

PHOTO: ROB PALMER

From little things

ALEXX STUART, ACTIVIST, EDUCATOR AND AUTHOR OF *LOW TOX LIFE*, SAYS CHANGING THE WAY YOU LIVE IS A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY, NOT DEPRIVATION. PLUS, SHE SHARES HER REAL FOOD MANIFESTO AND TWO OF HER FAVOURITE RECIPES.

Alexx Stuart wasn't always a purveyor of the low-tox life. She smoked, ate rubbish food, and took medications to combat recurring health issues including migraines, tonsillitis and sinusitis. Then she started learning about preservatives, additives and factory farming, and in the process, cleaned up her food act, reduced chemicals in her home and had a baby.

According to Stuart, a key component of her successful change was entering into it with a mindset of discovery rather than deprivation.

"In the discovery of all that is good and true, I let the old fall away," she says. "There's no deprivation. We're redefining quality and what's desirable. It wasn't negative. It wasn't stressful. It was a privilege."

Stuart also urges people to just start.

"Understand what's what, ditch the stuff that doesn't serve you or the planet, and find simple, gorgeous, delicious new ways to do things, whatever your budget or time constraints. I hope that it will become beautifully obvious to you what needs to be done, that you'll want to do it, and then go off on your low-tox way with the priorities and time frame that works for you."

Eating real food

When it comes to food, Stuart believes that if we can do eight basic things, we're streets ahead of where current-day culture sits, and a long way towards fixing many of the health concerns and sustainability issues facing us today.

- Shift away from most packets and make fresh produce the cornerstone of your daily food choices.
- Eliminate foods containing synthetic ingredients, including flavourings and preservatives, where possible.
- Reduce your intake of excess sugars, highly processed vegetable oils and human-made salts with few minerals.
- Cook and prepare the majority of your foods from scratch – if you made it, you know what's in it. Develop trusted sources to buy from when you have busy times.
- Double or triple your vegetable intake. Get inspired. Try new recipes. Celebrate seasonality.
- Reduce meat consumption and reject factory-farmed meat.
- Be grateful for the loved ones you're sharing food with. Or if you find yourself eating alone more often than not, pick up the phone and get social.
- Understand that gratitude plays a huge role in developing a love of fresh food and from-scratch cooking.

"We're told it's beneath us, that we have no time and it's such a chore," says Stuart. "Bollocks! It's an incredible privilege.

"I found in my own learning journey that it was much easier to become a critical thinker once I could identify flaws in the system and develop a healthy level of discernment when it came to my food choices.

"It liberated me to make sense of things and find the truth that aligned with my values.

"Exposing the cracks in the system at the grassroots level, questioning how food guidelines are created, and asking for transparency at every turn from any companies we're considering buying from, is a powerful step towards healing a broken system and letting the light back in – and preferably shining it directly on organic farming, eventually!"

HARVEST NOTES

Lettuce



Late winter and early spring is perfect for planting leafy lettuces, and if you sow them thickly, then you can also start harvesting within a couple of weeks. Thin your rows by pulling whole plants from the soil and using the leaves as micro-greens, keep doing this until remaining plants are about 10cm apart. Then start harvesting the outside leaves of the lettuces that are left, but never take enough to weaken the whole plant. Once the weather really warms up you can harvest the whole lettuce, and plant radish seeds in the gaps, until you have a row of radishes rather than lettuces.

'Seminole' tangelo

Cooler climate-loving, late-maturing 'Seminole' tangelos will be turning their deep red-orange over the next month or two. Tangelos are crosses between grapefruit and mandarins. 'Seminole' tangelos more closely resemble their grapefruit parent in shape, but are richly sweet, rather than tart, with only overtones of grapefruit flavour. The riper they are, the sweeter they are. Start picking when the fruit is fully coloured, but fruit will keep on the tree for several weeks once ripe, so pick as needed until the weather gets really hot, then it's best to harvest the rest of the fruit. Store in a cool position for up to a month.

Penny Woodward

IN SEASON

Herbs & edible flowers

CALENDULA FLOWERS
CHIVES
LEMON BALM
COWSLIP FLOWERS
NASTURTIUM FLOWERS

Vegetables

ASIAN GREENS
ASPARAGUS
BEETROOT
BROAD BEAN
CABBAGE
CELERY
ENGLISH SPINACH
FENNEL
LEEK
MUSTARD GREENS
PAK CHOY
PARSNIP
PEA
POTATO
SPRING ONIONS
TURNIP

Fruit

AVOCADO
BLACK SAPOTE
CITRUS
CUSTARD APPLE
JACKFRUIT
MULBERRY
PAWPAW
STRAWBERRY
STAR FRUIT
SURINAM CHERRY

WINE & DRINK PICKS

BY MAX ALLEN

Make the most of these last few cool evenings before the days grow longer and everything starts to warm up by matching this hearty curry and rich choc pudding with some equally rich and hearty drinks. Beer's a good option for curry, and the intense purple berry fruit of a fortified shiraz (what we used to call "vintage port") is perfect for chocolate.



