

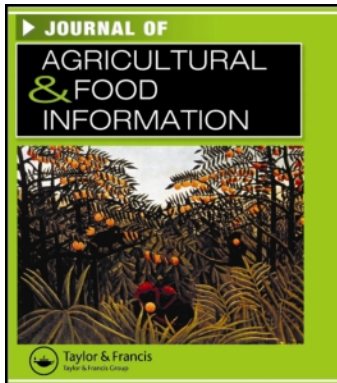
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Review of The Winter Harvest Handbook: Year-Round Vegetable Production Using Deep-Organic Techniques and Unheated Greenhouses

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Book Review

Review of *The Winter Harvest Handbook: Year-Round Vegetable Production Using Deep-Organic Techniques and Unheated Greenhouses*, by Eliot Coleman. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 2009. Reviewed by Madeleine Charney, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, Massachusetts.

“To the children who love our vegetables.” This is the simple yet powerful dedication found at the very beginning of Eliot Coleman’s latest book, *The Winter Harvest Handbook: Year-Round Vegetable Production Using Deep-Organic Techniques and Unheated Greenhouses*. In the introduction, Coleman describes his Maine farm where the “back side of the calendar,” the winter months, are as important and productive as the traditional growing season of the summer months. Cold-hardy salad and root crops raised in simple unheated greenhouses allow for year-round income, good nutrition, and fresh vegetables which Coleman claims are even sweeter, more tender, and flavorful when grown in cold temperatures. This practical book systematically covers the crops, tools, planting schedules, and techniques used in their four-season operation.

In an early chapter called “Historical Inspiration,” Coleman credits Parisian growers from the second half of the 19th century with the climax of market gardening, resulting from centuries of refining intensive gardening techniques. He points out that the key to their success was location, sustainability, quality and productivity—the same factors modern-day gardeners can use to succeed and improve upon with laborsaving devices and new technologies. These include, then and now, glass-covered frames, lightweight rail tracks (instead of roads) to access all parts of a parcel, and long-armed irrigation systems that are self-propelled by water pressure.

In another chapter, crisply entitled “Sunlight,” Coleman leads the reader through a thorough explanation of how to skirt the common myth that there isn’t enough sunlight in the winter to sustain crops. He demonstrates how careful record keeping and charting of data can yield accurate calculations around the intersection of limited winter light (10 hours or less per day) and the establishment of root systems. Coleman encourages farmers to collect their own data, share it with others, and continue to refine their own practices.

Designs for building “cold” and “cool” greenhouses are provided along with instructions for preparing soil and maintaining its fertility. Instructions

for growing and tending winter and summer crops include sowing, harvesting, weeding, and pest control. A chapter on marketing and economics stresses *fresh* and *local* as the buzzwords of the day, as opposed to *organic*. Beautiful crops and professional presentation are touted as the key to sales (p.167). Coleman covers packaging, setting prices, and innovative tactics such as creating "Thanksgiving Gift Packs" from a surplus of carrots (p.173).

The last chapter on deep-organic farming wraps up on a philosophical and political note with questions such as "Who controls organic?" (p. 203) and how to defend organic farmers' time-tested studies of their crops and soil. Coleman traces back to sources such as *Soils and Men*, the 1938 Yearbook of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, to reinforce the long-held understanding that the health and fertility of the soil is tantamount to disease-resistant plants. And again, he emphasizes that "real food comes from local farms run by deep-organic farms" (p. 209). To Coleman, the term "deep" in this context is synonymous with "nourishing" and "exceptional."

Insets appearing throughout the book offer miscellaneous but pertinent information including book, journal, and Internet sources; growing and marketing tips; inspirational references; and a tribute to Emery Emmert, the "father of plastic greenhouses in this country" (p. 59). Useful charts and graphs include harvest seasons based on cool-house versus cold-house crops, plot rotation schemes, and planting and harvesting dates based on light levels. Appendices include climate maps, effects of temperature on plants, tool and seed suppliers, and sowing dates (a chart which would have been better integrated into the text). The annotated bibliography is a bit too streamlined, listing only selections on historical materials and winter harvesting.

The vivid photographs of Barbara Damrosch (Coleman's wife) are simultaneously artful, illustrative, and educational: a diminutive landscape of salad greens newly unfurling from the moist soil, an action shot of neighbors hauling a greenhouse into place, the rosy-veined hands of a gardener maneuvering a trowel modified for transplanting, and boxes of dew-kissed produce which invite you to reach in for a crunchy treat. Her illustrations, though less graceful, are functional nonetheless.

Coleman's 40 years of experience shine through with a light wit, engaging anecdotes, and hearty doses of "on the ground" examples, making this book both readable and highly informative. This book is recommended especially for academic libraries with vocational agriculture programs and for their community of small farmers and amateur or professional gardeners alike.