

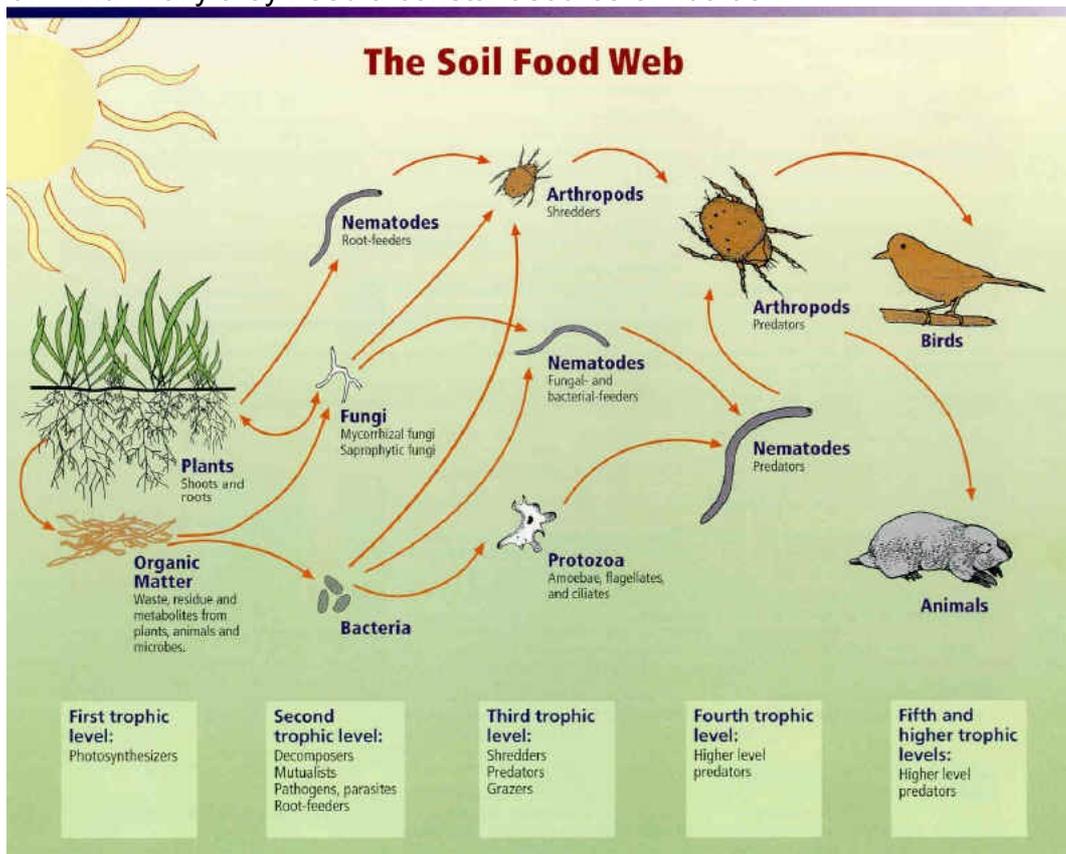


Green School? What is that supposed to mean? Maybe it's just a crazy or naïve idea, but since living and working in India for a year at the school which was awarded "Model Green of India" I have become more passionate than ever about sustainable living and the environment.

Perhaps I misnamed the project, since the term "Green" has developed many meanings and my real passion is the soil. In India I learned that soil really is at least part of the solution to problems as diverse as climate change, cancer, asthma, polluted drinking water, drought, famine and poverty.

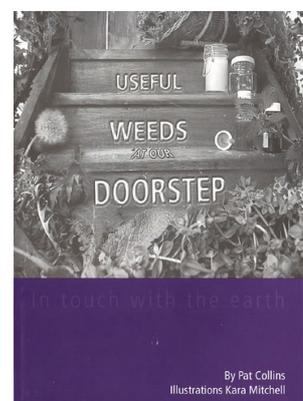
Healthy soil is a major part of the basis for life as we know it. Healthy soil is not dirt, it is a rich, dark, moist substance full of microorganisms that support plant life, hold and clean water, and keep the cycle of life going.

