Life in the paddock, edible flowers, gardening for health and more...
Happy new year to all our cherished Good Food News readers.

In our first issue this year, we’re focusing on the food journey – taking a look at the people who grow our food to preparation and sharing food knowledge with our children. We spent time with small scale farmers who work tirelessly to provide our markets and greengrocers with fresh produce. Their tell their inspiring stories of life on the land and we encourage you to have a look at our first Good Food News video story at sanitarium.com.au/health-and-wellbeing (Rita’s Farm).

Edible flowers are slowly coming back into vogue having made their first bout of popularity in the 1960s. We take a look at how you can incorporate them into your cooking and which varieties are best (page 7). We also take a look at the great work being done by the Stephanie Alexander Foundation in helping school children learn the basics of food preparation and growing (page 10).

We hope you’ve had time to relax and refresh over summer holidays and we wish you an abundance of health and happiness for 2011.

The Good Food News team

“ Our mission is to share with our community a message of health and hope for a better life.”
I have romantic notions of one day owning a quaint little cottage in a semi-rural township surrounded by succulent bushland.
This idyllic abode would have an abundance of space, especially in the backyard, where I would spend my days attending to a farm of organic fruits and vegetables. My dutifully tended garden would reward my efforts seasonally and the excess food would be sold cheerfully at the Sunday market with my equally passionate neighbours. Roma tomatoes, wild rocket, luscious strawberries and I would live harmoniously ever after.

Michael Champion is a local farmer living out my dream in the Mangrove Mountain area, an hour north of Sydney. But when I went to visit his farm in person, I quickly realise the reality of farming is not quite as romantic as I'd envisaged.

The drive to the property is picturesque. The winding roads, fruitful orange orchards and pine tree fences are inspiring. Though behind this tranquil scenery are the dry and bare paddocks of failed crops. As it turns out, owning a small farm is a tough business. Many young green thumbs have tried small scale farming, but like me perhaps, did not appreciate the reality of 70 to 80 hour weeks, the low return on investment and the devastating effects of too much or too little rain.

“You may not have good years...When you drive out here you’ll see paddocks that are empty where people have had a go then given up,” says Champion.

Michael’s farm has two modest paddocks adjacent to the family home where a snippet of his repertoire includes cos lettuce, spring onion, rhubarb, kale, bok choy and baby carrots. The farm is certified biodynamic, and has been operating using biodynamic techniques for over twenty years. A true pioneer of the industry, Michael was taught the trade by his grandfather in the 1950s and spent much of his apprenticeship turning weeds.

“Biodynamic farming is a holistic approach to farming that believes healthy soil is the prime basis for healthy plants, animals and people. It's a farming practice that's organic (doesn't use herbicides or pesticides) and manages pest and disease by treating the entire farm as a total organism. But it’s not as hippy as you might imagine. Most of it is based on thorough science and general common sense.

“I wouldn’t know any other way. It’s the only system I understand properly” Champion says.

“It’s environmentally sound. I could have had bulldozers in years ago and...
made more dollars, but keeping it small and keeping it biodiverse is something I particularly enjoy doing and I think it’s important.”

Michael represents many farmers in the Mangrove Mountain area who consolidate their produce and take it to local farmer’s markets. It’s the most efficient way for them to earn fair income because they sell direct to the public and transportation and administration costs are shared.

Operating about 30 kilometres from Michael’s farm is the Food Integrity Group (FIG), a not-for-profit co-operative that aims to support its members and local farmers by providing a fair price to all. They are Michael’s single biggest customer and provide hundreds of organic fruit and vegetable boxes each week to their members for 25 dollars.

David Lance is a co-ordinator at FIG and believes that if we don’t support local, Australian farmers with initiatives like co-ops, it will become an unlikely profession.

“We see the future of farming disappearing. There’s more money in selling your land for residential than there is for farming,” he says.

Lance believes that local orchards around Mangrove Mountain have already been sub-divided for housing because farmers have found it too expensive to harvest. One reason is because supermarkets import oranges from overseas for around 40 cents per kilogram. He is clearly disappointed about the current situation, but sees a bright future as consumers begin to value local produce and a solid trend is emerging towards buying food at farmer’s markets.
“The fact that we have over 100 members who are absolutely delighted with what we’re doing is probably a testament unto itself. And, we’ve got big plans - really big plans!”

So when I reflect on the dream of one day owning my own little farm, I do so knowing that farming is certainly not for the faint hearted. It takes dedication, hard work and most importantly a deep and instinctive connection with the earth. But, if the farming bug finds its way into your heart, like it has for Michael Champion, it can be an addictive and infinitely rewarding career.

