

Protecting Mother Earth, Supporting Local Farms, Growing Your Own Food

Five book reviews. Excellent holiday gifts,

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Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#),
[Environment](#), [History](#)

Need a last minute gift for your beloved locavore? Several books would make excellent holiday gifts, so this review covers a few of them on the environment, as it relates to local food sovereignty, food security and palate delight. There's even one for kids, which starts the set:

Avatars of Gaia: Escape from Hazard Hollow

Professor Heart (self-published: 2009, 210 pp.)

Website: www.avatarsogaia.org

Charlotte Purin of Los Angeles decided one of the best ways to save Mother Earth is to get kids involved. So she wrote *Avatars of Gaia: Escape from Hazard Hollow* for preteens. The adventure/fantasy tale educates as it entertains, integrating the concepts of sustainability, healthy-eating, and environmental consciousness into a fantasy adventure story.

Because she also wants reach all kids, regardless of financial background, she's made several [youtube videos](#), (seed saving, read the label/obesity, how to recycle & compost, how to make a solar oven, and one about saving frogs). Colorful, full-page drawings accompany the text, and the book includes a special seed protection pledge, along with a glossary. She also has board games: the E.A.K. (environmentally aware kid) game, and 'Gimme Green Grub' game, about what's healthy food.

Motivated by the privatization of water and seeds, an epidemic of childhood obesity, and rising bankruptcies among farmers, she plans several more books along the Gaia line, getting feedback as she tours schools, appearing as Professor Heart.

Life Rules: Why so much is going wrong everywhere at once and how Life teaches us to fix it

Ellen LaConte (self-published: 2010, 283 pp.)

Website: www.ellenlaconte.com/life-rules-the-book

LaConte provides a fresh take on ecosystem collapse, hierarchical culture, and the global capitalist industrial economy, analogizing them with AIDS. By following the evolution of life, LaConte shows how human "civilization" will always self-destruct, because it thrives on dominance and environmental exploitation. She provides a detailed comparison of nature to human societies, pointing out that in mature ecosystems there is no dominant species - everything is in balance.

She also contrasts her vision of a sustainable society with “civilization” that thrives on exploitation, domination and wealth concentration. Citing Derrick Jensen ([Endgame](#)) and Michael Ruppert ([Confronting Collapse](#)), she agrees that Power won’t voluntarily change, pointing out that the World Trade Organization has never once decided in favor of the environment. “The best we’ve done,” she writes, “is to flatten they pyramid” of power. Now is the time to challenge its existence, she says.

More than a third of the book lays out the plan for moving into sustainable human societies. All of the ideas are already being tried somewhere – like permaculture, slow money, slow food, and local organic democracy – going from competition and partisanship to participation and partnership. And this section is what makes the book ideal: all the best ideas are collected, and all of them are underscored by her theme of humanity living in accord with natural law, or Life Rules.

Chasing Chiles: Hot Spots along the Pepper Trail

Kurt M. Kriese, Kraig Kraft and Gary P. Naghan

([Chelsea Green](#), 2011, 193 pp.)

Website: <http://chasingchiles.com>

Here’s another delightful read in the eco-genre, although the serious business of climate change – wrought via whatever means – forms the basis for their culinary ecotours spanning the Western Hemisphere. A chef, a chili agroecologist and an ethnobotanist traveled to Mexico, Florida, Cajun Country, the Yucatan, New Mexico and even New England talking with chili pepper farmers about the history of their crops, the weather and the development of “rapid adaptation” farming.

The authors report that aberrant weather is only one problem threatening the diversity of peppers (and all foods): water disputes, agricultural industrialization, globalization, loss of farmland and of specialty markets, and genetic modification. “The Seed Savers Exchange has documented that more than 200 varieties of sweet and hot peppers have disappeared from the seed trade in North America since 1981.”

Interspersed throughout the story of how an unstable climate affects these crops – sometimes beneficially, sometimes disastrously – are recipes that include one variety or another, along with side boxes with detailed info. One helpful tip – to cool down your mouth if your pepper (or Tabasco sauce) is too hot, ingest something fatty instead of drinking water, since capsaicin – the heat molecule – is hydrophobic. A glass of milk will bind the hot stuff, taking away its burn. Many believe the chemical also provides arthritic pain relief.

The Superfood Gardener: A step-by-step guide to growing superfood vegetables in your garden

Sharon and Andrew Cooper

(Global Publishing Group, 2010, 161 pp.)

Website: www.thesuperfoodgardener.com

While not everyone can grow chili peppers, *Superfood Gardener* provides detailed instructions on growing local food. Replete with pictures, drawings and detailed descriptions of plants and their pests, the Coopers also explore soils and companion plants, along with twelve specific veggies in the superfood Hall of Fame.

This is a book you haul out to the garden, and it’s built for durability. Thank goodness – mine

is well thumbed and smudged with South Florida soil. I highly recommend this colorful how-to manual. Not all those superfoods can be grown here, but I'm making my way with spinach, broccoli, corn, and several varieties of tomato.

(Not on the superfood list, I still can't get the tobacco to grow, and the watermelons failed. But we're not giving up.)

Cooking Close to Home: A Year of Seasonal Recipes

Diane Imrie and Richard Jarmusz

([Chelsea Green](#), 2011, 240 pp.)

Website: www.cookingclosetohome.com/

Now that you've raised your own veggies - be they superfoods or not - you'll want to prepare them using recipes in *Cooking Close to Home*. This is a beautiful hardcover recipe book focused on the Northeast U.S., covering all the seasons for each of the major food groups, including pastries and other sweets. It's even got a recipe for pickling jalapeno peppers, or you can use them in the rib-eye steak marinade.

I've tried the Kale and Mushroom Soup, and the Garlic-Roasted Cherry Tomatoes with Fresh Basil and Goat Cheese, over pasta. Delish. My next endeavor will be the Vermont Vegetable New Year Rolls which I'm serving at the the family gathering this Sunday.

Imrie and Jarmusz introduce the sections with political tidbits to encourage supporting local farms, slow food and eco-consciousness. This is an excellent addition to any locavore's cookbook shelf.

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