



Food...

NOW & THEN

What We Can Learn from Our Past

by Laurie Young

There's an old joke about a city person who goes to the country for a visit with relatives he hasn't seen in many years. Looking at his cousin's huge and prolific garden he exclaims, "What in the world are you going to do with all those vegetables?!"

"Well," says the farmer. "We eat what we can. And what we can't, we can."

When I was young, we used to go berry-picking in the summer. Our neighbors kept bees, so there was always a jar of honey on the table. Fresh vegetables from the garden were plentiful from late spring into autumn. Tomatoes, having just been picked, were sun-warmed and full-flavored. Green beans tasted like what the were, not a pale version of their former selves. We ate what was in season, and in winter we went downstairs to the basement cellar and selected from a large stock of canned food that my grandmother had "put up" in late summer for future use.

I lived in a small town, and fast food hadn't yet arrived. There were no celebrity chefs on t.v. performing heroic culinary feats, no artisanal delicacies transported long distances from exotic places, and certainly no quick-fix weight loss programs with packaged foods made of questionable ingredients. In those days, we shared food and homemade recipes with our neighbors, and learned to cook what our family had eaten for generations. If we spent all day in the kitchen, it was because we were preparing for a celebration. Most of the time, though, food was simple sustenance. We gave thanks because we understood the effort that went into growing and gathering it. And we weren't afraid to slow down and enjoy eating until we were full.

Many of you share my story. Perhaps your memories are not of gardens and home-cooking, but rather special meals and traditional ways of eating handed down through generations of your family. Let's take a moment to consider food as it was then, and as it is now. Over the years, home gardens have given way to supermarkets. Vegetables and jams canned in the kitchen have given way to shelves of

food packaged with artificial preservatives. Simple cooking has given way to convenience products. And sharing slow meals with conversation has given way to eating on the run. We have become a culture obsessed with calories and workouts rather than nourishment and community. We have forgotten the deep pleasure of real, simple food and slow, joyful eating.

Indeed, most of my clients and friends express concern about sugar, salt and fat—a subject never discussed when I was growing up. Many say they either have no time to cook or simply don't know how to make simple food taste good. Yet tremendous energy is invested in worrying about the right things to eat, how much to eat, how many

Razz-Blue Smoothie

- ½ cup water
- 1 banana
- ½ cup frozen raspberries
- ½ cup frozen blueberries
- 1 cup spinach and/or kale, washed
- 1/2 - 1 cup ice cubes

Directions:

1. Wash the fruit and vegetables.
2. Place all ingredients into your blender in the order listed and secure lid.
3. Slowly increase speed of blender, until it is at full speed.
4. Check to see if you need to stop the blender at any time to help contents further down into it.
5. Blend for 45 seconds or until desired consistency is reached.
6. If you'd prefer a lighter taste, you can always add more ice and blend again!

calories food contains, and how to be successful on a diet regimen. Time and energy that could just as easily be spent learning simple techniques for preparing real food. They worry about the expense of organics while eating at restaurants that charge far more than it would cost to prepare a healthful meal at home.

"I took my family out to dinner a few nights ago," said a friend recently, "and we spent nearly \$100. The food wasn't bad," he said, "but I realized that we hardly eat together at the table when we're home. We could have made something as a family that cost a lot less and probably tasted even better."

As we've lost our connection to where food comes from and how to prepare it, cooking has become a hassle rather than a pleasure, and staying healthy has become a series of small and large battles against willpower and desire rather than a partnership between nourishment and our bodies. My clients often worry as much about real, whole food as they do about processed products. Reducing food to a set of calories and abstract substances like "protein" or "carbs", they speak of whole food and packaged meals as if they were the same thing. They're not.

"How much sugar does a banana have?" asked one of my clients abruptly, in the middle of our discussion. "They have a lot of sugar, don't they?"

I'd suggested she try green smoothies, which are essentially a combination of leafy greens and fruits that make a sweet, light and refreshing drink. I wanted her to add more fruits and vegetables by playing around with ingredients. I wanted her to have fun experimenting. She was skeptical.

"I don't think a green smoothie is a good idea. I just think the sugar content would be too high."

Before food became such big business, before microwave meals and diet plans were so heavily marketed, we didn't think to speak of it in that way. Now all food is suspect. A possible culprit in weight gain. It gets analyzed, reduced to a list of nutrients and calories, an abstract combination of fat, sugar and salt that either falls in the "bad" or "good" category. We apply these judgments to ourselves, too: we are either being "good" by staying on a proper diet, or indulging in a "sinful" treat that we shouldn't have.

This way of eating consumes a tremendous amount of emotional energy. It puts you in a tug-of-war with desire, a constant state of trying to control cravings. Unfortunately, it's also the basis of most diet plans. And it's hard to enjoy your food when all you can think about is cutting back. No wonder you can only hold out for so long before you're back to the same habits as before. That's the central reason diets fail over time, despite moments of periodic success. Because they're no fun.

So this spring, spend some time thinking about how your grandparents ate, where they got their food, and how they prepared it. Odds are, you've already been considering ways to eat better and get in shape for the summer months. As you set your goals, consider that you probably already know what you really need to do: eat more whole foods emphasizing fruits and vegetables (especially green ones, which are my favorites), experiment with fun ways to get your body moving, and balance all that activity with slowing down to relax. Make choices based on enjoyment rather than restriction, and eat food as close to its natural state as possible. Most importantly, simplify your health goals by recapturing the basic skills your ancestors had, respecting your body and savoring real food with gratitude.

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Try Something New This Spring

My philosophy of health is focused on adding in new practices, new foods, and new ways of thinking about nourishment. When you open up to the idea of experimenting with whole foods and figuring out how to make them taste great, it's much easier to crowd out unhealthy eating habits. Enjoy it slowly and with pleasure, taking time to notice how your body feels in response. Here are two ideas to add in this spring:

The Great Green Smoothie Experiment –

You can try the recipe included in this article, or run a search online to find recipe ideas. The goal is to have your smoothies be all fruit and leafy greens. Ripe pears, pineapple chunks, bananas, berries, and oranges are all delicious. Be sure you have some sweet fruit as a base. If you are new to green smoothies, start with spinach as

your leafy green of choice. You can increase the volume and variety of greens over time. Increase ice to get a lighter taste. And be sure to use a good blender that crushes ice well and can withstand a lot of use.

The "New Vegetable a Week" Plan –

Most people either don't eat enough vegetables or enough variety. Make a list with a new one to try each week, starting with leafy greens (some of the most nutrient dense foods) and colorful veggies. Get versatile at simple preparation and spicing. Look for creative recipes. Take a basic cooking class or watch one online or, better yet, get together with a friend who knows how to cook and is willing to share ideas and recipes.