

The Art of Guerrilla Farming

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Guerrilla farmer Anna Peach

Donated compostable waste





Evening harvest of squash



Still life class At Waimea Country School

By Diane Koerner

Some Big Islanders know Anna Peach for her wearable sculptures of reclaimed corsets and clothing, covered with the seeds of highly invasive plants, created while living here from 2001 to 2006. The overlap of nature and art are now expressed in her Squash and Awe Guerrilla Farm in Kamuela.

Upon returning to Hawaii, Peach has turned her attention to farming squash, a crop that she loves to eat, is highly nutritious, and is used in most culinary traditions. However, squash has not been successfully grown organically in Hawaii because of the many pests and diseases associated with it. Peach launched her new enterprise in 2012 doing seed trials with 14 heirloom squash varieties – a defensive tactic against the pests that ravage the Pepo varieties like zucchini and acorn squash.

Her goal to find squash strong enough to grow with sustainable methods led her to the Moschata family, which includes local kabocha and butternut squash, and Maxima varieties which resist pollination by potential GMO squash crops. In her own way, she hopes to slow down the runaway train of imported vegetables to our island and offers her advice to others who want to help fulfill the market for organic squash on our island... on practically a zero budget.

Peach uses the term guerrilla farm to describe her work because, “What I do is not what is conventionally defined as farming: I do not own the land, I am reclaiming nearly everything I use, I do not till the land, I build the soil a little bit each day... there’s now crumbly, rich soil instead of powdery red dust after just six months.”

Reuse is the core of Squash and Awe’s farming practice, with heirloom seeds being the only expense. “I make raised beds from raw materials reclaimed from the community. Local businesses sign on to the program by donating pure, green or brown compostable waste to help build my farm’s soil. In turn, I offer them their own squash patch, and teach a pumpkin program at their school of choice.”

So far, Peach has lined her raised beds with three trunk loads of cardboard covered with 40 gallons of green waste and hops, and topped with 18 pounds of coffee grounds mixed with coco fiber and grass trimmings. This has produced 2,000 pounds of squash being served by chefs at two local restaurants and a hotel.

Part of her community outreach efforts are educational show-and-tell programs for children, with more than 200 students at five schools in the month leading up to Halloween. At Waimea Country School, pumpkin portraits were drawn, and at Kanu O Ka Aina, the kindergarten class helped make and then enjoyed pumpkin smoothies.

HOW TO BECOME A GUERRILLA

So how do you acquire land for guerrilla farming? “Put out what you want to do,” advised Peach. “We have a gap – farmers who are retiring or have land laying fallow, and another group who want to farm – how do we connect those two? Think creatively – start with your backyard or your friend’s backyard. The important thing is to start, figure out if it’s enjoyable and right for you, then show what you can do.”

Peach recommends you think creatively when planning your farm or garden. What is in your community? A brewery for hops and yeast? A saw mill, or woodworking business for sawdust? Tree trimmers for wood chips? Big box stores for cardboard? “Think about what normally goes into the dump and see what you can use,” said Peach. “Scheduling a pick-up time with local businesses lets them stay on task, and allows you to be a help rather than a hindrance.”

You don’t need a huge investment or bank loans, said Peach. “It can be small, and you can do it yourself. In my case, I worked my way in by building raised bed gardens in town; the land owners were able to see first-hand that I had the knowledge and passion to do this.”

For more information, see www.squashandawe.com.