Local farmers really are the backbone of our quality food supply. They are the providers of the food that nourish our bodies and warm our hearts when we share that lovingly cultivated food with family and friends.

When I ask Michael about retirement and when he intends to leave farming for a more relaxed life by the beach, he tells me about his 85 year old neighbour who still attends plants and harvests his own crops.

“Like him, I’ll probably be doing this until my arms fall off.”

And I have no doubt that he will.

To find your local farmer’s market visit farmersmarkets.org.au

Find out more about local farming in our video interview with Sydney based fruit and vegetable farmer Rita Helman at sanitarium.com.au/health-and-wellbeing
It’s not an ingredient we typically include in our cooking but many herbs and plants produce flowers that are edible and make a stylish and delicious addition to common recipes.

Flowers you can use:
- **Arugula or Rocket** is commonly used in salads however the plant also produces small pale lavender or white flowers, which are tasty in salads. Keep in mind that once the plant flowers the leaves become bitter.
- **Lavender** French Lavender (Lavandula dentata) is most commonly used for cooking. It has a strong flavour, so use sparingly. The flowers and leaves can be chopped finely and added to vanilla biscuits, or ice-cream.
- **Rose petals and Violets** are beautiful edible garnishes for dessert cakes and tarts or salads that provide a delicate, sweet flavour.
- **Zucchini flowers** can be coated in flour, breadcrumbs or a light batter and gently fried until golden.
- **Pineapple Sage** is a type of Salvia. Its leaves have a distinct pineapple flavour and both leaves and flowers can be used in desserts, salads and drinks.

**Nutrition**
The nutrient content of edible flowers is unknown at present. However, it is likely that many edible flowers are a source of antioxidants such as anthocyanins. Anthocyanins give flowers, fruit and vegetables their red, pink, blue or purple colour.

**Which flowers are not edible?**
It is important to carefully identify any flower before eating to ensure that it is edible. Also avoid using flowers from florists, commercial growers or from the side of the road, as these may have been sprayed with pesticides.
Summer Recipes

Baby potato, asparagus & almond salad

2 vegetables per serve

Preparation time: 15 minutes
Cooking time: 15 minutes
Serves: 4
Level: 🍋

- 400 g small new potatoes (chats), washed
- 2 bunches asparagus, trimmed
- 150 g green beans, trimmed
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp baby capers, rinsed and chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- ½ cup flat leaf parsley leaves, chopped
- 2 tbsp finely chopped chives
- 50 g rocket or baby spinach leaves
- 2 tbsp slivered almonds (toasted)

1. Cook potatoes in a large saucepan of boiling water for 12 minutes or until just tender. Drain, rinse in cold water and set aside to cool. Thickly slice potatoes.
2. Cook asparagus and beans in a frying pan of simmering water for 3 minutes or until just tender. Drain and refresh in cold water. Pat vegetables dry with paper towel. Dry the pan.
4. Mix ¼ of the warm lemon dressing with hot potatoes, then add asparagus, beans and rocket or spinach. Serve on a large platter (or serving plates). Drizzle the remaining dressing over the top and sprinkle with slivered almonds and serve. Serves 4 as a main, 6 as a side dish.

Per Serve: 850kJ (205cal); Protein 6g; Total Fat 12g; Saturated Fat 1g; Carbohydrate 15g; Total Sugars 2g; Sodium 35mg; Potassium 845mg; Calcium 70mg; Iron 2.3mg; Fibre 4g.

Apricot, Banana and Buttermilk Bread

½ serve of fruit per serve

Preparation time: 20 minutes
Cooking time: 50-55 minutes
Serves 8
Level: 🍓

- 1 cup plain flour
- 1 cup wholemeal self-raising flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
- Pinch of salt (optional)
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ cup raw sugar
- 1 cup dried diced apricots
- 1¼ cups buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup mashed very ripe banana (about 2 large bananas)

1. Preheat oven to 180ºC. Line a loaf pan (base about 22cm long x 10cm wide) with non-stick baking paper.
2. Sift flours, baking powder, bicarbonate of soda, salt and cinnamon into a large bowl. Stir in sugar and dried apricots.
3. Combine buttermilk, vanilla, eggs and mashed banana in a large jug. Whisk until well combined. Make a well in the centre of dry ingredients. Using a metal spoon, gently fold egg mixture into dry ingredients until well combined.
4. Spoon mixture into prepared pan. Bake for 50-55 minutes or until a skewer inserted in the centre comes out clean. Cool in pan for 10 minutes then turn onto a wire rack to cool completely. Slice and serve.

