
S O I L

SOIL

NEW FROM THE FARM. SEDUCTIVE, SEXY SOIL.

Go on. Give in. Feel the silkiness of biodiverse soil under your feet, soothing and protecting the earth. Let it whisper over your skin with earthy scents and notes of chicory, plantain and clover. Allow it to regenerate and revitalise the ground. This new range, Soil Nº5 is the best the Farm has to offer. Every body alive wants some.

SOIL Nº5

SOIL

NEW FROM THE FARM. SEDUCTIVE, SEXY SOIL·

WELCOME & THANK YOU

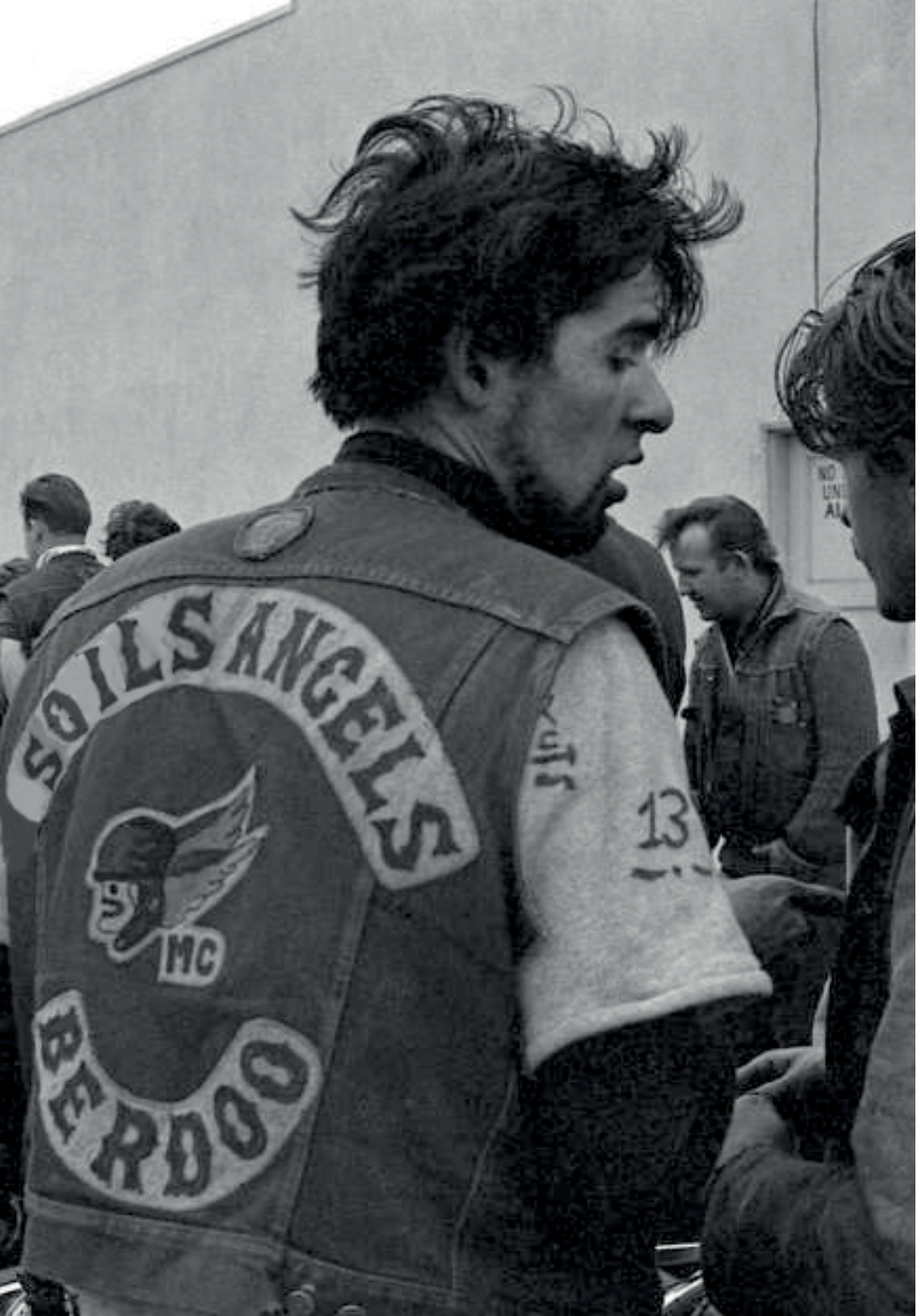
Welcome
to the first instalment of SOIL,
a zine all about, you guessed it, soil!

I'm Ananya, a second-year student at Goldsmith's University, and I've spent the last four months delving into the complexity of soil, from fungi to microorganisms, earthworms to bacteria. As a 21-year-old, it can feel overwhelming watching and reading about droughts, heatwaves, and other climate-related issues; wondering what's the right thing to do. I often felt helpless and confused, a little like this guy on the right, staring out at something too big to get my head around.

However, once I started learning about this fascinating life force, finding out incredible things like "dead soil can be brought back to life," I realised that we have the solution. So I set about talking with some of the leading voices in this field, plus some friends and fellow students who are all on the same path as me, to learn more about how they are engaging with nature, the planet, and most importantly, soil.

I hope that this zine can go some way to making you feel inspired to be more curious about the wonders under our feet and maybe encourage you to get into the garden, or even to just share some incredible soil facts around the dinner table. It's easy: healthy soil means healthy food and that means a healthy planet.

Ananya



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Test Your Soil Knowledge

Are these facts TRUE or FALSE??

