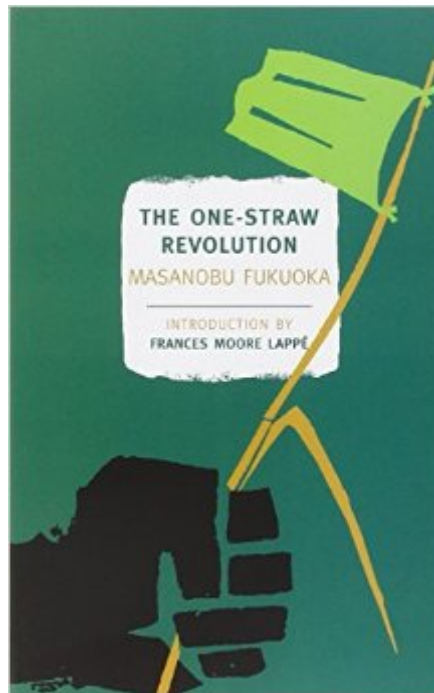


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The One-Straw Revolution: An Introduction To Natural Farming (New York Review Books Classics)



Synopsis

Call it *Zen and the Art of Farming* or a *Little Green Book* • Masanobu Fukuoka's manifesto about farming, eating, and the limits of human knowledge presents a radical challenge to the global systems we rely on for our food. At the same time, it is a spiritual memoir of a man whose innovative system of cultivating the earth reflects a deep faith in the wholeness and balance of the natural world. As Wendell Berry writes in his preface, the book is valuable to us because it is at once practical and philosophical. It is an inspiring, necessary book about agriculture because it is not just about agriculture. • Trained as a scientist, Fukuoka rejected both modern agribusiness and centuries of agricultural practice, deciding instead that the best forms of cultivation mirror nature's own laws. Over the next three decades he perfected his so-called *do-nothing* technique: commonsense, sustainable practices that all but eliminate the use of pesticides, fertilizer, tillage, and perhaps most significantly, wasteful effort. Whether you're a guerrilla gardener or a kitchen gardener, dedicated to slow food or simply looking to live a healthier life, you will find something here—you may even be moved to start a revolution of your own.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Some have said that the Fukuokan philosophy is the tap root of what is now more broadly called Permaculture, only Masanobu Fukuoka was a Japanese farmer, working with rice and winter grain in a southern Japanese climate. Both are no-till methods that shun the use of chemicals. However,

Fukuoka should be set apart from farming in general and Permaculture in particular, in that *The One-Straw Revolution* is essentially a profound work of literary philosophy. Indeed, in many cases it reads like a naturalist's bible. Although the book is dressed in the language and anecdotes of a farmer, the message looms much larger. We read of a man who came to terms with the problem of death, and then decided to form a profoundly new (or is it old?) relationship with nature. In essence, the nugget of his wisdom is that, instead of struggling to control and command nature, we must learn to work with and learn from nature. Allow me to share one quote: "To build a fortress is wrong from the start. Even though he gives the excuse that it is for the city's defense, the castle is the outcome of the ruling lord's personality, and exerts a coercive force on the surrounding area. Saying he is afraid of attack and that fortification is for the town's protection, the bully stocks up weapons and puts the key in the door." Now I ask you, does the following paragraph sound like the words of a farmer or a philosopher? From the face of it, one might think Fukuoka is here criticizing the nuclear arms race, but he is actually talking about the warlike mindset of farmers who see leaf-munching pests as evil enemies that must be fortified against, sought out and destroyed. Whether we are talking about bull weevils or communities, though, his advice is sound. We must change our frame of reference and establish a different relationship with the world. Concise and yet elegant, Fukuoka's prose is pregnant with meaning. Altogether, this work provides poetic and intelligent critique of industrial agricultural practices and the linear notions of nature and progress that underlay those practices. In fact, Fukuoka goes as far as to declare that the scientific method itself limits our experience and knowledge of nature. An invaluable, timeless work that will move you, even if you have never picked up a hoe. j.w.k.

Masanobu Fukuoka was a laboratory agricultural scientist who worked on fighting plant diseases. He also had many unanswered questions about the interrelationship between man and nature. After a long sabbatical he resigned his position and took over his father's rice and mandarin orange farm. Fukuoka thought that by putting the subjects of his questions into actual material challenges he might find the answers he sought. Fukuoka was immediately drawn to organic and natural farming methods, and over the years developed a type of natural farming that he refers to as "do-nothing farming". Contrary to what you may imagine, this method does involve work, much of it menial, but at least in Fukuoka's experience the benefits outweigh the negatives. His method of farming is thus: After the seasonal heavy rains, the rice is planted by scattering it by hand throughout the farming area. The planting rice is rolled in a type of clay that will help prevent animals from eating it but will not inhibit sprouting. Clover seeds are also sown at the same time in the same method. The

clover acts as a natural barrier to the young rice shoots, and helps the soil from eroding. The rice will grow naturally over the course of the next few months without constant pools of water as are often seen in traditional (from 1600-1940s) Japanese rice farming, albeit shorter and stockier than the cultivated rice. After the rice harvest, the leftover straw is scattered over the field to decompose, adding nutrients back into the soil. Afterwards, barley is planted as a winter crop and to further enrich the soil for the next rice season. Fukoka does not use compost on his rice fields or on his citrus orchard as he finds that the byproducts of the plant provides all the soil nutrients needed. He does maintain a small compost pile for his vegetable garden, however. Outside of the rice season, he tends to his mandarin orange orchard, which is also kept on a "do-nothing" method of growth. From using this technique, he has not only kept up with modern (tractor, fertilizer, pesticide) farmers in quantity, but has a much higher quality of rice, barley, and oranges. He spends very little out of pocket and sells his produce for a very fair price. The great thing about this short book (192pp) is that it is not exclusively about farming. In fact, there are many pages where Fukoka expands on philosophy, history, nutrition, intentional communities, and sustainability. There is also an excellent forward by Wendell Berry, one of my favorite authors (Jayber Crow is a must read) Highly recommended although it seems to be out of print. I borrowed mine from a local library.

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