

Personal power

Charlotte Hastings reflects on summer's capacity to unlock our full potential



As the woodland's flowers bloom, summer, with its theme of personal power takes a bow. Here we get into our creative confidence following nature's lead, of course, always. When we feel lost and overwhelmed, turning to our natural human ability to make and manipulate fire into food reconnects us with our primal purpose. Watching wild garlic grow and do its reliable, yearly thing, clearly loving each stage of its journey into lavish, sprawling bloom, I am reminded of this sentence, 'And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom' (author unknown; attribution varies).

Unlike the wild garlic, humans are often thwarted on their path to self-becoming. It is in our nature to dialectically move from unconscious perfection to conscious potential. This classic hero's journey is reflected in the tarot cards. The key archetype, the fool, comes of age and returns home, traversing life's pathways through adventures with other cards in the deck. I play with this idea in my book, *Kitchen Therapy*. Each recipe (a card) has a story to tell, a character to reveal and a message to share, revealing rich inner worlds. The cards relish being themselves and take us from the wonderfully unique to the reassuringly universal, human experience.

As I began psychotherapy training, I also started teaching community cookery classes, which I called 'Learn to love cooking'. I knew that if you poured pleasure into the pot as you made a dish, you would simmer it to the table full of your pride and joy! Cooking with love, as we see in the Mexican tale *Like Water for Chocolate*, infuses a meal with the transformative energy of the cook.¹ I would later discover the depth of personal development we discover when we let imagination lead the way, delving into our libido's resourceful larder.

As I began my kitchen therapy project, I was invited into a primary school to run a club with parents and children. I needed to

practise my plan at home, so I set my then six-year-old son, Carl, to make a bonfire cake. I put the splendid magazine photo and all the chocolate wood and fire-coloured icing we would need on the table for us to begin. Carl's cake is now infamous as an example of creative confidence and the parental conditioning that blocks a process. To me, the cake emerging was a horrible disaster. It looked a mess, unlike the glossy role model on the page. I ached to make him 'do it right' but I had to keep quiet as I needed to know how it would work in the classroom.

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Finally, he sat back finished. Despondently I asked him what he thought of his cake. 'Oh, Mum,' he said, 'It's the best thing I've ever made!'. Oh. I see. My child was demonstrating the process of true personal power and potential. You freestyle in the way of 'mudpie magic', no external measurements or prescriptions but an intuitive knowing that emerges in the woodland moment. Carl's cake has graced many a session where people block their natural abilities with notions of perfection or parental noise of what is or is not 'right'.

The nettles at the back of my studio have something to say on this matter. Often reviled as a painful nuisance (which I feel slightly ashamed of not clearing away), they fearlessly keep turning up. Living on the edge of pathways, battling through brambles, nettles are an (almost too) abundant source of nutrition. Finally, I have started to use them in tea, soups and wherever possible. They teach us about full, wholehearted, courageous self-acceptance and about looking into our shadow for soul

nourishment. Where the pain lives, so does new growth. Snipping nettles' top knots, or wild garlic's verdant cloak see this in action.

Summer's recipe is Hey Pesto. This woodland character makes use of the resources around her, turning leaves into meals. She's something of a gossip, picking up ideas to pop into her larder. She carries the Green Man synergy with her capacity to bring parts of the forest, and therefore herself, together. A verdant optimist, she heralds the spirit of personal power. ●

Gather up some green leaves that you like, classic basil from a window box or edible leaves from the woods. Defrost some trustee peas for protein, sweetness and all-round goodness and blend with soaked mixed seeds, olive oil. Season as you like it. Squeeze in lemon juice and plenty of garlic (from the shop, unless the wild stuff is available). Bring in some cream cheese and parmesan if that's on your menu, mix and taste, play and try until it feels just right.

Reference

1 Esquivel L. Christensen C, Christensen T (tr). *Like water for chocolate*. London: Doubleday; 1993.

Charlotte Hastings has been a psychodynamic practitioner since 2010 and BACP accredited since 2015. *Kitchen therapy* emerged through her childhood, marked by complex family dynamics, often expressed through food (as her chapter in *Attachment Relationships and Food* and book *Kitchen Therapy: how to become a conscious cook* describe). www.therapykitchen.co.uk