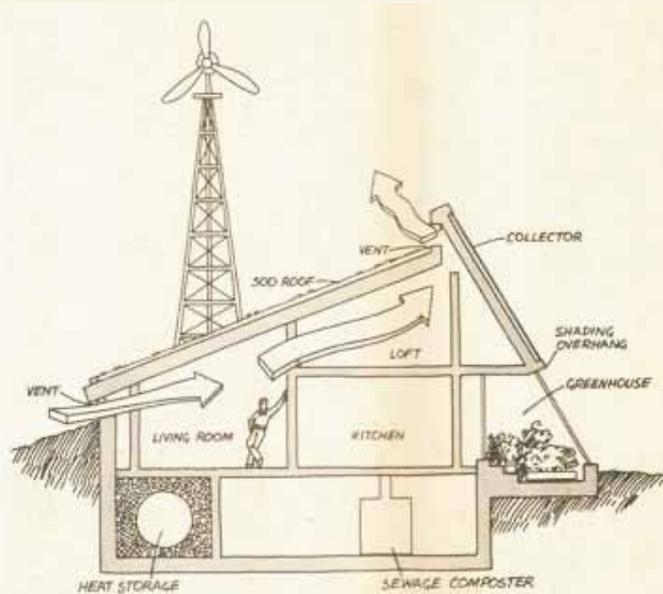


First 30 Years of Natural Life Magazine



Solar Home Survey

Natural Life has covered renewable energy and sustainable housing since the very first issue in 1976. In the April, 1997 issue, we surveyed the state of the art across North America. One of the buildings was called Ouroboros, after a mythical dragon that survived by eating its tail and regenerating itself. It is an experimental house built near the University of Minnesota, near Rosemount and was featured in *The Solar Home Book* by Bruce Anderson (Cheshire Books, 1976), which provided the drawing, above.

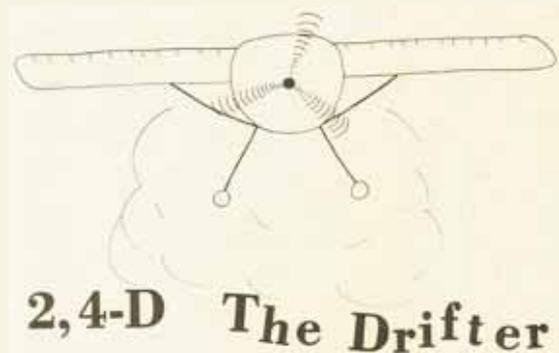
Both design and construction was the work of students at the university. In 1976, architecture Professor Holloway was awarded the Environmental Quality Award in Science and Technology from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for his pioneering work on Project Ouroboros. Since then, Holloway's writings and architecture have been published and exhibited widely and internationally. He is co-author, with Maureen McIntyre, of *The Owner Builder Experience, How to Design and Build Your Own Home*, published in 1986 by Rodale Press.

As an evolving laboratory for energy conservation and self-sufficiency, the house has such "novel" features as a sod roof, a wind generator and a composting toilet. It is in the shape of a trapezoid, with the longest side facing due south. Earth is piled against the north, east and west walls. The sod roof slopes backward almost to the level of the ground, protecting the house

against fierce north and west winds. The walls and roof were insulated with nine inches of fiberglass batts.

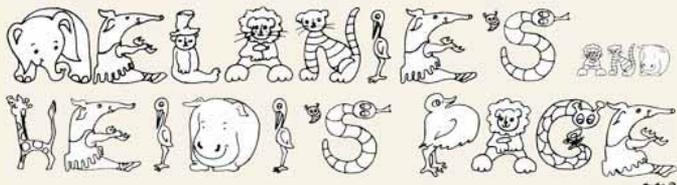
The entire south side of the 1,500 square-foot house is devoted to collecting solar energy. Its upper part is tilted at 60 degrees, the optimum for winter collection at that latitude. Vertical south windows and a greenhouse, both double-glazed, occupy the lower part. The 590-square-feet of trickle-type collectors originally installed in the upper wall were covered with two panes of glass because of the extremely cold weather. Later, the trickle-type collectors were replaced with a sandwich-type collector designed by a graduate student at the university; they worked so well, the later replaced all the trickle-type collectors. Solar heated water drained to a 1,000-gallon basement receptacle surrounded by 34 tons of crushed rock.

The entire project cost \$95,000, which included wages for student workers.



The herbicide 2,4-D has been in the news recently (see our news item on page 39 of this issue). When we heard the news that 2,4-D had been deemed dangerous, we shook our collective heads and rummaged through the back issues of *Natural Life* to the fall of 1977. And there was an article, entitled "2,4-D The Drifter" by reader Harold Marr.

