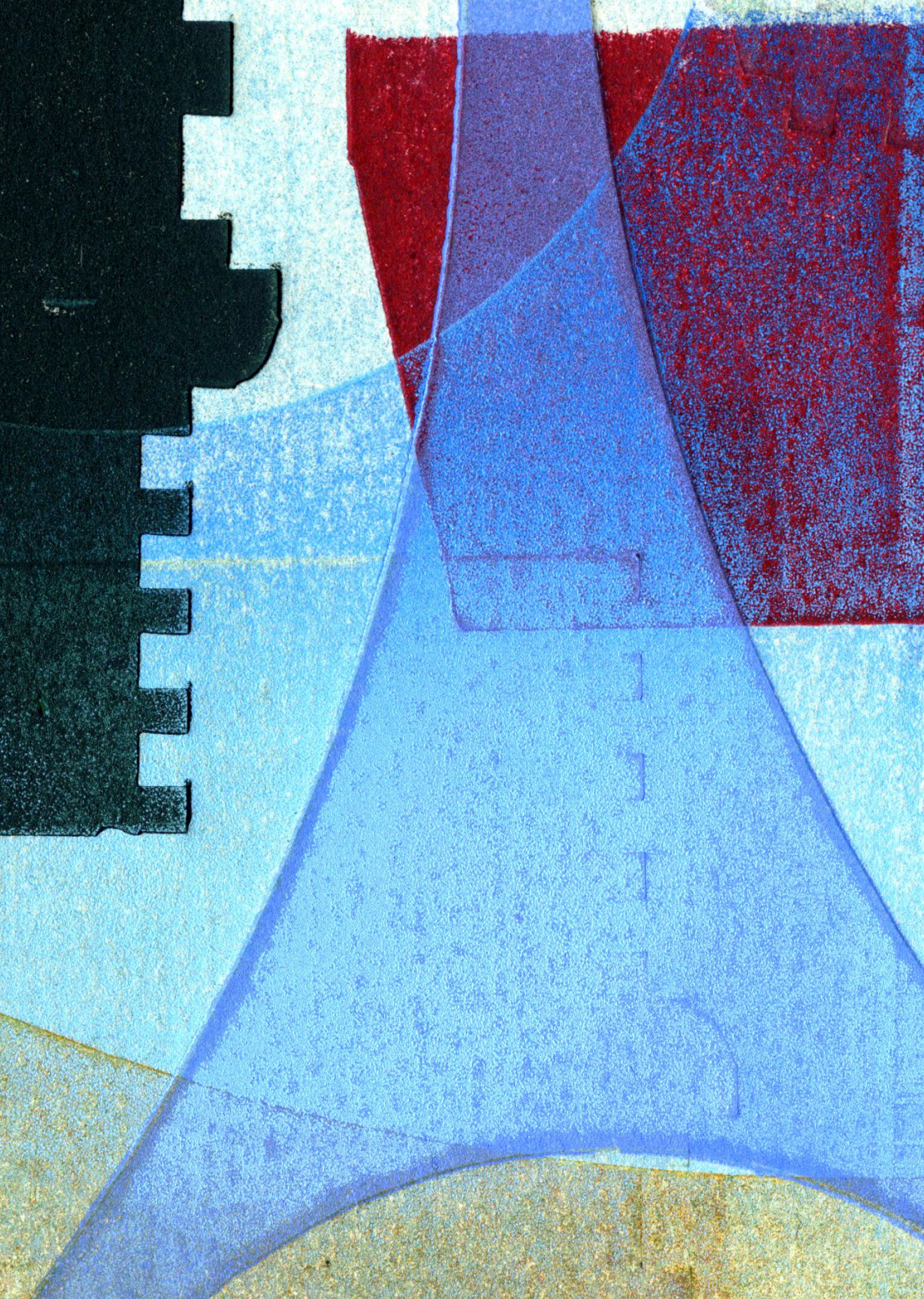


The People's Kitchen

Zine #3

John's Front Garden





The People's Kitchen

Zine #3

John's Front Garden

The People's Kitchen

Kate O'Shea is an artist and organiser. In 2015, she co-founded The People's Kitchen, a space where people could come together to cook, eat, build community, and have a laugh as they shared ideas and formulated plans to address the challenges we face as communities today.

