



Uncle Jun-Jun's Amaranth Garden



Rau Dền:

A Growing Guide to
Amaranth in the UK



The Guide

This guide to amaranth comes from the collective work of Yoni Carnice around the theme of ‘growing’ as part of the **Uncovering Vietnamese Archives: Research Residency** series under the Library of Ancestral Knowledge at the Museum of the Home. As part of the residency, Carnice facilitated a workshop titled *Growing – Cultivating and Tending Memory* inviting participants to connect to cultural memory through gardening and collage.

From sowing to saving seed, this material will hopefully serve as an educational and holistic guide to one of my favorite and most bountiful crops to grow.

About The Artist

Yoni Carnice (he/him) is a Filipino-American London-based gardener & landscape architect. His work explores the deep connections between ecological and cultural narratives informed by the landscapes and Filipino communities of his upbringing in the San Francisco Bay Area. As a gardener in London, he is experimenting with and building upon a knowledge of growing ESEA heritage crops.



Explore

Let's go for a sensory walk! Explore the nooks and crannies of the Discovery Garden beds or enjoy a leisurely stroll through the Gardens Through Time. Use the questions below to help guide your experience.



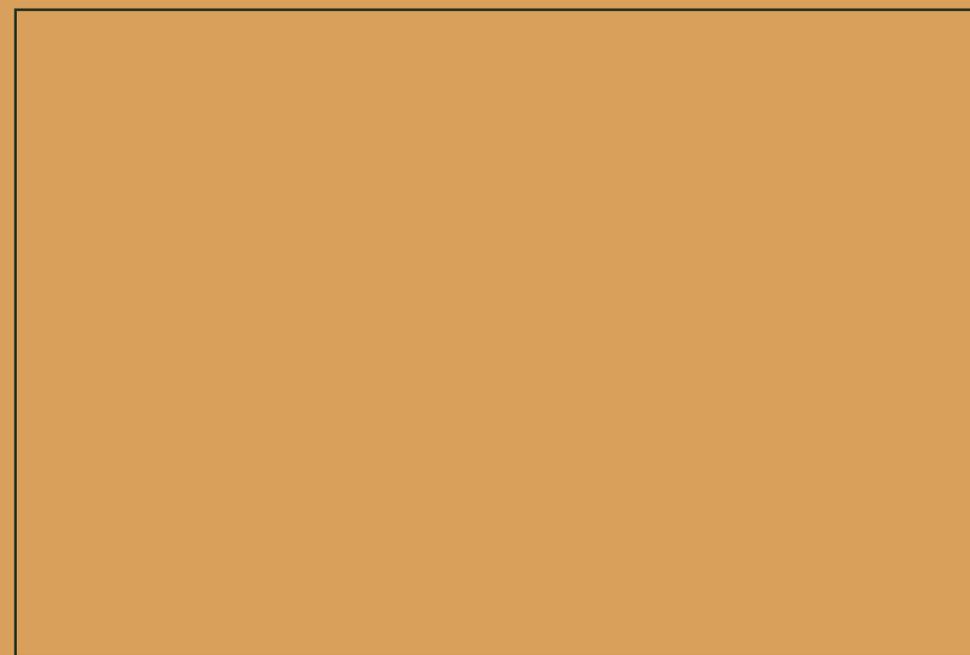
Record

Let the senses simmer. What emotions arise? Where does it take you?

Sit with it and let a memory surface.

- ❁ **What catches your eye?** Is it a colour? A pattern? A texture? Allow that detail to expose in your mind. Is it loud? Is it quiet?
- ❁ **Where does your nose wander?** A perfumed aroma? A putrid odour? Does it make you hungry? Does it fill you with disgust?
- ❁ **Eyes closed, what can you hear?** Can you isolate the source or is it an orchestra of noise? How close is it to your body? Can you feel it?
- ❁ **Where do your finger tips land?** Something waxy? Something course? Something alive? Trace the contours of that feeling. What shapes emerge?
- ❁ Slow your pace. **How do your feet meet the ground?** What is that feeling of contact? Its texture?

In the given space below use any available tools to illustrate your memory.