1 SOIL IS ALIVE! IT'S NOT JUST DIRT

2 UNLIKE EVERY OTHER LIVING THING, DEAD SOIL CAN BE BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE

3 95% OF OUR FOOD IS GROWN IN THE SOIL

4 SOIL STORES MORE CARBON THAN THE ATMOSPHERE AND ALL THE EARTH'S FORESTS AND PLANTS COMBINED

5 1/4 OF EARTH'S SPECIES CALL SOIL THEIR HOME

6 ONLY 1% OF THE MICROORGANISMS FOUND IN SOIL HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED SO FAR

7 POST WAR FARMING (CONVENTIONAL FARMING) IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST POLLUTING INDUSTIRES IN THE WORLD, DESTROYING SOIL AND OUR LAND

8 EVERY MINUTE WE LOSE THE EQUIVELENT OF 30 FOOTBALL PITCHES OF FERTILE SOIL

9 WE LEARN ABOUT HISTORY THROUGH SOIL

10 THERE ARE MORE LIVING THINGS IN A TEASPOON OF SOIL THAN THERE ARE HUMANS ON EARTH

11 SOIL ONLY NEEDS 5% ORGANIC MATTER TO APPEAR BLACK WHEN WET

12 EARTHWORMS WHICH LIVE IN SOIL ARE CONSIDERED 'ECOSYSTEM ENGINEERS'

13 SOIL STORES HUGE AMOUNTS OF WATER, HELPING TO PREVENT DROUGHT

14 COVER CROPS RETURN NUTRIENTS TO THE SOIL

15 EARTHWORMS CAN GROW UP TO 1.5M LONG

1:True - 2:True - 3:True - 4:True - 5:True - 6:True - 7:True 8:True 9: True - 10:True - 11:True - 12:True - 13:True - 14:True - 15:True

THE SOIL STARTER
1 - 5 Correct

Soil is an abundant topic. There is so much to learn and you're just at the start of your journey. Get digging!

THE SOIL STUDENT
6 - 10 Correct

You've got the basics down. But soil is vast and there is so much more for you to soak up ...

THE SOIL SAVIOUR
11 - 15 Correct

You know your soil stats! Keep growing your knowledge and sow those seeds with everyone you know.

FROM COSMOS TO COMPOST

with
JOHN
CRAWFORD

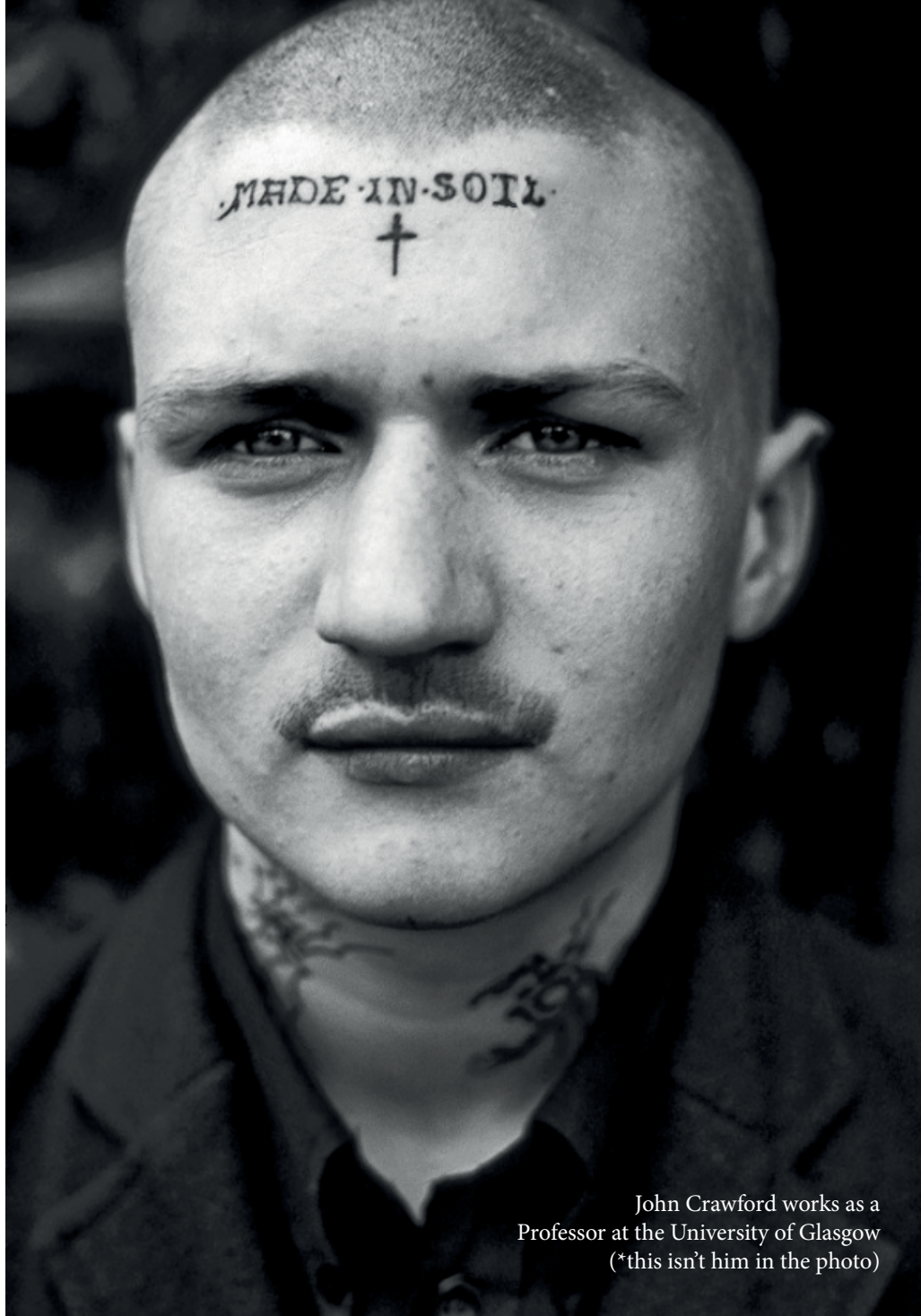
John Crawford's career started in astronomy and physics. In his words, he was doing stuff to do with "the clustering of galaxies, and what these clusterings tell us about the origin of the universe." Big things, you know. Then John started learning about soil. He thought: "It's also a clustered thing, like, if you could measure the way it's clustered (the health and spontaneous life) you might be able to tell something about where it comes from."

That's where the soil obsession started for John, exploring the virtually unknown, mind-blowingly expansive, network of life, that is soil. Back in 2016 biologists at Indiana University said there's an estimated 99.999 percent of species which have yet to be discovered. Many of these live in the soil. According to Wired, the same scientists said "it's not uncommon for a gram of soil to contain one trillion cells and 10,000 species of bacteria."

In terms of the human experience, Crawford says that "soil is the basis of natural fertility. Everything comes from the soil, everything goes back into the soil." On earth, soil is where life comes from, essentially. But Crawford believes soil could be a solution to helping the planet (as we know it) survive too. Brains included, Crawford thinks soil is "the most complex and important biomaterial on the planet". And the oldest signs of life, too. "After trees, soil is the next most significant nature based solution" he says. Given farmers are custodians of much of the soil on the planet, ensuring as many as possible are conscious of ways to improve biodiversity and regenerate the health of their soil would have a monumental impact in helping to slow, if not halt, climate change.

