

THE GIFT OF TIME

Design a nourishing holiday season.

by Laurie Young

One winter my grandmother gave me a quilt, every stitch hand-sewn and created especially for me. It is a beautiful thing, a balancing act of thoughtful design and uninhibited riots of color. The fabric swatches she used in the design contain scatterings of bright florals from the 60s and vivid geometrics from the 70s, all carefully harvested from clothes my mother, aunts and uncles wore growing up.

My grandmother worked on a large quilting frame in the living room. When neighbors and family dropped by to visit, they would scoot their chairs close together and sew a few squares as they talked, each topstitching their own unique design into it. For my grandmother and her community this was a leisurely social activity, as much about enjoying the quilting process as completing it. There was a sense of pride in giving their gifts, coupled with the equally satisfying promise of beginning anew each time. In this way, those who created my quilt became a part of its story and design, receiving as much joy as they gave.

In the few quiet weeks when autumn has just turned to winter, there is time to thoughtfully design your holiday season, time to consider how much of yourself will be crafted into moments with friends and family, and time to plan how you will give and receive gifts that nourish you. Nourishment comes in many forms, and is about more than just food. It is as much about feeling connected to your values, work, friends and family as it is about eating well. Consider how other areas of life “feed” you, just as my grandmother found sustenance through quilting and community. Following are some ideas to consider as you design your holiday:

Real Nourishment Lasts

The holidays are often a time of overindulgence in food and drink. Indeed, overindulgence may even be considered part of the merriment, as we step away from our regular routines and escape the demands we normally place upon ourselves. By choosing to add in other forms of nourishment, though, you may find that gatherings become less about food and drink, and more about sharing in community and creating sustained connection. By slowing down—our eating, our schedules, our conversations and ourselves—we can truly savor the moments that make up the holidays.

Seek out quiet moments to settle your mind and nervous system, so that you can focus not only on giving to others but also receiving from them openly and in equal measure. This calming and awareness supports all forms of healthy nourishment, and feeds the underlying craving we all feel at this time of year: the desire to create meaningful moments with those we care about.

For a mindful eating practice that offers a simple, enjoyable experience of slowing down and savoring the moment just as it is, see the sidebar on the next page. Let this be a guide for your eating, and just as importantly, the pace of your holidays and interaction with others.

Simple Stovetop Apple Crunch

Keep it simple, sweet and healthy with this easy recipe you can make in minutes.

1 apple, sliced into 8 or 12 wedges
 ½ cup chopped nuts of choice (walnuts, pecans and pine nuts combine well)
 1 tsp. extra virgin olive oil
 ½ tsp. vanilla extract
 1 Tbsp. maple syrup or honey

- 1) In a sauté pan on medium-high heat, sear the apple slices in olive oil so that they are browned on both wedge sides.
- 2) Add nuts but do not stir too much or you will break up the apples. Sauté until the roasted nut aroma starts to bloom.
- 3) Add vanilla and honey, toss well and remove from heat. Enjoy!

Recipe courtesy of: Bonita Woods Wellness Institute

Time is a Gift

It's not uncommon to feel increasingly hurried as Thanksgiving arrives and quickly turns into December. There is so much to do. And yet, when we speed up during the holidays, we are actually fighting against nature itself. It is in the season of winter that the natural world gracefully slows down and settles in, resting quietly until spring. In this place of stillness, nature gains strength for the warmer energetic months. And so do we.

Struggling against nature causes stress. Achieving a balance of thoughtful activity and quiet time, eases it. You may find that you actually get more done, or certainly that what you choose to do is expressed in a more relaxed, enjoyable way. And consider, too, that for many of those closest to you, the gift of time—time to gather together, engage in unhurried conversation, and exchange stories—is far more meaningful than anything you can buy.

Gifts Hold Stories

I remember the excitement of the holidays as a child and, in those years, receiving an equal balance of store-bought presents and handmade gifts—gifts like honey from my aunt's beehive, a poem written by my father about the moment of my birth, and of course my grandmother's quilt. As the pace of life has increased, however, personal or locally made gifts—the ones where you know the maker and can tell a story about their origin—seem to have dwindled in number.

It takes time and thought to give gifts that have meaningful stories attached to them. When the focus of our gifting is grabbing last-minute items at the mall and figuring out how to check each person off our list, something important is lost. Gifts that hold stories are both functional and sentimental, meant to be used, loved, and remembered by the recipient.

I have forgotten many presents I received over the years. But I know that my aunt's honey tastes like home, and I can read my father's poem and sleep under my grandmother's quilt. In one way or another, the whole of my family history is woven into the gifts they shared with me.

Certain things last. The things in which love, gratitude, and authentic elements of self are sewn in. Objects are simply small tokens that represent the deeper, more lasting meaning embedded within them. In this way, my grandmother's quilt is much larger than the space it occupies in my room. It contains her heart and soul, the pattern of my family, and expands past the boundaries of room and memory, extending throughout time.

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Savoring Food and Life Just as It Is

For many of us, slowing down doesn't come naturally; it takes practice. Begin by choosing a simple, healthy food that you enjoy eating such as dark chocolate or ripe fruit. Remember, the purpose is to slow down and use each of the five senses to fully experience food and how we eat it. Find a quiet space in your home, where you can devote at least five uninterrupted minutes of time. Get comfortable in your seat, and place the chocolate or fruit in front of you.

Look

- Take a deep breath and ask yourself what you see. Mentally describe the shapes and colors. What visual memories do you associate with this food?

Smell

- Pick up the food. Continue slow, deep breathing as you close your eyes and smell it. Is it pungent or sweet? Linger, enjoying the complexity of its scent. Anticipate what it might taste like. What memories do you associate with smelling this food?

Feel

- Is your mouth watering? What is the texture of the food? Now take a bite and describe to yourself how it feels in your mouth. Breathe.

Taste

- Chew slowly. Begin exploring the "subtle" flavors of your food, those you may not usually notice when you are eating quickly. Like a fine wine, many foods are complex and take time to release all of their flavors. Make mental notes of flavors you recognize. Take a deep breath and pause. What's different?

Listen

- Listen to all sounds—the sound of chewing, the breaking of the food as you take another bite. Listen to what's going on in the world around you. Does it affect your experience? Hear your own thoughts. Notice how different it is to eat with all senses engaged. Can you experience the next bite just as fully? Even more deeply?
- Repeat, slowly and with awareness.

Use the pattern of this eating exercise as a model for experiencing the world. When you slow down and savor food mindfully, engaging all the senses, you savor life. Mindful eating leads to mindful living. Food is much more than a means to satisfy hunger; it feeds your body and your soul. Cherish the act of slowing down and savoring the experience of eating food in a way that will shape your destiny.

Courtesy of: Matthew Corrigan, CMT, RYT – Certified Massage Therapist & Registered Yoga Teacher, www.pранаhealthworks.com