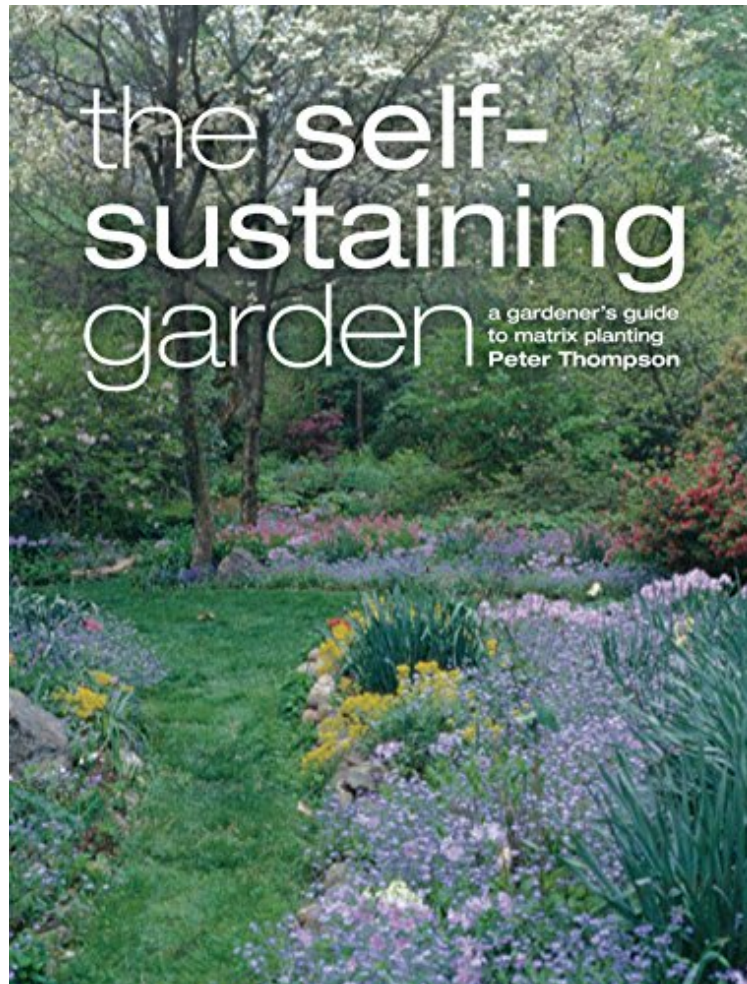


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# The Self-Sustaining Garden: A Gardener's Guide to Matrix Planting

*Peter Thompson*

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**Peter Thompson : The Self-Sustaining Garden: A Gardener's Guide to Matrix Planting** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Self-Sustaining Garden: A Gardener's Guide to Matrix Planting:

9 of 10 people found the following review helpful. For the Erudite GardenerBy allanbecker-gardenguruWe are in the midst of a multi-faceted historical development in gardening that has been propelled by social change. In our era, time available to maintain a garden has become as precious as water in the desert. Consequently, alternative styles of landscaping are evolving; styles that require fewer resources. In one way or the other, all of the alternatives politely ignore traditional gardening philosophies. The self sustaining garden is one option.The author submits that a self sustaining garden requires less effort because the plants do the work. The key to success is not to attempt to grow ones

favorite plants. Instead, one must select those that are best matched to local ecological conditions. In such situations, what goes on in the garden will be controlled not by the gardener but by the relationship between the plants that are happy growing together. The author refers to this kind of self-sustaining landscape as matrix planting and offers wildflower gardens as an example: Wildflowers grow all over the world with no help from humans. They survive by forming self-sustaining communities—broadly known as vegetation—which shelter and protect the plants within them, while excluding outsiders. They are successful because the plants within each community have established a balance with one another which enables each to obtain a share of resources, living space and opportunities to reproduce...Matrix planting is based on this natural model...Matrix planting requires less energy and resources as it contradicts traditional garden maintenance methods. For example, tilling and amending the soil is no longer required. Regular use of fertilizer is unnecessary; weeding of self-seeding plants is discouraged. Pesticides and slug pellets are never used and irrigation becomes irrelevant. The objective is not to grow bigger and better looking plants, simply healthy ones that can survive without too much intervention from the gardener. The author establishes the basic steps to creating a sustainable garden. They begin with proper soil preparation and an understanding of the concept of planting in patterns and rhythms. He continues with dedicated chapters that discuss the variety of sustainable gardens based on specific growing conditions, such as ornamental grass meadows and pools and wetlands. One chapter is devoted to the function of shrubbery while another deals with gardening in shade. Within each chapter, inspiring case studies are included and lists of plants appropriate for very specific growing conditions are supplied. From cover to cover, over 1000 plants are recommended. Readers who are mostly concerned with water conservation will find this book helpful. Mr. Thompson points out that, even though it was not specifically devised to address problems of water shortages, matrix planting has much in common with water conservation. He reminds the reader that traditional, generous irrigation encourages unbalanced growth of those plants best able to take advantage of additional water. Matrix planting of self-sustainable gardens reduces the amount of water required for a garden's survival. Mr. Thompson is a scientist. As a botanist, he headed the Physiology Department of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, UK, where he initiated research of seed germination, seedling nutrition and the long-term conservation of plant genetic resources. His book targets the scholarly, erudite gardener who appreciates a traditional style of garden writing almost as much as the science of gardening itself. In that regard, this publication is not a how-to manual, even though step-by-step instructions are given. This is a book for reference and consultation whenever sustainable gardens need to be considered.

