



The whole shebang

MANOR's food editor *Anna Turns* asks **Tom Hunt** how we can do more to put sustainability on the menu, and why root-to-fruit eating is his holistic solution to food waste.

The phrase root-to-fruit eating was coined by eco-chef Tom Hunt in response to the global food-waste scandal. "It's my solution to help make real food grown ethically and in harmony with nature more accessible and affordable to everyone," Tom explains. He realises that food shopping at most supermarkets can be expensive, and in the long term wasteful, stating that 30% of the produce we buy gets thrown away. "It might seem backwards to some people but if you can make a real commitment to eating seasonally, from greengrocers, markets, butchers and independent health food shops,

then following a root-to-fruit diet of real, complete consumption can be cost neutral and sometimes even cheaper than your regular supermarket shop." And by reducing our food bill, Tom explains that we can create the budget to buy better-quality and higher-welfare ingredients.

Diversity is key to making root-to-fruit so much healthier: tuning in to what's in season and trying new fruits and vegetables results in a more complex and nutritious diet of micronutrients, plus eating parts of ingredients that you wouldn't normally otherwise consume has added bonuses, too. "The skin of veg or



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stalks of kale, for example, are actually really fibrous and prebiotic," says Tom, "so don't peel anything, because the highest concentration of nutrients tends to be in and under the skin. A lot of ingredients, especially alliums and other foods like Jerusalem artichokes, are very beneficial to your gut health." It's a whole food diet, taken very literally – Tom chooses whole grains, brown sugars and seasonal veg, and cooks everything from scratch. Sounds complicated and time-consuming? Tom insists it should, in fact, be incredibly simple.

Unsurprisingly, the term root-to-fruit stems from Tom's love for Fergus Henderson's pioneering nose-to-tail philosophy. "I've been hugely inspired by Fergus's ethos, and that's something I've practised seriously since working at River Cottage from 2004 to 2006. I realised the reason we're wasting so much food is because we don't have any real connection to food anymore; we don't value it as we used to when it was perhaps more scarce or we had to work harder for it." In today's convenience culture, food has become a throwaway item and Tom wants to counteract this. "Root-to-fruit eating has grown into a deeper philosophy about eating whole foods from the whole farm, so it's about supporting the farmers' diversity of crops, eating them in their entirety, and it starts in the kitchen." His concept has evolved into a way of trying to reconnect us with our food and with nature, and that lies in the ability to eat for pleasure: "Really enjoy your food consciously, have a thirst for knowledge and an interest in where your food has come from. For me, it symbolises a holistic approach to food, in the truest sense, linking our health with the environment."

The food and drink industry is rife with waste at all stages of the supply chain, and in restaurants it can be particularly difficult to avoid. But at Poco, the tapas restaurant Tom co-founded in Bristol, waiting staff advise guests so they don't massively over-order, and if diners don't finish their meal, they can take home a doggy box. Every day, bin bags are weighed and food waste is recorded. If elements of one dish regularly get thrown away, chefs will adapt accordingly, and there aren't any unnecessary garnishes; all the food on the

plate is there to eat. As well as reducing food waste, the Poco team are careful about only buying recyclable packaging and buying in bulk, and are 95% waste free. Tapas lends itself to root-to-fruit eating, too: "If done properly, sharing plates can be a great way to reduce food waste, and variety comes from following the seasons."

Tom's ethos works on a bigger scale, too. Forgotten Feast is a social enterprise promoting sustainable food. Tom creates banquets with food waste, working closely with charitable organisations including Slow Food, FareShare and Action Against Hunger. "We've fed thousands of people with food classified as waste; tonnes of food gets saved through just one of our events – it's phenomenal, and the money we put back into food-waste charities saves thousands more meals being wasted," says Tom, who is currently planning a food-waste banquet in South Africa to raise money for local food banks.

Tom's busy schedule is just further proof that seasonal root-to-fruit eating can be quick, easy and achievable: "I don't have much spare time but I do grow a few veg from seed in no-dig beds, and when you grow your own, you don't waste it." Shopping isn't a prolonged affair, either: "I build trips to the markets into my routine and spend an hour buying enough produce for one week, and once every few months I buy dried goods and spices from a food cooperative. With a well-stocked larder and fresh veg ready to go, I'm not forced to randomly shop for extras." Tom suggests ditching the recipe books on weekdays, saving them for special occasions, and cooking simple food that takes just minutes to prepare: "Don't be overly ambitious, invest in the best ingredients and use them in their entirety – they will taste delicious." ■

Eat at Poco: 45 Jamaica Street, Stokes Croft, Bristol BS2 8JP.
pocotapasbar.com

Find out more about Forgotten Feast: tomsfeast.com
Hear Tom talk about his philosophy and watch him cook at Dartmouth Food Festival on 21 October: dartmouthfoodfestival.com