



## Episode 9: How to Boost Vitality with Gardening

**Evan Hirsch:** Hello, and welcome to the Fix Your Fatigue Podcast. Whether you can't get out of bed in the morning, your energy crashes throughout the day, or you're a biohacker looking to optimize your energy, productivity, and focus. This podcast is for you. I am Dr. Evan Hirsch. And I will be your host on your journey to resolving fatigue and optimizing your energy. And we'll be interviewing some of the top leaders in the world on fatigue resolution. Welcome.

**Evan Hirsch:** Hey everybody, Dr. Evan Hirsch here, with another episode on the Fix Your Fatigue Podcast. So glad that you're here with me today. So I'm really excited about today's episode. Today we have Jessica Smith with me. Jessica is a certified ecological farmer and nutritional therapy practitioner. She's got a BS in Sustainable Living and Living Soils, and she combines her passions to encourage the Earth and its inhabitants back into a state of balance and vitality, which is so important and so much of what we talk about. She teaches regenerative and ecological farming, gardening, and farming in hopes to improve soil health, equal ecosystem health, environmental health, and human health. Jessica, thanks so much for being with me today.

**Jessica Smith:** Thanks for having me.

**Evan Hirsch:** Awesome. So the first thing that I want to jump into is your story. Everybody's got a story about why they got to where they are, so what, and it informs so much of what we do, so if you could just share that with us, that'd be great.

**[00:02:11] Jessica Smith:** Yes, I'd love to. So I started out growing through with my grandpa when I was a kid. I've been growing food since I can remember. He's always had a garden, always had chickens, or something happening in the backyard to grow some awesome food. And those are some of my fondest memories. My grandpa actually has this picture that he saves for a blackmail, of me [laughs] pictures of me in my underwear in front of a plum tree, which was my favorite at that time as a kid, and I had plum juice all over my face. So it all down my body. So I was always in the garden, always growing with him.

And really, that was just normal every summer, you could expect lots and lots of fresh

tomatoes, and he would grow like 50 different varieties and like hundreds of tomato plants. So my childhood was just filled with like, positive and like wonderful memories of tasty food. And then, when I was getting a little bit older than I was in high school, I was just beginning to get into that age range. One time, I remember I was sitting on the back deck with my grandpa just kind of looking out over the fields and stuff and over the yard. And he told me that if you take care of the land, it'll take care of you. And from that moment on, I just "Oh wow." Like that's what we should be doing. We shouldn't like, it's so amazing to feel like you can put your love into something, and that will be reciprocated with abundance. And so, from then on, I decided to go to school for sustainable living and living soils.

And then that kind of triggered like human health as like an aspect of like, it's so interconnected. And then, from there, I went in and now working on a Master's in Soil Science to help try to teach people how to really put life back into the soil and how that can create super vibrant, like medicinal food, and everyday produce. So really, it's just growing awesome food, and it feels amazing. And I want everybody to be able to have that same feeling.

**Evan Hirsch:** Awesome. Yes, there's something really special about reconnecting with nature.

**Jessica Smith:** Yes.

**Evan Hirsch:** Right?

**Jessica Smith:** Yes.

**Evan Hirsch:** And so there's something that you mentioned, let's dive into that like putting life back into the soil. So, where have we gone wrong? What happened with our soil?

**[00:04:25] Jessica Smith:** Right? Well, the, where we went wrong was they started treating soil like dirt. Right? [laughs] Well really like when you treat it like an inanimate like a just like sad, like nonliving objects, then you're going to get a result that's not as vibrant as it could be. So, what we can do is because, putting chemicals or pesticides or herbicides, or different antimicrobials into the soil, what we've learned is that this actually short circuits the system, because in nature, like in the forest, nobody's putting fertilizer down, but the plants are growing. And really, we don't have to, when you have the diversity, there's no imbalances. So we've gone wrong as we think that we can improve what's already perfect. Like we think, we can make nature better, but what makes nature better is when we understand it and support it.

And so we can kind of shift it in the direction. So with gardening and stuff like growing your own food, what you can do is make sure you're not using chlorinated water because that is put into the water to disinfect it of microbes, and that's inherently going to disinfect the soil microbes. So, in the plant's rhizosphere, there's actually beneficial microbes that help break down nutrients and feed them to the plant, and then the plant

feeds the microbes. So there's a symbiotic relationship happening, and this is how we get healthy plants a spice supporting life, making sure our soils moist, making sure it's covered and not disturbing it all the time.

**Evan Hirsch:** That's so great.

**Jessica Smith:** Yes.

**Evan Hirsch:** So let's dive into health. Let's talk a little bit about that. Obviously, I focus on fatigue and energy, so how can going through this process and gardening? How can it improve energy and even mood?

