

FONDAMA Yard Garden Program

Dawn Berkelaar, with Mark Hare

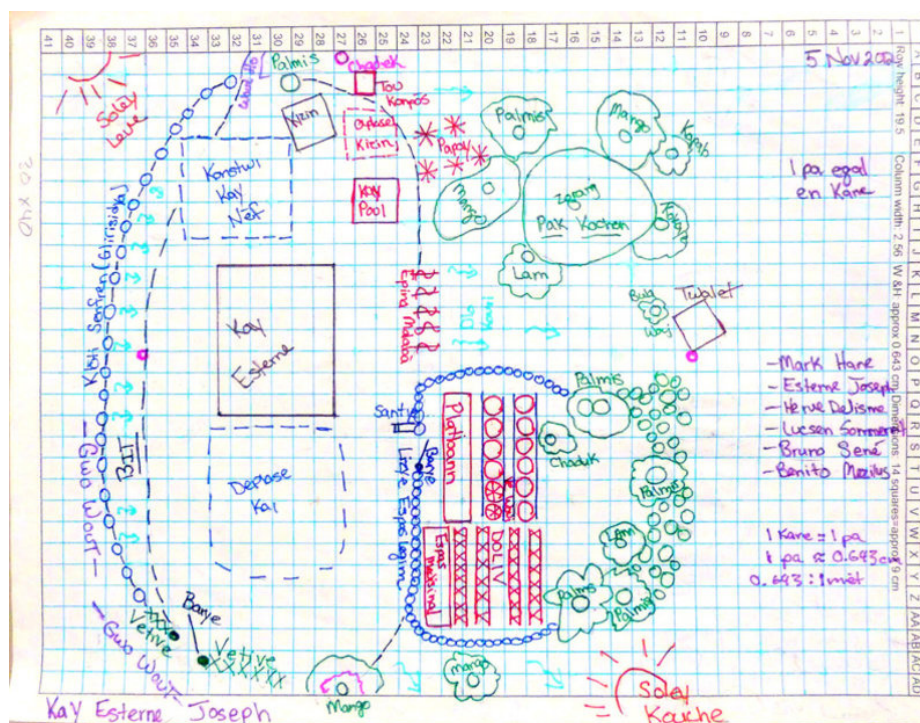


Figure 1. Yard design of Esterne Joseph's home in Orange, Léogâne. The objects drawn in red are the new additions, which include a vegetable bed (platbann), ten tires and several raised furrows of moringa.

In Haiti, a Yard Garden program is helping families and individuals to make real change in the area surrounding their homes.

The results, described and pictured in some photos below, can be impressive! Mark Hare with MPP describes the program as follows: "The Yard Garden program is not about making huge changes in people's lives. It is about making small, daily changes that are consistent, persistent and positive, without being intrusive. The program is about helping people recognize the power they have to learn to do something useful with what they already have at hand, and about sharing their knowledge with the people around them. It is also about learning to celebrate the small successes, while praying and struggling for the big ones."

The Yard Garden program is organized by MPP (Mouvement Paysan Papaye/ Peasant Movement of Papaye, founded in 1973) in cooperation with FONDAMA (an association of grassroots organizations working together to address the root causes of hunger).

In this article, we share a summary of the sixteen criteria used in the Yard Garden program, with text and photos used with permission from Mark's blog. We also share information from Mark about how the program came about and how it works, followed by feedback from a program participant.

Sixteen Elements of a Yard Garden

1) Participating families have a **yard design**, showing the changes they intend to make (Fig. 1).

2) **Vegetable Space**. An area within the yard (or the whole yard, if it is not extensive) that is completely protected so that medium and large animals cannot damage the plants (Fig. 2).

3) A **system for collecting rainwater**, or some other method for having water at hand. Usually, this means a set of gutters along with a cistern, buckets or barrels for holding the water.

4) **Space with perennial vegetables**. An area at least 1.5 meters wide and 4 meters long, planted with any type of plant that will continue to provide leafy greens for an extended period after planting. *Moringa oleifera* is our preference (Fig. 3), but Haitian basket vine also works very well (we like to see a minimum of thirty shrubs planted in one area of the yard). Malabar spinach is another option; it can provide greens on a daily basis for up to a year, and reseeds easily.

