

JOHN'S CORNER:

NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS

by John Ferguson

Home vegetable gardening exploded last year as it is one of the best ways to obtain healthy, nutrient dense, and delicious food. This included fruits, vegetables and herbs.

We have all heard this famous quote attributed to Hippocrates, "Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food." With the COVID-19 pandemic on all our minds, a lot of new studies are coming out on the nutritional side of treatment and prevention.

Research from Thailand has found the herb *Andrographis paniculate* has been found to be able to kill the covid virus and preventing it from multiplying. Thailand and China own the rights to their traditional medicines; hence we do not hear about them.

China uses a host of botanicals like honeysuckle, licorice, astragalus, orange peel and yams as part of their traditional medicine in conjunction with modern medicine. The most promising treatments are not being studied at all in the USA as they are not patentable and FDA approval is very expensive.

Potassium, zinc, quercetin, oregano oil, monolaurin, silver, and vitamin D have all shown promise as alternative treatments. [Alliance for Natural Health](#) (January 2021).

Most Americans are very deficient in many major, minor and trace elements as well as vitamins D and C. A paper in The Journal of Intensive Care Medicine addresses this issue and can be found [here](#).



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Note: The elements magnesium (Mg) and zinc (Zn) are essential for our immune system to fight off viruses. Most commercially produced foods are low in these essential nutrients to begin with. To make matters worse when we eat foods with the herbicide glyphosate on them which is most breads, corn, soy, etc. unless it is organic, it will have this herbicide in them.

[Glyphosate was originally patented as a demineralizer to clean pipes \(US Patent # 3,160,632\).](#)
[As a result, it ties up the nutrients](#) we need for good health and prevents them from being absorbed by our bodies like zinc and magnesium. As a result, most Americans are very deficient in these essential elements.

Studies are emerging that have found that the microbiome of people with COVID-19 and those without the virus, are very different. The Journal Gut (2020). A similar paper in the Journal of the American Society for Microbiology (2021) has found the same pattern.

The Western diet of most people is extremely poor, lacking in essential minerals, vitamins, fiber, micronutrients, etc. Herbicides like glyphosate on GMO foods, most breads and cereals, kill the good bacteria that live in our guts throwing it out of balance, hence we lose the health benefits they provide. Glyphosate the active ingredient in Round Up was patented as an antibiotic in 2001 (US Patent #7,771,736).

When we garden, work in the soil and use a good compost, we are exposed to billions of microbes that help our guts be healthy and strengthen our microbiome.

The reasons to grow as much of one's own food organically continues to increase, or at least purchase organic whenever possible, and local growers is best.

A study published in the British Journal of Nutrition (2020) found that there was a correlation with increased consumption of cruciferous vegetables (Brussels sprouts, broccoli, cabbage,



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etc.) and a reduction of AAC (Abdominal aortic calcification) in older women. One of the doctors in the study stated that these vegetables have a high level of vitamin K and it may be involved at inhibiting the calcification process. As in most nutrients, home grown and fresh from the garden will have the highest levels of benefits.

Habitat gardening is a growing trend across the country as is bird watching. Many gardeners are combining their love of these issues. For example, Bob White Quail love to build their nest under prickly pear cactus, yucca and tasajillo. These plants also provide beautiful flowers for our pollinators and they are extremely drought, heat, and cold tolerant (Lazy gardener plants to the extreme).

The fruits of prickly pear cactus make a delicious jam or jelly and the leaves or pads are used as a very tasty and nutritional vegetable called “nopales”. There are several ways to use nopal cactus, including in jellies and candies and even as an aid to help harden plaster. There are also a number of medicinal uses, thanks to this cactus’s varied health benefits. Studies have suggested that it’s an antiviral, helps protect nerve cells, it is high in antioxidants and it can help regulate blood sugar levels.

Most gardeners know that pollinators are declining all over the world. However, a study by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign looked at 25 million news items from six major U.S, and Global news sources. The data included The New York Times, The Washington Post, and the Associated Press amongst others. They found very low level of coverage of this important issue. As a result, most people do not know how important this is. As gardeners, we need to make our friends and neighbors aware of the important of this issue to all the life on Earth. Proceedings of the National Academy of Science (2021).

One item we can do as gardeners is to plant more native plants in our landscapes and when we purchase ornamentals, we need to make sure they are not sterile hybrids.



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Dr. Doug Tallamy's had a recent presentation to the Texas Master Naturalists. Dr. Tallamy is the author of "Nature's Best Hope" and "Bringing Nature Home" and the creator of the "Homegrown National Park" project to encourage homeowners to include natives in their landscape. This project is the basis for the Heartwood Chapter, Texas Master Naturalists' project to train advisors/ambassadors to assist homeowners in selecting appropriate native plants for their property with which our chapter is participating. The video can be found at their [website](#).

The Organic Horticultural Benefits Alliance (OHBA) has several videos on their website about gardening that are free. Members have a larger selection of [videos available](#).