**[00:06:17] Jessica Smith:** Yes. So when it comes to gardening, there's so many facets to how it boosts health and boosts your energy. And the first one being fresh air, you usually are going outside. And for some people, that makes the biggest difference, like my partner's mom, called us the other day, and she was like, "I'm having such a great day. I feel so good." And she was so like lively and happy. We're like, "What do you do?" She's like, "I opened the windows, and I went outside." [laughs]

And so it's like fresh air is so enlivening and full of so many good things. And what we don't realize is that a lot of times the air quality in our houses is actually pretty poor. And so really getting outside and the fresh air and the negative ions and all the different microbes and beneficials that are happening. It kind of just boosts our mood in a way. So that's the first component, it is just fresh air. And then sunlight, making the vitamin D and all the supporting cofactors that help you absorb nutrients and stuff like that. So getting sun some something about sunlight is like it just you can't help but smile when there's like sun hitting you. And then, also, the physical activity. So getting your lymphatic system flowing, you need that in order to detox and kind of help your system reduce the burden of anything that might be weighing you down. And then also, there's something so peaceful and soothing and healing about working with plants and being in nature.

So there's a studies in the hospital, we're just having pictures of plants in nature and the rooms, improved recovery rates of sick patients. So, nature therapy and getting outside is so healing in that sense. Then there's also soil, and so there's a specific microbe called *M. vaccae*, and it's also known as the golden bacillus of happiness. And what happens is, as soon as you come into contact with that, physically, it boosts serotonin levels in your brain, and it makes you feel happy and energized. And it's almost like the Earth is like coaxing you to like, come near it and be outside. And so besides growing the awesome food itself, that's so much nutritionally beneficial. It's just being outside and being present in that moment with nature, and living the whole system that kind of support you and lift your mood and lift your energy. And every time I've worked with students out in the garden, or when Joe and I were out in his garden, he said he couldn't be stressed he couldn't like feel dragged down.

So there's this, it's like a respite from the heavy burden of everyday life and different things that we might be going through, we kind of just leave them all behind. And we

kind of recollect ourselves and reconnect with that kind of source of life. So, there's so [laughs] many ways that gardening is super, super awesome. I always feel energized after gardening. And just besides that, it also helps you just have more access to fresh foods. So you, you're growing it, and it's there, and it's around you, so you're going to be eating more fresh produce. So that's also helps boost your energy as well.

**Evan Hirsch:** Yes, I love that, you didn't even really talk about the nutritional value of talking about everything that's kind of leading up to it, which is something oftentimes that we forget is that it's, it's giving us all of these essential lifestyle basics like movement, like air, like sun, like getting down into the dirt. It's, I think about the pictures of my daughter, who's now 11 years old, shoving the dirt into her mouth. And while you were talking about that, and bacillus, or whatever it was, increasing her serotonin levels, I was like, "That's why maybe that's why kids love just eating that dirt and just shoving it up in their faces."

**Jessica Smith:** Yes, that and it's inoculating their microbiome and it's like nature's way of kind of boosting our immune systems, and it just is packed with minerals, minerals, and all kinds of carbon and good, good things that, we actually evolved, like consuming some portion of soil and our food. Evolutionarily, it helps us kind of become symbiotic and close to our native microbiome of the local ecosystem. So it's just natural, it's natural. It's like a reason kids are drawn to it. It's so beautiful. I love it.

**Evan Hirsch:** That's so great. My wife and I get into discussions. I shouldn't say argue, because [laughs] we're not really arguing but when we get into discussions about washing vegetables because I'll say no, I don't want to wash them because I want the dirt on them. And she's like, well, there's more than just dirt on them, we got them from the grocery stores, most of the time at least right now while we're still growing things and she's like, there's gonna be other things on there's gonna be other people touching them. There's gonna be potentially blow by pesticides stuff like that, too, even though we're buying all organic.

**Jessica Smith:** Right.

**Evan Hirsch:** So what do you think in that situation? Which one should we be doing?

**[00:11:38] Jessica Smith:** Yes, that's why it's so important to grow your own because then you pick it fresh, and then you, it's straight to play. Like you don't have to worry about what else has been exposed to. So yes, stuff from the grocery store. No matter what, definitely, it's good to wash it because you don't know what else it's been exposed to. And that's the beauty of because like growing your own food that you put so much effort in and you've improved the soil. Whereas all soils are not equal is contaminants in some areas, and so you really don't know how your food was grown unless you do it yourself.

So for me, yes, washing things from the grocery store just couldn't don't know, and then that's all the more reason to grow your own food. Because then you're you don't have to worry about what could be on it and what's not. What, who else has been touching those

pesticides and stuff like that, you just cut that and put it on your plate. And so when it comes to new growing my own food, it's not by road or something like that. It's in like a secure, like secluded area, where it's not potentially having any airborne things on it. Definitely, like eat it without washing it. That's how our ancestors [laughs] does it. It helps really connect you to the land. So I definitely, yes, that's how I do it.

**Evan Hirsch:** Well, rats. I'll have to tell my wife that she's correct. [laughs]

**Jessica Smith:** Yes. Well, half correct, right? Give some to her. [laughs]

**Evan Hirsch:** That's great. Yes. And so let's talk about eating soil. So we talk about kids eating soil. How do we get more soil in our diet? Besides, I mean, do people actually eat it in larger quantities? Or should it just be consumed on these vegetables that are coming out of the garden?

**[00:13:25] Jessica Smith:** Yes, the best way is just having it natural amounts. I know. I've heard some stories of pregnant women who are just craving it because they need the minerals. So in some countries, they like they do have certain deposits where there's mineral-rich soils that they know about, and they utilize. But you don't have to really like go out of your way to consume it if you're getting exposure.