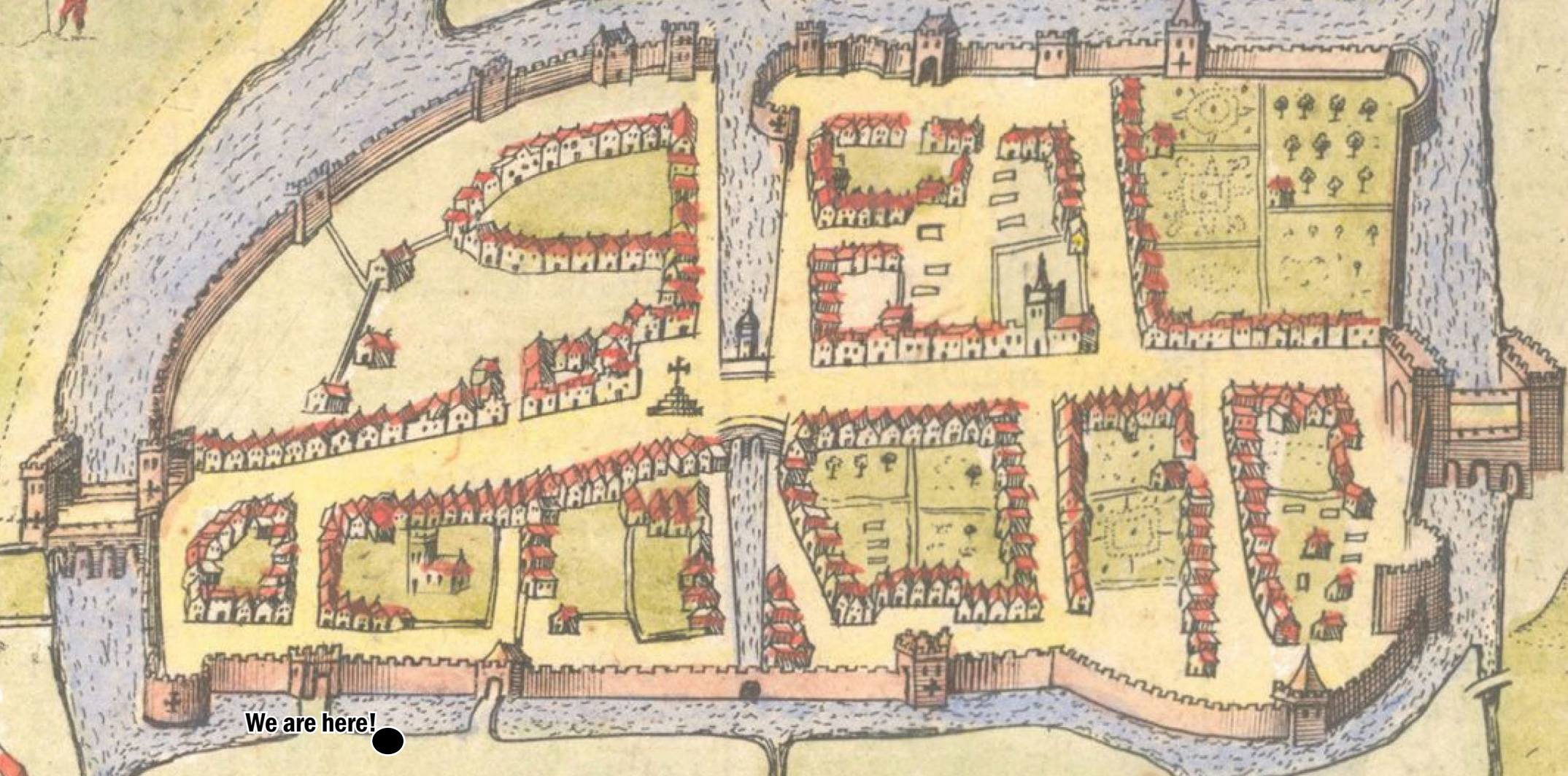
As the size of the events grew, the fun continued, but the underlying purpose—leading systems change from the ground up—got a bit lost in the mix. With the People's Kitchen North Main Street, the project returns to its roots. The People's Kitchen provides a framework for people passionate about systems change to literally sit around the kitchen table, share information and ideas from different perspectives, combine skills and knowledge, and formulate plans.

The People's Kitchen focuses on the energy of collaboration and mutualism—rather than individualism, isolation, and competition—to get things done. Connection and building relationships make work more enjoyable, more nurturing, and more productive. Link, exchange, imagine, do. And have fun doing it.

This series of The People's Kitchen—set in North Main Street, Cork City, Ireland—explores this approach through the lens of soil and food growing in an urban neighbourhood.



