

BEYOND THE BINARY



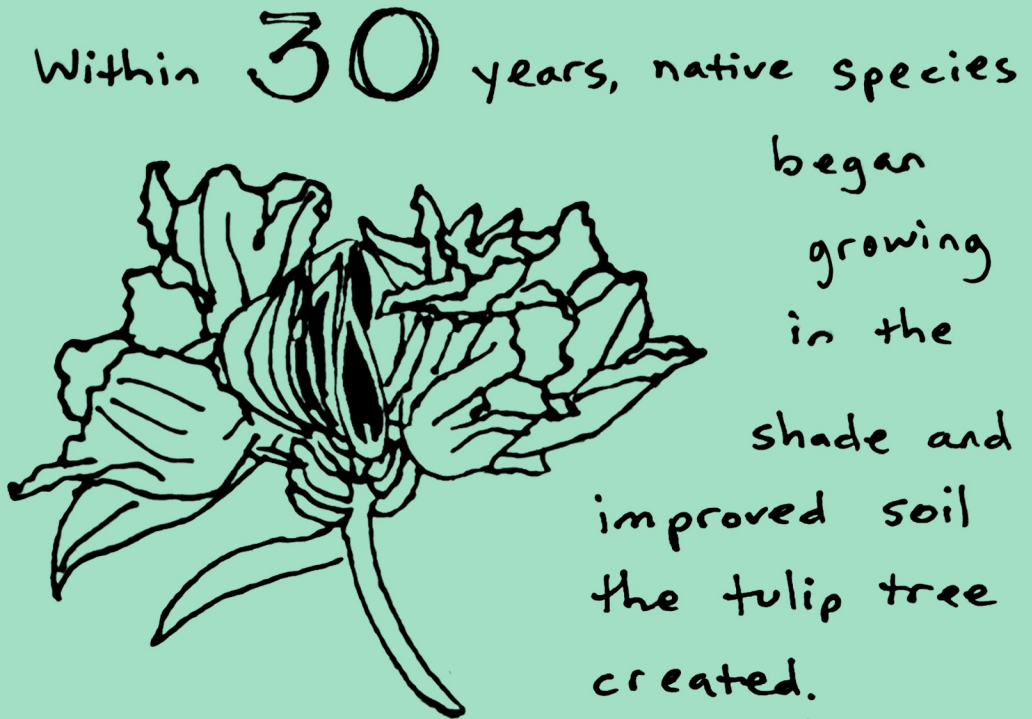
SUCCESSION &
NOVEL ECOSYSTEMS

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When farmland is abandoned, the soil is often too depleted for most plants to grow. The ones that can are often the ones we call **invasive**.

In Puerto Rico, decades of agriculture left behind overworked land that native species could not colonize.

But the African tulip tree, with its flame-red blooms, could and did. It formed monocultures on those deserted fields.



Within **30** years, native species

began growing in the

shade and improved soil the tulip tree created.

Once the trees grow tall enough, they shade out their own seedlings, allowing a native understory to flourish.

Within **80** years, the forest's structure matched that of native patches nearby.

FLIP 

The resulting forest, a mix of native and introduced species, enriches the soil and shelters wildlife in ways that bare fields can't.



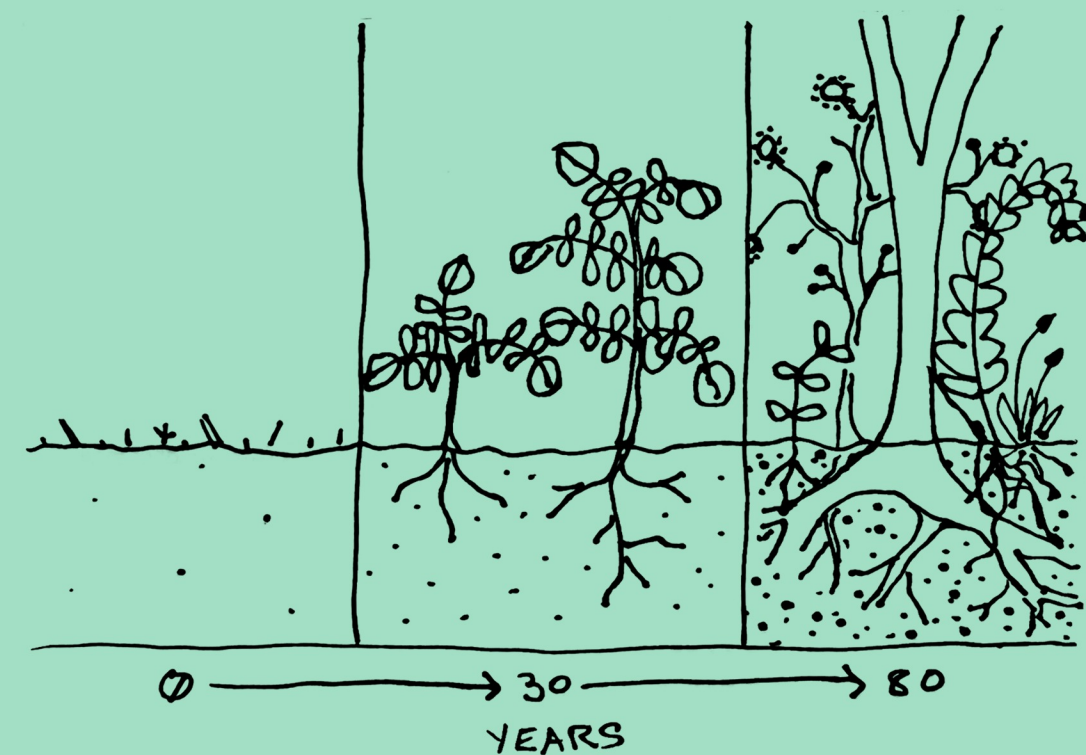
Ecologists call this a **novel ecosystem**.

Novel ecosystems often contain more species than a purely native landscape does.

Remove the tulip tree, and what grows back is more tulip tree.

The soil is too impoverished for anything else.

The alternative is **patience**. Allow **succession** to occur, and the landscape will often find its own complexity.



This requires a willingness to put aside purity, to let a place look "wrong" on the way to becoming a thriving ecosystem.



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SOURCES