As for those not farming, Crawford has a simple way of helping to increase biodiversity in fields: "Eat better. Eat more plants, add more diversity to your diet. If you're eating a more diverse diet, there has to be more diversity in the field. Not just for yourself, but for everything you know."

WRITTEN BY RHYS THOMAS



John Crawford works as a
Professor at the University of Glasgow
(*this isn't him in the photo)

The Man with the Microbes

A conversation with Tom Fairfax, a Northumberland-based farmer making the switch from conventional farming to regenerative farming

I wanted to start by asking you to talk about your journey into regenerative farming. What do you do and when did you start this process?

My father moved here in 1955 and we had always used conventional farming methods on our fields. We are a small farm of 1150 acres in Northumberland here on the Mindrum Estate and it was about 4 years ago that it became clear to me that everything was feeling a bit thin. Our profits were becoming tighter year by year and it struck me most when we had a couple of years where our winter crop yield was not much different from our spring crop yield due to the difference in input costs. Conventional farming methods are hugely dependent on chemicals which doesn't help to create the healthy conditions we need to support the soil and make good crops. It doesn't invest in our systems. Unlike regenerative farming. And so, about 2-3 years ago, we began to make the switch to regenerative farming and we have been converting ever since.

How are you working to create healthy systems on your farm and what processes have you been looking at?

In conventional farming, we have replaced biology, which is integral to a healthy farming cycle, with agro-chemistry, which is a lot worse for the system in the long term. And what we want to do here (on the farm) is put the biology back. To start, we want to try to understand what's going on, understand what we are trying to achieve and then aim to design strategies to achieve this. I started doing the foundation course by the Soil Food Web which was difficult but brilliant and it illuminated how vital this switch to regenerative farming is. The Soil Food Web has helped to provide me with a framework that gives a detailed understanding of the soil and a

variety of methods to fit each farm. Every farm is different and in conventional farming, the 'one size fits all' framework doesn't adapt to the individual conditions needed for healthy soil. We have only just begun to understand and design strategies to help our land and the Soil Food Web is giving me a great, holistic context within which to operate, showing how biology is essential to the soil in order to build healthier, resistant systems that can survive by themselves.

I read that one of the things you do to build healthier systems is use the technique of Korean Natural Farming. How did you get involved with this technique and could you briefly explain what it is?

I came across Korean Natural Farming (KNF) when I was desperately trying to find answers. In KNF, there is a really good set of disciplines and tools to produce natural additives which have really helped my farming. It is a process of collecting indigenous microbes, such as fungi, in your surrounding area, conservating them at farm scale and then deploying them to support soil biology and soil health. I collect the samples myself but you can also buy them in bulk, so it's pretty easy to start.

How does this technique help you on your farm?

KNF builds up the amount of natural, local microbes in the soil. The fungi and bacteria we collect help the plants to find sugars and generate nutrients which boost the diversity of life found in the fields, creating healthier food and helping to contain carbon and water in the soil.

So, talk to me about soil. How could we tell if soil is healthy or bad? Are there any key features?

There are many different things you can look at because there are many different types of soil. You can feel the difference. You can smell the difference. It smells, I hate to say it, earthy. I can really tell the difference when I use my microscope. When you really look at it, you can see it's alive. My microscope is essential for my farming. I think at the moment, everyone is talking about soil but no one actually looks at it.

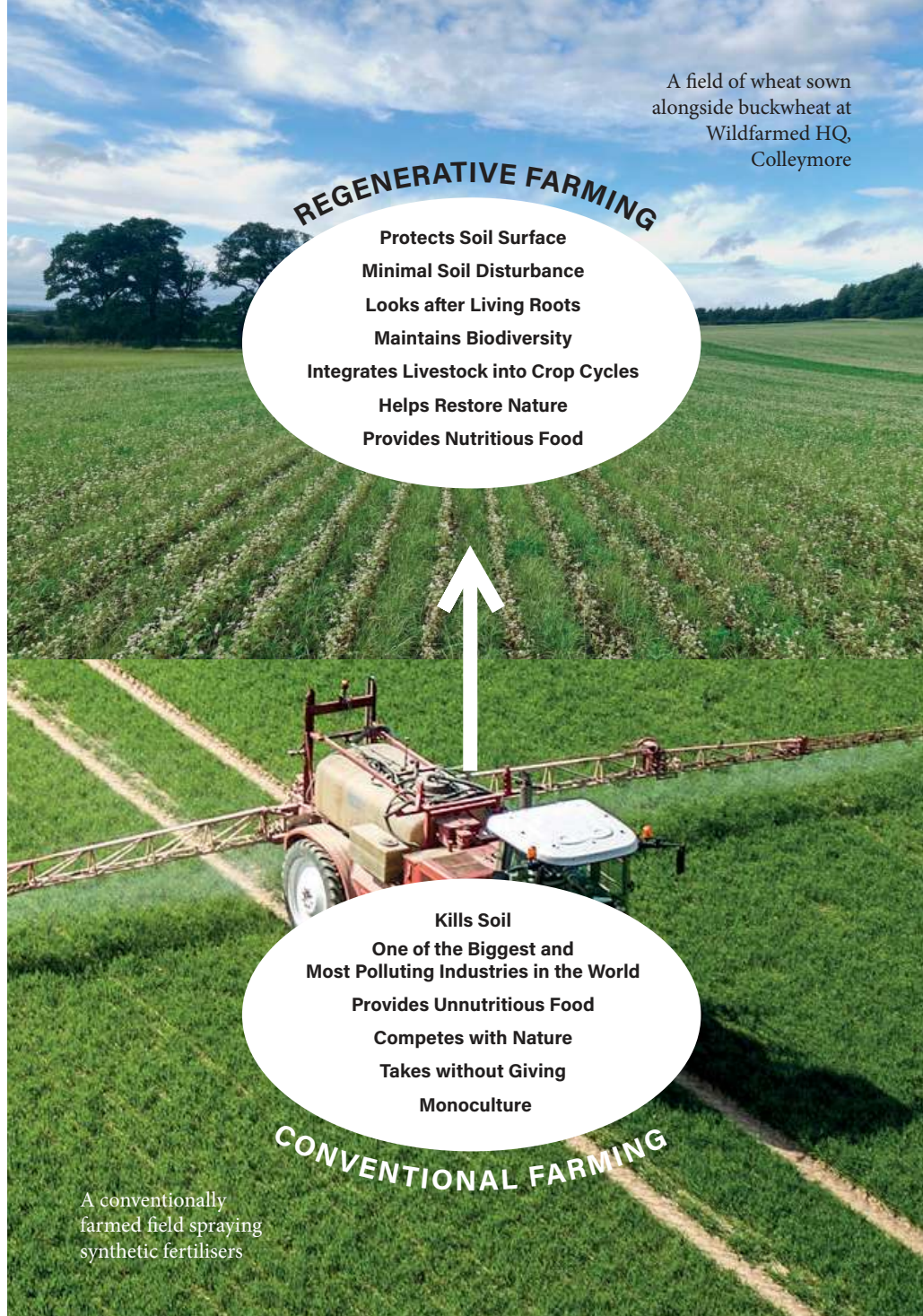
Why is regenerative farming the way to go?

