

Diane's Blog
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Bringing the Ranch Home

I just returned from a week of teaching cooking classes at Rancho la Puerta in Tecate, Mexico. What a wonderful opportunity to teach healthy cooking techniques using just-picked produce from the huge organic garden steps from the cooking school door.

For each class, I suggested we create a mystery salad based on what looked fresh in the garden. We pulled baby beets with tender tops, grill-roasted the roots, finely shredded the tender green tops, added parsley flowers, and dressed the salad lightly with olive oil, sea salt, and a few grinds of pepper. The next day we picked tender young romaine heads, halved them lengthwise, brushed them with olive oil, and grilled them to create a grilled Romaine salad with shaved Parmesan and lemon vinaigrette.

This was instant gratification—from farm to fork in under an hour.

I won't deny I soaked in the sun, but I also soaked in the ethos of the Ranch—remembering to create balance and space in one's life for fitness, healthy eating, and time for introspection in the midst of work and life's demands. Even though I was working part of the week, I had the opportunity to change the rhythm of my days. It sounds selfish when in fact it is restorative and, I believe, makes us a better person. To take a four-mile hike, waking in the dark and seeing sunrise on the trail, is incredibly gratifying. My pedometer registered more than ten thousand steps by 8 am. I felt empowered and hungry all at once, and satisfied as I filled my belly with nourishing foods and, yes, a cupful or two of coffee.

Just as the fitness experts at Rancho la Puerta pushed me to run faster, move differently, and stretch longer, I hope, as the guest culinary teacher for the week, I challenged my students to step into the kitchen and empower their own eating patterns. Taking charge of what we ingest, controlling the salt, sugar, and additives in our foods means we take time and ponder how we fuel our bodies. Are we selecting quick satiation over true satisfaction? Are we eating mindlessly instead of mindfully eating? Are we eating and chewing slowly, waiting for our stomachs to catch up with the forkfuls of food entering our mouths? Are we really hungry two hours after a meal or are we just thirsty?

We all need indulgences, I won't deny that. My "contraband" for the week was bringing along little squares of deep, dark chocolate (an excellent source of antioxidants). I guesstimated I would want one indulgence after lunch and one after dinner. I brought home half my stash! And now, as I write this, I have a full water bottle sitting on the desk. I'm now mindfully monitoring my fluid intake. I brought that home from the Ranch, too.

