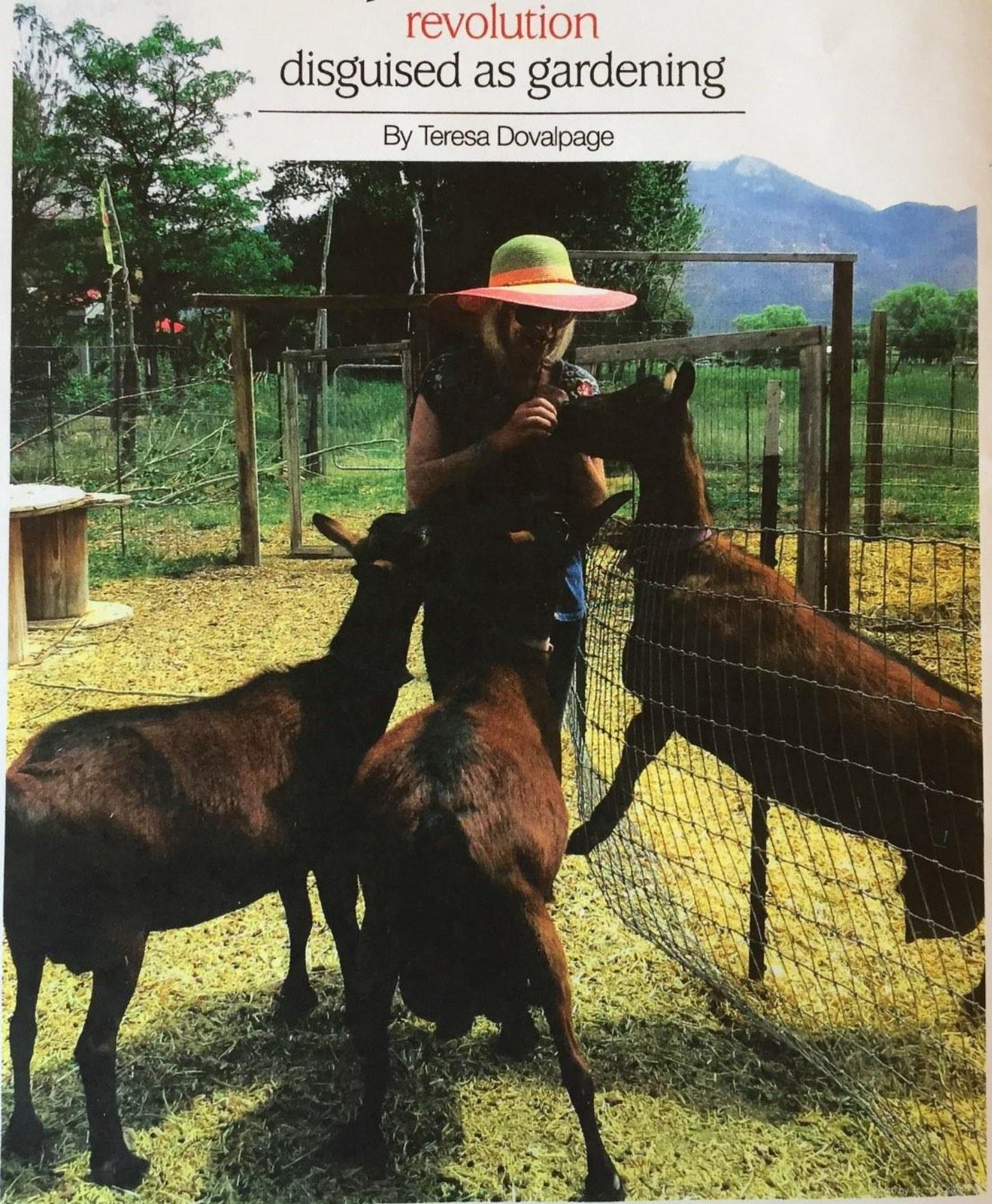
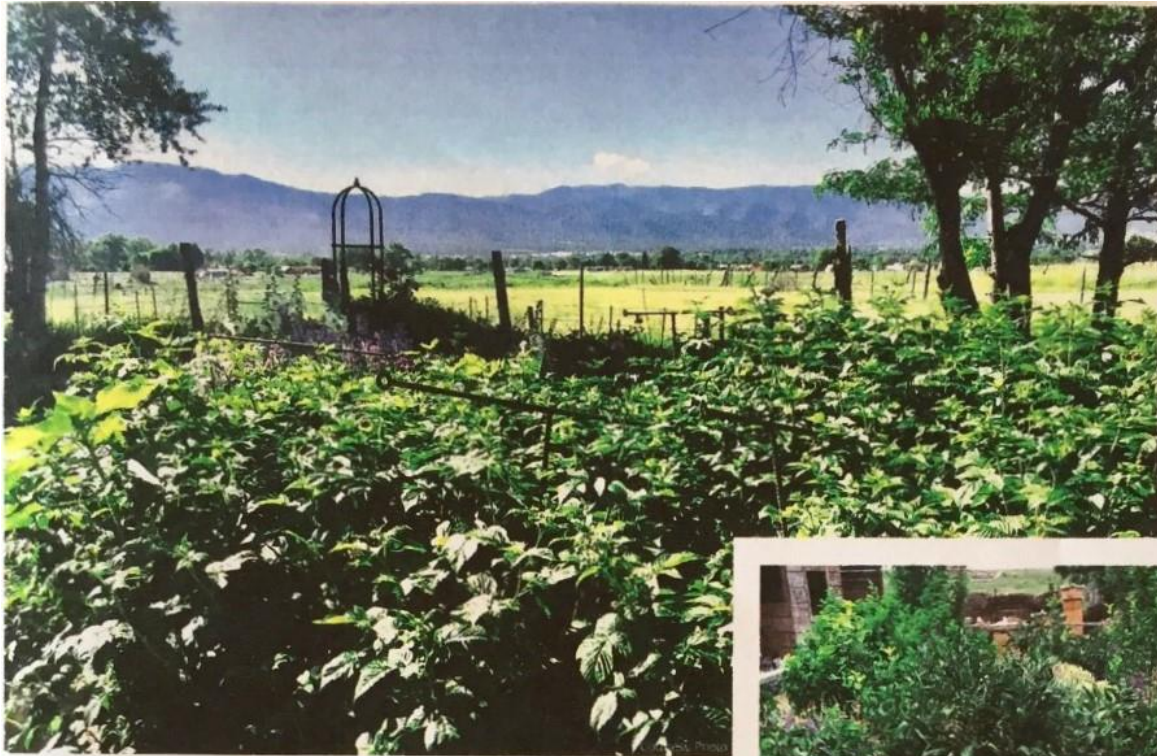