Conventional farming is like filling a glass of wine and drinking from it. At some point, the wine will run out and we will be left with an empty glass. And this is what is happening right now. We are destroying the soil by taking too much or overfilling so we have nitrates spilling into the rivers. Regenerative farming gives us a way to create more balance and support healthy life for everything, not just us! And I think it is the way forward.

Completely, so why do you feel like we should care more about the soil?

Because it is the basis of everything that we depend on to live. If we don't have healthy soil, we don't have a healthy world with healthy people. There are more organisms in a tablespoon full of soil than there are human beings on the planet. And that's incredible.

To learn more about Tom and his farm, take a look at www.mindrumestate.co.uk/



A field of wheat sown alongside buckwheat at Wildfarmed HQ, Colleymore

A conventionally farmed field spraying synthetic fertilisers

GETTING OFF THE TREADMILL

With Kate Still

WRITTEN BY HOLLY HOLDER

Kate Still works at the Soil Association, a charity that campaigns against intensive farming, so we figured talking to her might be a good starting point when learning all about soil and farming. As Head of Farming Programmes, Kate works daily with farmers helping them to transition to regenerative farming, acknowledging that "they've been stuck on a bit of treadmill". "The idea of cutting themselves off, you know, is obviously quite a terrifying prospect. So it's understanding that it's quite a slow, steady transition to rebuild that soil fertility and soil health and soil organic matter going forward."

Over the years farmers have overgrazed their fields, lost that much-needed bacterial balance by overspraying chemicals and killed biodiversity by sowing a single monoculture. They're now "looking and testing what they've got, because they just sort of assumed it was doing okay". And the pressure is on as government subsidies prioritise farming regeneratively and consumer demand is increasing for more products that "recover and replenish soil health". With any shift in behaviour, acknowledging that "the choice that you've made previously were the wrong choices is obviously quite challenging" but as Kate deals with this daily, she knows that one of the best ways to help this transition is "to give farmer's access to each other."

"A lot of it is about confidence building, and a lot of it is about hand holding and seeing what your neighbour has achieved, seeing what people have achieved on the same soil types as you, in the same situation, so that you can build confidence."

Transitioning over to a regenerative way of farming can be daunting, but taking "baby steps" with some "low risk" methods proves successful, from "cover crops" to applying "farming manure" is a good "quick and relatively non-scary practice to do." For Kate, moving away from inputs and towards a regenerative way of farming is paramount: "the climatic impacts of nitrogen production, the biodiversity destruction from agro-chemical use, and the massive potential to store carbon in healthy soils [...] we can't afford not to". As the world heats up, and the climate catastrophe looms, we are "still lacking evidence". Research costs money, and right now agrichemicals are still king. However, the Soil Association is working on an "innovative farmers programme, a sort of farmer-led research", to provide somewhere for farmers to learn and share their knowledge.

Looking ahead, Kate is finding "funky bacteria" within mob grazing a minefield of information, she's realising how little we know about "soil biology" and is looking forward to doing more worm hunts and continuing to learn about this complex world of soil.

To find out more, check out -

www.soilassociation.org/

FLOWERBOMB

Ever thought
of doing graffiti?

Making a patch of miserable
concrete look a bit better?

Course you have.
Now look down.

Look at the damaged, dry soil and the withered grass and the tiny patches of wilderness between the roads and pavements.

What about sprucing that up a bit?
And what about it actually doing some good?

What about creating an
environment for biodiversity,
and for better soil,
and for

a nice sight
for your eyes?

What if we put down the
spray and pick up some flower
bombs instead?

What if we then plant these in places
in the dead of night?

What if nature reclaims the city again?

Call it land art.
Call it reclamation and natural
re-beautification of public space.
Call it regeneration.
Call it activism if you want.

Do good.