Photo by Gretchen Kessler



John Speed's 'Corke' from his Province of Munster c.1610-11

This series of the People's Kitchen takes place in Grattan Street, Cork, Ireland, just off the original medieval street of the city (North Main Street) and around the area previously enclosed by the city walls. This part of the city was urbanised almost 800 years ago.



One day on Grattan Street

ERIN is chatting with her neighbour

GEORGE, who mentions that

JOHN, who lives a few doors down from George, has an overgrown garden that resembles the planters that Kate and Erin took on in **Zine #2**.

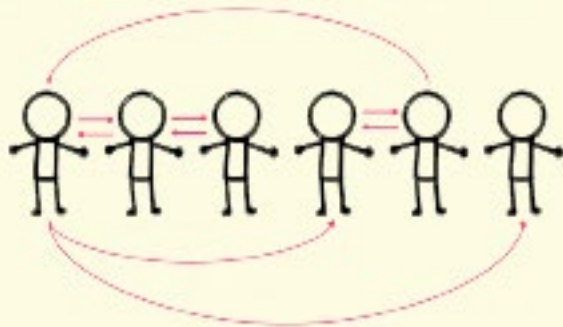
Erin has an idea, which she mentions to her co-worker

KELLY, who volunteers with Cork Zero Waste. Kelly introduces Erin to the group's founding member

AISLING, who is looking for somewhere to grow food but lives in a city centre apartment with no outdoor space.

George contacts John, Erin contacts

KATE, and People's Kitchen 3 begins.



KATE

is the initiator of The People's Kitchen.

AISLING

is a founding member of the community group Cork Zero Waste. She lives in a city centre apartment with no outdoor space.

ERIN

is part of the People's Kitchen and lives on Grattan Street. She is an urban planner.

THE JOY OF SEEING A SEED
POKE UP FROM SOIL. SEEING A
LEAF UNFURL. PICKING FRUIT
OR FLOWERS OR LEAVES.
MAKING TEA. ARRANGING THEM
IN A VASE. COOKING THEM FOR
DINNER. LIVING IN THE CITY
DOESN'T ALLOW MUCH SPACE
FOR THIS....OR DOES IT?





November 2023

George trims back the small willow tree, and we set to work picking up crisp packets and other litter tossed in over the wall. We cut away the invasive clematis vines, and dig out their sprawling roots.



As we dig, we are happy to find decent soil and loads of earthworms. We find bluebells—John's favourite—and set them aside for replanting.



Bluebells



We also leave wild plants like ribwort plantain.



Ribwort Plantain (Slanlús or 'health plant' in Irish) is used for healing wounds and many other ailments. Its young leaves can be eaten as leafy veg, and birds like goldfinches eat its seeds.





December 2023

We add a layer of compost made in [Zine #1](#). Then some aged manure, a gift from Caroline. Caroline is our local market gardener, who saw us working as she drove by on the way home from the farmer's market.

Then we cover the garden with cardboard from the North Main Street shops and top it off with autumn leaves that we brushed up off the footpaths. The mulch keeps the soil covered and smothers the remaining weeds as the garden sleeps over the winter. We meet Sam, who lives next door. He gives us bricks from his recent renovation that we can use in the garden.

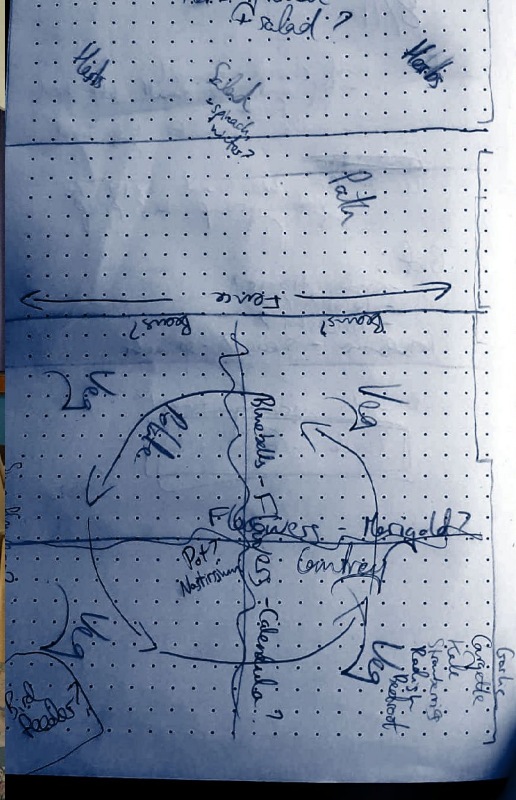


December 2023 (Winter Solstice)

Garlic, also a gift from Caroline, is the first planting. The tradition is to plant garlic on the shortest day of the year and harvest it on the longest.

