

Food Investigations

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I have been paying attention to food this summer in one of the most delightful ways possible—by tending a vegetable garden. My daily routine involves picking and eating peppers, tomatoes, broccoli, potatoes, chard, peas, green beans, carrots, cabbage, lettuce, onions, and yellow squash. Eating all this vitality-filled food gives me a new perspective on the processed foods that line our supermarket aisles and it leads me to propose two easy-to-do food investigations.

The first investigation involves two common food items—one a raw carrot, the other a vegetable-flavored cracker common to cheese plates. If you want to give it a try, begin by simply picking up the processed cracker. Examine it, noting color, feel, smell, etc., and then take a bite, chewing very slowly. Then, pause and register how you feel. Next, do the same thing with a carrot—one grown by you or by a neighbor. Examine the carrot first—look at it, smell it, touch it—and then when you're ready, eat it slowly, again, noting how you feel. In the first case, you are quite literally eating “dead” food; in the second, you are placing food that is alive, filled with vitality, into your body. Can you feel the difference? Vitality is not something that you need to measure; you have the capacity to sense it, unmistakably, with your whole being.

OK, here's the second investigation. The next time you are at the grocery store, simply walk around, looking at the food, with this concept of “vitality” in mind. Before making a purchase, pause and ask yourself: Is this food filled with life? Do I really want to put this into my body? Will eating it bring me vitality?

While you are at it, take some time to note how raw foods like potatoes or corn-on-the-cob have been manufactured into scores of processed products. When I did this for potatoes, I learned something important: The more highly processed the potato—e.g., raw potato → canned potato → frozen potato → instant mashed → potato buds → potato chips → Pringles—the higher the price and the lower the healthfulness.

Note, as you continue your walk, that most of the grocery-store food has been processed in one way or another—meaning that its vitality has been compromised. Now, finish your investigation by paying special attention to the promises on all those packages of processed foods. As you do this, you are sure to see “come-ons” such as: low salt, high fiber, no artificial colors, no pesticides, no cholesterol, no growth hormones, no saturated fat, reduced sugar, no MSG, no additives, increased antioxidants, no genetically modified components, and on and on. It is easy to be confused by these labels, with all their promises, but the confusion is really in the processing—i.e., it is in forgetting that the essence of good nutrition is in eating real food, food filled with vitality!

And that brings us back to vegetable gardens and a final question: What need do we really have for all these fancy processed products that line our grocery store shelves? After all, during our 4-5 month growing season, we can, if we choose, grow vegetables—real food that is filled with vitality and that has no artificial colors, no pesticides, no growth hormones, no MSG, no additives, no saturated fats, no cholesterol, and no genetically modified components—and we can do this in our neighborhoods!