To being outside, and also you're getting exposure like while you're growing food and you're out there gardening, you're going to be inhaling things in the air and stuff that's stirred up, and it's just going to [unintelligible 00:14:14] you're going to be exposed to it. So I would be very careful about going out of my way to consume soil there because our soils these days are contaminated in a lot of areas, especially if you're doing like an urban garden or stuff like and stuff like that.

You want to make sure that you're not potentially ingesting excess amounts of blood. So for me, instead of trying to purposely consume more soil, unless it's on my food, and because that's how you get to 12 and stuff like that, for a lot of vegetarians, if you grow your own food, a lot of microbes contain that element or that vitamin A nutrient. But there are some other things you can do like I said, besides gardening, there's some carbon sources like humic acids, fulvic acid, shilajit.

These products that are clean and tested. That's my biggest thing I would like to stress is like. You want to be really careful about the quality and any potential contaminants. So those carbon products are really good the fulvic and humic acids and different products. But yes, I would be very cautious about any soil consuming it. Like if you don't, if you haven't had it tested, and it's, I wouldn't go out of my way to ingest it. Besides on natural amounts occurring amounts on the stuff you grow.

**Evan Hirsch:** Awesome. Okay. And so then what about testing? Where do we get our soil tested? And how do we know if our soil is good enough for planting?

**[00:15:33] Jessica Smith:** Right? Well, there's definitely there's multiple things you can be testing for if I were in an urban area or a suburban area where there could have

been previous construction or an older home that had like lead paint or something like that. There's local municipalities you can check with to see where you can send off a sample for heavy metals, and potential hydrocarbons if you're near like a freeway or a highway. So there's local place labs that you can have it tested or at your local Land-Grant University.

A lot of times they'll offer things specifically for heavy metals. And then when it comes to planting in it, there's various labs that you can look at. I'm on the East Coast. So I have a couple labs here that I like. But it's just going to depend on where you are, and you want to send it in for you want to see the available nutrients you want to see kind of more than just the NPK, the Nitrogen, and kind of Phosphorus, and Potassium stuff like that. Just the three elements that are usually in standard flow tests you're going to have to look for a lab, probably more than just a Land-Grant University. Because you want to see Calcium and Magnesium, you want to see microelements. All the things that you're going to want to adjust for in your soil potentially. So you can look for local soil labs, and make sure that you are getting a test that offers you a wide array of minerals and nutrients.

So you're going to probably get organic matter, a pH, and then NPK, and then a Broad Spectrum Analysis of the different elements in the soil. That's really a soil test offers you a good place to start. And it offers you a good place for amending any kind of imbalances in Magnesium to Carbon to Calcium Ratio. For structure reasons, but it's just a place to start. It's just kind of what's in the bank right within the bank account that you have. Because even though it says you might have a certain amount of Calcium in your soil, it might not be available to your plants. It might be locked off or not in bioavailable form. Just like when we take a multivitamin, you're gonna want to look for a bioavailable one, because otherwise, you're just screaming that like non-absorbable nutrients.

So you, you want to make sure that, like I said, you're focusing on the soil microbes, because what happens is the plant secretes things to feed the microbes. And then the microbes can't just live off of the sugars and different metabolites that the plant feeds that they need minerals. So the microbes go out into the soil, they get the minerals to build their bodies, and then when they get eaten by another microbe, that nutrient the nutrients and its body and the minerals in his body are released. In the rhizosphere, which is the root system of the plants, and then it's bioavailable nutrients, so the plant would prefer to absorb all of its minerals, from microbe from the microbial metabolites. So that's from when microbes are eating microbe excretions. All the different, more organic forms of elements.

So like I said, soil tests, look for a local lab that does a Broad Spectrum Analysis of different elements. And that gives you a place to start. You can amend your soil as needed to kind of take care of deficiencies because that'll help kind of offset any potential for your plants to uptake heavy metals if they have everything they need. And then, from there, you just support life so that you have access to these minerals.

**Evan Hirsch:** Awesome.

**Jessica Smith:** Sorry, I nerd out like super hardcore, like [laughs]

**Evan Hirsch:** I was only swimming a little bit.

**Jessica Smith:** Yes. [laughs]

**Evan Hirsch:** Knows is great. I loved it. And so and so then to follow up that so then what is what should I search on Google? Is it like soil testing my county or soil testing biggest city near me?

**[00:19:45] Jessica Smith:** So for me, I would just type in broad-spectrum like soil tests. And then you can say, it's going to probably be regional more than state. Because for me, I'm, I go between New York and Virginia, and I still use labs in Ohio. So I, there's a lab in Ohio called Logan Labs, and I love their tests because they're already used to people looking for this stuff. So probably, it's probably going to be a private lab, but maybe if you're on the West Coast, some of the universities of have more offerings in Washington, you're probably going to have more of those agriculture, not just large scale AG kind of testing, but for people who are interested in more of the broad-spectrum. So, yes, you just really any lab that offers more than just NPK is going to be good. So what you would do is, once you look find a place near you, you can either call them, or you can look at the soil, like an example soil test. And you just want to make sure that it's, you're selecting one that's more just gives you more elemental analysis.