Tip: Bread can be toasted if desired.

Per Serve: 1280kJ (295cal); Protein 9g; Total Fat 3g; Saturated Fat 1g; Carbohydrate 58g; Total Sugars 30g; Sodium 420mg; Potassium 630mg; Calcium 100mg; Iron 2.0mg; Fibre 6g.
Warm spinach, pear & walnut salad

½ serve of fruit per serve
Preparation time: 10 minutes
Cooking time: 8 minutes
Serves 4
Level: 🍎

½ cup walnuts, roughly chopped
1 tablespoon olive oil
2 Corella pears, halved, cored and cut into 1cm-thick slices lengthways
1 tablespoon maple syrup
1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
1 tablespoon macadamia oil
100g baby spinach leaves
50g parmesan cheese, shaved

1. Heat a medium non-stick frying pan over medium heat. Add walnuts and toast, tossing often, for 2-3 minutes until golden. Transfer to a plate. Set aside.


3. Arrange spinach on serving plates. Top with warm pears and walnuts. Sprinkle with shaved parmesan and serve.

Tip: Honey can be used instead of maple syrup if desired.

Per Serve: 760 kilojoules (180 calories); Protein 5g; Fat 14g; Saturated Fat 3g; Carbohydrate 10g; Total Sugars 8g; Sodium 125mg; Potassium 190mg; Calcium 116mg; Iron 0.9mg; Fibre 2g.

Mushroom, choy sum & cashew stir-fry

3 vegetables per serve
Preparation time: 15 minutes
Cooking time: 8 minutes
Serves 4
Level: 🍎

450g pkt brown rice in 2.5 minutes
1 tablespoon peanut oil
1 red onion, cut into thin wedges
200g small cup mushrooms, sliced
150g oyster mushroom
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
2 bunches baby choy sum, stems chopped, leaves separated
100g sugar snap peas
¼ cup salt reduced vegetable stock
1 teaspoon finely grated ginger
1 tablespoons tamari
½ cup unsalted roasted cashews
1 medium chilli, deseeded, thinly sliced (optional)

1. Cook rice following packet directions.
3. Add choy sum leaves, stock and ginger. Toss until combined. Cover and cook for 1 minute. Toss through tamari, cashews and chilli. Serve with brown rice.

Per Serve: 1400 kilojoules (330 calories); Protein 9g; Fat 12g; Saturated Fat 2g; Carbohydrate 43g; Total Sugars 4g; Sodium 350mg; Potassium 565mg; Calcium 46mg; Iron 2.4mg; Fibre 5g.

Serving suggestions and garnishes are not included in recipe analysis. Energy values rounded to the nearest 10 Kilojoules and to the nearest 5 Calories.

Note: Not all Sanitarium products are available in all regions. Please ring us if you would like suggestions on alternative ingredients.
Just imagine that, instead of trying to entice your little ones to eat at least one of the few peas on their dinner plates (or else!), or tricking them into eating vegies by hiding some in ever so finely blended sauce, suddenly your kids are cheerfully helping you prepare a vegie dish and teaching you vegie facts while munching crunchy carrots! They know how to prepare them, why they’re good for you, and even how to grow them! And not only that, they are encouraging you to add capers to the pasta and to make sure there’s turmeric in the spice rack! No fairy tale, these are very real experiences shared by happy parents across Australia, whose children are attending one of the many schools participating in the hugely fruitful Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Programme that first started in 2001 in Melbourne.

Stephanie Alexander, cook and food writer, discovered that the secret ingredient to exciting children about growing and eating healthy food is to involve them in growing, harvesting, preparing and sharing of delicious fruit and veg. How much fun is it to dig in soil with gusto, learn about worm farms, and see a tomato grow and then taste it too in a dish prepared and shared with your friends! Beats classroom work any day!

Teachers, parents, communities and health professionals alike (us included) are delighted to see budding foodies take control of the kitchen and garden as they are learning valuable and lifelong cooking skills and healthy eating habits. They are more willing to both eat healthy food and try new ingredients, giving their own and often their families’ diets a welcome boost and mum a reprieve. And as an added benefit they are enjoying fresh air and a healthy dose of activity to boot.
As it turns out, Stephanie Alexander had a recipe for success. Since its timid beginnings the programme continues to branch out to ever more schools, seeing children, 8 to 12 years old, digging, mulching, planting and harvesting across Australia. By 2012, over 200 schools and about 20,000 kids are expected to be involved in the Kitchen Garden Program each year. If you would like to read more about the programme go to: http://www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au/

Why not try Stephanie’s strategy at home?
If you have a garden, involve your children in easy tasks that they can do. Kids love to use mini garden tools designed for their small hands. When planting, watering, weeding and harvesting, try pointing out the different plants and their individual characteristics, such as the colour and shapes of their leaves.

