

# AWARENESS

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**REPLANTING THE  
GLOBAL GARDEN**  
A Conversation with  
**DAVID CROW**

**LIVING SIMPLE, GREEN  
& MORTGAGE-FREE**  
An Interview with  
**SHAY SALOMON**

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# REPLANTING THE GLOBAL GARDEN

## A Conversation with **DAVID CROW**

By Donna Strong

**D**avid Crow is a medicine man with a very large mission; cultivating understanding about the value of native plants and the crucial role of plants on a planetary scale. David has studied natural healing systems for more than twenty years. A licensed acupuncturist and herbalist who travels extensively, he is the owner of Floracoepia Aromatic Treasures. His on-line store is an outstanding source for healing and harmonizing oils, and traditional attars from around the world.

David has his own organic way of sprouting productive associations with partners in the U.S. and across the globe and offering plant products with sustainable economic and environmental ethics that preserve indigenous life ways. His book, "In Search of the Medicine Buddha", is a fascinating account of his experience studying Tibetan and Ayurvedic traditional medicine in the Himalayas.

In 2001, David co-founded The Learning Garden in Venice, where local high school teens are learning to tend the onsite community garden. This project has had an amazing catalytic effect on the students, expanding their awareness through contact with the natural world. Once a corner eyesore, the garden space has become a lively oasis for community revitalization at its finest.

**Awareness:** *Your work with the Learning Garden seems to spring from the classic line from early environmentalism: Think globally and act locally. What kind of effects have you seen with the Learning Garden?*

**David:** There are a lot of benefits we have been seeing. In the last three years over a thousand students have taken the organic gardening program. It is becoming one of the more popular classes at the school because the kids get to go outside. Kids feel better, they behave better and they learn better if they are outside. They get some time with plants in the fresh air and this is a step towards a healthier kind of education. Now what is happening is the teachers are starting to catch on — there are more and more classes happening outside, including math, science and theater. We have created a space where teachers and students

can spend more time outside and everyone benefits from that.

For the kids in the horticultural program, learning about organic gardening is a real eye-opening experience. Lots of kids never eat fresh food. They are completely addicted to junk food and have no idea what real food actually tastes

how we break the cycle of their eating at Mac Donald's.

This of course has huge sociological and medical consequences because the epidemics of ADD and adolescent diabetes and obesity are all related to eating junk food. This is not just a problem at home, it is what the school feeds them as



**David Crow displays the Osha root found in the San Juan Mountains of Colorado, an important Native American herbal medicine.**

like. So when they grow their own vegetables and they pull carrots or harvest the strawberries, they find out how delicious they are! This is one of the really big transformational experiences the kids have in their first semester. It really opens their eyes to how good natural food actually tastes, and this is

well. This is a very simple thing but it is also revolutionary. And so, we are seeing a lot of awakening through the transformation of nutritional awareness. Many of the kids now know a lot about the dangers of pesticides, GMOs, and processed foods that they didn't know before they started garden-

ing. Organic gardening is a doorway into a healthier world view, which is an important social and spiritual evolution.

A lot of these kids have never had any experience actually taking care of a living thing and because of that they are not environmentally sensitive. They don't respect the environment around them because they don't see adults acting respectfully towards the environment. When they work in the garden and grow their own plants, it is their first experience of taking care of something living. They become very proud of the vegetables and flowers they have grown and become sensitive to whether other people step on them. All of a sudden they have developed ecological stewardship. This is how you break the cycle of social violence, really. Vandalism occurs because kids just don't care about the environment. Once they get into gardening, then they start to become much more sensitive to all these issues.

These are the main things we see: better physical and emotional health from getting outside; an increased awareness about organic food and healthy eating; a kind of organic, holistic consciousness starting to develop; and we see a kind of spiritual sensitizing, or spiritual awakening coming from taking care of something living. There are also a lot of other benefits when communities come together and take care of a community garden. You might say the 'community immunity' is strengthened. Gang violence and vandalism are opportunistic of weak community immunity; of not working together.