5) **Vegetable tires**. At least three tires that are in continuous production for at least six out of every twelve months (Fig. 4). For six short videos from MPP about building a tire garden, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yL4dgMzI_HU (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yL4dgMzI_HU).



Figure 2. Luxène Sommervil and his wife with their vegetable space. *Orange, Léogâne.*



Figure 3. Perennial vegetables in a yard garden. Fenaheme Joachim, in Bassin Zim- Hinche, with his patch of moringa (LEFT). Malabar spinach maintained more or less as a perennial (as it readily reseeds), growing from tires up the side of the kitchen/storage room at Good Samaritan clinic, Batey 7, Dominican Republic (RIGHT).



6) **Red worms.** At least three tires that are producing vermicompost on a continuous basis (Fig. 5).

7) **Compost.** A space for collecting kitchen waste, straw, animal manures and other organic residues. A hole

works best, so that as the family sweeps the yard, the sweepings (and any other waste that can rot) can be added along with what comes out of the kitchen.

8) A **permanent source of animal manure.** An area where the family keeps pigs, or a chicken roost, or where animals are tied up for the night (horses, burros, mules, goats), or any system that provides a daily source of manure. The manure is included in the compost or provided as food for the red worms.

9) **Vegetable bed.** At least one vegetable bed (Fig. 6) which produces vegetables continuously for at least six out of twelve months. This could be a bed that is at least 1.2 meters (4 feet) wide and 4 meters (12 feet) long, or it could be four ridges that are each 4 meters long [for example, this might be done on an area of sloped land].

10) **Roots or other types of staple food plants.** At least ten plants in the yard that can produce significant amounts of energy-giving food. Examples include bananas, papaya, or taro.

11) **Fruit trees.** At least five well-cared-for, fruit-producing trees or vines. Preferably these will be plants that will not shade out the rest of the yard; for this reason, soursop, passion fruit, and guava are preferred over mangoes and avocados.

12) **Medicinal plants.** At least five varieties of plants that can be used to make natural remedies. Examples include aloe, lemon grass and false basil (“Fòbazen”). See Figure 7.

13) **Trash collection and elimination.** Plastics are harmful to the land. The family needs some system for eliminating non-organic trash in the yard. Cleanliness of the yard is a measure of success.

14) A **latrine.** The family is producing healthy food, and their environment needs to be healthy as well. The yard should have a latrine that is in good condition: it should have a roof, a hole that is not too large for young children to use, and a cover for the hole to prevent flies from readily entering or leaving.

15) **Treated water.** In order for the family to take maximum advantage of the food that they are producing, they should eliminate as many sources of parasites as possible. There should be a bucket with a spigot and some system for ensuring that the water in the bucket is potable. In Haiti, several simple systems are available. The Klorfasil system is one example; see <http://www.klorfasil.org/> (<http://www.klorfasil.org/>)

16) **The beauty of the yard.** As we come into a yard, how does it make us feel? Is it a pleasure to be there? Do we see flowers? Is it well-organized? Is all of the space well-used? See Figure 4.

How the Program Works

I asked Mark a number of questions about the program, to better understand how it is structured and how it works.

DRB: How did this program come about?

Mark: FONDAMA is an association of grassroots organizations that are working together to address the root causes of hunger. They are part of the Joining Hands Program, which is part of the Presbyterian Hunger Program. Their main focus is advocacy, but the Yard Garden Program is being extended to FONDAMA partners through MPP.

As we prepared the Yard Garden program, I thought of what seemed to have worked in MPP and what didn't; what I have read over the years; and what I have heard at ECHO. I tried to distill all of that into a viable process for introducing the program, providing training, following up with the work, and providing for evaluation (our evaluation of the yards, but also evaluation by the participants of their experience with the program).

In terms of how the program was developed, it came out of the work of an earlier project that I helped initiate in 2004. The specific elements and quantities came through A LOT of home visits, and consultations with Haitian yard garden technicians who worked with me on developing them. The list has gone through many edits. Many ideas were the inspiration of Alexander Placide, one of MPP's agronomists. Other ideas were the inspiration of program participants.

