



Potatoes, the perfect starter crop

By Piers Reilly

Although February is the month when many of us stare hungrily at whatever amount of bare earth we possess, dreaming of summer tomatoes or strawberries or fresh herbs, it is first worth considering how much effort all that takes

You sow your seeds and then you'll need to sprout, plant, prune, support, water, fertilise, defend, and put copious amounts of time, effort, and patience into the growing season often to produce just a handful of tomatoes or a scattering of strawberries.

Quality is the point, of course, rather than quantity, plus it's great fun to pluck some of your bounty straight from the plant and shove it into someone's face saying: "See that? Go on, give it a smell. I created it and it's delicious!" But while we do that, how many calories did we actually produce and how much energy did we expend to get them?

Humble and hardy

The point here is not to suggest we all start growing cereal crops. While it would be utterly hilarious to see individual tiny wheat fields, harvesting wouldn't be very practical. Instead my suggestion is simple, humble, and delicious: potatoes.



Sons of the soil: Potatoes are a relatively easy crop to get right

Grow some and see what happens. They are the perfect crop for beginners. Technically with a potato, you can just grab one and stick it in the ground to make more within a few months. The devil is of course in the details, they're not fool proof, but they are hardy and, with care and watering, anyone can try no matter their circumstances.

Growing from seed, potatoes give you access to far more varieties than you can find in a supermarket. And if you only have a small space they can be grown in pots, buckets, and even cardboard boxes. I urge you to try this spring by making space for one or two potato plants. Experiment, and see how much produce you can produce.

A welcome retreat to revitalise hardworking health workers

By Ruth Anders

Almost two years ago, industrious fingers started making NHS laundry bags and, all over East Finchley, rainbow posters began to appear in windows in recognition of the sacrifices and dedication of our health services personnel.

Resident Lucie Ormerod found a way to go a step further by offering her services to Reclaim Yourself NHS Gift Retreats, a remarkable initiative providing sponsored retreats to exhausted NHS healthcare teams and launched by north Londoner Jools Sampson.

Lucie met Jools online last spring, when their businesses had been paused by the grip of Covid restrictions. Lucie, who has worked in the field of health and wellbeing for many years, offered her holistic healthcare services to two retreats.

Making a difference

After three days pampering with yoga, aromatherapy, massage and reflexology at venues in the countryside, Lucie told *The Archer*: "It was a privilege to do something positive and see the impact of our retreats on guests. They left us looking very different from when they arrived."

Applications from NHS staff are reviewed by an independent committee who shortlist individuals before finalising a group from different hospitals and professional backgrounds, ensuring a diverse and well matched bunch of people from around the UK.

A recent NHS guest told



Wellbeing: Lucie Ormerod offered her health therapies to NHS workers

the team: "Thank you for my retreat... I don't think I've ever felt so calm and relaxed. It was very therapeutic to spend time with other healthcare workers and discuss our experiences, compare notes and offer support to each other."

Fundraising

Having worked on three such events, Lucie fervently hopes to work on more Sussex-based opportunities in the spring and summer, following another busy winter for NHS staff. However,

this can only be achieved through a further fundraising effort. Despite generous support from venues, chefs and others, there is still a significant cost in funding travel, food and miscellaneous fees. With a pot of £1,000 already raised, a further £1,500 needs to be achieved to run the next retreat for 16 attendees.

If this is something you feel you could support, in however modest a way, please donate via their Gofundme page: www.gofundme.com/f/nhs-gift-retreat

Tips on eating for energy in winter

Local nutritionist Elisa Tricon explains the best foods to eat to keep energy levels high in the winter months. Along with cold temperatures and shorter days, winter often means a lack of energy and motivation for many people. They tend to turn to sugary treats and comfort foods for a little boost while avoiding the gym like the plague. However, it may be this drive to self-indulge with treats that actually leads to a lack of energy.

Eating well-balanced, healthy and regular meals containing good quality protein, healthy fats, and an array of brightly-coloured, plant-based foods helps promote good energy levels, support our immune system and mitigate the winter blues. Here are my top three recommendations for food choices this winter:

1. Choose complex carbohydrates minimally processed. Foods like whole grains, sweet potatoes, squash and legumes are excellent sources of carbohydrates that provide you with a steady energy source. Avoid simple carbs options such as sugar, white bread, baked treats, etc., which can cause low energy slumps and cravings.

2. Eat a nutrient-rich diet for immune support. Some of the essential nutrients that assist immune function are vitamin C (from vegetables and fruit), zinc (meat, beans, whole grains), and vitamin D (from oily fish, eggs, liver).

3. Support your gut by eating a diverse diet rich in fibre and fermented foods. Gut bacteria manufacture about 95% of the body's serotonin, which influences mood. In other words, if your gut is happy, then you are too!

I recommend starting by making small changes to ease yourself into those good habits. For example:

- Swap your white bread with a low-sugar, wholegrain version
 - Instead of peeling your vegetables, eat them with skin for extra fibre
 - Enjoy vegetable-rich, warming soups and stews
 - Carry some nuts with you (rich in fibre) for snacking instead of overly sugary or salty foods
 - Make a weekly trip to a local greengrocer or subscribe to a vegetable box delivery scheme to commit to a good weekly intake.
- Even just one small step is better than no step at all. For more information on nutritional upkeep and fighting winter blues, check out my website at www.livingwellbee.com

Become an insider at historic Kenwood

Anyone interested in art and architecture who fancies something new and interesting to do with their spare time is invited to become part of the volunteer team at Kenwood.

Cared for by English Heritage, Kenwood is a neoclassical villa on the edge of Hampstead Heath, and is one of London's hidden gems. The breathtaking interiors and stunning world-class art collection, including Rembrandt's *Portrait with Two Circles*, are free for everyone to enjoy.

The team there is currently looking for people to join its band of Explainer Volunteers, who help bring the stories of Kenwood and its collection to life. No specific skills are required to join, just a genuine enthusiasm for getting involved and helping to share information.

A day in the life of the team involves everything from answering questions on 'The Gouty Chair' (one of the first prototype wheelchairs), to explaining the importance of Vermeer's *The Guitar Player*, which is one of just 36 surviving paintings by the artist.

"Our volunteers are at the forefront of our visitor experience, and engage with all

those who come through the door, from regulars who pop in weekly to see a favourite painting, to those who have never stepped through our doors before," said Kenwood's Holly Walker.

If you think you might be interested, you can find both the role description and an online application form by typing 'Volunteer at Kenwood' into your search engine.



Stately home: Kenwood is looking for tour volunteers