Illustrated Homegardens for living light in the Tropics

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HI I'm Lauren

I traveled from Boston, MA to Kona, HI to learn more about agroforestry.

I thought I was endeavoring to learn a skill set,

but I wound up questioning my inherited views about food, and how we grow it.

and gained a new appreciation for homegardens.

Where did these come from?

Let me show you what I've learned!
In Hawaii about 85% of food is imported, much of it is processed and not healthy with only 15% being grown locally.

A study in 2007 found that residents of Hawaii spend 21% of food expenditures on fast food.

Obesity has dramatically increased around the country,

but most notably in Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander populations.

Diet-related problems such as heart disease, type II diabetes, and obesity are more acute than in the general population.
Throughout the tropics, agroforestry has always been a fundamental form of agriculture.

In an agroforestry system, lots of different food crops and trees were grown mixed together, often with animals pasturing in the same area.

As time went on, agriculture has shifted more and more towards growing one crop on a large scale for commercial purposes, or industrial agriculture.
Industrial Agriculture has been focused on getting more food to more people as profitably as possible.

But industrial agriculture hasn't had much concern for the environment, or long-term sustainability.

and it is bad for both.

Industrial agriculture is very dependent on oil for creating special fertilizers and pesticides, operating heavy machinery, and transporting food all over the world.

Many believe that oil production is already past its peak worldwide.

Planting just one crop on the land can easily lead to soil imbalances, erosion, and nutrient depletion, and deforestation.
One answer to many of these concerns is to reincorporate principles of agroforestry.

On a large scale this might include alley cropping or wind-breaks.

On the individual level, this means multi-story homegardens.

What is a multi-story homegarden?

The homegarden has a variety of edible plants on at least 3 levels, minimum.

The upper level is where trees like coconut, breadfruit, mango, are grown (with some open area, so they don’t over-shade lower levels!)

The intermediate level can contain coffee, cacao, black pepper, or bananas.

The ground layer might include taro, ginger, herbs and medicinals.
Initially, I wasn’t used to the idea of growing trees in a garden, or foregoing tidy rows.

But, as Bill Mollison (1990) said, “Order is found in things working beneficially together. It is not the forced condition of neatness...”

The secret to agroforestry is to utilize the natural relationships between different plants.

Trees can be grown for fruit, and leaves and branches make great mulch for plants in the lower levels.

Trees are important carbon holders.

They provide a habitat for many insects, birds, and other animals, and they provide shade for plants and growers alike!
What are the benefits of homegardening for me? Personally...

- gardening relieves stress,
- leads to better eating habits

Environmentally...

- better buying habits,
- and helped me develop a sense of self reliance.
- homegardens mean less dependence on fossil fuels,
- We Can Do It!
- sustained soil fertility
- and a reduced carbon footprint.

Socially...

- the fun of gardening can create lovers of healthy food,
- and conscientious consumer and citizens.

Surplus from the garden can be shared with family and neighbors.
How did I get started?

I was lucky enough to find an expert in agroforestry who was willing to teach me.

One of the best ways to learn about gardening is to talk to a gardener.

There are also a lot of great resources for gardening online, including "Hawaii Island Homegrown: Start Up Guide".

Don't be afraid to experiment,

and of course...

have fun!

and build your garden gradually
Sources


Additional Resources


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