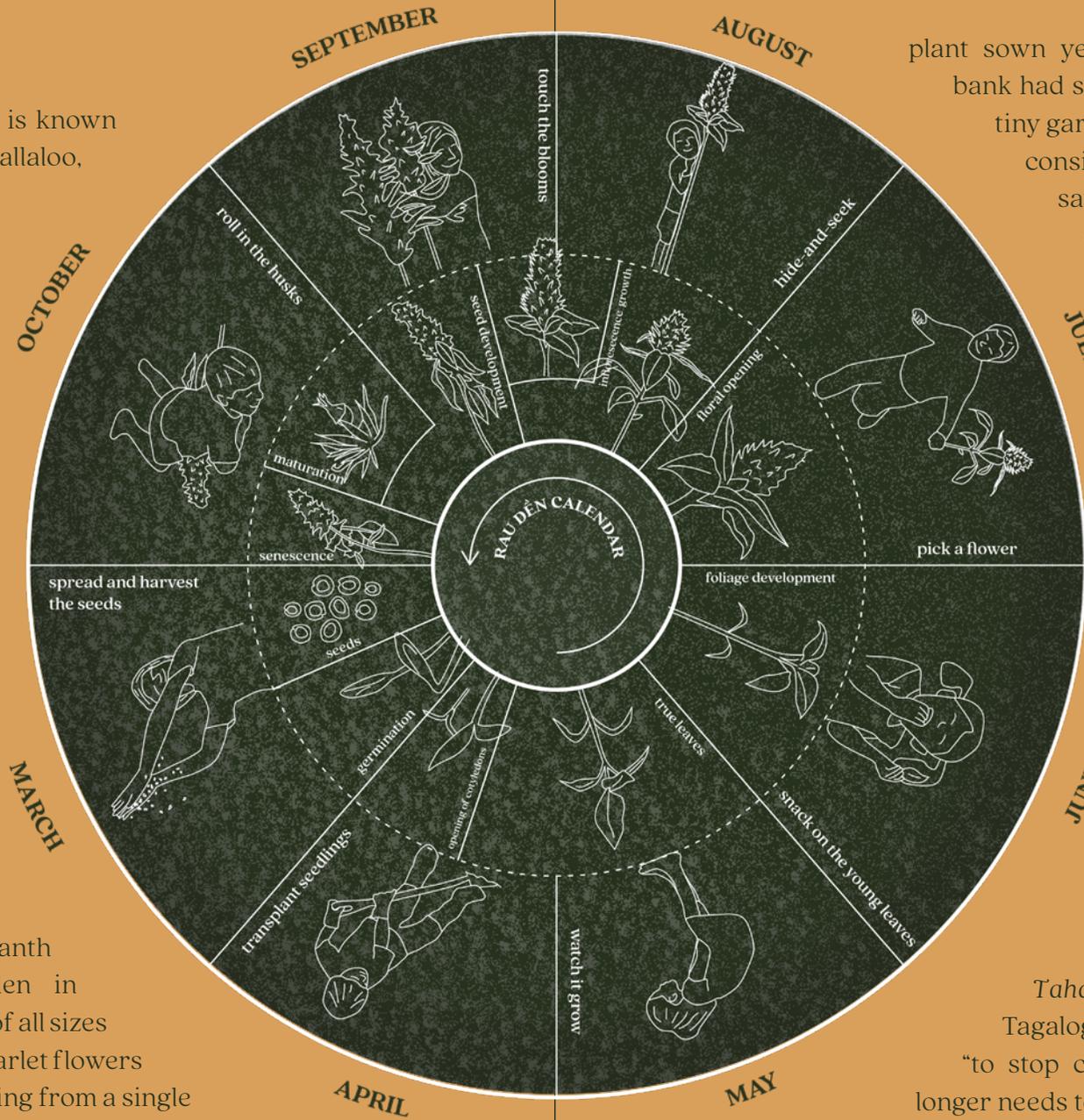
The Plant

The genus *Amaranthus* is known globally by many names—callaloo, lal shak, or pigweed. All parts of the plant are edible. The genus includes an array of varieties bred for taste, colour, beauty, and vigour, most often grown for their nutritious leaves. With ancient ties to Central America, the crop has expanded far beyond its origins and has become a staple in tropical regions. It has also adapted to colder climates such as the UK, where many immigrant communities continue to cultivate and experiment with crops from their homelands.

My first experience with amaranth was at a community garden in California. I noticed seedlings of all sizes alongside stately stalks with scarlet flowers filling empty corners. Originating from a single

plant sown years before, the generous seed bank had spread across the entirety of the tiny garden. While many gardeners may consider this a nuisance, the gardener saw it as a bounty: its roots come out easily, and the remaining seedlings help maintain soil structure and retain moisture. As the plants matured, they provided an endless supply of greens, and once in flower, they brought beauty to the garden—only to return their seeds to the soil to grow again. The life cycle of amaranth, and its wild generosity, has made it a special plant wherever I tend land. Likewise, for many immigrants across London cultivating rau dền, callaloo, or lal shak connects us to home.

Tahanan is the word for “home” in Tagalog. The root word, *tahan*, means “to stop crying”—a place where one no longer needs to cry.



