

# GROW

Cultivate gratitude and community in the abundant gifts of late summer.

by Laurie Young

A few months ago, I helped the students at my son's school plant their first organic garden. In those hours of working in community with the children, parents, and school staff, I experienced a feeling of joyful connection just as nourishing as anything we are now harvesting from the garden.

We started with a simple project: a small 3' x 6' raised bed filled with organic planting mix and compost, and two blueberry bushes in the ground next to it. All afternoon, students came by to put in a plant or two, shower the little green leaves with blue watering cans, and learn more about the coming abundance.

"What's this?" asked one girl, excitedly, as she lifted a delicate plant from its container.

"Broccoli," I replied, helping her ease the little green start into its new home.

"Oh, great! I love broccoli!" She was visibly excited about the prospect of eating something she had planted herself.

"So do I," intervened the boy next to her, bending down to look at her work. "Can I plant some?"

"Wow," said his classmate, "We have something in common. We both like broccoli!"

The notion that children, and you or I for that matter, won't eat our vegetables is backed by some pretty solid studies and health statistics. And yet, those automatic assumptions fall easily away when putting hands to earth and watching small plants ripen into juicy vegetables. Even if a garden isn't practical for you, farmers markets and small, local stores are a good place to share in the community harvest of fresh food.

Learning to feed oneself well is among the most important life skills. Every day, at least three times a day, we make choices on how to nourish our bodies with food. Similarly, we choose how to feed our souls through work, play, friendship, and community. It is all interwoven. Making the commitment to nourish yourself mindfully, in every

sense of the word, is a gift to yourself and your family. It nurtures a positive relationship to life.

Late summer is a natural time to explore a deeper appreciation of this partnership. As plants bear fruit and vegetables, you get to share in a bounty large enough for everyone in the community. Here are some practices and perspectives to add into your daily nourishment routine now, and in the coming months:

## Cultivate Wonder and Gratitude

Slow down and take time to enjoy the fullness of the season. Don't you feel a sense of gratitude and wonder in the fact that nature alone is capable of producing food



## Watermelon Gazpacho

### Ingredients

4 cups largely chopped seedless watermelon  
2 cups orange juice  
3 Tablespoons extra virgin olive oil  
1 seedless cucumber, diced  
2 stalks of celery, diced  
1 small yellow or red bell pepper, seeded and cut into ¼-inch dice  
1 small red onion, diced  
3 medium garlic cloves, minced  
1 small jalapeño pepper, seeded and minced (optional)  
Juice of one lime, plus zest what you can  
2 Tablespoons chopped fresh parsley, basil and cilantro  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

### Directions

Process 1-2 cups of watermelon (at a time), along with the orange juice and oil, in a blender or food processor until pureed. Transfer to a medium bowl, along with remaining ingredients. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Refrigerate overnight.

*Recipe courtesy of: Billie Jo Bevan*

for the whole human race, as well as all of the Earth's other inhabitants? It is a simple yet miraculous thing happening all around us and, for the most part, occurs so effortless that it is easy to overlook.

### Plant Something of Your Own

You don't have to grow a huge garden or put in a raised bed to experience the abundant flavor of fresh plants. Even a small container of herbs grown by a windowsill can be added to salads and cooked dishes. You will easily appreciate the difference between the taste of real, fresh food and artificial, processed versions.

### Take a Field Trip to a Farmers Market

Remember during your school years how exciting it was to take time off for a field trip? Change your routine by exploring the difference between a farmers market and a supermarket. It's a wonderful way to awaken your senses, connect with your community, and get to know the people who produce your food.

### Cook and Enjoy a Meal with Family and Friends

Joining together to play in the garden and kitchen creates strong memories and a warm, healthy sense of conviviality—the merriment that can only be had in good company with others. Eating in community as a regular practice is a form of nourishment in its own right. The experiences and stories that flow from such gatherings hold deep meaning that sustain us.

I remember gardening and cooking with my grandmother when I was growing up, and I thought a lot about her while I was putting in the raised bed at my son's school. Because she and my grandfather lived in the mountains,

they had multiple vegetable patches carved in places where they could find the best sun. They also had five children to support on a coal miner's income. My grandmother gardened, cooked, canned and stored food for winter. A lot. Nevertheless, she was deeply satisfied by the details of her daily work and the moments spent teaching me all that she knew about growing plants and harvesting berries.

She also took pleasure in sharing food with family and neighbors. She knew the contours of the earth and felt the natural shifts in weather and seasons. And she made beautiful meals from scratch, three times a day. It required attention and care, and while the rewards were not monetary, we reaped the much richer benefits of healthy food, generous amounts of sunshine and exercise, and learning to feed ourselves well. We made the most of every slow day, and enjoyed plenty of time with family and friends.

As it was in my grandmother's vegetable patch, so it is now in my son's garden at school. Together we tend, harvest, cook, and enjoy the bounty of small plants that were set in Spring. Whether cultivating fruits and vegetables or nourishing healthy habits, mindfully chosen experiences link past and present to future and, in doing so, nurture a sense of connection. In the shared community of life and conviviality of thoughtfully prepared food are the stories that help us grow.

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## Movement from the Inside Out

In the summer, it is particularly easy to find creative ways to get more exercise. The sun and warm weather welcome us outside. Options for experiencing the joy of being out and about in the world are many—biking, swimming, hiking, and organized games like softball or volleyball where you re-connect with friends and neighbors through play.

But movement is about much more than just getting fit. It's also about creating an inner motion, a moving forward that is in alignment with how you choose to be in the world. It's about making conscious decisions that are the building blocks of health and happiness.

Interestingly enough, slowing down is one of the best ways to increase the healthy momentum in your life because it gives you time to go inward and understand more of what you need. For a daily exercise routine that helps you balance physical movement with inner awareness, see "Connecting Back to Nature with Sun Salutations" on page 34-35 of this issue. Then, making use of that inner balance, let your energy grow outward and guide you to conscious choices about how to be active this summer in a way that feels right for you.

For example, changing your routine to go to a farmers market instead of the grocery store is a step toward shifting priorities about food and your relationship to eating. You are consciously slowing down to improve your health. You are moving away from shopping and cooking as tasks to check off a list, and toward a more expansive sense of nourishment that includes things like being a part of your community and making time to interact with others. By spending time with the people who grow your food, you are literally getting to know the hands that feed you.

Small moments of contact with others create connection, caring, and authentic community. And it's not just the moments, but also the environments in which they occur. So it matters where you buy your food, it matters who you share it with, and it matters how you share it. It may seem like a small thing, but by slowing down your regular routine and making changes more in alignment with what you need, you will feel energetic and nourished. Most importantly, you will experience positive growth and movement from the inside out.