**Evan Hirsch:** Okay. And so is there anything wrong with like, me and Seattle using Logan Labs in Ohio?

**[00:21:05] Jessica Smith:** No, it's going to be fine.

**Evan Hirsch:** Just a longer turnaround?

**[00:21:10] Jessica Smith:** Yes. Yep. Because they'll email you the results. So as long as you shipped it to them, and it's such a small enough amount so that it's not going to cost too much. Logan Labs is just my favorite when it comes to this because they're used to people that are backyard gardeners, or sometimes they're, they don't. It's hard to convert it from like acres to square feet. [laughs] And so these people are already kind of aware of a lot of people giving a lot smaller scale.

**Evan Hirsch:** Excellent. So then the next step is then you get that information back. And it sounds like you're talking about making adjustments and things to give your soil.

**Jessica Smith:** Right.

**Evan Hirsch:** Is there a, what sort of resource do you recommend, then, that we can kind of learn about how to do this because I could see myself I get the information back, I'd be like, what do I do with this?

**[00:22:00] Jessica Smith:** Right? Yes. So there's an organization called the Bionutrient Food Association, and they have, if you go to like the resources and stuff on their website, they have a lot of information about how to interpret soil test and what it means. And then you can also, I think Logan Labs offers like recommendations based on your soil test. So you could take an extra box to get recommendations back from them specifically. But really, there's not a lot of information the most user-friendly kind of garden scale people out there that I've seen with would be Bionutrient Food Association or finding AG consultants in your local area that is more aware of the more holistic approach.

**Evan Hirsch:** Okay, cool. Sounds like that would be a good course offering.

**Jessica Smith:** It really what I haven't seen that many that offer it for small scale like for backyard gardening. So currently, I'm in the process of creating kind of my own package to offer people because it's so hard to find all of the amendments that I want like every, I've moved a few times. And every time I get to new place, I have to like locate like, "Where are the closest, like mineral sources and rock, dust, quarries and [laughs] all this stuff?" And so it's hard to get the stuff once you find it, it's hard to get it in like a quart-sized jar or something small enough for your garden plot, and usually have to buy a book. So for the backyard gardener, it's kind of a challenge, so it just takes a lot of Google searching. And then, for me, I decided that I wanted to make a product for people because I wish I had one when I was like moving around, so yeah, I don't know many options. You could definitely Google it.

It would be more like looking for full-year or DIY recipes. I could also share like a DIY recipe like eBook for you for like ecological garden primer. So yes, it's, there's so much information that it's really easy to get overwhelmed, but if you keep it pretty simplified for yourself, you're like okay soil, and you start with like soil mineral balancing. There's actually there are some pretty good books I could share with you to share with people because I think there's the, what is it called? There's a couple books I have to share with you. I have three books in mind. And there's one called The Ideal Soil, and there's one called The Intelligent Gardener, but I should get some specifics. I think that would help people a lot with the mineral balancing. So-

**Evan Hirsch:** That'd be amazing. Thank you.

**Jessica Smith:** -Yes. And then there's Foliar Feeding. So there's different products that stimulate microbes. Put carbon into the soil, which is like a food source. So it gets, there's so many things you can do. And the beautiful thing is a lot of the stuff is in your kitchen already. So [laughs] be a lot of it. Yes, like my, I have. I've heard some stories about grandmas and stuff for use to take sugar, and they would sneak it. And they would put it around their tomato plants because they sat him in make the tomato sweeter. And what they didn't realize is that they were feeding the microbes because the microbes love sugar. And then there was more nutrients available to the tomato plant. So many things just look up biostimulants look up microbial boosting recipes. A lot of DIY recipes out there.



**Evan Hirsch:** Cool. I'm taking notes.

**Jessica Smith:** [laughs]

**Evan Hirsch:** That's excellent. Yes. I mean, I, my story is very similar in the sense that I created my programs because they weren't available.

**Jessica Smith:** Right.

**Evan Hirsch:** And there were certain things like I never wanted to treat infections. But I found that I had to because my patients would get better to a certain point. And then I couldn't find anybody to help them get to the next level and help them treat in a natural way. So I had to learn this stuff and then incorporate all of it. So I totally get it. I'm excited for when you have that course. Come out. No pressure.

**Jessica Smith:** [laughs] Awesome. I'll be sure to let you know.

**Evan Hirsch:** Sure, you got nothing else to do, right?

**Jessica Smith:** Yes. [laughs] Actually, that is my life. So [laughs] it's definitely something I enjoy doing.

**Evan Hirsch:** That's awesome.

**Jessica Smith:** Yes.

**Evan Hirsch:** So let's dive into another question here. So let's talk about food in the garden versus food from the grocery store. So we're talking about energy, we're talking about nutrition. How do those different types of produce differ?

