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Nick Harman

13 September 2012

This week is the first Urban Food Week, where since Monday the city has been celebrating and feasting on the local produce being grown, produced and cooked here. It's a collaboration between restaurant network Ethical Eats, Capital Growth – a campaign to create new food-growing spaces by 2012 – and Capital Bee, helping to promote community beekeeping. Importantly, it wants to show people how easy it is to buy and eat local food and plant forage for bees.

Here, writer Nick Harman writes about why it's satisfying tending to an allotment in London.

Is it a chard? Is it a herb? Is it even edible? At a press event at The Table in Southwark last month, assembled food bloggers and journos were each given a box of green stuff to take away, a reminder of new chef Cinzia Ghignoni's (previously of Duck Soup, Zucca and Angela Hartnett) commitment to sustainable, fresh produce all sourced as close to home as possible.

It was interesting to see how many people were unsure what was actually in the box or what to do with it. Food writers, no less than everyday consumers, are all too often ignorant of what really goes on in muddy fields and dark barns. Hence the nameless food writer who once informed me that he knew for a fact that aubergines grew like courgettes, trailing along the ground.

I know what goes on in muddy fields, or at least in my muddy south London allotment, and could rather smugly identify everything in the box with ease and even, and after encouragement, tell people what they could do with it.

The more we grow our own, the more we appreciate it, the more we respect it. We don't waste it, because we know the effort that went into it - the digging on cold days, the careful tending of the young plants, the Sundays spent weeding and cutting the grass (before heading to the pub for a well-earned drink).

Once you've survived the heartache of a brassica crop destroyed overnight by pigeons, or lettuces raised to the ground by armies of fat slugs, you can celebrate with the first purple broccoli of the season, the tenderest broad beans you'll ever eat, the mystery of a kohlrabi pulled from the ground just hours before being eaten.

Too many chefs trot out 'Seasonal, local, passionate' during interviews, but too few really walk the walk and cook the veg. With Urban Food week now upon us hopefully Londoners all too often divorced from the land will discover the joys of food that has come no further than from across the road.

Urban Food Week runs until September 16. For more information on events (Still to come are an Edible Open Gardens Day and the Muck Heap Challenge held at Freightliners City Farm) visit sustainweb.org/ethicaleats/urbanfoodweek. Any diner submitting a picture of their Urban Food Week dish or drink will be entered into a draw to win a one-day urban foraging course.

Nick Harman is editor and founder of Foodepedia.co.uk

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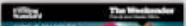


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The screenshot shows the homepage of The Motley Fool. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the site's logo and a search bar. Below this, there are several featured articles and promotions. A prominent article on the left is titled 'LONG-TERM RISE IN U.S. STOCK MARKET' with a sub-headline 'Investing in U.S. Stocks: A Long-Term Strategy'. To the right of this, there's a section titled 'The Motley Fool' with a large image of a person in a green shirt. Below the main article, there's a '2 for 1' promotion for a book or report, with a 'Buy Now' button. The bottom of the page features a 'Fool.com' logo and a 'Sign Up' button.

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