

A Delicious Revolution by Alice Waters

Learning to make the right choices about food is the single most important key to environmental awareness — for ourselves, and especially for our children.

Until we see how we feed ourselves as just as important as — and maybe more important than — all the other activities of mankind, there is going to be a huge hole in our consciousness. If we don't care about food, then the environment will always be something outside of ourselves. And yet the environment can be something that actually affects you in the most intimate — and literally visceral — way. It can be something that actually gets inside you and gets digested.

How can most people submit so unthinkingly to the dehumanizing experience of lifeless fast food that's everywhere in our lives? How can you marvel at the world and then feed yourself in a completely un-marvelous way? I think it's because we don't learn the vital relationship of food to agriculture and to culture, and how food affects the quality of our everyday lives.

To me, food is the one central thing about human experience that can open up both our senses and our conscience to our place in the world. Consider this: eating is something we all have in common. It's something we all have to do every day, and it's something we can all share. Food and nourishment are right at the point where human rights and the environment intersect. Everyone has a right to wholesome, affordable food.

What could be a more delicious revolution than to start committing our best resources to teaching this to children — by feeding them and giving them pleasure; by teaching them how to grow food responsibly; and by teaching them how to cook it and eat it, together, around the table? When you start to open up a child's senses — when you invite children to engage, physically, with gardening and food — there is a set of values that is instilled effortlessly, that just washes over them, as part of the process of offering good food to one another. Children become so rapt — so enraptured, even — by being engaged in learning in a sensual, kinesthetic way. And food seduces you by its very nature — the smell of baking, for example: It makes you hungry! Who could resist the aroma of fresh bread, or the smell of warm tortillas coming off the comal?

There is nothing else as universal. There is nothing else so powerful. When you understand where your food comes from, you look at the world in an entirely different way. I think that if you really start caring about the world in this way, you see opportunities everywhere. Wherever I am, I'm always looking to see what's edible in the landscape. Now I see Nature not just as a source of spiritual inspiration — beautiful sunsets and purple mountains majesties — but as the source of my physical

nourishment. And I've come to realize that I'm totally dependent on it, in all its beauty and richness, and that my survival depends on it.

We must teach the children that taking care of the land and learning to feed yourself are just as important as reading, writing, and arithmetic. For the most part, our families and institutions are not doing this. Therefore, I believe that it's up to the public education system to teach our kids these important values. There should be gardens in every school, and school lunch programs that serve the things the children grow themselves, supplemented by local, organically grown products. This could transform both education and agriculture. A typical school of say, one thousand students, needs two hundred and fifty pounds of potatoes for one school lunch. Imagine the impact of this kind of demand for organic food!

There's nothing new about these lessons. In a pamphlet published in 1900, a California educator argued for a garden in every school. School gardens, he wrote, will teach students that "actions have consequences, that private citizens should take care of public property, that labor has dignity, that nature is beautiful." They also teach economy, honesty, application, concentration, and justice. They teach what it means to be civilized.

I've seen all this happen at The Edible Schoolyard Garden at Martin Luther King Middle School in Berkeley. I've seen the kids sitting around the picnic tables in the schoolyard, eating salads they've grown themselves with the most polite manners. They want these rituals of the table. They like them. I've seen troubled kids who've been given a second chance and allowed to work in the garden be so transformed by the experience that they return to King School to act as mentors to the new students. The Edible Schoolyard creates that kind of clarity — and its potential lies in the multiplication of these epiphanies of responsibility, at school, two or three times a day.

What we're doing now is building models and demonstration projects, such as The Edible Schoolyard, to prove that this kind of experiential education is truly a viable initiative. In Berkeley we're about to transform the school lunch program of an entire school district, with over seventeen schools and over 10,000 students, in collaboration with the school board, Children's Hospital Oakland Research Institute, the Center for Ecoliteracy, and the Chez Panisse Foundation. This is a revolutionary way of thinking about food in schools — it's what I call a Delicious Revolution.

Wendell Berry has written that eating is an agricultural act. I would also say that eating is a political act, but in the way the ancient Greeks used the word "political" — not just to mean having to do with voting in an election, but to mean "of, or pertaining to, all our interactions with other people" — from the family to the school, to the neighborhood, the nation, and the world. Every single choice we make about food matters, at every level. The right choice saves the world. Paul Cezanne said: "The day is coming when a single carrot, freshly observed, will set off a revolution." So let us all make our food decisions in that spirit: let us observe that carrot afresh, and make our choice.