



Well FED

Sense, Sensation, and Satisfaction

by Laurie Young

The heat of summer brought my grandmother's garden to abundance every year. Suddenly, it seemed, we had more food than we could possibly eat. We harvested baskets of vegetables and cleaned them carefully while portioning some to share with neighbors. Alongside my mother, aunt and anyone else who stopped by to pitch in, we canned, cooked and shared stories. I remember dragging home heavy buckets of berries, shucking corn on the back porch, and my grandmother's kitchen table loaded with a huge, freshly cooked evening meal. At the end of the day, we were satisfyingly tired and well fed.

These days, not as many people garden in the way my grandmother did, harvesting enough food to feed a large family with plenty left over to store for winter use. And even though farmer's markets are full of just-picked vegetables and locally made goods, grocery stores are as busy in the summer as in winter. Why is it that now, more often than not, we eat the same meals year-round? Why do we order take-out and go to restaurants with the same standard menus? Why isn't our eating more driven by pleasure and instinct, more attuned to the seasons and a sense of place?

There are plenty of reasons. Maybe you're busy, can't or don't like to cook. Maybe you don't have the time or skills to plant and harvest your own garden or spend a day in the kitchen figuring out new seasonal recipes. Why bother anyway, when "healthy" food options are promoted in restaurants and on the front of most boxed quick meals? For many, shopping, cooking and healthy eating are chores to be gotten through as efficiently as possible to free up time for other things.

But consider this: while all those reasons may make rational sense, a far healthier approach is to choose your food in the way human beings have done throughout time, at least up until just recently. That is, through slow sensation rather than efficient logic or maximum convenience. It is by tasting, smelling, and savoring what we eat that we get the most pleasure and nourishment from it.

A diet full of processed foods presents a problem in this regard, however. Many of the meals you buy in boxes, including fast food and restaurant dishes (which likely also came from boxes), use chemicals to manipulate your senses and erase any true relationship from the place where those foods were grown. The unique and variable taste of fresh food is traded away for the controlled consistency of generic

flavor. Sugar, salt and fat are strategically used to dazzle your palate. Vitamins and fiber are then added as a health benefit. Much of what is sold on the front of packages is the illusion of an idyllic farm. But look at the list of ingredients, and in small print you'll see items so foreign to the way human beings have eaten throughout time, that the stuff inside could hardly have come from a garden.

Real food—the kind that my grandmother grew and the kind you get at the farmer's market—is connected to the place and people who produce it. The distinct flavor of local honey, crunch of just-picked greens, earthiness of a carrot—this is the kind of freshness that feeds the senses, and our bodies

BAKED STUFFED TOMATOES

Ingredients:

- 3 large tomatoes
- 1 cup baby leaf spinach, slivered
- ½ cup zucchini, shredded
- ¼ cup fresh parsley leaves, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 Tbsp. toasted pecan pieces
- ½ Tbsp. olive oil
- salt & pepper to taste

Directions:

- 1) Slice tomatoes in half and remove tomato "meat," leaving a ½" shell. Place tomato meat in colander to drain.
- 2) Saute the rest of the ingredients together on medium high, long enough to remove the rawness but not enough to turn brown. Remove from heat and cool.
- 3) Mix the cooked ingredients with the tomato filling and stuff back in the tomato shells.
- 4) Place the stuffed tomatoes in a lightly greased baking dish. Cook in very hot oven (apx. 400 degrees) until the center of the tomatoes are steamy hot.

Recipe courtesy of: Bonita Woods Wellness Center

are programmed to seek out nourishment in this way. Long before we were able to scientifically study and classify foods, nutrients, and calories we used our senses to discern what was good to eat and what might hurt us.

We desire, and if we have fed our bodies well, we want those things that not only give us immediate pleasure but also the lasting sensation of health, energy and vitality. This deeper form of nourishment applies to human connections that feed us too. In this way, my memories of harvesting vegetables, sharing stories and being in community feed me as surely as the meals from my grandmother's garden.