The microorganisms in the soil are amazingly resilient and nurturing, but alas die when exposed to sunlight. They also need for the soil to be loose so that they have access to oxygen—pounding the earth down with heavy farm equipment is not helpful. And finally they need a constant source of nutrition.



Nature solved the problem beautifully with quickly growing plants often called weeds that come in to hold and loosen the soil as well as binding small reserves of water and minerals until slower growing but more appreciated plants can begin to thrive. My best biology teacher once said, "Weeds are the guardians of the soil and grow where, there is disturbance in the balance." Once the soil is re-established, the weeds tend to disappear.

In India I saw places where the soil was so damaged that even



weeds couldn't grow. How could this happen? In the seventies, one of the first



misuses of the word "Green" took place with "Green Revolution," an industrious idea to feed more people by getting three or four crops a year out of the soil instead of the traditional two or three, which had been common in India for literally thousands of years. One can wonder whether it was not profit for big fertilizer companies that motivated far more than the desire to feed more people. At any rate, the result was ultimately that farmers, unable to buy the

expensive fertilizers and compete with huge production of those that could, lost their land and ended up as starving beggars in the cities. The high yields were not indefinitely sustainable; the soil became depleted, hard, too saline and ultimately useless. A desert arose, where there used to be a forest.

Sadly damaging practices exist seemingly everywhere man gets involved. We push the plants to grow faster, try to eliminate certain species, continuously take from the soil without giving back. Basically we have tried to take ourselves out of the cycle of things. If put ourselves back in the cycle and work with nature instead of against it, we see that life is amazingly abundant and beautiful.

To understand this better, let's look at the simple food web. Plants use energy from the sun to produce, herbivores consume the plants and carnivores consume the herbivores—at least that is how I was taught. Put that is a pyramid and not a cycle. It leaves out the part of the detritivores—the busy microorganisms and small life forms that break down everything from cow manure to the decaying body of a carnivore and return all of this to the soil. Neither the cow nor the wolf takes from the soil without ultimately returning everything. Neither does the tree or any plant. What they take is returned—richer than before having grown and been used by life. When we humans decide that a garden with decaying leaves is unsightly, we take away the nutrients that nourish the birds, the worms, the microorganisms and ultimately our plants. We can replace them with chemical fertilizers to feed the plants, but this won't feed the birds or worms and ultimately will cause the problems I already described in India. It doesn't happen as quickly here, since our growing season is very short, but it is nonetheless happening.

So I started a Green School Project at Quentin Blake. For a school we have an enormous amount of land. And while it may look like I am mostly interested in plants, it is actually the soil that remains my passion. I want to teach children the beauty of healthy soil and how practices like composting, mulching and planting trees protect and nourish the soil.

Children should understand the role of insects, wood lice, worms and fungi. They should see how animals fit into the scheme. They should also feel how thriving plants give them a sense of calm, beauty, health and even community.

This is already happening with our humble beginnings of the Tarry-a-While Garden in front of the school. An area that was little more than hard-packed dirt is increasingly able to support flowering plants. Insects and birds are beginning to visit. People are beginning to slow down, look and wonder.

This is only the beginning. We have also:

- planted a thriving meadow with assorted fruit trees (apple, cherry, peach, quince and pear) as well as berry bushes
- established a compost and mulching system
- planted several larger trees including oak, willow, poplar, ginkgo, linden, chestnut, pine, quince and beech to make shade.

To teach the role of animals in the system I would like to get a small school zoo going, with at least rabbits and guinea pigs and possibly a few chickens or even a sheep or two.

To create much needed ecosystems for frogs and salamanders I also dream of a school pond. Many people fear the danger of this project, so it may need to be downscaled to a brook. At any rate, the school already won the solar pump for the project. There is a lot of financial support out there to anyone with the time and inclination to go get it.

So I share my crazy naïve dream and invite you to dream with me and get involved in any way that you wish or can. How can you help? Many have done so already by:

- just being interested in the project
- donating plants or money
- donating time to water, help plant, pick up materials, etc.
- bringing in compostable items, everything from potato peels and coffee grinds to the litter from your guinea pigs or rabbits
- seeking sponsors
- contributing your ideas
- taking on small part of the garden as a family or class project.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns you have at:

[much.klotz@gmx.de](mailto:much.klotz@gmx.de)

Thank you for your interest.

Heidi Klotz