TURN YOUR LAWN INTO A SALAD

In the Middle Ages while Alchemists searched for the magical powers that would allow them to make the elixir of life, all around them plants performed miracles everyday.

The light absorbing pigment chlorophyll in the chloroplasts of the leaves of green plants is the basis of life on earth. During the process of photosynthesis plants use carbon dioxide, water and minerals from the soil to turn sunlight energy into glucose, starches and cellulose. Solar powered, energy packed, nutritious plants not only feed themselves they are nature's food bank. This food bank provides whole foods with minerals like calcium, iron and phosphorous balanced in the correct ratio to vitamins and micronutrients. These plant superheroes come in company with the fibre, protein, fats and carbohydrates we need to develop and grow healthy bodies.

Beth in her front garden

Glucose is carried all over the plant to where it is needed and plants use it to manufacture carbohydrates, proteins and oils, which can be stored in bulbs, tubers, seeds or nuts.

Plants also use glucose to make other sugars like fructose and sucrose as well as phenols which give fruit and flowers their colours. Plant colour is not just for decoration. Although green is the predominant colour, plants have developed many pigments to help protect themselves from solar radiation and the ravages of insects and wind.

These healing pigments, called phytochemicals give vegetables, nuts, seeds, fruits, herbs, flowers, leaves, marine algae, and barks of trees and shrubs their amazing colours. Nutrition researchers continue to discover healing compounds called antioxidants in every colour of fruits and vegetables.

In the past century it has been scientifically proven that there are 16 essential nutrients for plant growth and all nutrients are equally important even though some are required only in small amounts. Nutrients have a direct effect on growth and metabolism in plants and just like in human growth and development nutrients must be absorbed in sufficient quantities as well as balanced proportions if the plant is to grow well.

The soil can be compared to your stomach and digestive system. Soil is composed of countless bacteria, soil organisms and fungi all busy digesting and fermenting the organic materials (or food) in the soil. Organic matter must first be broken down before plants can absorb the minerals. These soil organisms do this job so the inorganic nutrient ions can wash into the soil solution around plant rootlets or adhere to the surface of soil particles to feed plants.

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Plants take up nutrients from the soil and composting and worm farming are the first steps in building and maintaining a long term balance of these essential plant nutrients. Composting is nature's way of changing organic waste into plant food and it happens all over your garden. Everywhere you look bacteria are constantly recycling the remains of plants and animals while liberating the essential elements from soil particles in forms that living plants need for their survival.

So many variables influence our health and many environmental toxins are outside of our control but organic gardening allows you some control of what you eat. And this is important at a time when chemicals and pesticide residues are finding their way into our fruits and vegetables while nutritional quality is declining. Many researchers believe the decline in trace minerals such as iron, selenium, chromium and zinc is a result of our modern industrial farming methods based on chemicals rather than using nature's soil organisms, composting and recycling. The practice of picking fruits before they are fully ripe, storage and long distance transportation (food miles) reduces Vitamin C and other phytonutrients.

In my organic gardening classes the most asked question is what shall I grow?

And my answer to that is grow a range of things you like to eat, especially some salad vegetables that can be picked fresh and crisp to provide enzyme packed raw foods to accompany your meals. Many of these can be grown in containers if you have only a small space. Try broccoli, lettuce, rocket, chickweed, spinach, chives, parsley, purple basil and edible flowers like calendula, borage, day lilies, nasturtiums, pineapple sage and violets. Alpine strawberries are a delicious surprise for children to discover in salads too.

Make regular plantings of beetroot, kohlrabi, and carrots for grating into your salads, as well as sugar snap peas, and climbing beans, children love these crisp morsels.

For 65 years the mantra of the Soil & Health Association has been Healthy Soil, Healthy Plants, Healthy People. They have promoted composting as the most sustainable method of renewing soil nutrients. Ongoing research has proven that they have been right on the mark all these years and in fact with industrial farming and food imports it is even more important today to not only grow your soil but to grow some of your own food if you want it to be full of the vitamins and minerals essential to develop and grow your healthy body. Turn that lawn into a salad!

http://www.organicnz.org/

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