

I left my job in London to grow food. This deep connection with nature gives my life meaning

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the questions below with a classmate.

1. Do you know anyone who grows their own vegetables?
2. What do you think people might learn from growing food plants?
3. How do you connect with nature? Would you consider a career change to spend more time outside? Why / Why not?

2 Key words

a. Find the following words in the text. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. a noun meaning *the activity of raising bees and collecting their honey*
_____ (paragraph 1)
2. a noun meaning *the substance on the surface of the Earth in which plants grow*
_____ (paragraph 2)
3. a noun meaning *a vegetable with a smooth dark purple skin and white flesh*
_____ (paragraph 4)
4. an adjective meaning *very interested or attracted by someone or something*
_____ (paragraph 4)
5. a verb meaning *collect a crop from the fields or collect plants that can be eaten*
_____ (paragraph 5)
6. a verb meaning *plant seeds in the ground* _____ (paragraph 5)
7. a noun meaning *a small hard part produced by a plant that can grow into a new plant of the same type* _____ (paragraph 5)
8. an adjective meaning *safe or good enough to eat* _____ (paragraph 6)
9. an adjective meaning *relating to the countryside, or in the countryside*
_____ (paragraph 8)
10. a noun meaning *the countryside considered as a place to grow your own food or live in a simple healthy way* _____ (paragraph 8)

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11. a noun meaning *the fact of belonging to a particular ethnic group; ethnicity*
_____ (paragraph 8)
12. an adjective meaning *making you feel extremely tired and without energy*
_____ (paragraph 9)

b. Discuss the questions.

1. Do you prefer rural or city life? Which do you find most exhausting?
2. Have you ever sown a seed or harvested something edible?
3. Would you enjoy working the land and putting your hands in the soil?
4. Which plants are you fascinated by?
5. Do you like any aubergine dishes?

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Claire Ratinon

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- 1 In July 2016, I was sitting on top of a building in central London, listening to a nearby beehive, when I realized that my life had changed completely. I didn't mean to quit – it just happened. After eight years of working in the media, I was becoming an organic food grower, with a temporary side job of city beekeeping.
- 2 Not long before that, I was just like the people in the office building below me. My days were spent behind a desk or carrying around camera equipment, but now I am taking care of the soil and growing plants for food.
- 3 I'm actually comfortable with being a quitter. I used to work in television production, and with its short contracts, I'd become used to making big changes. In fact, in 2010 I got on a plane to New York to avoid a new contract.
- 4 I was growing tired of my life in London and I wanted to explore somewhere new, and it was in New York that I first experienced food growing. It was at Brooklyn Grange – a rooftop farm that sits above New York's busy streets and overlooks Manhattan. Kale, peppers and tomatoes in unexpected shapes and colours, aubergines – so many vegetables in the most unlikely places. I was fascinated.
- 5 From that day, all I could think about was joining the other farm workers while they harvested, planted out and readied the earth for the next sowing of seeds. After two seasons of working there for free, I wanted to make growing food a bigger part of my life. So I went back to London.
- 6 Back in Hackney, I had an evening job – during the day, I looked for spaces where edible plants could be found growing in the city. After a year, I quit and tried to take on any job – each day a different one – so I could spend my days outside, my hands in the soil. Each job taught me something valuable.
- 7 Working as a school gardener showed me how little room there is in the school day for children to learn about how food gets to their plate; training as a beekeeper taught me that growing flowers is a far better way of supporting bees and other insects than keeping hives; and growing organic salad leaves for people in Hackney made me realize there is nothing so ordinary and yet somehow amazing as the act of feeding people.
- 8 Leaving London in 2019 to move somewhere rural changed my life. Now, in a garden of my own, I grow the vegetables and fruit I want. I write and talk about how important this is and encourage others to try it. I also write and talk about the issues I have seen along the way – like the political nature of working the land, land justice, the dynamics of race and belonging in rural spaces.
- 9 I'm probably too romantic in the way I speak about working the land. It is a difficult way to make a living. It is exhausting and underpaid work. Yet it remains the most important thing I've ever done. It has given my life more meaning than I have ever known and more purpose than I ever found pursuing a career in the media.
- 10 Learning how to grow the plants that feed us has helped me to grow a deep connection with the natural world for the first time. One way or another, I'm certain I would always have found my way back to the soil.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Are these statements True (T) or False (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. The writer wanted to become an organic food grower since she started working in the media.
2. The writer does not work behind a desk anymore.
3. Experiencing the rooftop garden at Brooklyn Grange made her want to grow vegetables.
4. Back in Hackney, the writer had to work in many jobs, so she didn't have time to be outside.
5. She thinks the best way to help bees is to keep beehives in the city.
6. She is now a gardener and also writes and talks about land justice and race issues.
7. The writer feels that working the land is extremely tiring.
8. The writer feels that it was a mistake to take up on gardening.

4 Key language

a. Match the adjectives and nouns to form phrases from the text.

- | | |
|---------------|--------|
| 1. edible | job |
| 2. organic | spaces |
| 3. rural | places |
| 4. temporary | plants |
| 5. unexpected | food |
| 6. unlikely | shapes |

b. Choose the three collocations you find the most useful and write sentences about you or your work experience.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- “You should work in something that makes you happy, even if it means less money.”
- “All children should learn to grow food at school.
- “Cities should plant more fruit trees for everyone to use.”

6 In your own words

- a. Use an internet search engine to find information about edible plants that are easy to grow. Find plants that would be good to grow in your environment. Think about the space that you have and conditions like light and water.
- b. Report your findings to the class.