

3-29-13 Budding Opportunities

Have you noticed the changes in the tree branch tips? They've been changing color for a few weeks now, turning more pink and red and now they are beginning to swell, as the buds get ready to unfurl this year's life. Every year the sight of these changes, seen even from great distances as I drive around, gives me such joy because the colors are so beautiful and because it is proof of the arrival of spring.

This year of seemingly never ending snow storms has been more challenging than most and all the more we need a bit of hope and beauty in our lives. One way to witness the miracle of life at this time of year is to bring inside some branches and place them in water. At first it is a bouquet of branches, interesting on their own for their shapes and lines. Soon, you will notice a swelling of the buds and then the growth speeds up to a rate that you can't track. It seems that every time you walk by, they have grown some more! Even if it is not a flowering branch, watching simple leaves take shape and grow before your eyes is a delightful experience.

The plants are not the only buds waking up; our taste buds are, too. And I think they are saying, "Hey, remember me?" Have you ever noticed that at this time of year, you might crave fresh vegetables and stronger flavors? You might even enjoy some bitter greens. I crave and enjoy dandelion leaves this time of year. Even though this happens every year, it still takes me by surprise and is another enjoyable wake up call. We might have fallen into a routine of cooked foods and warm vegetables; what my grandson, Joey, calls "cooked salad". After too many cooked salads, our body begins to tell us that fresh and flavorful would nice and would deliver that spring tonic of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants that we need.

Some Plympton and Halifax folks enjoyed a spring tonic last week with a cooking demonstration of ways to bring fresh and healthy foods into our life and lifestyle. The visiting registered dietician first whipped up a banana mango smoothie. With so many fruits available now as frozen, it doesn't get any easier than putting banana, frozen mango, yogurt and a little juice into the blender to give yourself and your family a treat good enough to satisfy that craving for ice cream but trick the brain and taste buds with good food. (If you use whole milk yogurt, rather than low fat, this would also produce great frozen treats.)

Speaking of tricking the brain our demonstrator used tricks at her home for delivering nutrition, as did I when my children were young. She even admitted to making kale muffins for her daughter and her daughter has learned to not ask what the ingredients are, just taste and enjoy. We both used this hide and disguise technique. If my children could not identify the food, they could not accuse me of serving something I was supposed to know they would not knowingly eat, such as onions or spinach. So, I "blenderized" all that stuff, for we didn't have food processors back in the day. The blender was the latest and greatest kitchen device. One night my children told me the meatballs were the best ever. They had no idea that the meatballs had loads of spinach and kidney beans

After the smoothie making everyone happy, the next recipe demonstration was for salad and I think I saw some skepticism in the crowd as the ingredients of kale, red cabbage, apple, almonds and cranberries quickly came together for a colorful dish. The salad was dressed with a quick shake-of-the-bottle blend of olive oil, apple cider vinegar, Dijon mustard, salt and pepper. Any skepticism quickly faded as people tasted this beautiful blend of color, texture and flavor. It was delicious and satisfying. As people were leaving the demonstration I could hear them making plans to purchase the ingredients for these recipes. Good for them! And I was one of them.

The cooking demonstration had succeeded as a one hour health promotion program, thanks to the fine work of Linda Cole who has been working on wellness programs with our town's insurance company. It makes perfect sense; the healthier the workforce, the fewer sick days taken. Linda has also arranged for walking groups, exercise groups and yoga classes for town employees. We've loved having the classes and have benefited from having them right at the town hall. Once people leave, they may not stop at the gym, despite all the good intentions to do so. Research shows that health promotion programs right at the work place is the best way to get participation. Thank you, Linda, for waking us up with exercise, calming us down with yoga and awakening our taste buds with delicious healthy food!

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