Late summer is one of the best times of year for re-connecting with your five common senses and letting sensation, rather than logic and convenience, guide how you feed yourself. Instead of struggling against your body's cravings, cultivate a new habit of giving in to healthy desire. Why make time to challenge and change the habitual ways in which you've fed yourself for many years? Following are good reasons to get out of your head and into your senses right now:

Summertime is Sensual by Nature

There is a lush, juicy warmth to the long summer season. As human animals, we become more aware of our bodies and nature, our skin and the sun. Gardens flourish, bearing ripe fruits and vegetables. Slow down to notice the texture and smell of your food as you select it, how it differs based on the environment you are in. As you prepare it, feel the rhythmic pace and sound of chop, chop, chopping fresh vegetables. Notice what it's like to slice into a ripe tomato from the farmer's market...one just off the vine that you know be full of flavor before you even taste it. Maybe that tomato is going into a salad, or perhaps you're making a salsa or you've found a recipe for homemade tomato sauce. Savor it slowly, and notice that fully giving yourself to the sensation of eating is the basis for true nourishment.

It's Easy to Eat More Vegetables

There are many disagreements within the field of nutrition, and advice changes over time. But on this one key point, everyone agrees: eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.

If you are not in the habit of finding creative ways to enjoy vegetables, then convenience can be key to changing how you eat. Here is an obvious way in which the senses override logic every time: vegetables have to taste good for you to eat enough of them to meet your recommended daily requirements. If they don't, you won't. So if you aren't eating vegetables because you think they don't taste good, then consider your source. A robust and flavorful dish as the result of your efforts is an important incentive. And vegetables taste better when they're freshly harvested and local. (See sidebar for a great recipe!)

You Become More Empowered

At first glance, it hardly seems a good use of free time to spend half a day at a farmer's market, working in a garden or in the kitchen with family and friends. But stepping back from habitual routine and efficiency to elevate health, nourishment, and connection with others is an empowering act. Doing so is a way of taking charge of your health—not only in terms of what you eat, but how you eat. No longer are impersonal food companies in charge of your palate, your body and your health. No longer do you have to shut down your senses to avoid noticing that much of what you eat is manufactured with ingredients and flavorings developed in a lab by companies that don't know you and who value quantity and profitability over quality and healthfulness.

By actively choosing to buy, cook and enjoy fresh, locally produced food, you have the possibility of re-connecting with your health at a sensual level. You take the first steps in recapturing the power and promise of trusting your body's sensations, allowing a yearning for fresh food to emerge and responding to a desire you can trust. And along the way, you learn the power of your common senses—touching, tasting, smelling, listening and seeing the abundance right here, all around us at every moment.

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FOOD TRANSFORMATIONS AND MIRACLES

My philosophy of health is focused on adding in enjoyable practices, new foods, and creative ways of thinking about nourishment. Following are two well-known authors who have done just that. By working with their hands in the earth and in the kitchen, both Pollan and Kingsolver reach a deeper understanding of their (and our) relationship to food, eating, health and nourishment.

Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation

by Michael Pollan

"In *Cooked*, Michael Pollan explores the previously uncharted territory of his own kitchen. Here, he discovers the enduring power of the four classical elements—fire, water, air and earth—to transform the stuff of nature into delicious things to eat and drink...The reader learns alongside Pollan, but the lessons move beyond the practical

to become an investigation of how cooking involves us in a web of social and ecological relationships...Reclaiming cooking as an act of enjoyment and self-reliance, learning to perform the magic of these everyday transformations opens the door to a more nourishing life.

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life

by Barbara Kingsolver

"In this lively account of a family's locavore year on their farm in Southern Appalachia, Barbara Kingsolver and her coauthors unearth the secret lives of vegetables and the unexpected satisfactions of knowing their food producers—and sometimes their dinner—on a first-name basis...*Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* makes a passionate case for putting the kitchen back at the center of family life, and diversified farms at the center of the American diet."