**[00:26:45] Jessica Smith:** So the stuff that you find in the grocery store, it's usually picked before it's ripe. Otherwise, it wouldn't be shelf-stable for long enough for them to get it from the farm to the distributing facilities to the grocery stores. Because usually, who knows how long it's been since that tomato has been picked. Normally they're picked green, and then they're forced ripened, or they're sent to the grocery store. They're red by the time they get to the grocery stores, but that's just like a false kind of, that's why you get a lot of tomatoes, and they don't have a lot of flavor because they're picked before they're ripe. So when it comes to totals at the grocery store, you don't know how long it's been picked. You don't know what, how it's been grown.

And so when it comes to ripeness, you really need to be eating things that I've picked, have been picked after they're ripe because a plant does not want you to pick a tomato before it's ripe because the seeds are not viable yet. So plants makes the ripe tomato so much more appealing to animals because it wants the seeds to be spread only when they're ready. So nature already hasn't intended when we eat like a carrot that's bitter,

or that doesn't taste good. It's because it's lacking certain bounces of minerals in it, and different aromatic compounds and plant secondary metabolites that give it flavor. So, a lot of times with the stuff growing at the grocery store is grown for quantity over quality, and it's grown for parents versus the actual nutritional value of it. So people are geared towards thinking that it has to, everything has to be perfect and the same size and shape. And really, it's just not how it normally looks when you grow it yourself.

And a lot of times when people garden and grow their own produce there, it looks beautiful, and there's like all kinds of interesting shapes and different things to happen. And then also that's why you won't taste the tomato from the store that tastes like one from your backyard. You just can't compare it. So it's also what I've found is that you can taste the love in the food. You can taste all the effort, the hard work, the love, the intention that's been put into the food, and somehow that's way more uplifting, empowering. And the nutritional quality of food grown at home. It's harvested, and then it's eating super fresh, super close to when it has more. It retains more than nutritional value. Because as soon as you start to cut something, some kale or something like that. It's not getting fresher. [laughs]

So, for me, the stuff yes, you can get high-quality stuff by looking at it on the shelves and looking for the best and most vibrant looking produce or shopping at a local farmers market. That's all great if you can grow anything in your backyard or containers or something like that. It's so worth it because you will feel a difference. I know that for me, when I started growing my own produce, it just felt so much more nourishing. I felt I didn't even have to eat as much. It's so much more dense and or balanced in full nutrition that the satisfaction just is so much easier to be stay satiated. And I also noticed this, even when I was in school, is that the school offered, it's called a Veg Bag Scheme, and so they had local farmers contribute organic produce to a vegetable like CSA type thing.

And me and my partner both noticed the difference when we were cooking food with that produce versus the stuff from the local big chain supermarket. Even organic stuff from there. It's still really noticed. We are like, wow, like, I feel so much better and like, my energy is so much more stable and then also, you just, it just tastes better like there's something where you don't have to when it's not empty calories you actually, like hit a point where you're like, "No, I'm done." And because of that, you don't overeat, and you don't get weighed down. And your, like digestive system, doesn't get overwhelmed. So that eating homegrown food, it's so much nourishing on so many different levels.

**Evan Hirsch:** Yes, I remember when my daughter was young, and she would like she doesn't really like brussels sprouts, but she would eat it right out of the garden. [laughs] I call them "mini cabbages," and she chopped down on her kale, she eat right out of the garden, but she wouldn't eat it if it was on the table. And so, sometimes it was the same kale, but it's like, she wanted the absolute freshest thing that was gonna be available, and that's kind of what she was drawn to.

**Jessica Smith:** Right, yes, I had a friend who, he has a farm, and he had a young child, and they were like five years old. And they would have their mother babysat him. And

she would bring she brought him home one day, and she was like, he wouldn't eat the carrots. He just would eat the peanut butter off of them, and leave the carrot sticks. And as soon as she like, dropped him off that day, and was telling his dad about it, he walks right over into the garden, pulls up a carrot out of the garden, and just starts eating it with the with the soil all over it, like all over his face and his kids know. [laughs] So it's, I don't know, it's just, it was such a cute story and us. That's so true, though. That was like baby carrots from the store. [laughs] Who knows how long ago they've been picked, but the stuff from home like his dad was growing amazing food. That's, you knew the difference so.

**Evan Hirsch:** Thank you for listening to today's podcast. If you're ready to stop missing important events and opportunities, have robust energy and be excited about life again, please go to [fixyourfatigue.com](http://fixyourfatigue.com) and sign up for a free strategy session with me or register for a power-packed webinar showcasing my unique process that's helped thousands of people resolved their fatigue. You can take control and fixed your fatigue. I promise. The tools are waiting for you at [fixyourfatigue.com](http://fixyourfatigue.com).

**Jessica Smith:** Yes, amazing. [laughs]

**Evan Hirsch:** I love that.

**Jessica Smith:** Yes.

**Evan Hirsch:** So you mentioned CSA. So for those of our listeners who aren't familiar with that, can you talk a little bit about what that is?

**[00:33:29] Jessica Smith:** Yes. A CSA is called it's Community Supported Agriculture. So in some areas, there might be a farm that's big enough to supply maybe six to 12 different varieties of produce each season, and you sign up ahead of time. And you're kind of supporting the farmer initially in the year by paying upfront. And so they have enough money to get all their seeds and their supplies for the season and to start growing. And then you just either pick up the delivery or pick it up from the farm or specific location, or it's delivered to your door. They function differently in different locations. And there's also some which are kind of co-ops. So it's, it's like a CSA, but maybe there's a few different farmers who come together and they, they make up a box between what they've all grown. And it's just a way for people to connect more with their local food and support the people growing it and get really fresh produce.