We decorate the willow tree as a surprise for John and later get a laughing voice note from him.





Aisling makes plans. She orders seeds and also trades for some at the Cork Zero Waste seed swap.



Spring 2024

With limited space in her apartment, Aisling starts some of the seeds in the canteen window at her work. She uses plastic packaging saved from the recycling as domes over the seed trays and cuts up an oat milk carton for marking sticks.





As the willow tree and the transplanted bluebells come back to life, Aisling starts planting. First strawberries, then herbs, and finally the office-window seedlings when the weather warms up. She crosses her fingers that the slugs and birds don't eat too much and counts down the days until harvest time.



HERBS

Aisling makes a herb spiral from Sam's repurposed bricks and buys herbs from the nearby farmer's market.

Chives
French tarragon
Mint

Lavender
Lemon balm
Lemon verbena
Oregano

The herbs add flavour to dinners, become tea, and are dried and added to bath salts.

MEDICINE

Ribwort plantain, comfrey leaves and calendula petals are turned into salves.



Summer 2024

FROM AISLING'S GARDEN JOURNAL:

Slowly the efforts start bearing fruit. Seeing the first flower and peeking to see when it becomes a baby vegetable. Then waiting until it's big enough to be plucked.

Some are more successful than others. A few planted too early and some too late. Slugs and bugs from a wet summer feast on others. Lessons learned for next year.



A DAY OF EATING FROM THE GARDEN

Breakfast

Chives (or onion and garlic tops) in scrambled eggs piled on toast

Lunch

Courgette fritters flavoured with onion and fresh herbs with green tomato chutney

and a **green leaf salad** topped with nasturtium flowers

A hard cheese with **beetroot stem** pickles and **radish leaf** pesto for after

Lemon balm tea in the afternoon.

Dinner

Garlicky beetroot pasta

with the **beetroot leaves** steamed like spinach, topped with feta cheese





REUSE

In nature, there is no waste. The outputs of one process become the inputs of another in a **closed loop** system.

Zero Waste is about creating a circular economy that mimics nature and treats 'waste' as a resource. This can be done through reuse and by using whatever is readily available around us:

- Unused space becomes a vegetable garden
- Cardboard and autumn leaves becomes mulch
- An empty recycling bin becomes a makeshift wheelbarrow for collecting and moving leaves
- Leftover bricks make a garden path and a spiral herb garden
- Seeds and plants are shared at swap events
- A canteen window and plastic containers saved from the recycling bin become plant propagators
- Ice lolly sticks make plant labels
- Rainwater from the roof is saved in a water butt
- Herb stalks and onion skins from cooking make soup stock
- And food scraps make bokashi. Bo-WHAT?

BOKASHI

Bokashi (rhymes with toe-GOSH-ee) is a Japanese term related to fermentation. Like composting, it involves microbes (see [Zine #1](#)). But unlike the microbes that decompose things into compost, bokashi microbes ferment (or pickle) food scraps. This fermenting process creates a ready-to-eat feast for soil microbes when the food scraps are dug into the ground.

Bokashi is an easy home composting method. Food scraps are placed in a special bin and sprinkled with an inoculated bran. It is especially convenient for tight spaces like Aisling's urban apartment.





Meitheal (pronounced meh-hal) is a traditional Irish work party that would form to get a labour-intensive task done. Neighbours would gather to help each other with jobs like harvesting crops, because farmers could harvest crops from their individual fields better by working as a group than as individuals. The work included eating together and celebrating when the job was done. This cooperative and mutual approach was not only a practical solution but also helped reinforce community ties and provide a social outlet.

November 2024

We put the garden to sleep for the winter again. First, a weeding **meitheal** with friends, including some new ones from Soil Savers (a recently formed composting group). Aisling plants some garlic and onion sets. We cover part of the garden with leaf mulch again and plant the rest with clover, a cover crop (see [Zine #2](#)) that will fix nitrogen and keep the soil covered over the winter like a cosy quilt until it's time to grow food again.





