

CAMBRIDGE ORGANIC GAZETTE

courgette



Celebrating Organic:
a shortcut to better

Meet a local organic farm

Figure out fibre

A fibre-packed recipe!





Founder and owner of Cambridge Organic

There is a special place in my heart for the Prospects Trust. I have been buying produce from them since the first year of business, making them one of the very first local growers to supply us. More than that though, it is one of those organisations that just has goodness at its core; caring, friendly and producing wholesome organic vegetables. What's not to love?

Every time I visit I am treated to the warmest possible welcome, hi-fives included. Just the other day I went there to collect our produce. It was one of the baking hot days and I had arrived a little early, before our order was ready. I was given a cup of tea, which I sat in a shady spot to drink, before doing a couple of circuits of their wonderful nature reserve while a small army of colleagues went about grading our cucumbers and weighing our tomatoes. When I returned from my walk the same mob of smiling workers cheerfully helped load the van, before waving me goodbye. I couldn't have been happier.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the weather. Conditions such as we have had this summer clearly present all sorts of challenges to farmers. It's not simply a matter of water scarcity; farming is, of course, an 'al fresco' profession, and working outdoors in temperatures above thirty degrees is not much fun. I think new levels of appreciation are in order for those heroic producers, who have been toiling away on those hot days in order to produce the food on your plate.



From left: farm manager Adam, Alan, Trevor, Amy, Bethany & Steve

The Prospects Trust

The Prospects Trust at Snakehall Farm is found near the historic village of Reach in Cambridgeshire. The farm operates as one of the Trust's social enterprises, supporting people with mild to moderate additional needs and autism, whilst also growing delicious produce to help fund the project. To many they offer meaningful work and training, however they also meet increasing demand for therapeutic green spaces and accessible facilities to support those with complex additional needs.

Much of their produce ends up in our veg-boxes and has done since Cambridge Organic first began in 1998. The farm is 18 acres of organic land, incorporating a diverse mix of agricultural, enterprise, and conservation spaces. Dedicated heavily to market gardening, the site features a fruit cage, numerous polytunnels - including four recently added tunnels and a designated "hotbed"- as well as outdoor growing beds/plots. The farm also includes a

recently expanded "Enterprise Kitchen", building on baking, food processing, jam and preserve making, and in-house laundry activities. These products then go to food businesses such as The Prospects Trust Unwrapped, their shop and cafe in Ely, showcasing organic, eco and locally sourced produce.

A major focus of the site is biodiversity and nature conservation, including multiple ponds, woodland and a nature reserve. They actively promote biodiversity by companion planting, such as marigolds with tomatoes for natural pest control. They maintain bird boxes with speaker calls for nesting Swifts. They have also extensively planted trees and hedges - erecting over 2,200 native whips (like field maples, hazels, and hawthorns) to support local wildlife, including ground-nesting birds, hares, butterflies, and dragonflies. Clearly, they are local heroes!





Companion plants: Marigolds



We took a tour with Adam Tibbles, Farm Manager at Prospects Trust. A 'hot' topic was the warming climate: extreme summer temperatures have placed significant stress on the farm, prompting re-evaluations of how and where they cultivate crops.

Water Sources & Usage

The Prospects Trust is fortunate to have access to a borehole to extract underground water (permitted up to 20 cubic meters per day). Because of its depth, the borehole offers protection against droughts that may affect neighbouring farms who are drawing from surface ditches.

In addition, they have a 35,000-liter underground

rainwater harvesting tank, but sadly its extraction pump is currently broken, leaving the stored water inaccessible.

Their existing automated irrigation controller is outdated and lacks flexibility, currently they run a compromise, meaning some crops get too little water and others too much, and they're always anticipating yearly system failures where an aged component fails.

However, there is a grant opportunity, and the farm is pursuing a 50% match-funded grant for water-saving initiatives to upgrade outdated controllers, repair the underground pump and improve their outside watering capacity.

Heat Impact on Crops (and People!)

Temperatures inside polytunnels become so extreme during heatwaves that staff cannot work in them during normal 'office' hours, meaning they are only accessible for brief periods of harvesting and completely inaccessible to co-workers for safety reasons. The irony is that the tunnels provide shelter and warmth during the cooler months, allowing the co-workers to be 'outside' throughout the rest of the year.

It's not just the people that suffer during high temperatures, plants get severely heat-stressed too. It can halt processes like tomato ripening and pollination. Leafy greens

and seed germination are suffering significantly regardless of any interventions.

As the climate looks to continue rising, efforts are being made to adapt the polytunnels to improve ventilation and shading, however this preparation for the future doesn't come cheap. Luckily cucumbers, aubergines and peppers are thriving in the heat, as long as they receive adequate water and enough attempts at care and weeding.

Soil Quality & Nutrient Depletion

The site features heavy, hungry soil - clay over chalk - that dries out quickly and drains nutrients fast. Soil nutrients are rapidly exhausted by bumper crops like the high-yield pepper plants, that need long periods of heat. The farm team



works on improving the soil year on year with home-made custom composts, imported anaerobic digestate (nutrient-rich organic fertiliser) and cover crops such as vetch, white clover, and rye, though even these are struggling in the summer's heat.

The Prospects Trust is unique compared to our other local growers. 'Growing' efforts are naturally prioritized towards co-workers, meaning some otherwise traditional crops, methods or solutions, such as starting earlier in the day, simply aren't possible. Adam wanted to thank his team for braving a tough year and taking pride in the results; a wonderful range of organic items which you can find in your veg-boxes. You are also welcome to visit their nature reserve at any time.