**Evan Hirsch:** Nice. So I'm totally convinced that I need to eat closer to the ground. [laughs] And for, we're gonna get into tips in just a second, but for those people who are kind of overwhelmed by doing their own garden, is CSA like the next best option?

**[00:35:05] Jessica Smith:** Yes, definitely. Yes. The more local you can go, the better.

**Evan Hirsch:** And are oftentimes when they're delivering that box, have they been picked that morning? Or do you know if it was picked the previous day or it's tonight?

**[00:35:17] Jessica Smith:** Yes, when I've worked on farms around this area, there's a lady who supplies restaurants and stuff with produce and also has a few CSA customers. It's picked either that morning or it's picked the day before and packaged that night and then sent out to the driver who delivers it the next day.

**Evan Hirsch:** Nice and so then-

**Jessica Smith:** Yes.

**Evan Hirsch:** -and so then what is ideal for picking to consumption? How many, I know you talked about the grocery stores, are obviously on a longer time delay. What is ideal? Is that one day? Is it three days? What's ideal?

**[00:35:53] Jessica Smith:** Well, it's gonna depend on the type of produce it is. Your leafy vegetables, your green stuff, like they, it. The sooner, the better. When it comes to say like watermelons or squash or stuff like that, some stuff actually does get better [laughs] in a way where more of the things might be converted to sugars and stuff like that and get sweeter. So for and I'm what I like to do is the stuff that could wilt. I like to decrease it to use it within a week of harvesting. And then, but what I've noticed is that when you grow it yourself, it actually lasts a lot longer because there's a higher phone call like sugar content or what they call Brix reading.

So, my other farmer friend, she had some kale in the back of her fridge that she forgot about for like a month. And she found it later, and it was still completely fresh. And that was one stuff that she had grown. So yes, it can last long time, the quality starting out really determines, like how long it's lasting because if you pick a carrot if you have a higher quality care and a low-quality carrot, you pick them at the same time you have more to start out with with the high-quality carrot as far as like a mountain nutrition. So, it really for me, if it's something that will be fast, I like to eat it fast within about a week, and most other things, depending on quality, that's about the timeframe I'd like as well as within a week of harvesting and then for some things like squashes like the Winter squashes.

That's, there's less issue there when it comes to how long it's been picked. Because usually, it's some the squashes that can last all winter in a root cellar. So carrots, squash, stuff like that, is not as pertinent, but if it can wilt definitely want to use it quickly.

**Evan Hirsch:** Awesome. That's great advice. Thank you.

**Jessica Smith:** Yes. And also, when it comes to the greens and stuff back that wilts, one trick that you can do is to stick it in a glass of water and put that in your fridge. So fresh herbs, I've had so many experiences where the Cilantro just would go bad before I could use it or wilts or stuff like that. So putting things like that, or Celery and stuff into our Green Onions into a glass of water in the fridge, or a bunch of kale. It'll stay vibrant,

and it won't wilt. So, definitely recommend that.

**Evan Hirsch:** Cool. So should we do that with all of those that might potentially wilt or just at the first sign of it wilting?

[00:38:37] **Jessica Smith:** No, as soon as you get home from the grocery store. Yes.

**Evan Hirsch:** Okay, cool.

**Jessica Smith:** And if you have something that's kind of slightly started to wilt and you do that, you'll notice it, perk back up.

**Evan Hirsch:** Okay, nice.

**Jessica Smith:** Yes.

**Evan Hirsch:** So let's talk about soil rotation. So right now I've got a greenhouse. And we've planted a number of different lettuce in there, and we're going to harvest those shortly. We've got some butter leaf, and we've got some bitter stuff. Do I plant lettuce back in there? Is there a different, something else that I should plant that'll be healthier for that soil?

[00:39:18] **Jessica Smith:** Well, lettuce isn't usually like a heavy feeder. So some things are considered heavy feeders and that they they use a lot from the soil, like your tomatoes and corn, stuff like that. But when it comes to some, there's a lot of people who are really heavy believers in like rotational planting or crop rotation. And I have a few different opinions about it because where there's some people who are growing food, somebody do it because have to break past cycles. So they'll grow a specific family of crops. One seed like they'll rotate each family of crop with a different one that doesn't share the same pests and disease like your cucurbits, which is like your squashes or melons or cucumbers.

They'll rotate that with like a green or something like spinach in a different family. And so there's some people who do it for pest reasons. And when it comes to that mentality, I am on a different page because I believe that pests and disease only show up. They're the nature's cleanup crew. So I believe they only show up when there's food that's suited for them because usually they show up when a plant is sick, or a plant doesn't have a good balance of different amino acids or doesn't have complete complex sugars and stuff like that. So it's actually insect food, it's not going to be able to procreate a high-quality seed for the next generation. So it's like the insects and disease show up because there's a deficiency or an imbalance. And so I don't rotate out of fear as much as it would be more the level of feed of like how much is removed from the soil.

