

DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

Dirty enough

BY SIOUX ROGERS

When my sister and I were little kids, we loved to play in the mud, take mud baths, make mud pies and, knowing us, probably even ate a few "pies." Seems as if that practice has now come full circle as "righteous wisdom." Kids need to eat more dirt. In fact, seems as though we all need to be a little dirtier. If you ask my husband or my late mother, they would both agree I am extremely compliant in the dirt department, always have been.

Years ago, my very alternative family physician, Dr. Joseph D. Walters, said to me, "A carrot is not a carrot unless it is grown in healthy soil." Although I always understood his wise statement—and indeed practiced organic gardening even when I gardened on a warehouse rooftop—I never fully understood the implication of his wisdom. Dr. Walters said that if you eat a vegetable, say a carrot, grown in depleted soil treated with synthetic fertilizer and toxic chemicals, the nutritional value of the carrot is minimal compared to a carrot grown without toxins in an "alive" soil. He was very focused on the necessity of the mineral content found in the soil. So while some of you may freak out over my lack of "hygiene," I do believe that if I grow my carrots in friable soil (good soil teaming with earthworms), I have healthy soil.

Consequently, this is where you can say "Yuck." I pull my carrots from the ground, give them a medium wash-off with the hose or just a firm blue-jean rub and then, dirty fingernails and all, I crunch away. And, no, I have never been sick from a "dirty carrot."

From my very early teachings from Dr. Walters, who also was an organic gardener, I formulated my garden practice on what he taught me about the human body. He often explained, "A healthy body can withstand many insults, same as your garden." As a society, we now are learning how very true that is, especially related to stress, any kind, whether you be a plant or a person.

Dr. Walters never mentioned the "dirt factor." Most likely he figured I was ahead of the curve in that area. Somehow, I think I just had a genetic instinct that some dirt was fine. Most people never die of dirt. Now there is much new research substantiating my basic instinct.

Since the early part of the century until the present, many of the most feared diseases have disappeared. Remember polio, chicken pox, measles, mumps, whooping cough, even herpes and AIDS? Most of those dreadfuls are not even household conversation anymore. Well, of course, I know why. We immunize and take lots of pills. Now we are facing a plague of autoimmune everything: diabetes, dozens of cancers, brain disorders, overactive thyroids, lupus, ulcerative colitis and a plethora of the unnamed. One of the well-researched theories is we are "too clean." We need to eat more dirt.

A Canadian newspaper, *The Ottawa Citizen*, in an article dated February 6,

2009 titled, "Honey, Eat Your Dirt," the author (not mentioned by name) says, "Parents know that children should eat more fruits and vegetables, but probably don't know that there's something else missing from the kids' diets: dirt. . . . Children need to eat a little dirt now and then to develop healthy immune systems."

There is a growing body of evidence that suggests this is due to excessive hygiene—the old too-much-of-a-good-thing problem. British epidemiologist David P. Strachan first suspected in 1989 that [too much] cleanliness could lead to illness, dubbing this idea "the hygiene hypothesis."

New York Times health writer, Jane Brody in an article on January 27, 2009, quoted the microbiologist-immunologist Mary Ruebush from her new book, *Why Dirt is Good*: "What a child is doing when he puts things in his mouth is allowing his immune response to explore his environment. Not only does this allow for 'practice' of immune responses, which will be necessary for protection, but it also plays a critical role in teaching the immature immune response what is best ignored."

One leading researcher, Dr. Joel V. Weinstock, the director of gastroenterology and hepatology at Tufts Medical Center in Boston, said in an interview that "the immune system at birth is like an unprogrammed computer. It needs instruction."

None of the many scientists studying the connection between "too-much-too-clean" and the immune system are even remotely suggesting that handwashing is not necessary after using the bathroom, changing a diaper or prior to handling

food. So don't "ick" them out too fast. What they do suggest, short of a plague, is good old soap and water (not antibacterial hand-squirts). No one is disputing the control of disease through sanitization in third-world countries, but apparently that is not the end of the story. There is a price to be paid. While I did not mean for this to be a "medical article," I find the numerous studies extraordinarily interesting and exciting, almost too simple, maybe too obvious. For lack of space, and the nature of this column, do a web search for "cleanliness and the immune system."