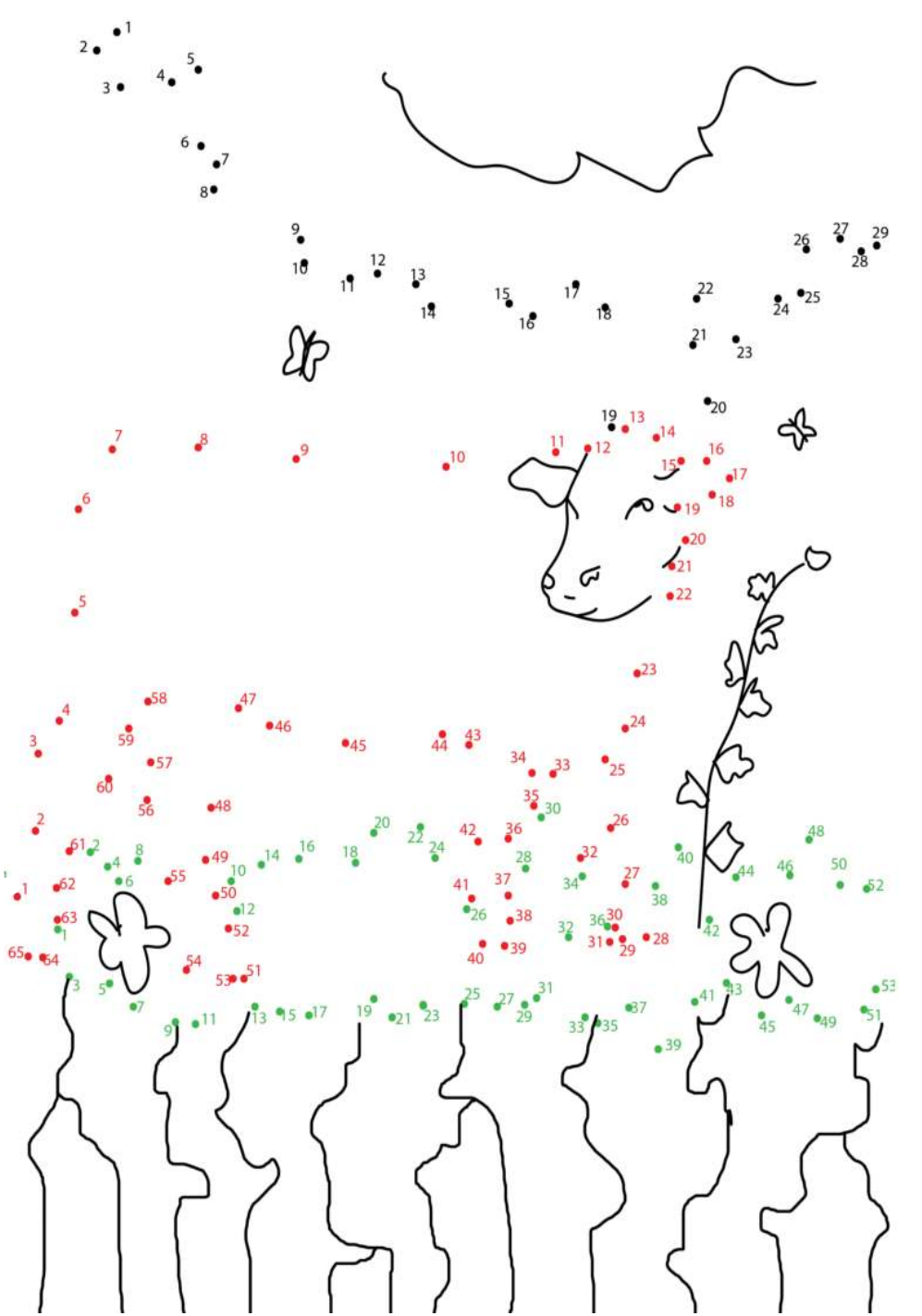
Drop flower
bombs.

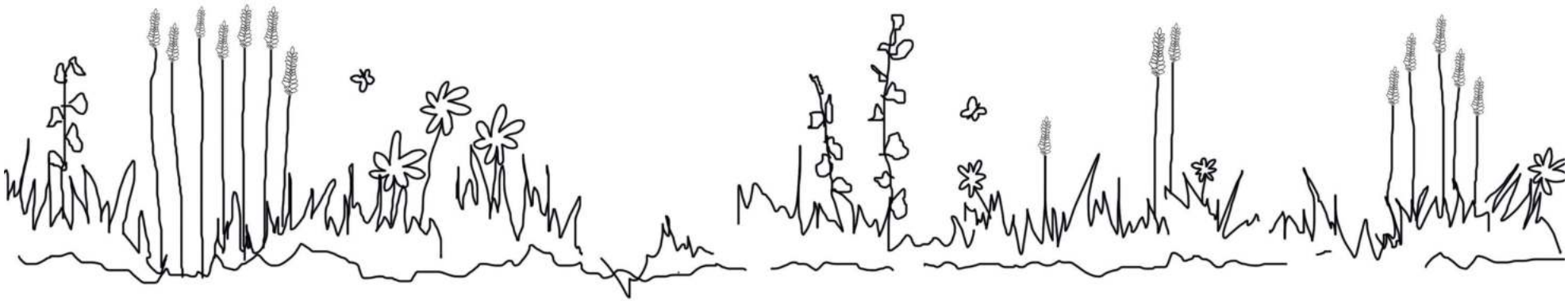
FLOWERBOMB

Why not search on Ecosia for D.I.Y Flower Bombs to find out how to make your own!

I spoke to Dr. Adam Cobb, academic and mentor at the Soil Food Web who stated "We can see in history what has happened to civilisations when we do not care for soil - look at Babylon for example. The loss of soil will cause the displacement of people that will affect us all, no matter who we are or where in the world we live". Adam says, however, people are innovative and there is still space to be hopeful with what we can do and achieve to change this situation.

If the world treated each other with the same love and respect that nature does, then wouldn't that be a wonderful place to be, for humans, animals and nature alike?





Draw what
you find in the soil!
Tag @wildfarmed
with your
creation!

WHAT MINERALS DO WE NEED FOR HEALTHY SOIL?

Soil is a major source of nutrients needed by plants for growth. The three main nutrients are nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K). However, as soil health has depleted over time, we've lost these minerals by spraying synthetic fertilisers onto the crops, growing monocultures that take from the soil and using herbicides, fungicides and pesticides, all of which create nutrient depleted soil.

NITROGEN

The Leaf Maker

This mineral helps the plant to grow upwards and form healthy stems and leaves. It keeps plants green and growing.

PHOSPHORUS

The Root Maker

This mineral helps plants to reach down and grow strong roots. It helps the transformation of energy and photosynthesis.

