



## *From Food Scarcity To Food Security*

With the advent of lockdowns and recently floods in Australia many were shocked to see people fighting over the last few remaining products on grocery store shelves. Some people thought prolonged food shortages were impossible, and panic buying at the beginning of the pandemic was a wake up call. It has led to the movement for many to start their own gardens to grow their own vegetables and fruit, become seed savers and to preserve their produce. Some are raising chickens while others join community gardens and co-ops.

When most people think about farming and gardening, they picture the endless cycle of labor—ploughing, planting, harvesting, and doing it all again. But there are other methods which allow you to put a lot of planning and effort into planting initially, so that later you can reap the fruits of your labor with very little upkeep.

Food forests are a type of permaculture designed to mimic a natural forest environment, but loaded with specifically selected food plants. You design the system with different layers— from shade trees which form a canopy and cut out the harshest sun, all the way down to ground-cover plants which work as living mulch.

1. **The Canopy:** Large nut trees, like walnut or pecan, depending on where you live.
2. **Small Trees:** Fruit trees, such as apple, pear, peach, or citrus if you're far enough south.
3. **Shrubs:** Blueberry, huckleberry, raspberry, and other berries.
4. **Herbaceous Layer:** Plants such as herbs and perennial vegetables that will come back on their own, or reseed as long as you allow some plants to go to seed, or leave some fruit to rot and fall. Examples include basil, mint, chives, kale, parsnips and peppers.
5. **Ground-cover:** This layer generally includes plants that creep along the forest floor. You might include squash, pumpkin, strawberries, and purslane.
6. **Underground:** Here we have root vegetables, like carrots, beets, radishes, turnips, ginger, potatoes and garlic.
7. **Vine Layer:** As long as you leave some fruit to fall to the ground, vines like tomato, beans, melons, and cucumbers should come back year after year. Yams will keep shooting out vines, as long as any tiny bit of tuber is left in the ground. And grapes are another good choice.
8. **Wetland or Aquatic Layer:** Some people incorporate a pond into their food forest, or plant it on the edge of a wetland providing a source of protein, like fish or provide edible aquatic plants
9. **Fungal Layer:** This could be considered part of the ground-cover or underground layer. You could inoculate dead trees with edible mushroom spores like shitake or oyster mushroom.

This allows nature to work for you. The falling leaves and dying ground-cover creates fertilizer and mulch allowing the forest the retain moisture. A perfect food forest will be self perpetuating— no watering, mulching, ploughing, or new planting. Just pick what you want to eat when it ripens.

The design can even reduce pests, by spreading out plants bugs may attack. It also helps to include marigolds or other flowers that attract beneficial insects, like ladybugs which eat aphids and mites. And at each layer, you can once again allow nature to work for you by allowing edible wild plants such as dandelions, sorrels, and wild purslane to take over.

*Soil Lovers say: Teach A Man To Fish, And You Feed Him For A Lifetime.  
You Give Him Power, Independence, And Security.*