milling, malting, freezing and fermenting. The book will not suit everyone, but those who share Bonsall's vision will be well served and firmly grounded. Over 200 full-color photos. --John Jeavons, author, executive director of Ecology Action, and developer of sustainable biointensive mini-farming"Will Bonsall's homestead is a 'thinking farm,' not one engaged in armchair musings about agriculture, but where difficult questions are addressed by intense experimentation. This book pairs the incredible depth of Bonsall's gardening knowledge with his infectious enthusiasm. It is both a magnificent reference and an inspiring call to action. Every practical lesson throughout is guided by the vision that our humble gardens can affect the world."--Steve Conaway, Conservation and Outreach Director at Greenwich (CT) Land Trust--Every gardener and small farmer can benefit from Will Bonsall's decades of focused, quality experience. Will's book is one of the key practical resources you should read as you reach for full sustainable soil fertility in your garden or farm!--John Jeavons, author and developer of sustainable biologically intensive food-growing--Here is a bright star in the constellation of voices for land-based sustainability. Not only is Will Bonsall incredibly learned -- the result of decades of careful studies in the field and out -- he is bawdy and brave and bold. His credibility is a Ph.D. in homesteading and his rambunctious wisdom is very worth reading. If you want to learn from a master, you need this book.--Janisse Ray, author of The Seed Underground"The risk of describing Will Bonsall's Essential Guide to Radical, Self-Reliant Gardening as a gardening

book is that the aspiring reader may miss the reality that it is really a book onÂ life, centered as a good life should be, around a garden. Will is a patient teacher with encyclopedic knowledge. His writing style is warm and authentic, accentuated by his dry New England humor. To read this book is akin to having Will stop by and visit by the glowing kitchen cookstove. He shares a lifetime of observations and conclusions â “ both useful and essential â “ and a deep respect for those who have come before us."--Jim Gerritsen, certified organic seed potato grower and owner of Wood Prairie Farm"Will Bonsallâ •Mr. Scatterseed himselfâ •has done it all, and this book covers it all, from maintaining soil fertility with minimal external inputs to growing annual and perennial vegetables, fruit, nuts, grain, beans, and even oilseed crops. Willâ ™s methods are all vegan based and garden scale, with little resort to tools beyond hand tools and a rototiller and shredder. His description of making oil-seed seed meals and cooking with them is particularly interesting. Willâ ™s book is a great introduction to gardening for the beginner, and it also offers enough brand new original material to delight even the most expert. Best of all, the interweaving of Willâ ™s coherent personal philosophy, decades of gardening experience, down-to-earth style, and touches of humor all make for an interesting, entertaining read."--Carol Deppe, author ofÂ The Tao of Vegetable GardeningÂ Â andÂ The Resilient Gardener"Eco-efficiencyÂ is the key new word andÂ gardens-without-bordersÂ is the key new concept with which Will Bonsall illuminates 'this experiment we call civilization.' His view is wide and deep. You can accept his warm, witty invitation to explore the big questions. Or/and you can, with grace and ease, pluck out practical, hands-on directions as needed for all aspects of cyclical food production and use. I will read it again and again for reference, guidance, inspiration, and delight."--Eva Sommaripa, pioneering organic farmer at Eva's Garden in Dartmouth, Massachusetts, and the hero ofÂ Wild Flavors by Didi Emmons"If you wish to live well and eat well no matter what is going on in the rest of the world, this book is for you. Thresh your own grain and press your own oil. Can't buy seeds, no problem. Can't buy fertilizer, no problem. Will Bonsall will help you enjoy the good life under any and all conditions."--Eliot Coleman, author of The New Organic GrowerÂ and The Winter Harvest Handbook

Will Bonsall has worn many hats since going "back to the land," including prospector, draftsman, gravedigger, hobo, musician, logger, and artist, among others; however, he considers subsistence farming to be the only true career he ever had. He is the director of the Scatterseed Project, which he founded to help preserve our endangered crop-plant diversity. His first book, Through the Eyes of a Stranger (Xlibris, 2010), is an eco-novel set in a sustainable society of the future. Will lives and farms in Industry, Maine, with his wife, Molly Thorkildsen, and two sons.

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

Awesome book. Thorough, based on decades of experience.

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

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

A wealth of experience and helpful information for anyone who is trying to live more sustainably in New England....or anywhere, for that matter.

This is an excellent book for the gardener who wants to get more OFF the land by first putting good stuff ON the land. This can be done by diligent composting techniques without animal manures. You could still use animal waste but this book would help you fertilize your land without them. This text is also about taking care of yourself, like composting and seed saving, as opposed to buying more farming "stuff" to improve your crops. IF you are an organic gardener or farmer at any level, you should definitely read this to gain new insight on what "organic gardening" really means. If you would like a better garden and have your humanity intact at the end of the growing season, then buy this book now and read it before spring. An added bonus is the homespun wisdom and tongue-in-cheek humor included within the horticultural information.

The best book ever written on sustainable food production hands down.

Book is extremely informative. Easy read, easy to understand. A must have for any level of gardening!!!!

Probably one of the most informative sustainability/gardening books I've read so far. Lots of great information!

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