POTASSIUM

The Flower Inducer

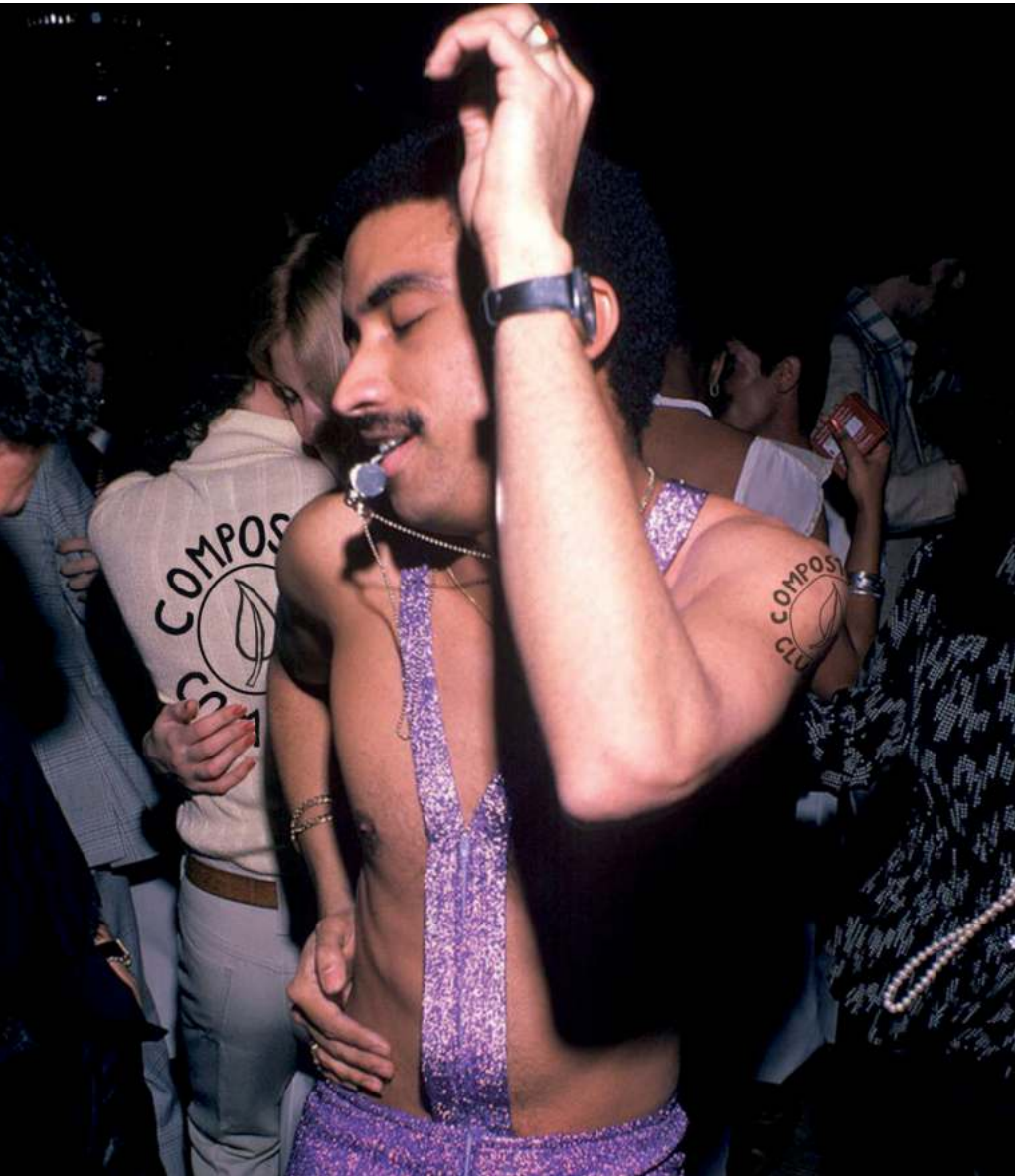
This mineral provides all around wellbeing. It helps the plant access all the nutrients it needs and develop fruit and flowers.

In healthy, biodiverse soil, these minerals are found in abundance, produced naturally in cycles that build themselves. When we use synthetic fertilisers, we break these cycles and damage the soil.

COMPOST CLUB;

A Local Scrap, Using Scraps, For the Planet

WRITTEN BY RHYS THOMAS



The first rule of the Compost Club is to have a positive impact in the world. The second rule is… alright, you get the idea. Like that film we're referencing, there's fighting involved in this story, just here the fighting is holistically good. Michael Kennard is fighting against climate change. What's the weapon? Soil.

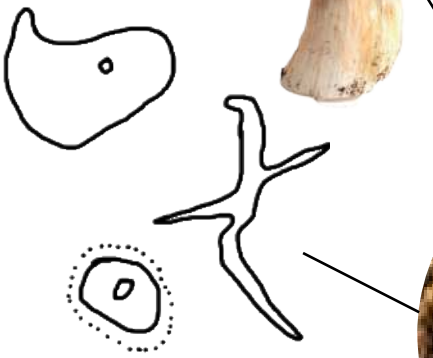
Michael's interest in the magical stuff started at a young age. He often helped out in the garden with his grandad, sowing sunflowers and marvelling at their rapid growth. Michael became an electrician but in the back of his mind was always gardening. Eventually, he managed to get a little parcel of land not too far from his home. "It was really degraded land, which I kind of liked because I wanted to demonstrate that you can produce an abundance of really great food while improving the soil, as opposed to just taking from it". The challenge then was taking this bad soil and making it good. But he found it difficult to find healthy compost. So, he decided to make his own, converting old food waste into compost. Very quickly, he found he was making more and more and saw the potential in the positive impact he could make for the world by making compost for others too. There was a growing demand of people wanting to get involved to recycle their food waste and process it into something reusable and revitalising. And so, the Compost Club was born and it went from strength to strength. As a community company, they take food waste from many houses around Brighton, usually collecting the buckets of waste on their bikes and repurposing it for compost – healthy, biodiverse compost. This compost, then returned to those who share their waste, can then be added to the soil in the ground and used to make good food, creating a positive cycle which is replicable in many neighbourhoods around the world.

Michael oversees the Compost Club and its many projects alongside raising two children. "What we need", Michael says, "is more children who are educated and active in nature and soil health." There is hope in children and it isn't just a third generation of Kennards who are inspired, it's adults, too. "People are receptive. I'm finding you can speak to anybody very easily about climate change, and at the very least they'll agree it's a problem. They can tell their kids that too. It's an exciting time. I'm hopeful there's time for us to do something before we just all perish."

You might hear perish and think doom and gloom. But conversations like this show that while drastic change is still needed, there is huge room to be hopeful and excited. Soil is providing solutions that can actually have a positive impact, both locally and beyond. It is people like Michael who are trying to get things going and encourage us to do the same too. Will you join the club too?

You can find the Compost Club at www.compostclub.online

WHAT MAKES HEALTHY SOIL?



MICROORGANISMS

Microorganisms help nutrients and minerals move around the soil and ensure a thriving ecosystem.

FUNGI

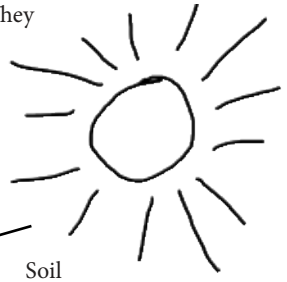
Not just on the surface but below the ground too, fungi help deliver nutrients to plants, protect them from diseases and help decompose organic matter.

INSECTS

worms help to aik soil.

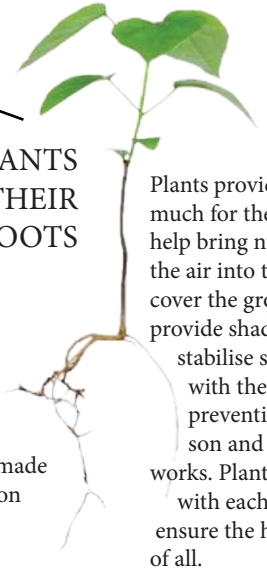
Insects are a great sign of healthy soil. Earthworms break down soil, allowing air and water to get to plants as well as adding nutrients to the soil. Another vital insect are the Dung Beetles. They build tunnels that improve soil structure by reducing soil compaction.