DRB: How do people become participants in the Yard Garden Program?

Mark: The process starts when participants are chosen by the local Farmer Movement group in a given area. Our vision is that the initial group of participants will acquire and apply all of the essential skills and then be the nuclei for extending the skills to the people around them.



Figure 4: Wilner Exil and his wife, Tesil in their yard garden. Tesil is harvesting moringa shoots for food and Wilner is weeding his cabbages in the tires. Wilner and Tesil also have tires with red worms and fruit trees planted throughout their 1/3 of an acre (0.13 ha) yard. They have papayas and bananas as well. It is always a pleasure to walk into their home. *Leodiague, Hinche, Haiti.*

At an initial meeting, we start by discussing the knowledge and resources that farmers have already in each of their zones, and the fact that what we have to offer them is very small compared to all the knowledge and resources they already have. We follow this up by sharing a Biblical basis for the work of building a yard garden. As part of this, we describe God's abundance by sharing texts taken from Genesis 2:15

("The Lord GOD took the man and put him in the garden...to till it and to care for it.") and Revelation 22: 1-3 ("Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.... On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there anymore....").

Next, participants watch a PowerPoint that shows photos of the program working, and one person shares how working with the Yard Garden program has been important to his/her family.

Then there is a visit to an area where the participants see good examples of yard gardens and talk with the families. During this visit, we provide a three-day workshop to teach the basic techniques: mixing soil for the vegetable tires; building vegetable beds; producing vermicompost; building benches for the tires; making compost; and producing organic insecticides.

Once we all return from the trip, the MPP team visits the homes, one by one. We start with a yard design (a diagram with a proposed layout; see Figure 1), an evaluation and a registration form. The registration form provides some baseline information (for example: what a family produces in their yard already; what seems to produce the most right now; what animals they have; what animal provides the most benefit; what problems they have in terms of production; how far away the water is). The registration

form also asks the participating family to list at least ten things they are going to change in their yard during the next twelve months. We use the evaluation form to guide them.

DRB: Do participants tackle all of the aspects at once, or do they work on their yard garden bit by bit? Is there a recommended order of incorporation?

Mark: Once a family has a design and a plan of action, they can choose to start with whatever element they would like.

We evaluate yards of new trainees in the middle of the year and in November. Each element of the Yard Garden Plan is worth 3 points. At the end of the year, those who have achieved a score of at least 45 out of 50 possible points receive a certificate of excellence.

DRB: How do participants go about the initial planning process and come up with a yard design diagram (like the one shown in Figure 1)?

Mark: We provide the initial expertise to draw the yard designs. This year, one of our main goals is to have someone acquire the skills to do the designs in each area where there are participants.

DRB: Do people need to demonstrate a certain level of commitment to participate in the program?

Mark: The team of instructors has criteria for eliminating participants. In such cases, we offer the organization the opportunity to replace the lost participants.

In general, we are moving towards having a team of three participants in four or five key communities within the respective organization.



Figure 5: African red worms (*Eudrilus eugeniae*) and the compost, produced from animal manures.

Yard Garden Testimonies

Gultho Orné

Excerpts from an interview with Gultho Orné illustrate some of the benefits that a yard garden can provide. The interview from April 2014, with members of MPP, was later translated and transcribed by Mark Hare.

Mark Hare commented, “The interview took place at Gultho’s current home (in which he also grew up), sitting in one of the two yard garden spaces he has created within the yard, underneath the shade of a huge *rakèt* [*Euphorbia lactea*], a common fencing material for live fences. Gultho is a young man, single, who for several years was one of the primary caretakers for his mentally ill mother until her passing in 2012. Gultho has been introducing new yard garden techniques in his own yard since about 2007. Because of the excellence of his work, he was offered a paying job around 2009 or 2010 working for one of MPP’s Yard Garden projects called The Road to Life Yard.” Gultho has several siblings who have their own homes but live nearby.

Concerning the changes that Gultho has made over the years (including a goat house, cedar tree [*Cedrela odorata*], compost hole, cistern and *rakèt* fence), Gultho shared, “Having this production here helps me because when you buy things in the market place, you don’t know what kinds of chemicals people used. Before you eat anything, you should ask where the food came from. If you want to eat good food you should produce it at your own home.

