

Nature's signposts to health

Throughout my life I have seen first hand the enormous impact that working on the land can offer people. If we are ever to make humankind's life on this planet sustainable it will be because we will have become more connected to nature. Mother Earth and nature is where we come from and where we will return to. It's what we walk on and inhabit everyday of our life. Holding the intention to care for it is for sure good for our own wellbeing.

When I was struggling with depression as a young man, my work on the land was a daily life saver. Mother Earth was always unquestioning and loyal, always there to catch my soul and soothe me.

We are facing an immense challenge - that of ensuring that nature is there to be enjoyed at all. There are still vast amounts of wild and wonderful land on earth. Yet, the amount of time and resources we spend in it is limited by our city living and culture.

Humankind seems hell bent on journeying towards a time and place where natural life is a side show at best. It is possible that the Covid-19 pandemic has awakened us enough to shift this way of thinking and being. Perhaps nature will become more central and we can learn to trust a little more that we are but an outcrop of it.

It was early April 2019 and I was out walking. I came to some big fields which were part of a local dairy farm in the Chew Valley. The field was sodden and smothered in cow slurry. It looked very sick - as if it had been poisoned and then drowned. The only sound was of crows hanging around the back of the nearby monster-size cowsheds. They were scavenging on death. I had a sense that nature had no way to thrive and so was responding with decay and foul smells.

Later that same day, I walked across another field. This was a permanent pasture on part of an organic farm. It was also wet, due to the winter rains, but was healthy and open with a good mat of grass, clover and meadow herbage. There were signs of worms everywhere. I noticed the birds and I could sense that nature was in relative balance - vital and healthy. My spirits lifted.

If most of what we grow is produced while crushing nature and suppressing sickness with chemicals then the health of food produced in this way is inevitably compromised. Our own health and wellbeing is directly affected. If we nourish our soils and allow

The healing power of a walk in nature



RECIPE

Minestrone

This is such a delicious, hearty and versatile soup.

Choose whatever veg you like but always include, onion, garlic and carrot. Add perhaps 200 g of other root veg and 150 g of greens of some kind. A couple of sticks of celery is a great addition. Heat a large heavy-bottomed pan with several tablespoons of olive oil over a medium heat. Finely chop the garlic and onion and sauté. Finely chop all the other veg, adding roots first, then 5 minutes later add the rest of the veg except greens. Continue cooking for another 10 minutes.

If you are using potatoes then add now with some beans, either leftovers or from a tin. You can even get away with baked beans. Add a tin of chopped tomatoes, then add some vegetable stock or water and a stock cube.

Put a lid on the pan and simmer for about 15 minutes. Now taste for seasoning. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Now add some pasta. Kids like alphabet pasta that's easy to get or any pasta that is fine and quick to cook. Add the chopped greens and cook for a further 8 minutes, or until the pasta is cooked.

Some fresh summer herbs are the last addition. Chopped parsley or chervil is great, or a bit of ripped basil.



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our natural world to flourish it will feed not only our physical wellbeing, but also our spirit and our place in the cosmos.

Of course, we lead busy lives and we feel we need some easy solutions to help us. However, we are paying a huge price for this assistance. Every element of our food chain impacts on our whole health. Our bodies flourish or sicken depending on the food that we eat; our emotional being is nourished by nature's health. Our spirits lift to a place of joy when we encounter the wonder of nature while fear and depression creep in if we are surrounded by the ugliness of sick land.

One way of supporting the health of the land as well as ourselves - mind, body and spirit - is to choose to buy and eat organic fruit and vegetables.

An organic box direct from a farm can be a true gift, abundant in nature's health. It has been produced with care for our soil, which is critical to our health. The love and attention given to the growing, harvesting, preparing and delivering this box of nutritious food fills it with life-enhancing energy. Good for the body, good for the soul! If it's possible for you, choose a box from a small box scheme that is mostly doing its own growing, rather than a national one.