



Field Notes From MesoAmerica

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Most people on most of the Earth; that would be Central and South America, Africa, Asia Major and Minor, and Australasia, live something like this, and have since like, forever. What's more, most people in the World will continue to live like this (if they're lucky) for the foreseeable future, despite promises of "aid" and "progress" from the developed nations. These terms usually translate into "we'll give you trinkets in exchange for your ancestral lands."

Most people on most of the Earth spend the majority of their waking hours seeking, growing, preparing, and eating food, mostly plant products. Despite the European addiction to "meat," in the grand scheme of things, plants and plant products are eaten exponentially more than meat. But watching the food programs, esp. "No Reservations," and "Bizarre Foods," one would think that all humans everywhere share our obsession with meat. I did see a recent "No Reservations" where Bourdain had an OMG moment when he observed people living in a landfill in Nicaragua eating freshly dumped garbage.

Many people equate the words "tropical" and "paradise." Many people, of course, are usually wrong, and this is the case here. "Tropical" means "too damn hot for people (and plants) who were raised in the Northern Hemisphere," which are latitudes somewhere above Texas. Tropical means you better have a bulletproof immune system, or you will spend all of your time fighting off the numiferous microbes that thrive in high heat and humidity. Microbial life is everywhere, and grows on and in everything, including you?..

When I moved into these apartments in the capital city of Belmopan, Black vultures (*Coragyps atratus*) would make daily visits to the trash heap in my backyard. At night, dogs, cats, and opossums would make their visits, scattering baby diapers and other goodies all over the place. I estimate about one-third of an acre of the two acre property is an unsanitary landfill. This is because although trash pick-up is available, nobody has the money to pay for it. Much easier to continue with the tradition of throwing trash pretty much anywhere, and when it accumulates to about two or three feet, douse it with gasoline (when one can afford it) and set it on fire. Food scraps, baby diapers, aluminum foil and baking pans, cans, and bottles do not burn, and so lie smoldering silently until the next fire. Or vulture.

In The Rainforest, the only thing more important than keeping the rain from washing your seeds from their beds, or having the hormiga carry them back to their nest, is preventing them from drying out. Humidity varies greatly in the Tropics; some areas are almost desert-like (but not for long!). Like where I am in Belmopan at the edge of the tropical hardwood forest. Or, as was the case for my former garden project site near (too near) the Macal River, are damp and moist almost all the time.

Then there's the wind. The dehydrating, desiccating wind that moves moisture from one place to another. In this case, from your germinating seeds into the atmosphere. And I have learned through bitter experience to keep your seeds moist, never mind the seedbed. In theory, a moist seedbed should mean enough moisture for the seed. But stuff happens, so be sure the seed has enough water to survive a temporary drying out of the

bed. The best way to do this is to make sure the humidity is high at all times. Two easy solutions are to cover the flat with plastic wrap, or it put inside a plastic bag. This also protects seeds against the flash downpours common in the tropics.

I have observed that heirloom seeds tend to be more delicate than hybrids. This is because hybrids were developed to withstand all kinds of hideous chemicals and a wider temperature range, and so are more uniform and hardy. Heirlooms, on the other hand, seem to still have a great deal of genetic variation among the seeds. Some grow large, some grow small. Some germinate early, some late. Some plants look like the picture on the seed pack; others have variations in color and leaf shape. Some plants yield abundantly, some; not so much. But that's what genetic diversity is all about: diversity.

It seems the seeds are all much more individuals than is the case with hybrids, where uniformity is required to create the profits for the agribusiness(?) giants that control the World's food supply. I mean really; agribusiness? What a concept. Some Slick Willie(s) or Wilheminas in an Armani suit get to literally live like Royalty, while contaminating or eliminating the genetic diversity present in heirloom seeds. Worse yet, while restricting or eliminating what people get to eat almost everywhere in the World. Basta!

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