“I produce papaya, peppers, moringa, Haitian basket vine leaves. Yard gardens are so important. If you don’t have beans to cook, instead of going to market to buy them, you harvest some leaves to cook with your rice. And leaves are important for your body.

“Also there are family members and other people who ask me for leaves. I don’t sell them. I give them away. But tomorrow, maybe I won’t give them away because I produce the leaves in dirt. They can produce them in dirt, too, so that they have them for tomorrow.”

Gultho mentioned that the yard garden provides a source of income to purchase needed items such as salt, oil and kerosene. Mark Hare noted, “A bunch of amaranth leaves grown in one tire can sell for 20 to 50 gourdes, which is enough to purchase oil and seasonings to cook a meal, with maybe enough left (depending on the season and the going price for the leaves) to buy kerosene for the night and one or two other small items.”

Gultho grows peppers to sell in the market, and commented, “I have purchased two chickens with the money from my garden.” He also built a goat house, on his own initiative, after seeing one in Papaye. He said, “I give away a lot of manure to other people starting their yard gardens.”

On how Gultho came to start his yard garden:

“I was in a farmer’s group that sent me to participate in a workshop. During the workshop I saw some nice looking yard gardens: vegetables in tires, vegetable beds and “biyon” [a system for planting on a slope, where the soil is worked up into

ridges that approximately follow the contours]. I said to myself, I can't just see this here and learn this and have it stay here. I need to produce this in my own yard for my own family.

"So I started producing in my own yard for my family. I like the vegetable tires, because one gallon of water can water two tires. The water isn't wasted. If you have five gallons of water you can water a lot of vegetables so that you can find food and you will get money from those tires too.

On motivations for making a yard garden:

"Initially I had the idea that they were paying the leader of the community group. And when he asked us to do yard gardens, I wondered if he was going to make money off of me when I started doing a yard garden in my yard. After that, I realized that that wasn't so. Because everything I was producing in my garden was mine. No one came and took anything away.

"And I realized, too, that if someone had given me money to do this garden, or they had given me those tires for me to grow vegetables I would not have taken the thing seriously. But I bought those tires with my own money and nobody was going to give that money back to me. So I had to buckle down so the money wasn't wasted. And now I make money on this garden."



Figure 6. Herve Delisma helping form vegetable beds at the home of Luxène Sommervil's in Orange, Léogâne.

On interactions with neighbors:

"I have a lot of neighbors who ask me how they can have a garden like this. And I tell them if they buy the tires I can help them get started. But I tell them, if I am the one to give you the tires, you won't take it seriously. I have five people that I am working with. Their yards are looking good. From time to time the people ask me when I am going to come by to see what they are producing. Yesterday, I went down to the crossroads and I found someone growing vegetables in two old plastic wash basins. One basin had leeks that they use for cooking. The other had green peppers that the family is eating and selling and giving away. I have people who are interested in the gardens and I am helping them, in vegetable beds, in old plastic wash basins or in tires.

Gultho has family members who have yard gardens of their own, and members of his community group also work with the yard garden technique. About the latter, Gultho explained, "What got them interested is that when they were asking those of us with gardens to give them things from our gardens, we would tell them, "I can't give my vegetables away to you every day. I produce this in my tires, you can produce it, too." So they got jealous of us and they started producing so that they could eat their own production and sell it too."



Figure 7: Medicinal plant bed at the Good Samaritan Clinic in Batey 7. Lemon grass forms the outer part of the circle.

Rhoda Beutler

Rhoda Beutler, who also works in Haiti, is familiar with the Yard Garden program. She commented, "I love the yard garden program and have learned a lot through the program and Mark's willingness to share. I've been in a handful of homes of the participants, and I have been quite impressed to see the life and abundance there."

Conclusion

In Haiti, the Yard Garden program promoted by MPP and FONDAMA is resulting in real change for the families who participate and whose yards—and lives—are being transformed as a result. If the yard garden idea interests you, we hope this article will encourage you and help you understand how the program works.

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