

Making Ripples

Clueless in the Kitchen

by Amanda Bancroft

Curry spices like turmeric and ginger have been used in cooking for over 4,000 years, but to me they are new forms of magic I'm clueless to control. Even someone with an awareness of food sustainability issues can be confused about what to do with that newfound organic kale leaf. Living sustainably often means going beyond the books to take back our yards for garden space, take back our electric bill with renewable energy, and take back our kitchens from pre-packaged convenience foods high in chemicals and low in nutrients.

When the word "kitchen" becomes synonymous with "microwave," and the refrigerator is full of leftover restaurant meals and rotting, forgotten produce – that's when I need a revolution. Gardening is only part of that revolution. Ron Finley, a guerilla gardener in South Central L.A. who appeared in a TED Talk, said that young people should battle the neighborhood food desert instead of joining the neighborhood gang: "Get gangsta with your shovel, and let THAT be your weapon of choice!"

My weapon of choice is my cutting board, made locally by The Pennington Family at the Fayetteville Farmer's Market. If you can chop it up on a cutting board, it's probably fresh food. When we start chopping up packages of twinkies, boxes of cereal, bags of potato chips and frozen dinners on our cutting boards, we can start calling those things real food.

I know where my food comes from, but where is the kitchen? If I can't find my way around a kitchen, the organic local carrots will end up being fed to my friend's pet rabbit. I used to think I was so clever, eating healthy by re-creating a Happy Meal using all-natural frozen French fries and a processed veggie burger on a gluten-free bun. "Look Mom! Fruit-sweetened ketchup!" But those are food products, things which are technically edible yet not wholly whole. My kitchen revolution demands a whole day of whole foods, multiplied by a lifetime.

Sustainable food needs a good cook, otherwise it's organic compost. This new mindset I'm trying to develop isn't a process of perfection. Life happens. The microwave beeps when your food is ready. But when I open the door for my reheated leftovers and spot the bowl of fruit on the counter, I'm already thinking: apple potato squash soup? Rather than "we're almost out of frozen burritos." Every thought about whole foods is a win for this revolution. It can take courage in the kitchen to stop being clueless. You can follow my journey to cook with diverse whole foods by reading the "Cooking Camp" series of posts on Ripples. Last week, kabocha squash. Next week: the world!

Ripples is a blog connecting people to resources on sustainable living while chronicling their off-grid journey and supporting the work of non-profit organizations. Read more on this topic and others at www.RipplesBlog.org