THE SUN



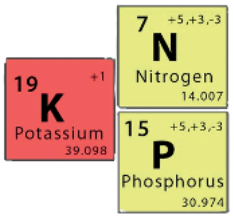
Soil does not need sunlight to survive. However, the organisms living in the soil and keeping it healthy do. It helps photosynthesis in plants and keeps soil warm; warm soil is more fertile.

PLANTS AND THEIR ROOTS



Plants provide so much for the soil; they help bring nutrients from the air into the soil; they cover the ground and provide shade; they stabilise soil structure with their deep roots, preventing soil erosion and create networks. Plants work with each other to ensure the health of all.

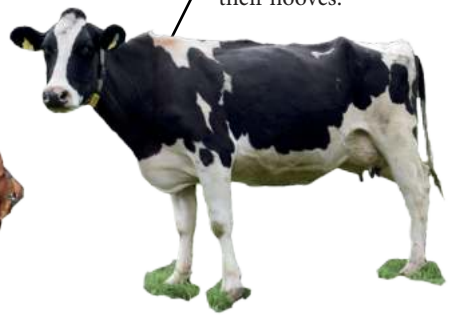
MINERALS



Theres a lot to learn about minerals, so we made a whole page on them on Page 23!

ANIMALS

Livestock, like cows and sheep, provide natural fertilisers for the soil while keeping cover crop low and aerating the soil with their hooves.



WATER

Different types of soil require different amounts of water. Plants then soak up about 50% of this water to help them stay alive.

* notes written by children at Greenside Primary School

Photographs of Fatima's work at the Goldsmiths MA Art and Ecology show.

FROM ONE LIFE, TO ANOTHER

WRITTEN BY HOLLY HOLDER WITH FATIMA ALAIWAT.

Fatima Alaiwat is an artist, activist, land-based worker and cook who explores how we can grow a deeper sense of belonging through food and soil.

We came across Fatima's work, not by sight, but by smell. Her most recent work following her MA in Art and Ecology focuses on oranges, and the entangled political and migratory histories with which they are embedded. The work invites participants to eat oranges, and the peel is added to a composting process, "creating a home for microbes… inoculating waste with a type of dynamic power that enables [the oranges] to transform into something else". Soil care, and how it connects with broader notions of care, is at the core of Fatima's practice. Now that her degree has finished, she's looking forward to finding a tactile space, like a farm or garden, where she can continue to develop her research and art practice, aiming to find new potential in growing, cooking and composting, and how they can be at the heart of social change.

Fatima grew up in Bahrain but now lives in the UK and finds that food is a powerful tool to "re-collect home". After spending years WOOFing and farming on permaculture farms from Chile to Greece, she is aware that engaging deeply with food cycles gives us a greater respect for food provenance - an awareness essential to political engagement with the climate crisis. Fatima has spent time researching Bokashi composting, Japanese for "organic fermented matter". Fatima finds Bokashi an empowering process as it doesn't require outdoor space. By building intimacy into our relationship with food (as well as food waste) and farming, Fatima hopes that everyday practices can become acts of activism, radical movements away from cultural and systemic homogenisation.

Fatima will donate the compost made from orange peels during her exhibition to a local garden charity, maintaining the cycle of her work and returning it back to the land.

Check out some of Fatima's work here - @home_land__

SOIL: Much More Interesting than Fried Chicken and Highlights

A conversation with all round soil fanatic Anthony, the founder of Silas Yard

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY RHYS THOMAS

About two years before lockdown, Anthony was "desperately depressed" and had an onslaught of climate anxiety. Constantly, he was hearing problems and not solutions. "It would always be 'we need to do this', never how to do it," he says. Enough was enough and in December 2019, the former hairdresser turned fried chicken vendor decided to make a change.

"I went home to Dublin to offload some things so I could start fresh, including throwing my phone away – which I threw out of a taxi window, the driver was a bit concerned." He says. Having lost all contact with the outer world, Anthony began to dive into a new one. A world of learning about living sustainably. From chemistry right through to the biology of our own microbiome. From mycology to quantum mechanics. That continued for a long time. Then he hit something very interesting. Soil. Via mushrooms. "Everything started with mushrooms really: how magical, how wonderful and how unknown they are. But soil completely blew my mind." Anthony set on the task of trying to create a city soil cycle, because in East London, looking around, he figured waste was absolutely everywhere, and where there's waste, for Anthony there's potential. "I came up with a slogan:

"Waste lays the base to create an entirely different place."

Soon, he was doing experiments in the kitchen, using different microbes, bacteria and different fungi to break things down, just to observe what happened and the impacts that would have on different waste materials from his shared kitchen. "My best friend lived with me at the time and it was too much for her. But the results were amazing and I applied them to the garden." With waste and all that, Anthony's idea is to create something called the City Soil Lab. "Of course every single household and business has different waste. But it's only waste because we view it as waste." Anthony's thinking is that we could actually build soil from a lot of this waste. If we (well, he) cleverly closed the loop, and found out exactly what each element of 'waste' could be broken down into.

"We could build soil that is endemic to the neighbourhood where the waste was created."

From there, he'd put that soil into the neighbourhood to see what happens to the air quality, the biodiversity, and the

accessibility of nicely-grown, fresh, local food for the people. The best part? In theory, it would be cheaper than what we currently do. "Where there's a pile of shite there's a pile of money. There's a reason why every gangster is in waste."

"In London alone, the food waste that we're incinerating equates to about two and a half billion pounds a year. I was paying £22,000 a year on bins for Clutch [the chicken shop Anthony ran out of Silas Yard]. I want a slice of that, and I want the neighbourhood to have a slice of that" Anthony says. That aside, we already pay for our waste collection when we pay our taxes. So, he figures, why not still pay but have something profitable at the end? More soil, and more places to plant food and sequester carbon. But where in E2, London, would you be able to start a soil lab? Well, turns out, there's almost as much wasted space around as there is waste. The council alerted Anthony to some possible spaces. One of them is a car park, not far from where Anthony lives, which has been misused for a couple decades. "41 car parking spaces, huge. And free."

