



Cooking from the Garden

Growing and raising your own organic produce is exciting and satisfying, but sometimes it can be a challenge to know what to do with all the fresh vegetables, fruit, herbs, and eggs. You can make healthy and delicious meals using freshly harvested ingredients, but it is also great to know how to handle gluts and excess produce, and make the most of what you have grown. Another challenge is learning how to cook convenient, family friendly and easy meals, whilst still 'eating seasonally' and using what you are harvesting from your own backyard!

What is cooking from the garden?

If you want to start growing your own food in your backyard, on your balcony, or at a local community garden, the next logical step is learning how to eat what you have grown. Those already growing some of their own produce know the joy of being able to pick it, eat it, cook with it and enjoy it!

Throwing together a home grown salad of freshly picked heirloom tomatoes, crunchy cucumbers, salad leaves and a handful of herbs is easy and satisfying. You might already have several recipes or methods that use zucchini, pumpkin, beans or other prolific growers. Sometimes though, cooking what grows in your garden can be a challenge, because you don't have enough time, energy, ideas or maybe because you have so much of the one thing. Learning some tricks means you are less likely to end up with an annoying abundance, or home grown goodness going to waste.

It is also about embracing the seasons, and perhaps preserving produce when it is growing, to then be able to eat it other times of the year. It is growing what your family eats, or learning how to transform what you've grown into something

everyone likes. You can plan meals based on what harvests are happening, and develop a range of flexible dishes. By changing your perspective about what you think you should be eating, to being flexible with what you have available to eat, means you can enjoy delicious and healthy food, right from your own back door!



Cooking from the Garden addresses the Permaculture Principals – Obtain a Yield, and Produce No Waste.

The yield is not just the amount of kilograms of produce that you can harvest, but the food and meals that your fresh organic produce becomes. Make the most of what you have grown, by learning how to cook and create with the fruit, vegetables, herbs, eggs, and even dairy or meat, that you grow in your urban space.

Learning how to do this means you are less likely to end up with an abundance of homegrown goodness going to waste. By taking the time, and learning the tricks, to cook from the garden, you are valuing the hard work you put in to growing, managing and harvesting your fresh produce.

Do I Grow what I Eat, or Eat what I Grow?

Both! When planning your garden, and buying seeds or seedlings, think about growing fruit, vegetables and herbs that you, and your loved ones, consistently eat. Sometimes it is worthwhile trialling things that may not be the most popular with those you are feeding, because home grown produce can often be dramatically more delicious than what you are used to. You can always share or swap produce you didn't end up liking.

Some produce you commonly eat now, may not be so easy to grow yourself, depending on the climate you live in, and you may have to learn to enjoy what does grow well in your area instead. Sometimes it is worth experimenting, as you can have success with a variety that isn't considered suitable for your area, especially if you have a greenhouse or microclimate!

What is 'eating by the season'?

You may have heard the term 'seasonal eating' which means you eat produce during the period when it is being harvested in your region. If you are eating or cooking with fresh produce that would not be growing at that time of year, it may have been shipped from far away, grown in a heated greenhouse, or chemically treated to be stored in cool rooms, none of which are sustainable. Eating produce when it is at its peak, also means it tastes better, it may be more nutritious, and more readily available. Look for cook books or websites specifically about seasonal cooking, like River Cottage, Jamie Oliver, Northwest Edible Life and The Witches Kitchen. By doing without for part of the year, you really appreciate when something does come into season!

How can I make it easier to cook from the garden?

- Change your perspective about what meals you expect to eat, what you grow and what parts of the plant or animal you can use
- Make it a fun challenge, practice and experiment with seasonal recipes that allow for convenience or save time
- Try adaptable meal planning – weekly or fortnightly, plan meals that you like to eat that can be adapted to whatever produce is in season
- Adjust favourite meals, or create new ones – add more vegetables, try substituting seasonal produce, and try new cooking styles
- Learn to preserve food using various methods
- Learn shortcuts – such as cooking in advance, freezing meals or prepped vege's ready to use
- Have good systems, like how you wash and process your harvest to make it easier to use
- Reduce waste by meal planning, using up leftovers, giving scraps to chooks, worm farm or composting them, and giving some of your abundance or gluts away.

References & Further Reading

Kitchen Garden Companion by Stephanie Alexander, 2010, Quadrille Publishing Ltd

Local Food – How to Make it Happen in Your Community by Tamzin Pinkerton & Rob Hopkins, 2009, Green Books

Frugavore, Arabella Forge, 2011, Skyhorse Publishing



For further information on this topic, contact

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