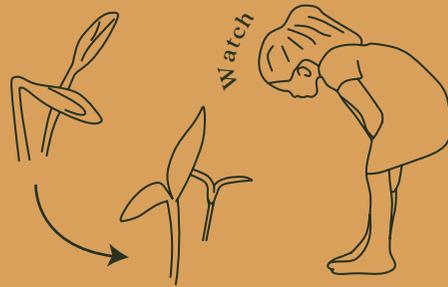
Sow

It's best to sow seeds directly into the soil once temperatures are around +20 °C and there's no risk of frost, typically between April and June. You can also get a head start by sowing indoors in March–April.



Because the seeds are very small, scatter a few lightly onto the surface of compost and gently press them in, or cover with a fine layer of additional compost.

Keep the soil consistently moist. Germination usually takes around 14–21 days.



Once the seedlings are large enough to handle (I prefer them to have at least one or two sets of true leaves) carefully transplant them into their final position.



Space plants about 20 cm apart for larger individuals, or closer at around 10 cm for smaller, tighter salad leaves. They prefer a warm, open site with full sun and good drainage (I've even grown them successfully in sand!), but they're generally quite forgiving.

Grow

Keep the soil moist while young transplants are settling in. Once established, the plant develops a deep taproot and needs very little watering unless conditions are particularly dry.



Harvest

Depending on how you plan to use them, leaves can be harvested from around 30 days up to 8 weeks after sowing. Pick smaller, more tender leaves for salads, and allow larger leaves to mature for cooking, using them much like spinach.

Remove flower buds as they appear to encourage continued leaf production. For a bushier plant with more leafy side shoots, harvest from the top of the plant.



Cook

Amaranth leaves are cooling to the body and are often prepared simply. Boiled, they make an excellent addition to soups, or they can be stir-fried with spices, pepper, and garlic.



Vietnamese Amaranth Soup (Canh Rau Dền)

Ingredients

- ❁ 1 bunch amaranth leaves rau dền, about 200–250 g
- ❁ 1 tbsp minced shallots
- ❁ 3 cloves minced garlic
- ❁ 100 g minced pork, shrimp, or mushrooms
- ❁ ½ tsp salt
- ❁ 1 tsp cooking oil
- ❁ Chicken powder (optional to taste)

Instructions

1. Wash the amaranth, trim any fibrous stems, and cut into 5 cm pieces.
2. Heat oil in a pot and sauté shallots and garlic until fragrant. Add pork, shrimp, or mushrooms, season lightly with salt, and cook until done.
3. Add water to cover, season with chicken powder if using, and bring to a boil, skimming any foam. Add the amaranth and simmer for 2–3 minutes until tender. Serve with jasmine rice.

Save

Seeds are ready to harvest once they begin to drop from the drying flower heads, appearing as tiny brown specks.



Give the plant a gentle shake and you'll notice seeds falling daily, as they mature at different rates.



Alternatively, cut the entire seed head and hang it to dry and finish maturing in a well-ventilated space.



The seeds are tiny (around 1 mm) and dark and shiny once clean.

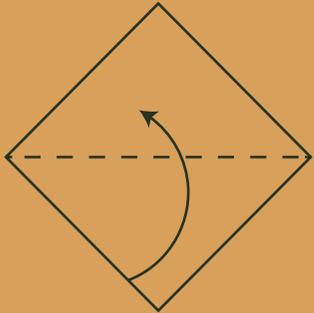


Use a fine strainer to remove the larger chaff, then lightly blow or use a fan to winnow away any remaining chaff.

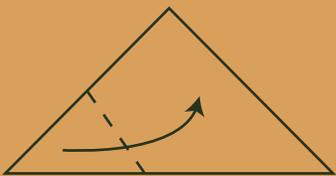


Seed Packet

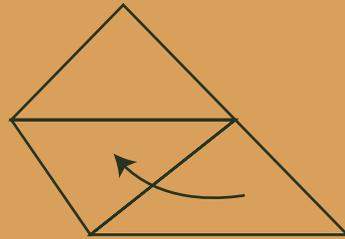
1. Start with a square piece of paper then fold it in half horizontally.



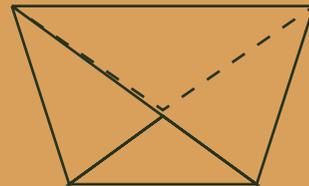
2. Fold the bottom left point to the right along the black dotted line. Make sure the top edge of the folded flap is parallel to the bottom edge of the paper.



3. Fold the bottom right point to meet the left corner.



4. Fold the top triangle down to crease and unfold.



5. Fold down the front triangle at the top and tuck it into the outer pocket below.