DIG WHERE YOU STAND

**There are over 60,000 residential gardens in Cork City.
Many front gardens have no real use.
The grass takes time and energy to mow,
and the clippings often get hauled away
in a refuse truck.
What a waste.**



Resources

agriton.co.uk

Provides detailed instructions and videos about bokashi.
(Bokashi supplies are available on-line from several Irish retailers.)

communityroots.ie

a Dublin-based garden sharing initiative

corkzerowaste.wordpress.com

Also on social media @corkzerowaste

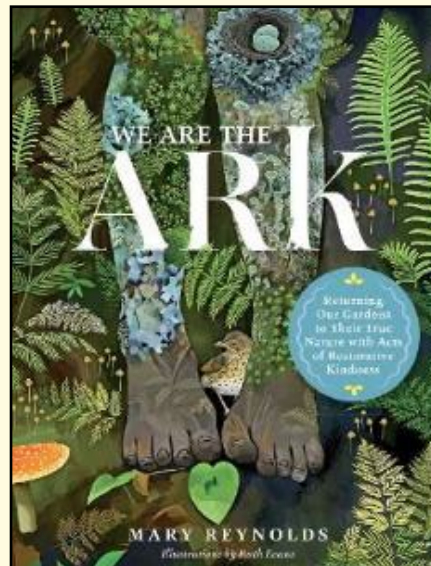
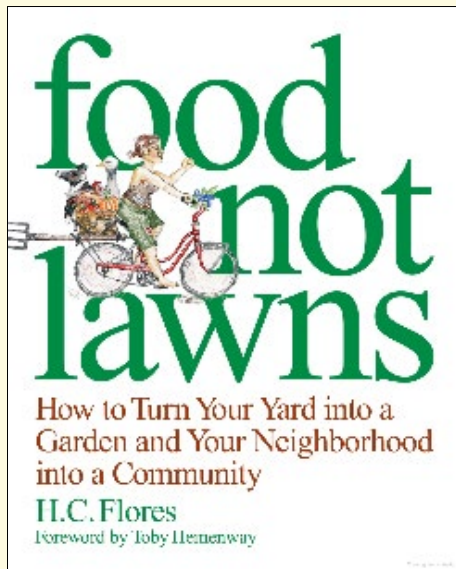
foodnotlawns.com

Resources and inspiration. (You may also be inspired by searching the web for the term 'foodscaping')

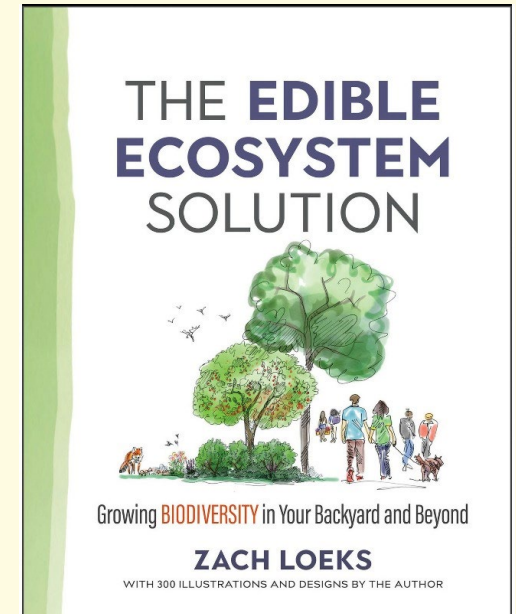
weartheark.org

More ideas on what to do with residential gardens

Books



See foodnotlawns.com/authornote



The Fine Print

Cardboard mulch: Cardboard works well for smothering many weeds or grass when starting a new garden. However, this technique won't work on some really robust plants. We were pleasantly surprised it worked so well on the clematis. In addition, many people caution against using cardboard to suppress weeds around veg in an actively growing garden, as it can block air flow to the soil. When mulching, use plain, non-glossy cardboard and remove any tape, staples, and labels. Remember to overlap the edges to prevent weeds from growing through. Detailed instructions are available from many sites on-line.

Seed saving: Saving seeds for the next growing season can be fun and cost-effective. However, to achieve good results, you should only save seeds from 'open-pollinated' plants. These seeds will grow true to their parent plants, which means that they will retain the same characteristics. Many seeds on the market are hybrid varieties, often labelled as 'F1' on the packet. These hybrid seeds are a result of crossing two different varieties of the same plant species, bred for their desirable traits. Unfortunately, they cannot be used for seed saving because they do not produce true-to-type seeds. Instead, the seeds from hybrid plants will yield a random mix of genes from the two original varieties. As a result, the next generation of plants is unlikely to have the same flavour, yield, or other favourable characteristics as the original seeds you purchased.