26 of 28 people found the following review helpful. Helpful book, good information  
By Cate  
Although Peter Thompson considers matrix planting an "unorthodox" way of gardening, the concept has been around for awhile. Ann Lovejoy devoted about 20 pages to it in her book, *Ann Lovejoy's Organic Garden Design School* (2001), and she covers it briefly in *The Ann Lovejoy Handbook of Northwest Gardening* (2003). She called it sandwich planting, but it's the same as matrix planting. Peter Thompson's book provides more depth, guidance, and rationale on the topic. I use his book to complement and enhance Ann's books. The practice of layering or intermingling site-adaptive plants really makes a lot of sense.

In response to reviewer, MuffieNH, below: I didn't notice the size of the font until I read her(?) review. The font is a bit smaller than some other books, but it didn't bother me. She denied herself all the helpful information in this book...

1 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Don't waste your time with this book.  
By RedBoa  
Don't waste your time with this book. Being the green-minded person I am I checked it out from my local library because I thought it would have some useful insight into establishing a stable sustainable garden. The premise is alluring promising an alternative to the usual back-breaking gardening style we are used to. Wrong. After sifting through 5 chapters of Mr. Thompson's pontifications on things he sees us all doing wrong or not noticing in nature he still has not let us in on what exactly a matrix garden should be or end up as. He does give lists of plants and a number of case models of gardens others have established but in the end he blows his own premise for the book away by recommending the use of herbicides, fertilizers and black poly sheeting to control weeds. He gives no hints as to how to control weeds or other undesirables in the garden without the usual tools chemical or otherwise and frequently recommends the usual tools and chemicals. One might learn something about matrix gardening from the case studies in the book, they are on nice green pages within its folds but the bottom line is one will have to do some work to establish their desired garden. I can sum this review up by giving you the secret, not contained within this book, to sustainable gardening. Plant what grows in your area, match your plantings to the seasons/weather for your climate, look for creative ways to not use chemicals and over-watering and finally observe what works in your garden and what doesn't. I for one use weeds against weeds because some are nice flowering plants and crowd out others. This lets me go back and remove sections of those same weeds in favor of other things I want later. Also remember weeds are weeds only in definition. They may be temporary if you can get some succession established they may very well disappear in short order. Use them as fertilizer and mulch for your garden. If you want good soil get some bagged top soil and mulch, mix them up some native stuff and most plants will be happy with that then just wait for the dead stuff of the previous year to rot into the ground. To end this I repeat my first statement. "Don't waste your time with this book."

This book explores the theme that the plants themselves can do much of the hard work gardeners believe is an

essential part of gardening. The Self-Sustaining Garden advocates using plants as partners in self-sustaining communities to create low maintenance gardens rather than being a slave to spades and hoes. In a series of compelling case studies, Peter Thompson shows how to transform a conventional garden into a self-sustaining garden. Updated from the original edition (published in 1997), The Self-Sustaining Garden brings together an explanation of the universal principles of matrix planting with specific applications and informative chapters on soil health and biological controls, and shows how to pull all the ingredients together into a strong, self-sustaining design.

The message. . . is one that can be adapted to gardens anywhere: look to the natural models and plant accordingly. Pacific Horticulture A perfect gift for any gardener who wishes to reduce the amount of time spent on chores. Manchester Journal Inquirer Plenty of inspiration to transform your conventional garden into a self-sustaining one. . . . If it seems that the more you work in your garden, the more problems are created, then perhaps your garden could use a matrix-makeover. Camden Herald If you are unable or unwilling to devote a great deal of time to your landscape, this might be the book for you. Pine Cone Press-Citizen Practical, how-to advice combined with cutting edge ideas make The Self-Sustaining Garden a handbook and a manifesto for a new way to garden. River Falls Journal An interesting and useful garden book, especially for environmentally conscious gardeners and those of us who wistfully dream of a lower-maintenance garden. Washington Gardener