Samuel Smith's Organic Chocolate Stout, Yorkshire, 500ml ($12)
The dark roasted barley malt used to brew this beer gives it its black colour and chocolatey flavour – not very sweet but rich enough for the pudding as well as the curry.
> samuelsmithsbrewery.co.uk



2016 Kalleske JMK Shiraz VP, Barossa Valley, 375ml ($21)
Made from ripe shiraz grapes and fortified with spirit, this is deep purple in colour and jam-packed with sweet blackberry flavours. Try with the choc pud or blue cheese.
> kalleske.com



BUY-NOTHING-NEW-CURRY

Serves 4

Don't be bound by my ingredient list – truly, make this curry your own by using any limp veg that has got less and less pretty, and is less and less likely to be used. For a yummy soup, add another cup of stock, remove the cinnamon stick at the end, and blend on high for a few seconds.

60ml coconut oil
6 cardamom pods, bruised with the back of a knife
1 cinnamon stick
½ teaspoon fennel seeds
1 large onion
1 × 2.5cm (1 inch) piece chopped ginger
2 garlic cloves
2 tablespoons of your favourite curry powder
1 large red chilli or ½ teaspoon chilli flakes (optional)
4 fennel fronds
4 limp, unpretty celery stalks, cut into 2.5cm chunks
12 leftover silverbeet (Swiss chard) stalks, cut into 2.5cm chunks
125g ugly green beans
A few beetroot leaves (or any other leaves)
200ml coconut cream
250ml vegetable, chicken or beef stock
250ml filtered water
125ml tomato passata (puréed tomatoes)



Heat the coconut oil with the cardamom pods, cinnamon stick and fennel seeds in a large saucepan over low–medium heat, then fry the onion for about 20 minutes, until very golden but not burnt.

Add the ginger, garlic, curry powder and chilli flakes (if using), and cook for 1–2 minutes, until aromatic.

Add the veg and stir until well coated with the spices. Add the remaining ingredients and stir until everything is warmed through and the vegies start to soften. Simmer for 15 minutes.

Top with garnishes such as black sesame seeds, sliced spring onion, sliced chilli and coriander leaves, and serve as is, or with rice, quinoa or flat bread.

PHOTO: ROB PALMER/ILLUSTRATIONS: ISTOCK



CHOCOLATE PUDDING WITH GOOEY BITS

Serves 10

This is a super-forgiving pudding! I make it with a blender, but you could mix it by hand with a whisk.

4 eggs (or 3 if very large)
130–180ml rice malt syrup, maple syrup or honey, to taste
125ml melted salted butter, macadamia oil or coconut oil
90g tapioca or arrowroot flour (see Note)
40g unsweetened Dutch-processed cocoa powder or raw cacao
40g coconut flour
2 heaped teaspoons baking powder
1 heaped teaspoon vanilla bean powder, or 1 vanilla bean, split lengthways and seeds scraped, or 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

GOOEY BITS SAUCE
125ml melted salted butter
80ml rice malt syrup, honey or maple syrup
40g unsweetened Dutch-processed cocoa powder or raw cacao

Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F).

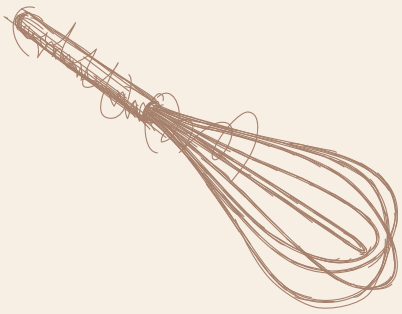
To make the sauce, combine all the gooey bits ingredients in a medium saucepan over medium heat and stir until well combined. Pour the sauce into the bottom of an ovenproof pudding basin (mould).

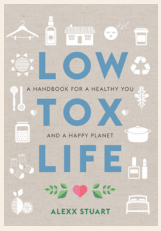
In a blender, whisk the eggs for 5 seconds. Add the remaining pudding ingredients and blend to combine.

Pour the pudding on top of the sauce. Don't panic, the gooey sauce will come up around your pudding batter, which is totally normal and even perhaps awesome. You'll see!

Bake for 20–30 minutes, until the pudding springs back when you press the edges but is still quite soft in the middle. When you test the centre with a skewer, there should still be a little pudding on it. Worst cake scenario is you get a cakier result if you take it a few minutes too far. You'll still get a bit of gooeyness from the sauce around the edges and underneath.

Note: Arrowroot flour is often preserved with E220, so check. For a denser pudding, replace the tapioca flour with 90g of buckwheat flour or 70g of almond meal (only if the recipe doesn't need to be nut free). If using a thermocooker, make the sauce for 2 minutes on speed 3, 100°C. There's no need to clean the bowl before whisking the eggs for 5 seconds on speed 6, then the remaining ingredients for 6 seconds on speed 5.





IMAGES AND RECIPES FROM *LOW TOX LIFE* BY ALEXX STUART. MURDOCH BOOKS. RRP $35.00. PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROB PALMER.

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