With all this said and done, even with the jury not completely in, have a good romp barefoot in your garden. Before your next daily supplement becomes "dirty dirt in a capsule," let your dogs kiss you and your baby. And while you are at it, pull a carrot from the patch, wipe it on your jeans, and munch away.

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Ruch Schoolyard Gardens



Photo left to right: Catherine Gustafson; Taylor Burgess; Amber Morse; Principal Terri Dahl; and Phillip Newsome.

Ruch School now has a greenhouse thanks to the Medford School Foundation and grant writer Terri Dahl, principal of Ruch School. Donations of gravel from Sue Pennington of Frontier Roack and construction of the greenhouse by Nick Hale, Jim Mainwaring and Gary Gustafson made our greenhouse a reality. Right after spring break, elective classes and after-school enrichment will be offered to Ruch School kindergarten through eighth grade students. A greenhouse wish list has been started, which includes a wheelbarrow, a small storage shed, potting supplies and volunteers with time or expertise. Our future plans are to become a real schoolyard garden, growing native plants, starts for the garden, and become self-sustaining.

Contact Ruch School office manager Denise McCollum 541-842-3850 or Meg Gustafson 541-899-8807 for more exciting details!

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Springtime allergies and Chinese medicine

BY NADINE LEVIE

Heaven joins with Earth in the form of the gentle rain of spring soaking deep into the land, exciting the seeds which have lain dormant and hidden under winter's blanket. The energy of Heaven is Yang and the energy of Earth is Yin. The mixings and interactions of yin and yang happen in the area between heaven and earth, the place where we live. Concepts of Traditional Chinese Medicine are based on observations of nature and of these interactions. We who live in the Applegate have a wonderful opportunity to "tune in" to these traditional theories and thought patterns as we have chosen to live close to and in harmony with nature.

Balance of energy (yang) and matter (yin) along with temperature and the five elements of nature (wind, fire, earth, metal, water) form the basis of all phenomena, including sickness and health. Where there is balance and harmony there is health. As we are part of nature, we can gather clues on how to live by observing the nature of the seasons.

Many people experience spring allergies and/or springtime fatigue. There is an explanation for this that comes directly from an ancient text, *The Yellow Emperor's Medicine Classic*, Asiapac Books. In this book there are many observations and discussions on why people get sick and the theories put forth in this classic form the basis of theories of acupuncture and Chinese herbal prescribing. There is a discussion of how people should behave in winter in order to maintain their health and have enough energy in spring. The sap of trees goes deep inside the tree in winter, seeds are dormant and many animals hibernate. This is the slumbering nature of winter. "The three months of winter are the season for closing and storing. . . . Do not disturb the yang qi (energy) in this season. Sleep early at sunset and get up later after sunrise. . . . Let your spirit be as calm as if it

is in hiding, and as if you have some private matter to keep from others. Remain happy and contented as if you've come to know a secret." (*The Yellow Emperor's Medicine Classic*) It is important to conserve and store our vital energy in order to meet the tremendous energy demands on us in spring, for deep within our being we, too, like the seeds in the earth, burst forth. If we are "running on empty" we experience allergies, as our bodies are not able to meet the challenges presented by pollens that are blowing around or we experience profound fatigue. Western naturopathic medicine refers to adrenal fatigue.

You can see how out of sync our lives are with the energetic nature of winter. Electric lights keep us up at all hours and even though we may feel like "hibernating," we tend to feel guilty if we are not doing something.

The small amount of theory I have presented here will not prevent your allergies this spring if that is your tendency, but can perhaps lead you in a direction of using the observations of nature to bring balance into your life. It is not too late. Start being aware of each season and enjoy your unique place between heaven and earth.

As for spring: "The three months of spring are the season of renewal for all things. With everything flourishing, the world is full of life. To accord with the season, go to bed a little later and get up a little earlier. Go for a stroll in the courtyard, loosen your hair, relax your body and freshen up your mind. Enjoy the season and do not do anything harmful to your health. Let things grow and do not harm them, give and do not deprive." (*The Yellow Emperor's Medicine Classic*)

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