So that's one thing for me though, it's more sometimes just convenience. If I have one bed, that I'm having short rotations in like lettuce, which sometimes it fizzles out in the heat of the summer, so you want to keep replanting, and I would do like lettuce all season because my other beds might have longer going things like tomatoes and zucchini and stop them coming again to harvest. So those beds are staying in the same

crop all season, whereas I'll have some beds that I just keep successional planting. And so for me, it just depends on the situation. I'm not really afraid of disease or pests, so that doesn't really hold me back from planting the same thing because sometimes if you keep planting the same thing in the soil, you have the perfect microbes present that know how to support that plant already. So if you are or if you want to rotate for nutritional reasons from year to year, that's totally fine. But I don't feel that it's necessary if it makes planning complicated.

**Evan Hirsch:** Awesome. That's a relief.

**Jessica Smith:** Yes. [laughs]

**Evan Hirsch:** There's just one more thing to make it-

**Jessica Smith:** [laughs]

**Evan Hirsch:** -complicated, right?

**Jessica Smith:** Yes.

**Evan Hirsch:** Move all the barriers that people can possibly have to gardening.

**Jessica Smith:** Exactly. Yes.

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**Evan Hirsch:** So great. So let's dive into what are your top tips for a successful and stress-free garden.

**[00:44:13] Jessica Smith:** So for me, the number one is mulching because a lot of people, their biggest barrier to gardening, is the maintenance. So reading and also plants getting sick and stuff like that. So when you mulch like I mulch, my pads, I mulch my beds, and everything. Any exposed soil I tried to cover because that's a potential place where we might come up. Or also I like to retain the moisture, some mulch is a great way to do that as well. And when you retain the moisture, that supplies that helps support the life that supplies the nutrients to your plants. So the fastest way to short circuit your garden like your plant health is to let the soil dry out.

That's so a lot of people will notice the zucchini plant looks super healthy in the

beginning of the season, but as the heat of the summer kicks in, the weeds might start drooping. And as soon as that starts happening, That's when like disease can come in because the plant is susceptible. So mulching is a great way to kind of stabilize the moisture levels between waterings and also protect the microbes. So mulching materials that I like to use are shredded leaves, make sure they're shredded. Otherwise, they will blow away. And straw is really good. You want to be careful to avoid hay because it usually has seeds on it. The difference between hay and straw is that usually, the seed heads have been harvested already, and the straw is like the leftover stalks.

And then in my pathways, I like woodchips because normally I do like berm to bed so I'd be like mountains and be like permanent kind of raised beds. And in the kind of indents between my beds. I like fill them with woodchips because it kind of acts as a sponge. And if it rains, they soak up all the rain and then after some raining, the moisture can kind of seep out of them into the beds later. So definitely mulching is number one.

And the second tip would be irrigation, especially if you're busy because sometimes it's really easy to forget or get too busy and not have time to water your garden and just installing like simple sprinkler system or soaker hoses, which are really easy to just put into your bed and hook up to a faucet. Drip tape if you want to get fancy. Some people they have different apps and technology where it can be set on a timer, or they can push a button from their phone. [laughs] Like there's so many ways to like set it out to make it work for you. And if it's small enough, yeah, wiring can but definitely irrigation makes life a lot easier. And when you do irrigate, I highly recommend anytime you're watering your garden to have a filter to filter out chlorine and chloramine. And they sell them. It's just called like a garden hose filter or just a garden water filter. It just screws on to either the hose or the faucet itself, and then the host attaches to it. They're like 20 bucks. They're really cheap and super worth it.

And then besides like keeping your soil covered, keeping it moisturized, I definitely would say to have like a permanent system, so decrease disturbance. For me, that means permanent raised beds that I disturbed the soil once, and then I don't have to disturb it much after that. So I've built my beds. And the next season, I might come in with a broad fork. And I like that kind of sticks in the soil and lifts it, but it doesn't turn the soil over because as soon as you turn the soil over and expose it to oxygen, the carbon off-gases as carbon dioxide. You boost or the carbon in your soil, which is what makes it spongy increases water retention is homes for microbes. So you don't want to excessively kill or disturb your soil if you possibly can. And that's why raised beds are great because you don't usually have to do much after you build them. They just fluff it a little bit.

And then when it comes to, I think, for me, personally, the thing that I like to nerd out about is just garden nutrition. Because I don't have to fight anything like it's a different mentality. It's like a mentality that's like supporting the system, just like we have innate immune systems. And when we walk into a room, if there's like four people if there's one sick person that everybody get sick, so same ideas with my plants, I like to make sure I'm providing all the nutritional needs of the plant. If it's not, it's directly with different organic amendments then with supporting the microbes. So I do kind of a garden

maintenance program where I'll have like a seaweed spray. It's just liquid seaweed or liquid kelp. And I'll just dilute that in water. And if I know, it's gonna be a really hot day, that morning when I do my watering. I'll water kelp because it helps plants with stress.

