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### Growing kids should get growing

23 October 2005 By Ros Drinkwater

Food Dudes is an initiative from Bord Bia aimed at getting children to eat more fruit and vegetables. A central component is a video starring the Food Dudes, super-heroes who save the life force from a gang of baddies whose objective is to take away the energy of the world by depriving it of nutritious fruit and vegetables. This is all good and well, but in my experience the best way to get children eating fruit and vegetables is to get them growing them.

The proof of the pudding can be found at Castle Durrow, a superior country house hotel in Co Laois. Tanguy le Goazre de Toulgoet (the name's Celtic Breton, in case you were wondering) began gardening aged five when he was given some seeds to plant. Three weeks later he was hooked. Vegetables have been his passion ever since and today he is Castle Durrow's head gardener, in charge of 30 glorious acres.

Guests have the pleasure of knowing that the produce on their plates is fresher than fresh. During the day they can wander around the vegetable garden and watch the cooks harvesting dinner - in October this means globe artichokes, pumpkins, courgettes and squash, carrots, leeks, rocket, and a variety of broccoli we don't see nearly enough of, Romanesco, a lime green late cropper with outstanding flavour.

Tanguy grew up in Brie, north east of Paris, but his family comes from near Quimper in Brittany. "The first thing I grew was radish," he told me. "It's the perfect plant for the novice gardener of any age. You pop in the seeds and you have results in three weeks. I'd also recommend pumpkins and squash - easy varieties include Galeuse d'Eysines, Jaspee de Vendee, Turban Turc and Red Kuri." Tanguy is particularly partial to pumpkin. As a member of Kokopelly, a French seed savers organisation (Kokopelly being the god of fertility for the Mexican Hopi tribe), this year he is 'godfather' to King of Mammoth, an American heritage pumpkin that dates from 1824. His duty entails growing the pumpkins and sending back seeds to Kokopelly.

Tanguy grows vegetables first and foremost for taste and in this regard he emphasises the importance of sun for both the development and the health of plants. "Because people think vegetables are not very attractive there's a tendency to use the best, south-facing beds for roses and flowers. I'd put the roses in the north-facing patch (Zephirine Drouin will do well) and keep the sunny spots for the edibles, otherwise your choice will be limited to spinach, salad leaves and brassicas," he said.

"Better still, mix vegetables with flowers and shrubs.

"The globe artichoke and the cabbage Nero di Toscana are very architectural, rocket makes a nice cut flower and some lettuces have very interesting colours. The American lettuce which has lovely green and red colours is beautiful when bolted."

Castle Durrow is strictly organic, which means no toxic insecticides. To protect his apple trees from pests, Tanguy uses the ancient remedy of painting the bark with lime wash. "This is a very efficient organic way to protect trees against a wide variety of pests," he said.

"The alkalinity will kill insects that over winter under the bark and moss and lichen will die instantly. It has also been used for centuries to protect young, freshly planted trees from dehydration. White reflects heat. This may slow down the sap in spring, so you might then avoid late spring frosts which do so much damage to flowers." Prior to applying the wash Tanguy removes old bark with a wire brush. The mix consists of no more than lime and water. "Add water to lime until you have a creamy paste, then apply with a thick brush. Bear in mind that when working with lime you should wear gloves and be careful to protect your eyes," he advised.

"Last but not least is the attractive effect, but you have the symbolic aspect as well.

"In the middle age, monks graveyards were planted with fruit trees, one tree for each monk. The tree is the symbol of the elevation; the white on the tree purifies the soul of the dead contemplator."

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