In Anthony's opinion, "everybody in the city points the finger at farmers, says they should do better, but the reason we're farming the way we are, is because of the way we live in the city. We're never going to fix outside unless we fix inside."

For now, 'inside' is a section of Tower Hamlets. There's some businesses and some residents involved. As far as they're concerned, they just need to scrape the waste in a bin, spray it with the solution, and shut it. "Easy," Anthony says. The spray "uses effective microbial organisms which are quite similar to the beneficial bacteria that lives inside your gut. They make the process of digesting food about quicker than anything else that I've seen, and it gets rid of all food waste, not just vegetable waste: cooked, raw bone, egg, everything." Adding that:

"The system of decomposition is much cleverer than we are all, it just needs a little bit of help. To be honest, as far as I can tell, the only thing that doesn't know what to do on planet earth is us. Even seeds know what to do."

To find out more, find Silas Yard online at www.silasyard.com

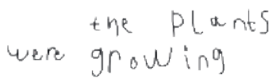
Or visit them at

4 Ravenscroft Street
London
E2 7QG

THE CYCLE OF A SEED

I visited Hackney School of Food to meet with Tom, the Head Food Educator and meet the children who were planting a small plot of Wildfarmed wheat in the school garden.

PLANTING



This microplot allows children and adults to learn what wheat looks like at all stages of its growth and get involved in the harvest and milling process, on a micro-level.

GROWING

HARVESTING

Following the lifecycle of a vegetable, herb, fruit or grass helps children understand the relationship between their food and the way it is grown, inspiring healthier lifestyles, and a love for cooking and growing food.

SEASONAL RHYTHMS IN THE CITY

London National Park City Ranger & Art Ecologist Becky Lyon (above), chatted to Ananya about using nature as a teacher, looking down, not up and finding nature later in life.

WRITTEN BY HOLLY HOLDER

When Becky found herself "captured by" nature, it wasn't the bucolic countryside origin story that most of us expect to hear. Instead, Becky started her relationship with nature around six years ago. A born and bred Londoner, Becky knows just as well as any other city dweller that feeling the "molecular nature of our being" isn't about "going to the Lake District and doing a wonderful walk" but "it's realising that we are ecology. We are at stake in everything that is happening, and we have the power to reshape things differently".

Since 2016, Becky has spent time working out, how can she, as an artist, help bring us back to ecology, and back to our bodies?

Becky's practice focuses on "thinking about how we can live differently and where we might get those answers." One way she does this is by organising walks in Stanmore Country Park, exploring dead and decaying wood to understand it as part of the ecosystem and appreciating dead wood as a sacred relic: "everything is on the way to becoming soil and everything new that emerges is actually quite incredible". She also runs a group called Squishy Sessions, working on how "we can activate our embodied mind to live differently", but underneath all of these forms of learning Becky is keen to champion "ways for people to engage (with nature) without judgement".

For now, Becky is driven to find out how her practice can help to "attend to the sticky complexity of the climate crisis" in some way and is continuing to work on events that draw attention to seasonal rhythms.

Check out her upcoming events here -
@elastic_fiction
www.elasticfiction.co

Photographs from the
MA Art and Ecology show at
Goldsmiths University

THE FUTURE OF FUNGI

Maymana is a gardener, activist, artist, writer and nature lover, who, moving forward after their post-graduate degree, is looking to how we can learn from and work with the natural world, and more specfically, the remarkable world of mushrooms.

During COVID, Maymana left London and moved back in with her parents in the Kent countryside. Here, she was able to find solace in nature, taking long walks foraging and exploring. During this time, they discovered a new passion and consequent obsession; the wonderful world of fungi. She began thinking about them, feeling them, scratching the surface of their power and learning about how they care for and protect ecosystems. When the world felt in flux and uncertain, Maymana turned to "this care web that's happening beneath our feet, holding us in place, on earth". She would return roughly every other day to a spot in a forest an hour away from their family home; a spot that she has been visiting since she was seventeen, to continue to "build a relationship with" the land and watch it move from a once barren landscape to a dense ecosystem, "bursting with life."

Fungi are a world unto themselves; a diverse fusion of organisms that live out of sight; what we typically know to be fungi or mushrooms, the odd, bouncy things that we find deep in forests, are simply only the flowering part of the organism. They are integral to plant growth, helping them to draw water and nutrients from the soil, yet their full capacity and power is hugely unknown. Research is being done into fungi at a colossal rate to discover how they may be able to help from anything as varied as organ transplants to biofuels to construction.

Maymana recently finished their post-graduate at University College London winning the MAPS Postgraduate Taught Prize award for their dissertation on mycorrhizal fungi, radical futures and care work. Reading through her work, it is fascinating to see the connections that can be made between our world and the fungi world. The networks built by fungi act as both a model for how we can restructure our society in a way that cares more for one another and for the planet we live upon. Maymana's writing is powerful and hopeful, exploring a new way of thinking and acting as taught to us by fungi.

Moving past her degree, Maymana is exploring beyond the power of fungi, towards herbalism, going on foraging walks as part of 'Misery Party', a mental health collective for people of colour and trans and queer people. These walks are free of charge and centred on healing, including activities such as creating "herbal remedies together".

Maymana is also turning their hand to horticultural therapy, merging their early studies in psychology and science to find alternatives to mental health treatment through access to green spaces and gardening. One of the ways that Maymana is doing this is by teaching at a community garden, as well as also finding joy as an ecology educator to young children where she "goes into nurseries to teach two to four year old children about different aspects of nature." A rewarding experience as Maymana says, at this age, there is so much energy and excitement to learn and experiment.

Maymana knows that with everything they do, there are always questions at the forefront of her mind such as: "Is it morally right? Or is it something that's harming people or the planet?" This is something, taking a leaf out of Maymana's book, we should practice more regularly as part of our daily actions to step towards a change regarding how we interact with each other and our planet in a more care-based way.

Find Maymana on Instagram at @fungi.futures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FIX THE PLANET
WILDFARMED

RESOURCES

TV & FILM

Kiss the Ground

Fantastic Fungi

A Life on Our Planet: My Witness Statement, David Attenborough

Breaking Boundaries: The Science of Our Planet

An Inconvenient Truth

BOOKS

Dirt to Soil by Gabe Brown

Entangled Life by Merlin Sheldrake

Dirt: The Erosion of Previous Civilisations by David R. Montgomery

The Unsettling of America by Wendell Berry

The One-Straw Revolution by Masanobu Fukuoka

PODCASTS

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Regenerative Agriculture

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Reasons to be Cheerful

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