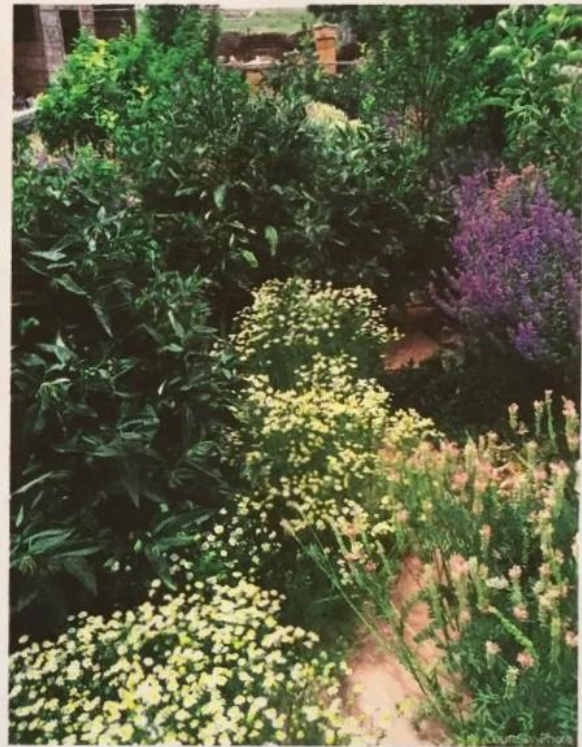
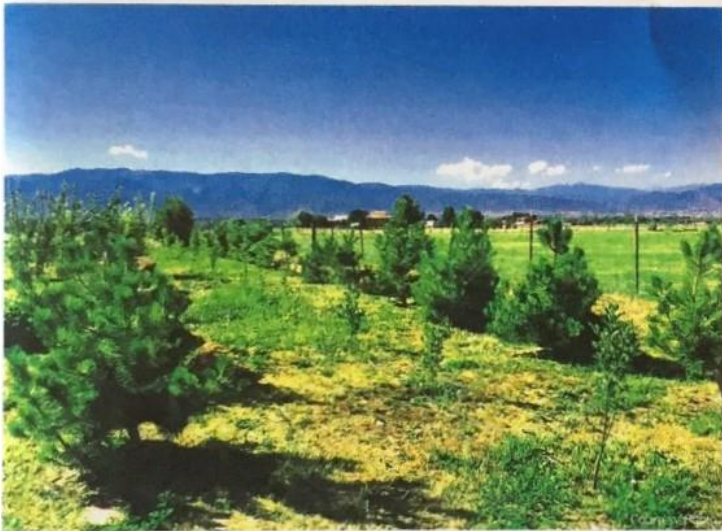
Brigid Meier on
permaculture:
revolution
disguised as gardening

By Teresa Dovalpage





Pictured:
 Left Page: Brigid feeding Bees petal treats
 Right Page Top: Raspberries
 Bottom Left: Wintobreak with Austrian pines and chokeschemes
 Bottom Right: Bee forage garden



When you enter Tierra Drala — the name Brigid Meier has given to the 3/2 acres in El Prado her husband, Fred Fair, has owned for more than 40 years and where she has implemented permaculture principles and techniques for the past 15 you come into a mix of an Edenic paradise and a working farm. You can hear the buzzing of bees (survivor stock, she says: local, resilient and treatment-free bees), smell the flowers and hear the birds singing.

