

Hum House



Community Portrait

I met Raquel through a mutual friend, and immediately loved her, her home, her family and her garden. An invitation into ones' home gives an impression of the souls who dwell within. For some this means declarations of sport loyalties, lawn ornaments, low or high maintenance landscapes, etc. People are drawn to Raquels' home because at first glance you are sure that faeries live there. It is flanked by a legendary 4-storey treehouse which is a beacon to adventurers. This small plot of land heals, sparks the imagination and whispers truths. The earth is full of medicinal plants, edibles and aesthetic plants which compliment one another in a feeling of harmony. Her home is a place where hummingbirds are drawn, and one often finds himself humming with happiness.

Raquel is perfecting the art of creating a sanctuary. Her home and lifestyle have built a community of

like-minded people who want to do their part to change the world. If I ever have a question related to plants, herbs, gardening or permaculture, it is to Raquel and her husband, Oliver, that I turn to for direction and answers.



Our most recent conversation began with edible flowers and completely home-grown meals. Raquel shared that her family has been loving edible flowers lately, and shared images of yucca

flowers, sunflowers, hollyhock flowers, and daylilies cooked with eggs. Her four year old son, Ezra, loves to eat these meals with tongs, of course. We also talked about a flower salad which Raquel often brings to gatherings with friends. These include Borage flowers, Japanese Chrysanthemum petals, Calendula, mustard flowers, kale flowers, currants, clover, dandelions, arugula, fennel, red leaf lettuce and lots of berries; all or most of which has been grown on their own land.



Raquel was born with a love of the land and gardening. It is literally in her blood as her ancestors were Mennonites in Pennsylvania. She

visit me at www.melissachappell.com

a gentler and happier approach to health

interesting
articles

[Gardening]

Hum House

was raised among people who would grow flowers, vegetables and bake bread for markets; they would build bricks and everything was from scratch. Her family strived to find a way of living that was poetic as well as functional. She was raised feeling that the welfare of our planet lies in our hands, that the earth is living and needs to be cared for. She believes that connection to land and nature will build families and communities that will break patterns of consumerism and opulence.

We are both advocates for joy and connection that comes of growing your own food rather than the disconnected experience of a visit to the grocery store, where you do not know where the food has come from or how it was grown. You often do not connect the impact on the planet each purchase can have; supporting current agricultural practices, the consumption and disposal of plastic and dependency on oil. The philosopher Rudolf Steiner has had a deep impact on Raquel and her family. Steiner proposes that there are two schools of thought: either the earth is a machine that we take from or that the earth is alive and we are here to protect and take care of her. These can link into huge issues, global issues; however, change begins with small steps, and that is what I wanted to focus on.

I asked Raquel what the first thing someone should do if they have no idea where to begin with taking care of their land, and without hesitation she

replied, “start a compost pile! Gather all your leaves in the fall... all of your neighbors leaves... start a compost pile,” rather than going to a company or a store and buying fertilizers and soil mixes. Raquel continued, “I think the biggest contribution we can make to the earth is making good soil.” Much of our conversation was related to soil, building the soil to make up for the loss of topsoil and the poisoning of our soil that is happening as a result of mass-production of food.

We also talked about paying attention to what you like to eat and begin learning how to grow a couple of those things. To “celebrate every step along the way and know that you’re so awesome for doing it! If you only grow aloe vera on your window sill, celebrate that and use it! ... Get excited when you get a little burn, and use it!”

Raquel made reference to two books [among others], *The \$64 Tomato* by William Alexander and *Paradise Lot* by Eric Toensmeier and Jonathan Bates, as our conversation turned to what we can do and moving toward a more sustainable way. Having a garden doesn’t have to-- in fact should not cost you a fortune. The challenge issued is to find ways to grow your garden that do not cost any money. “Do what you can without going to a store and buying things. See what you can salvage. Be creative... be resourceful. Look on Pinterest and see what people do in their gardens without spending a single penny. Share seeds at a seed

visit me at www.melissachappell.com

a gentler and happier approach to health

Melissa
Chappell
.com

Hum House

exchange.” You can get starts from friends who have established gardens. There is a momentum that will build from the experience of others and your own momentum to further impactful change in our communities.

In a sustainable garden what you produce gets used or goes back into the system. For example, Raquel has chickens. The chickens are fed largely from food scraps and weeds and other yard clippings. The family eats and shares the eggs. And the waste that is produced by the chickens is added to the compost pile and is returned to the soil for plants to grow. Beginning a process of learning of what your property wants, paying attention to the dynamics, and what is growing naturally. Learn how to grow things, but also learn about the lore, the history and the uses of your plants. Even your “weeds” have a use and a purpose, and you can learn how to integrate them in the process of developing your land.

Of course we had to complete our visit with a walk through the garden, gathering greens, herbs and leaves for a smoothie. Our smoothie included Goldenrod, multiple varieties of kale, evening primrose leaves, fennel, stinging nettle, yogurt and berries.

To see more about Raquel and her garden, please visit grittypretty.blogspot.com.

author: swan dritti

visit me at www.melissachappell.com

a gentler and happier approach to health