30+°C temps require regular breaks





Fibre is a vital part of a healthy diet

by **Jools Abraham**

of www.eatlikeyournana.com



For many years, fibre was thought to have no nutritional value. We knew it helps our digestion to function smoothly but, since it's largely undigested, we thought it had no other health benefits. We now know that fibre has a complex role in our health and eating plenty of it helps prevent many diseases - including heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and bowel cancer. **Sadly, most people's diet includes only about 18g of fibre per day, which is less than two-thirds of the 30g recommended by the NHS.**

For most of human history, refined grains such as white flour and rice were very expensive to produce and were eaten only on special occasions by the wealthiest people. White flour and rice were produced by hand, but the process was laborious and wasteful. From around 1880, the invention of industrial milling changed our diet fundamentally and white flour and rice became cheap and easy to produce. It was soon discovered that these refined products store much better than wholegrain foods and are more suitable for industrially produced food. Food manufacturers started selling products made from refined grains and advertising

that they were pure and healthier than wholegrains.

Unfortunately, the nutritional penalty from eating refined grains was significant. When wheat and rice are refined, the bran and germ, which contain most of the fibre and nutrients, are removed leaving mostly starch. To prevent malnutrition, many countries legislate that white wheat flour must have nutrients added, including calcium, iron and B vitamins. These additives replace some of the micronutrients that have been removed but they do not replace the natural fibre.

We now know that eating sufficient fibre is essential for maintaining good health. When our food contains fibre, we feed the large community of bacteria and other microbes that live in our large intestine. We're still learning about the vital role played by the gut microbiome which metabolises fibre that we cannot digest ourselves. The microbiome produces vital compounds such as short-chain fatty acids which keep our gut healthy and probably provides wide benefits for immunity, inflammation, metabolic health and even mental wellbeing.

There are several different forms of fibre which have varying functions and are found in different types of foods. The best natural sources of fibre are beans, peas, lentils, wholegrains, nuts, seeds, vegetables and fruit. The best practical advice is to eat a variety of these unprocessed foods and try to include a selection with every meal.

Food manufacturers like to make health claims but the claims on food packaging can be very misleading. Products that state "a source of fibre" must contain at least 3g of fibre per 100g and the words "high fibre" mean it must contain at least 6g per 100g. That fibre could come from healthy whole ingredients such as beans, oats or wholemeal flour but it could also come from plant fibres that are added to bulk up a product. The fibre could also be from synthetic chemicals such as polydextrose that are entirely artificial and have an unknown impact on the gut.

Personally, I'm suspicious of health claims on food packaging. Manufacturers often use these claims to convince consumers that a highly processed product is a healthy

choice. Some breakfast cereals claim a 'high fibre' content, but are made with highly processed ingredients and contain a lot of sugar.

It can sometimes be difficult to know which are the best types of bread. The healthiest bread is made from wholemeal flour with few additives, but supermarket loaves are often made with cheap white flour that has been dyed brown to appear healthier. If you see "caramelised sugar" amongst the ingredients you will know this is a white flour product that has been coloured brown to appear healthy.

One note of caution is to make any change to your diet gradually. If you are used to a low-fibre diet you will take a little time to adapt. A sudden increase in beans, lentils, seeds or wholegrain products might cause temporary issues such as wind, bloating and discomfort while your gut and your microbiome adjust.

The best way to include plenty of healthy fibre in your diet is to eat meals with minimally processed natural plant foods, such as beans, nuts and wholegrains.



**Chickpea Ratatouille
recipe on back page offers
1/3 of adult RDA of fibre**

High-Fibre Chickpea Ratatouille

Nutrition per portion: Fibre 10g (1/3 of UK adult daily recommendation)

• Protein 8g • Carbohydrate 26g • Fat 12g • Calories 260 kcal

I love this vegetable stew because it's so versatile. You can eat it as a vegetable accompaniment to meat or fish, or as a sauce for pasta. All these vegetables are useful sources of fermentable fibre and healthy polyphenols that feed your gut microbiome.

By Jools Abraham of www.eatlikeyournana.com



Ingredients

Serves 4

- 1 tin (400g) cooked chickpeas or red kidney beans (drained and rinsed)
- 1 medium onion
- 1 pepper - any colour
- 1 medium aubergine (about 300g)
- 1 medium courgette (about 200g)
- 1 or 2 garlic cloves (optional)
- 1 tin (400g) of tomatoes
- 3 tbsp olive oil or other cooking oil

Optional additions:

- Tabasco, chilli flakes or cayenne pepper
- Chopped coriander, basil or parsley

Method

1. Cut the aubergine and courgette into 2cm cubes. Put them into a big bowl and mix in a whole tablespoon of salt (you will rinse it off later). Stir occasionally as juices appear.
2. Chop onion into medium-sized pieces of about 1cm. Heat the oil in a large saucepan and add the onions. Fry gently for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.
3. While the onion is frying, cut the pepper into 2cm squares. Add the pepper to the onion and continue to fry gently.
4. Rinse the salt from the aubergines and courgette with lots of water. Drain. Add to the onions and pepper and continue frying.
5. If using garlic, peel the clove and crush it into the vegetable mixture and stir.
6. By this time, the vegetables will be starting to soften. Add the tinned tomatoes. If you like a bit of heat, stir in the Tabasco, chilli or cayenne pepper. Season to taste.
7. Cover the pot and continue cooking on a low heat for at least 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. You can continue to cook it gently for up to an hour if you like it softer. If it looks dry, add a little water. Add fresh herbs, if using, at the end, and stir.