He was expressing concern about the spraying of 2,4-D, which, in those days, was very common. Specifically, Marr was worried about the "drift," which he said he'd observed killed burdock more effectively than when the spray had been directed right at the plants! Government pamphlets of the day (available in bulk, he wrote, for five cents each) warned that crops could be damaged less than a quarter mile upwind from a sprayed area. Also available, Marr wrote, was a government poster that could be used to warn sprayers that yours was a "2,4-D Susceptible Crop." Yes, he noted, these materials suggested more than they explained. And who would have thought that 29 years later people would still be trying to understand and avoid the fallout from this toxic herbicide?



In each issue of *Natural Life* until the early 1980s, there was a page dedicated to children. It was called "Melanie's & Heidi's Page," after the two youngest members of the publishing Priesnitz family. The column head was drawn by Canadian artist Kai-Liis McInnes (www.kai-liisartstudio.com). Sometimes the articles and drawings were contributed by Melanie and/or Heidi or other children, but in the November/December 1977 issue, freelance writer Rene Tunney wrote about how to grow plants from food waste. Here's an excerpt:

Garbage Plants

Rene Tunney

Organic gardeners add kitchen scraps to their compost piles; but with a little time, knowledge and patience some discarded foods can be coaxed to grow into luscious green houseplants.

Carrot: Slice off the top of a medium or large sized carrot leaving about 1.25 cm (1/2 inch) of the vegetable. Place it in a saucer or shallow bowl and add enough water to almost cover it; you'll have to add water every few days to prevent the plant

from drying out. Be careful not to completely submerge the carrot-top or the shoots will rot when they begin to grow. In two or three days the green sprouts will appear –it's actually called "panic growth." Although carrot-tops will grow in almost any windowsill, I set mine in a west light. Not only do carrot-tops offer "instant" greenery but the featherlike leaves can be snipped off to add flavor to soups and salads. The carrot slice will become moldy and rotten after about a month, but then you just start all over again. The lacy tops can grow as much as 15 cm to 25 cm (6 to 10 inches), however, mine have never gotten that big because my cats like to nibble on the leaves.

Pineapple: Like the carrot, it's the top, or the crown, of the pineapple that's salvaged for planting. Leave about 2.5cm (one inch) of the fruit and set it aside, in a warm corner, to "rest" for two days. Pineapple roots do not grow very deeply, therefore a relatively shallow, wide pot will do. However, pineapple does like an acid soil so I use equal amounts of potting soil and acid peat. Bury the pineapple so that the soil comes up to the base of the crown, and then give it a good soaking – this will help settle the plant. Pineapple is a little different than most houseplants in that it prefers to be fed through its leaves. I spray mine every few days with clear water and every three or four weeks with a weak solution of liquid fertilizer. Once a week I water the soil. It takes a very long time before the pineapple shows signs of growth. After three months of "nothing happening" I dug up my first pineapple plant, convinced it had died. But it had developed a sturdy set of roots, so be patient. A tropical plant, the pineapple likes quite a bit of sun and does well in a south or west window; and some have been known to grow large enough, indoors, to bear fruit.

- NL -

More From The "Are We There Yet? Dept."

In *Natural Life's* October, 1979 issue, among the ads for woodstoves, Birkenstocks, greenhouses and wind generators, there were two articles that both demonstrate how long we've been covering certain issues and astound us that we're still covering them. They were about the problem of patenting seeds, and about taking personal action to solve the problem by harvesting and saving one's own garden seeds.

Yes, the problem was around back then. In fact, American plant patent legislation has been around since 1970. We raised the alarm that "something akin to genetic wipe-out may be happening right under our noses – without the majority of the population even knowing about it." We encouraged readers to contact their elected representatives to make sure the European version of the law, which would, we reported, make not only new varieties subject to licensing but make it illegal to collect and use your own seeds from existing varieties.

We quoted Pat Mooney, of the Council for International Cooperation, later to become RAFI and now the ETC Group, as saying, "The most practical step that can be taken lies with farmers and backyard gardeners willing to exchange, catalog and

grow traditional varieties before they vanish."

Then we gave instructions for doing just that for seven common vegetables, including tomatoes:

Any variety can be saved other than hybrids. Choose the plumpest, healthiest, ripest fruit and scoop out the pulp and seeds. Put it into a non-metallic container, add sufficient cold water to cover, and set aside for a couple of days. Stir the contents at least once each day during this time. After a few days, the seeds will have sunk to the bottom. Rinse thoroughly with cold water and spread the seeds out to dry. This will take about three days, at which time they can be stored in a cool, dry place. Viability of these is approximately three to four years.

- NL -