Another bonus of open-pollinated seeds is that they adapt to local environmental conditions over time, leading to plants that are well-suited to the local climate and soil. Open-pollinated seeds also contribute to genetic diversity, which is important for resilience.

If buying seeds, it's best to shop local. Some sources of open-pollinated seed in Ireland include:

brownenvelopeseeds.ie

fruithillfarm.com

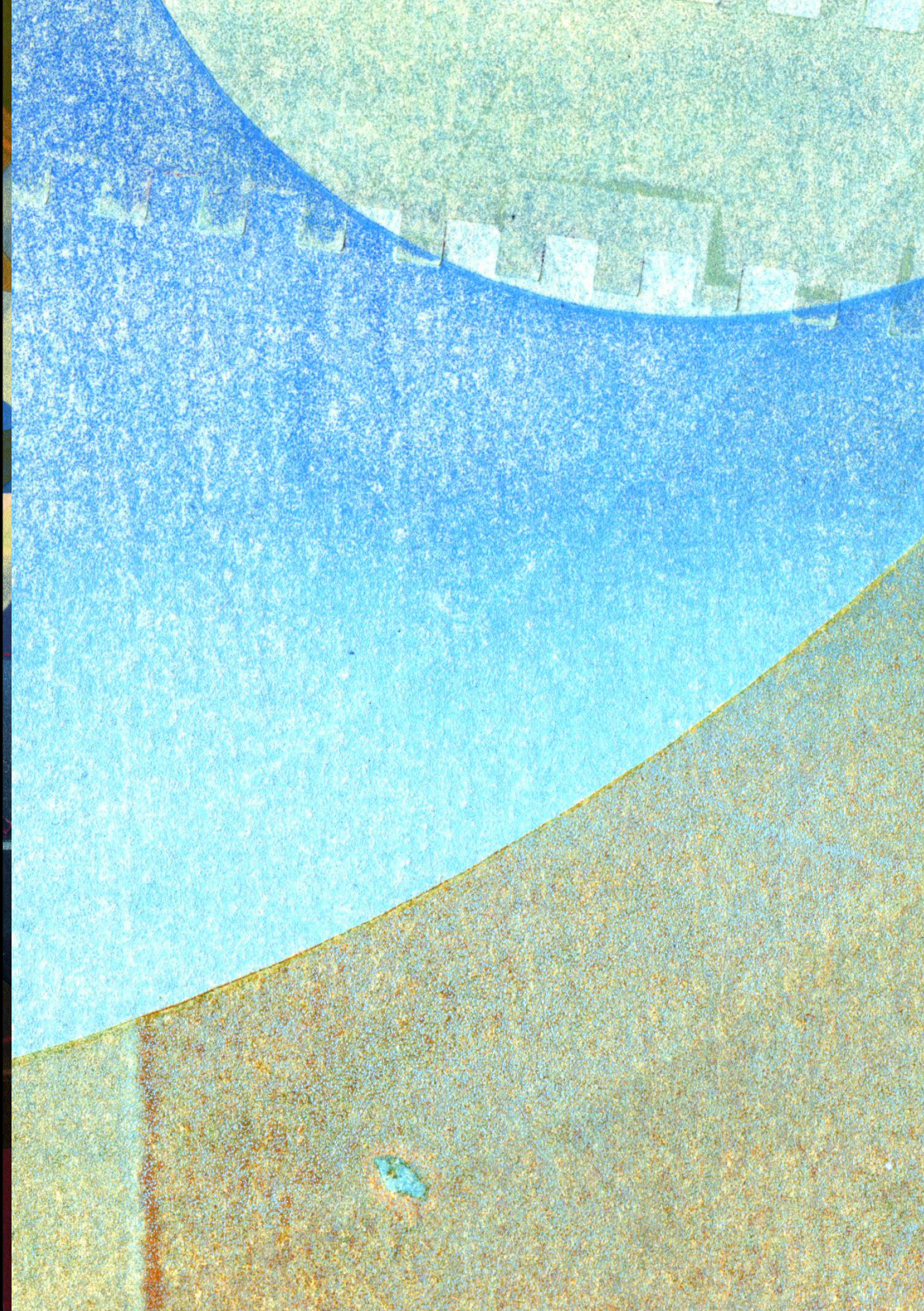
irishseedsavers.ie

seedsandstuff.com

seedie.ie

seedsireland.ie

sowdiverse.ie





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create national development
agency for collaborative arts



funding
the arts
artscouncil.ie