When we first started, the whole plot of land was just abandoned and abused, but now that it has become a centerpiece of community beautification. People take care of it and are proud of it, so these problems disappear. It is really about people taking responsibility for making the environment nice and how that makes people feel. A lot of benefits are coming from it.

**Awareness:** *So the Learning Garden is developing a new context for emerging community.*

**David:** It is really about communities becoming stronger and

*(Continued on page 6)*



**Awakening to organic food consciousness at Venice High School's Learning Garden.**  
(Photos by David Crow)

**Platycodon (Chinese Balloon Flower):** cultivating medicinal plants for grassroots healthcare at the the Learning Garden.



the biosphere that is completely connected to plants. Petroleum was created by plants, and by using oil we are releasing the carbon they have bound back into the atmosphere; at the same time we are destroying the plant base that recycles carbon, so the biosphere is losing the ability to regulate its atmosphere.

This is a short description of a very complicated process, but the point is that human beings came long after the plants did, and we are completely dependent on the plant kingdom biologically for existence — for food, for regulating the seasons, for stabilizing the soil, for purifying the water, for medicines, for oxygen, for everything. In terms of actually stabilizing the biosphere, we are completely biologically dependent on plants. *If we are going to have a future biologically, we must give up our toxic addictions to fossil fuel and consumerism.*

Spiritual awareness and ecological sensitivity are closely connected, and when we become more ecologically sensitive, we realize our kinship and dependency on plants. That gives us a vision, then, of replanting the global garden. There is no way that we are going to have a habitable world unless plant life is regenerated on a large scale. If we really understand that, our social priorities

So reforestation, community gardens, green cities, living pharmacies, all of these visions that are now emerging all over the world in countless projects, all have to do with humanity getting behind the plants. Not exploiting them, dominating them, controlling them, modifying them or destroying them. It is getting behind the plants so they can simply do their biological function and we can have enough to eat, water to drink and air to breathe.

*Awareness: We are a very young species and I am so glad you are bringing forth this information. There is a whole kind of framework set for us on this planet that is enormously intelligent, about how it regulates everything, and we need to appreciate it rather than blindly destroy it.*

**David:** The levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide are going up so quickly that scientists are continuously reevaluating how much time we have left before there are catastrophic consequences and it is getting shorter and shorter.

*Awareness: Not to minimize the issues, but would you also address kelp reforestation as a way to redress this potentially disastrous imbalance?*

**David:** Kelp reforestation is only one example of many ways reforestation can help stabilize ecosystems. Kelp is the fastest growing plant in the ocean. It binds the most carbon and generates the most oxygen. It has been studied and hypothesized that if the kelp forests of the ocean were replanted to their original levels, it could have tremendous benefits in

healthier through working together. Our communities are very fragmented because everybody lives fairly isolated lives — spending all their time on cell phones or in front of their televisions and computers. Just getting together and working in a garden is kind of a revolutionary activity as far as community building. Community gardens give people an opportunity to come together and do something positive, beautiful, constructive and healthy that everyone can feel good about. Having something beautiful like this to show the community strengthens immunity against social degradation.

So that is one level of “community immunity”. I also use that term a lot when it comes to the use of essential oils and herbal medicines at the public health level. This is a very interesting idea because medicinal compounds from plants are actually their immune systems. For example, the essential oils specifically are produced by aromatic plants as part of their immune defense against pathogens and bugs. So when we distill the oils from the plants, those essential oils are literally the molecular expression of the plant’s immunological intelligence.

When people smell eucalyptus oil, it is literally the immune system of the eucalyptus tree in a bottle. Then when we put it in a diffuser and disperse it into the atmosphere, we get the immunological benefits which are anti-viral, antibacterial, anti-fungal, and antiseptic. Furthermore, because the human body and the plants are very similar in terms of anatomy and physiology, those molecules not only have anti-microbial puri-

fying effects, they also strengthen and activate our immune responses.

