

# Purna Gurung

The gardener and plant hunter talks to Anne de Verteuil about his life and setting up a community garden project in the Himalayas



Photo: Xoxa xoxaxoxaxox

**“I LOVE THE EVENINGS AND SUNSET WHEN THE SKY AND THE MOUNTAIN CHANGE COLOUR EVERY SECOND”**

**What was your first recollection of being outside in a garden or wild space?**

My home village in the Himalayas – open space, forests and greenery. As kids we ran around freely. There is a *Prunus* tree whose leaves produce a sweet liquid – I remember picking the leaves, licking them like sweets.

**What aspect of your past has influenced your present?**

In 1999 I was working on a child welfare scheme in western Nepal, tackling child malnutrition. I started an organic farm in the community to introduce a greater variety of vegetables into the local diet. Our project donors were Kadoorie Farm and Botanical Garden in Hong Kong who liked the idea and invited me for a month’s training in Hong Kong. It’s what has led me to start this new project, ‘Garden in the Himalayas’.

**What or who has been your most unexpected source of inspiration?**

In 1996 I was running a bar and living in a

house in the forest with no electricity, using water from the stream. A Norwegian guy came into the bar and was curious to see where we lived. When he saw it he told us this was ‘pure permaculture’. He was looking for a farm where they practised permaculture near the border with India, so we travelled there together and found this paradise. I was moved by this – it was my introduction to permaculture.

**Which one book would you pass on to your grandchildren – or your students?**

*The Book of Life* by J Krishnamurti. It teaches you to find answers from within yourself, rather than from religious leaders.

**What object or word sums up the way you look at the world?**

Permaculture. It’s a pure life; nothing is wasted.

**What’s on your mood board?**

A picture of the project ‘Garden in the Himalayas’ with mountains in the background.

**Your sharpest learning curve?**

Visiting Kadoorie Farm and Botanical Garden taught me the possibilities of various techniques to grow organically.

**What has been the high point of your life?**

Having our three-year-old daughter, Anika.

**And the low?**

English summer weather.

**If you were left to wander for eternity in one garden, or space, where would it be?**

The Annapurna region of Nepal. When I’m in the mountains, I feel I’m in the right place. I love the evenings and sunset when the sky and the mountain change colour every second and birds and animals are coming home.

**Why will we remember you?**

If I can make a difference and benefit people through the ‘Garden in the Himalayas’ project.

*In August and February Purna will be leading plant-hunting treks for his project. Visit [www.lpgardening.co.uk](http://www.lpgardening.co.uk) for information on this and the ‘Garden in the Himalayas’ project.*