So I'll do that during the summer. And then also, I have like organic amendments that use like nutritional like bioavailable foliar sprays. And then, I also add in biostimulants to boost the microbes to make sure that they're supplying the plant with all of the minerals applied to the soil earlier. So those are my thing. The things I think you can do in your garden to remove the stress of it. Nutrition so you don't have to fight with disease and insect pests. With less disturbance, so you support your microorganisms, irrigation, mulching so you don't have weeds. There's one more thing, and that would be depending on where you are some kind of barrier.

Because the thing about growing food that's food like for people versus insects is that and when you make your produce so healthy, that's going to taste amazing. The animals know that too. [laughs] So the rabbits or deer, you want to make sure you have some kind of barriers so that you can actually enjoy the harvest. Or like my grandpa says he says, I'll just plant an extra few plants so that I can, they can have some and I can have some too. So whatever your strategy to kind of compensate for, you know more animals wanting to eat your food. That definitely would be a tip as well.

**Evan Hirsch:** That's awesome. Your grandpa-

**Jessica Smith:** Yes.

**Evan Hirsch:** -sounds like a really cool guy.

**Jessica Smith:** [laughs] Yes, I'm really excited. I'm about to move down there and start farming with him.

**Evan Hirsch:** Oh, that's awesome.

**Jessica Smith:** Yes. [laughs]

**Evan Hirsch:** That's super cool.

**Jessica Smith:** Yes.

**Evan Hirsch:** So we're just about at a time now. So I'd love to. I mean, this has been so amazing. You've just shared so many great tips. Hopefully, people are excited about gardening. What would be, what's the big takeaway that you see here that is really practical for folks that you really want to motivate people to do?

**[00:51:20] Jessica Smith:** I really want to motivate people to just start growing something just whatever it is, you don't have to grow a whole garden. Maybe this year, you just want to try growing carrots or lettuce, or like one thing. Just try growing it



because it might seem overwhelming, but as soon as you do it and you harvest your first one, you're going to be hooked. And I want everybody to be hooked on gardening because it's such an amazing habit and [laughs] yes, I just, you don't have to get complicated with all of my nerdiness. All you have to do is buy really good quality seeds, like organic seeds and put some love into it. And I believe that green thumbs are it's just based on intention. So good intentions, and just try it. Try growing on food, and you'll taste the difference, and you'll feel the difference.

**Evan Hirsch:** That's great. Just do it.

**Jessica Smith:** Just do it. [laughs]

**Evan Hirsch:** I'm excited.

**Jessica Smith:** Yes. Same.

**Evan Hirsch:** So tell us about this film, Grow Food Film.

**[00:52:23] Jessica Smith:** Yes, so it's called Grow Food, my whole message. I just feel like everybody should try growing food because it's amazing experience. My partner, Joe Vignola, and I, kind of one day met up because I had been working with him on other projects. And I got I used to be really nervous around people, so when I would, I actually go see people in person when I wasn't in a garden hiding. I would start talking about soil and [laughs] nerding out. And I was like, we have to tell everybody about this we have to tell the world, and he likes making movies. So we're like, okay, let's make a movie. And then we started traveling and going to different kind of cool operations where people are growing food for with juvenile detention centers with schools for the deaf and blind with like, different community kind of urban agriculture setups and, and we went to Dan Kittredge's farm, who's the founder of the Bionutrient Food Association, and with all of that. All of that kind of supports the central story of this one guy that we found who was on Long Island, and he had no land, but we wanted to farm, and so he started farming on people's front lawn, and We follow his story, his trials, and tribulations and we kind of weave in this whole idea that most of the problems in the world can be solved by growing food. So--

**Evan Hirsch:** That individuals grow food.

**Jessica Smith:** Yes.

**Evan Hirsch:** That we all step up and start doing them.

**Jessica Smith:** Right, because a lot of the problem besides the climate, environment, ecosystem, embodied energy, supply, all that. There's more than enough food, but there's a distribution issue, and so by more people growing food locally, we increase food access and get more food to the people who need it.

**Evan Hirsch:** Awesome.

**Jessica Smith:** Yes.

**Evan Hirsch:** Oh my gosh.

**Jessica Smith:** [laughs]

**Evan Hirsch:** You see now with what you're hearing about supply chains and whatnot and issues with that. Yes, so important.

**Jessica Smith:** Yes.

**Evan Hirsch:** So many good reasons to get back to gardening.

**Jessica Smith:** Right, I mean, we did it before the Victory Gardens, and we were growing 40% of our food, like our fruit and vegetable intake back then. Definitely doable.

**Evan Hirsch:** Awesome. Great. And so when is the film coming out?

**[00:54:43] Jessica Smith:** Well, we're going to be doing a screening of it online for free starting May 16th, and you can check that out by going to [growfoodfilm.com/watch](http://growfoodfilm.com/watch). And you'll get all information you can sign up and register and see it when it goes live.

**Evan Hirsch:** Awesome. Yes, we'll put all the links in the show notes.

**Jessica Smith:** Awesome. Sounds good.

**Evan Hirsch:** Cool. Well, Jessica, it's been really a pleasure. Thank you so much for sharing all of your amazing knowledge with us today.

**Jessica Smith:** Thanks for having me. I've had such a blast. I don't get to nerd out enough. [laughs]

**Evan Hirsch:** Awesome. Thank you.

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