

Survive and Thrive

Corvallis garden expert's latest book

The Good Earth Home and Garden Show is coming up in Eugene this month. One of the scheduled speakers is Carol Deppe, Corvallis plant breeder, expert gardener and an authority on duck keeping. Deppe will also be signing her latest book, *The Resilient Gardener: Food Production and Self-reliance in Uncertain Times*, published by Chelsea Green. This exciting book could hardly be more timely. The uncertain times of the title extend from personal adversity to the shared uncertainties that now confront all of us.

Widespread financial insecurity. An industrial food supply that denies us proper nourishment. Global climate change that promises shortages of food and water and an increase in "natural" disasters.

Not surprisingly, people are increasingly interested in growing some of their own food — it's a way of exercising some level of control in our lives. Maybe it just means having something in the garden to fall back on if we forget to shop for greens, or a bed or two of something special that is prohibitively expensive to buy. A small but growing band of gardeners are producing a substantial portion of their food supply. Whatever our level of gardening, Deppe points out, most of us still garden for the good times. She wants us to prepare for the challenges that must come sooner or later, including wild weather, special dietary needs, failing strength and unavailability of inputs (water, fertilizer, fuel, even seed). So diet, health, labor and exercise, tools, soil and fertility, watering and seed saving are all addressed with this very smart author's characteristic depth and thoughtfulness.

Deppe's book lays out in great detail how to grow, store and use "the five crops you need to survive and thrive — potatoes, corn, beans, squash and eggs." Many people could

get by without the eggs, but Deppe believes (based on her own experience) a purely vegan diet is not for everyone. Each of these staples gets a chapter to itself. Other crops are discussed in earlier chapters, often with valuable insights you won't find anywhere else. Chapter notes include references to books that provide more basic gardening know-how.

There's not much point in growing something if you don't know how to store it successfully, or get it to the table in a palatable form. Deppe grows several varieties of her staple plant foods, both for flavor variety and because some are good for one thing, some another. Some corn varieties, for instance, are good for polenta, some for baked goods. Why corn, not wheat? Deppe is gluten intolerant and highly allergic to wheat, and she has lots of experience with alternatives, especially corn: "delicious, traditional corn varieties," that is, not the modern hybrid corn of agribusiness. But she also explains that corn is much easier to grow and harvest than other grains, and gives a higher yield than all crops except potatoes.

Potatoes reign supreme among staple foods for their ease of production, versatility and nutritional value. They are a good source of high quality protein as well as calories, and can be grown in areas too cold and wet to grow grain, and on poorer soils. Remarkably, Deppe grows potatoes without irrigation, and her storage method is about as simple as you could imagine. The chapter on potatoes is one of the most densely useful pieces of gardening literature I've ever read, not least for its treatment of potato diseases: how to avoid them, how to spot them and what to do about it.

I asked Deppe, by email, why she didn't include rabbits in her brief discussion of meat animals. She replied giving several reasons in great detail, adding, "I didn't have the



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Carol Deppe

room or the personal experience ... And *The Resilient Gardener* was designed to cover certain topics in much greater detail than they are normally covered, not to be yet one more superficial treatment giving just a little bit about everything." That is the strength of *The Resilient Gardener*: its wealth of detail of the kind that reflects a lifetime of experience, carefully observed. If sometimes, just sometimes, the level of detail seems a bit over the top, that's easily forgiven. I'm confident that everyone, beginner or expert, will learn from this book and feel better prepared to carry their gardening to a new level.

Go to www.caroldeppe.com for a free download of the table of contents and first chapter of *The Resilient Gardener*. You can also sign up to receive a list of the new seed varieties Deppe is releasing this year.

Deppe will speak at noon Jan. 22 at the Good Earth Home and Garden Show, Lane County Fairgrounds. Book signing follows at 1 pm. She will also speak at noon Feb. 12 at a fundraiser for the Benton County Master Gardeners, at the LaSells Stewart Center, 875 SW 26th St. in Corvallis. **EW**

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