



Mind Matters

articles on mental health from experts in the field

Harvest Time

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As I write this column, I am smiling. Those are the wrinkles I don't mind getting — the ones that are related to excessive smiling. I get the opportunity to develop those wrinkles a lot at Prince Street Academy (PSA). Right now, my window is open, the sun's shining in, and there are excited shouts and laughter floating in from the garden that the kids have planted right outside my office. They are discovering all kinds of amazing things...giant pumpkins, huge ripe peppers, super-purple eggplants, just-ready-to-be-picked cucumbers, massive zucchinis, and a strange hybrid creation that seems like a cross between a pumpkin and a zucchini — affectionately named “zumpcchini” by the kids.

They're catching grasshoppers for our “pet” (raised from an egg) Praying Mantis. They're taking out non-monetary bets about the taste of the “zumpcchini.” They're talking about the recipes with which we will cook the veggies. There is a palpable sense of amazement in the air. It's the beginning of harvest time at Prince Street Academy.

Of course, one of the most spectacular aspects of all of the above is the fact that these kids are *learning* and they don't even know it! Even more important, they are beginning to associate

intense feelings of excitement and enthusiasm with learning. The process is capable of starting a positive cycle in which the act of learning is reinforced.

But, that's not all...we are reconnecting with the land, the direct results of our hard work, self-sufficiency and the basics of economics. We are building community when we share our vegetables with neighbors, or invite them to join us in gardening. We are learning history and discovering future possibilities for our world. There's nothing quite like a garden.

Back in the days of widespread farming, the source of our food was no mystery. However, over the years, many of us have become more and more alienated from what we eat and our responsibilities to the land and animals that produce our food. It seems that this is one of many situations from which we could benefit from regressing a bit. With farmer's markets around just about every corner, the national economic crisis persisting, and the season for rejoicing in home-grown abundance upon us, there are so many opportunities for learning at our fingertips.

With this in mind, I am recommending a few fun projects that help make the most out of the season:

- **Read a book that pays tribute to harvesting.** Two of my personal favorites are [Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life](#) (2007) by Barbara Kingsolver, which chronicles a year in the life of a family attempting to live solely on their own produce and that of their

surrounding community; and Seedfolks (1997) by Paul Fleischman, a quick read about the far-reaching impacts of a community garden. Both of these books and a multitude of other relevant titles can be obtained from your local library. If your library happens to be within walking distance, save the fuel and notice the gardens and advertisements for weekend markets on your trip.

- **Attend a local farmer's market.** Create a recipe using only fresh organic vegetables and compare it taste-wise with one containing processed items.
- **Research where your food items come from.** Fruits and vegetables at the supermarket usually have the state and town of origin marked on them, either on the food itself or on a tag. Calculate the number of miles the food has travelled, multiply by the current cost of gas (allowing for mile per gallon figures, of course), and you have an estimate of the minimal cost of your food. If you are really ambitious, compare these calculations with those for food that is "locally grown" or for food that comes from your own back yard.
- **Look into creating your own community garden** (maybe next spring).
- **Learn more about fast food.** This project is for the really brave-at-heart. Research the process food goes through in this country to become "fast food."
- **Learn more about feeding our world.** Think about, or study, the phenomena that causes many individuals in our country to be well-fed, while others go hungry.
- **Plant something.** Even indoor herb gardens impact us all positively.

This column is dedicated to Lori, Ryan, and Ed, a few of Prince Street Academy's wonderful teachers, and all of our young gardeners.

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About Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network (ADMHN)

ADMHN is a private, nonprofit 501 © (3) corporation providing professional, comprehensive behavioral health care and substance abuse treatment primarily, but not exclusively, in Arapahoe and Douglas counties. We offer programs for adults, seniors, families, couples and children. These services include counseling, psychiatry, crisis services, case management, substance abuse treatment, victim services, an adult acute treatment unit, adult supported and residential housing, services to the criminal justice system, vocational and social rehabilitation, a day treatment therapeutic school and school-based services. Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network has an on-site pharmacy. We offer community education, wellness programs and a Speakers Bureau. Learn more at admhn.org.

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