If you don’t have a garden, or space for a vegie patch, don’t worry. It is amazing what you can grow in pots. Strawberries, potatoes and tomatoes are good options, but there are many more and your local garden centre will be able to give you more advice on how to go about growing vegies on the balcony or in the backyard.

Taking your kids to the local farmers’ market is a great experience as well. Engage them in finding and picking the produce you need, and point out other fruit and veg, their smells and colours, and what you may use them for. And when cooking, let them do some easy tasks, making sure to let the family know they helped cook the fabulous meal!
Gardening is not just an enjoyable past time, but a great way to unconsciously add some physical activity to the day.

Gardening incorporates a number of different movements, such as lifting, bending and stretching which all count towards daily physical activity recommendations. Not only this, but gardening can help to improve mental health and provide healthy food to help maintain a balanced diet. It's exercise that keeps on giving.

When gardening, it is important to take care, always remember to wear sunscreen and a broad brimmed hat for protection from the sun and appropriate footwear and gloves for protection from injury. Take regular breaks and stretch and change position to avoid straining muscles and joints. When lifting or moving heavy objects, do so in a safe manner, keep a straight back, lift with the legs and get help lifting or moving heavy objects when needed, either through appropriate tools like trolleys and wheelbarrows or through a helping pair of hands.

Whether it’s a plot bursting with colourful flowers or a backyard vegie patch, planting and maintaining a garden is a great way to add physical activity to your day with a sense of purpose and the added benefits of nutritious food on your plate or simply a tranquil place to relax and re-energise.
I’ve heard that organic produce is better for the environment, but are organic fruits and vegetables healthier than conventional?

The topic of organic versus conventional foods is one of the most hotly debated areas of health. And the range of organic produce has increased dramatically in supermarkets over recent years because of high demand.

The term organic is usually used to describe foods grown without pesticides, artificial fertilisers, hormones or antibiotics. Studies have found little difference between organic and conventional foods for the majority of vitamins and minerals analysed, except vitamin C, which appears to be higher in organic produce. An emerging area of interest is in the antioxidant content of organic foods.

Research also suggests that organic foods may have higher levels of antioxidants because of the reduced use of pesticides and antibiotics. However, this is not yet conclusive.

Organic foods are better for the environment. Pesticides and artificial fertilisers can reduce the fertility of the soil, as well as impact on biodiversity by killing non-target insects that aren’t harmful to the crop.

While research hasn’t found hugely significant benefits in terms of vitamin and mineral content, for some people eating organic foods gives them a greater sense of wellbeing. They feel more connected to the food they’re eating and benefit from contributing to the health of the environment.
Growing your own fruits and vegetables is a great way of connecting with the food we eat, but it is important to practice safe preparation of fruits and vegetables to ensure you get the most out of them.

Once harvested, vegetables should be washed under clean running water to wash off any physical debris or residues from the skin. This is important even for fruits or vegetables which will be peeled, as the process of peeling can result in contaminants coming in contact with the flesh. Some vegetables or fruits, such as berries, will not keep as well or change texture if washed a long time before using; in the case of berries, wash just prior to use. For vegetables, mushrooms will soak up water if washed; instead of washing wipe mushrooms with a damp paper towel to remove any dirt just prior to use.

Most vegetables are perfectly safe to eat raw, some raw carrot or capsicum can be a great way to add some crunch to salads. The exception to this rule is legumes, which include chickpeas, lentils and kidney beans; they’re nutrient powerhouses, but must be cooked before use to inactivate potentially harmful compounds found naturally in them. Fresh varieties can be boiled or steamed on their own or cooked in recipes like soups or casseroles; canned varieties are cooked during processing and can be eaten without any further cooking.

Delicious, fresh, home grown fruits and vegetables are a great addition to the diet; making sure they are prepared properly helps to maximise their benefits.
The Sanitarium Nutrition Service is a free community initiative that has been offered by the Sanitarium Health Food Company for the past 21 years. We are a team of qualified nutritionists and dietitians who work together to help people enjoy the benefits of healthy food and a healthy lifestyle. We would like to help answer any questions you may have on health and nutrition. Whether it’s nutrition advice for you or your family or for delicious healthy recipes, just give us a call or contact us via our website:

www.sanitarium.com.au
freecall 1800 673 392.
We look forward to hearing from you.

If you would like a copy of any of the references for the articles featured in this newsletter, please feel free to contact the Sanitarium Nutrition Service.

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