Her two Maremnas, Paolo and Pluma, large white livestock guardian dogs, come to say hi. In the shed next to their pasture, Meier keeps four goats: Dulce (a Nubian) and Bella, Cha Cha and Vida (the Oberhaslis). She says they are all "superb conversationalists. There are several beehives, an acequia, lavish bee forage, medicinal plants

and a greenhouse. There's also a livestock well with a pump powered by a solar generator. And there are five hens and a colorfully plumed, highly vocal rooster

Every year, the Northern New Mexico Permaculture Institute comes to Tierra Drala for hands-on training for its students. "Taos is a perfect place to see the world through the lens of permaculture and to implement its tenets," Meier said. "There's no polluting industry here. We have over 300 sunny days a year for solar power, and while the threat of drought is always present, there's also the potential for sufficient rainwater harvesting. Foremost, there's a many-centuries-old heritage of agrarian intelligence from both Native Puebloan farmers and Hispanic agriculture. There is a treasure trove of land use wisdom here."

Meier also mentions the fact that most people in Ibos already understand how essential it is to grow without using chemical fertilizers or pesticides. "There's a very high level of consciousness here that avoids the use of poisons; people here want clean, healthy, organic food," she said. "And they want that sense of awakened interconnectedness - from the level of their integrated gardens to social justice — permeating their lives and their communities that permaculture can teach and support."

For Meier, permaculture is "revolution disguised as gardening."

"It encourages us to see connections between things and make decisions based off of interconnectedness." she said. "Permaculture principles are as applicable to group dynamics, finances and business endeavors as they are to land use. It's about ethics and wisdom and working in harmony with natural law. Someone who is growing their own food — or food for others — is much more independent and probably healthier than those who don't." She also refers to the movement's spiritual component and the contentment that results from relating to the world as a permacultunist.

"Permaculture's credo of 'Care for the Earth, Care for People, Share the Surplus' is radical, especially in today's divided political climate" she said.

OBSERVE AND LISTEN FIRST, THEN DESIGN

Meier took a two-week permaculture design course in 1996 with Pojoaque's Scott Pittman and Bill Mollison, one of the fathers of permaculture, where She learned about the importance of employing pattern recognition and doing prolonged observation on any site on which you want to build, grow or plant or keep animals.

"One needs to study the seasonal aspects of wind, rain, sun, noise and threat of fire to understand how to work in harmony with a piece of land," she said. "While this may sound contradictory, what I remember most from the course was Bill saying, 'Get out there and start making mistakes.'" While she admits she has made many, she has also learned a lot from them. "We must become fully engaged and develop a genuine back-and-forth relationship with our property," she said. "You can't just impose your transplanted vision or aesthetic on it; each Site has its own intrinsic nature and beauty. so find out what it has to teach you. Observe and listen first, then design.

Mollison also encouraged her to become a permaculture Realtor to help people understand these principles and make their home building and home owning experiences more fulfilling and sustainable.

In 1997, Meier took the design course again with Clayton Brascoupe and Louis Hena, from Tesuque Pueblo. Many Taos locals say that permaculture is nothing new, that they've been doing it for hundreds of years - and they're right, she says. Permaculture adds cutting-edge sustainable technology, systems thinking and state-of-the-art design capabilities to a wealth

A PERMACULTURE RULE, PLUS SOME WORDS OF ADVICE

There's a permaculture rule: "It can't be done cheap, easy and fast." You may have only two of those at the same time, but never all three at once. "I'm not sure where I first heard that axiom, but I heard it again a few years ago from Miguel Santistevan, one of

Wisdom, thereby bringing the best Of all

Taos' premier traditional farmers and acequia maestros and it's so true" Meier said.

For those who, after prolonged observation, want to develop a permaculture site plan with little money, but have some time and energy, she has the following advice:

- **Begin doing extensive sheet mulching where you want to plant. Gather up free cardboard and (organic, not chemically sprayed lawn) grass clippings, wood chips and leaves, layer them a couple of feet deep and let it sit over the winter or longer. All that decomposing material will attract and nourish microorganisms and fungi, which will result in rich, fertile soil.**

- **Plot out the contours of a field and make berms and dig swales (ditches) to capture rainwater. You want any rain that falls on your land to stay on your land, not run off into the street or an arroyo.**

- **Plant fruit trees and brambles, as well as perennial forage and flowers to attract birds, bees and other pollinators.**

- **Install wind breaks. You can get inexpensive seedlings from the New Mexico Forestry Department in the spring and in the fall.**

- **Take a permaculture design course and/or get a consultation. There's a two-week course offered in Taos every year through the Permaculture Institute (permaculture.org) and there are several offered online, some of which are free.**

But most importantly, enjoy the journey, take the long view, try new things and be willing to course correct. Share what you grow and what you know. The co-creative work with nature and the delight of a permaculturist is never over and will always be a work in progress. Permaculture is a case where being on the path is the goal. ■





Photo by Teresa DiValpage



Courtesy: Photo

Pictured:
Top: Brigid with Pluma, one of her two Maremma livestock guardian dogs
Bottom Left: Bee boxes: Warre hives and topbar nuc boxes
Bottom Right: Garden with bee-friendly flowers, herbs and raspberries