

FEATURES



Ian MacAlpine/The Whig-Standard

David Fiske's sunflower patch is just a small part of his 82-acre property. Fiske is an organic farmer who believes firmly in connecting with the Earth.

You are what you eat

DAVID FISKE'S ORGANIC FARM REFLECTS HIS NATURE

I STILL CURSE ON THE GOLF course but David Fiske has helped make me a calmer person. I first met him at the Kingston Taoist Tai Chi Association when he taught me the beginner's course in Tai Chi. Even though he was one of the club's founding members, he moved out on his own last year to offer Tai Chi at Cookes-Portsmouth United Church and I followed him. David expanded his teaching to include meditation and other Eastern forms of movement. (I can now do a fairly graceful set of movements with a wooden broadsword thank you very much.) The meditation has come in handy. (Ever since I learned a little about it, I find myself using it in lots of situations that I don't want to be in to relax.)

And what you may ask, does this have to do with food. To David it's crucial because for him life is a question of balance within yourself and with your environment. That's why he's got an acre of organically grown veggies and fruit, as well as four beehives. My daughters and I went out to visit him last week at his 82-acre property with a breathtaking view of the lake below.

We started with a tour of David's organic garden. Getting a grasp of how big or small an acre is can be a hard thing. When you're thinking of property, consider a back yard that's roughly the size of a football field (if it was 100 yards long and 48 yards wide). That's a lot of weeds and it's a lot of produce, enough to fill three freezers and keep David and his wife Genevieve and son Raphael fed all year round. As for the weeds, mulch helps discourage them a little but they're kept at bay because David uses his space efficiently and packs a lot of stuff into his acre.

It's a bit mind-boggling because David grows several varieties of just about every vegetable. For example he grows four different kinds of cabbages. He's got varieties of mint I've never heard of, like apple and chocolate. I don't have the courage to ask him how many different things he's got in the garden but needless to say by the time we were through my head was spinning.

I wouldn't call this a complete list but here's what I managed to jot down: broccoli, cauliflower, lemon balm, sev-



GREAT GUSTO

By Greg Burliuk

eral kinds of basil, three types of raspberries, strawberries, parsnips, endive lettuce, several kinds of corn, squash, several types of onion, lovage, chicory, kale, three types of pole beans, a couple of different miniature tomatoes (the orange ones were out-of-this world), chicory, peas, a bunch of different tomatoes, eggplant, every colour of pepper you can think of, and four types of potatoes.

Scattered around the garden are what David jokingly refers to as his 12 apostles, compost containers which he loads up with leftover greenery. And dwarfing the plants are a bunch of the highest sunflowers I've ever seen.

"Those are for the birds," says David. "They scatter the seeds all over the garden. Then next year more flowers pop up and I decide whether to keep them."

David pumps water up from the lake to feed his big garden. Growing organically means artificial pesticides are verboten on this plot of land. That means sometimes killing off pests by hand. Critters have been successfully fended off this year by an electric fence.

He's had his garden for the last 15 or 16 years. "This piece of ground is better because of me - because I've looked after it and made it better," says David, a vegetarian who tells a great line he's just heard about most people digging their graves with their teeth.

The land has done wonders for him too. "I've saved my soul by putting my hands in the dirt," he says. "Most people live unconnected lives with the Earth."

We stopped for a break and a sip of some delicious homemade cordial as I learned more about David's life. A South African, he had just graduated from law school when he heard of the teachings of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. That was in 1962, several years before the Beatles became the Maharishi's most famous disciples. He taught meditation techniques throughout Scandinavia and England.

"In those days we believed that we could change the world," he says. In 1978 he came to Canada to get away

from apartheid in South Africa and in 1980 helped start the local Tai Chi club.

Next, we visited his four beehives which are down the road from the house and deliberately off the beaten track. It was a tough winter for David's bees: three of the hives were destroyed by mites which proved resistant to the medicine he used against them. "Did you know that for every teaspoonful of honey, eight bees have lived and died to produce it," asked David. (Another piece of trivia: It takes visits to two million flowers to make a pint of honey.)

Each hive contains 50,000 bees and one queen who will lay 200,000 eggs in five years. In a good year, David will harvest 100 to 125 pounds (45 to 57 kg) a hive, but last year was a banner one as he got 398 pounds (180 kg) from just two hives. Every fall he wraps the hives with styrofoam and tarpaper. "The bees keep the hives around 70 degrees," said their keeper. "They form a ball around the queen and the vibration of their wings keep her alive."

Each bee in the hive is rubbed with the scent of their queen which enables them to ferret out strangers. To keep them off his scent, David rubs lemon balm on himself, but when we visited the hives the bees didn't bug us as we stayed quiet and didn't get too close to their hive.

We sat down to a lunch pretty well made from the fruits of David's garden. First up a delicious gazpacho, a cold soup that I absolutely love. The recipe is here and among the different ingredients is lovage, which is sometimes used as a salt substitute.

My daughters also had a couple of smoothies made with David's fruit and mint leaves and we had some nice homemade bread.

There was a terrific string bean salad with lovely miniature tomatoes and Italian cheese. I had to leave before the photographer got there so I didn't get to try an exotic salad which contained purslane (a leaf rich in Omega 3), fresh peas, cucumber, cherry tomatoes, lemon and purple basil, orange parsley and walnuts.

For more information on David you can go to his Web site at www.esotericarts.com or if you want to buy some honey from him you can e-mail him at



Ian MacAlpine/The Whig-Standard

David Fiske shows off an exotic salad made with ingredients from his garden

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GUSTATION:

It's a diners' delight. For the second year the Canadian Hearing Society is running the Great Kitchen Getaway raffle. For \$5 a ticket you get a chance to win the grand prize - \$2,700 worth of vouchers at 27 area restaurants, \$100 at each restaurant. Second and third prizes are \$50 per restaurant. The 27 are Aqua Restaurant, Athlone Inn, Boston Pizza, Brandees, Cavalier Room, Chez Piggy, Copper Penny, Eastside Mario's, Frankie Pesto's, Grizzly Grill, Gusto, Hoppin' Eddy's, Kelsey's,

Le Chien Noir, Lone Star Cafe, McGinnis Landing, Megalo's, Mellow D's, Old Stones Bar & Grill, Ramekins, Red Lobster, Royal Coachman, Schooner's, Shoeless Joe's, Swiss Chalet, Tir Nan Og, and Tango. Special events co-ordinator Melodie Aubrey says last year the Canadian Hearing Society raised \$11,000 through the raffle.

You could eat out every other week, or feel rich dishing out gift certificates for presents.

The tickets are on sale in stores all over town, but the easiest way to get one is to call the society's office at 544-1927 and they'll tell you the outlet nearest you.