



ANNA SHEPARD

My year of living sustainably

WEEK 21: GROWING FRUIT & VEG

As someone who loves cooking and eating, the concept of edible plants has always appealed. Whether it's a pot of mint on a windowsill, or a garden bursting with homegrown bounty, it's a satisfying way to cut food miles and packaging, while also saving money and learning of provenance.

That said, I have excelled at finding excuses for why our small city garden has not become a thriving allotment. I've never been convinced by the quality of our soil, nor do I believe there's enough sunlight. Even more of a problem, there are not always enough hours in the day to battle slugs and care for fragile seedlings. Since our third child arrived, I've only grown herbs, although I still have a few raspberry canes that bring a disproportionate amount of joy to the kids when berries appear.

According to organic food grower and writer Claire Ratinon, author of *Unearthed*, it's sensible to embrace shortcuts if it helps you get growing. "There's nothing wrong with buying young plants, rather than growing from seed," she says. "Make sure what you're growing suits the conditions. Fruiting plants, such as courgettes, need lots of sunlight."

If space is limited, Claire recommends fabric grow bags (Vigoroot, £8.99/3x10L, waitrose.com) that encourage plants to put down strong roots. I fill one with compost and now it's full of young lettuces.

"Crops that can be eaten at any point in their lifecycle, even when young, such as microgreens, are a good starting point," Claire says. "Perfect growing conditions are irrelevant since you won't need to nurture the plants for long."

As for pests, learn to live with them. I'd say we are sharing our lettuces 50/50 with snails.



Illustration: Amelia Flower/Folioart



Illustration: Alex Green/Folioart

MY WEEK

Alvin Hall



Time to honour and celebrate my friends who have passed

A new friend I ran into at a book launch recently firmly reminded me that I will become a board member of The New York City Aids Memorial. He didn't say should. He didn't say might consider. He said will. He repeats this every time we meet. In response, the deeply Southern, good-mannered side of my personality would normally say something gracious, but totally innocuous and noncommittal like: "That's such a kind and generous thought." However, in this case, I have not done that. The resoluteness in his voice and the direct way he looks into my eyes each time come from a place of deep humanity, compassion, and caring. He has a mission, and he is certain that I can contribute meaningfully to it.

Since the Aids Memorial opened in December 2016 in the small park called St Vincent's Triangle at 7th Avenue and 12th Street in New York City, it has served as an important marker for me during many of my walks around Manhattan. I pass through the geometric, open-air 1,600sq-ft structure several times a month. Its interconnected triangles and parallel lines make it feel like a curious, intriguing, and welcoming small plaza. I sometimes pause to read the inscriptions from Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself* and recall the name of a friend or two who died of Aids.

Thinking about joining the memorial's board has caused memories to emerge that I tidily sealed away decades ago. I

moved to New York in December 1982 and lived through and survived the worst of the Aids crisis in the city. Dozens of close and casual friends died. I witnessed the disease's physical, emotional, and social ravages. I stayed overnight in the hospital rooms of friends whose entire families had abandoned them. At each death, I was able to find a compartment deep inside myself in which I could contain the loss and its grief, except for one – my dear friend, Drew Dreeland. My intuition keeps telling me that joining the board of the New York Aids Memorial is the proper opportunity to honour Drew and our friendship in an expansive, philanthropic way.

It must also be a fun way. Over many years (I choose not to remember the number), Drew and I shared many delicious, homecooked meals, lively conversations, evenings at the opera, and giddy laughter. Each time I see the LGBTQIA+ Pride rainbow flag or an arch of rainbow-coloured balloons, I hear Drew's voice with a slight lilt, saying it "always looks and feels like fun!" Designed by artist Gilbert Baker and first flown in San Francisco in 1978, today the flag and its colour combinations are iconic. However, in recent days I find myself thinking about the symbolism of two of the colours. Red, the first colour in the flag, means life; violet, the last colour, means spirit. I think of the memories and spirit of each friend's life that stays with me – sometimes quietly as a look on my face or an aside, sometimes loudly in expressions and actions.

As I think about the reasons for me to join the board of the NYC Aids Memorial, I am beginning to see that my inspiration and contribution will come from the spirits of my late friends and acquaintances. Each life was vibrant, creative, giving and fun. For decades now, I've held them in neat compartments in my heart. It's time I let go. It's time I honour and joyfully celebrate the spirits of Paul, Adrian, Albert, Jim, John, Charles, Hank and so many others. But most of all, Drew.