I just received a shipment of conifer oils from around the world; pine from Bulgaria and silver fir from Austria, spruce from Canada. If you go into a forest, what you are smelling is the community immunity of the trees because they are producing essential oils to strengthen their communities against pathogens. So when we use those oils in our homes we are not only enjoying the fragrance of the forest, we are also creating our own community immunity.

Forests are communities, gardens are also communities, and these communities have their own functional immune systems. When we do simple aromatherapy we are utilizing the medicinal compounds from those communities at the medical level. So that is another definition of community immunity that I am concentrating on these days. It is very, very important.

*Awareness: I think it is fascinating how multi-layered this is and you've tapped right into it.*

**David:** It is all very interconnected. Plants made the world habitable for higher life. If we study planetary history we learn that plants came first and human beings have just come on the scene very recently. It took millions and millions of years for the plants to actually bind all the toxic gases in the atmosphere into the soil so higher lifeforms could evolve. Plants literally created the habitable world, and they are controlling the planetary biosphere so that life can continue.

The process of global warming is a disease process of toxicity in



**Harvesting roses in the Himalayas, replanting the global garden with high-value crops.** (Photo by Christopher McMahon)

change quite dramatically and we can start to see that the only way we are going to actually have a future as a human race is to unify with a spiritual purpose of ecological restoration.

And this goes beyond all the things we are now fighting about. It goes beyond all racial, economic, ethnic and religious divisions. It goes beyond all divisions into one simple unifying principle of biological survival depending on the plants.

stabilizing global warming since the plants would be absorbing so much carbon dioxide and generating so much oxygen. And that is just one particular species.

*Awareness: The kelp option is fascinating to me because there aren't as many issues about property and who owns rights to what. The ocean is wide open so it sounds like a great one.*

**David:** Well, no one owns anything actually and that is what this age of ecological chaos is going to



**Harvesting roses in Rajasthan, an ancient form of sustainable agriculture. (Photo by Christopher McMahon)**

show people. These ecological issues are bio-regional issues, not issues of national identity. *Even the Pentagon realizes this. Last year they put out a paper saying that global warming and climate change is more of a threat to national security than terrorism.*

To solve these problems, we must have a collective epiphany of biological unity. We must realize our interconnection to the plants and the biosphere and how our actions have effects in the world around us. We have to realize that collective actions have collective effects and that these problems cannot be solved through national identities anymore.

They cannot be solved in any other way than unification. And that is potentially the great spiritual awakening of this time. More and more people are realizing that there is an urgent need for change of lifestyle and change of thinking. It is going to be very positive, very exciting and very challenging.

*Awareness: Tell me about your vision of replanting the global garden.*

David: I think one of the most important visions is green cities. Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, said last year that we must create green cities. It is a very basic goal because more people live in cities than in the countryside and we can't keep shipping our food all over the world. Our cities must become gardens because we need sustainable sources of food and medicine within the urban environment. Non-toxic sustainable urban living in garden cities is the primary vision.

Another vision is phytoremediation: using the plants to clean up the toxicity in the world. This is what the plants have done all along, which is to purify the water, clean the atmosphere and regenerate the fertility of the soil. We must stabilize biodiversity immediately

so the plants can do their work, and many scientists and world leaders are calling for this.

One example of this kind of work is Wangari Maathai, who won the Nobel Prize last year for leading women in efforts to replant the countryside for environmental, economic and social benefits (See *Awareness Magazine March/April 2005*). The use of kelp is another example of phytoremediation.

For humanity to have a future, society must have an ecological awakening that completely changes our priorities in life. We must break the dependency on fossil fuel, and create alternatives to the destructive forces of non-sustainable economic systems. Community gardens, grassroots healthcare, natural medicine, phytoremediation, and planting green cities are all important ways to accomplish this.

**For more information on David Crow's educational activities, products or partnerships, please visit [www.floracopeia.com](http://www.floracopeia.com) or [www.thelearninggarden.org](http://www.thelearninggarden.org)**

**The writer, Donna Strong, has gardening in her blood. Her first book, "Coming Home to Calm", will be published later this year. Contact her at [www.donnastrong.com](http://www.donnastrong.com)**

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