

# SUSTAINABLE TABLE

THIS MONTH'S ECO FOOD HERO IS MADE IN HACKNEY, A COMMUNITY KITCHEN IMPROVING LIVES THROUGH A LOVE OF LOCAL FOOD

"I love meat," says Rose as she peels a butternut squash. "I always have. But now I'm all about the vegetables." Rose is taking part in one of Made in Hackney's cooking classes and today gözleme – Turkish savoury pancakes filled with butternut squash and spinach – are on the menu.

"We take inspiration from all over the world and put our own seasonal twist on it," says Ximena Ransom, a key member of the Made in Hackney team and one of its longest-serving teachers. "You have to be quite creative with what you cook as it's all locally grown and plant-based, but it's incredible what you can come up with, even in winter."

Ximena is preparing a mixed bean, kale and herb salad, inspired by one of her Brazilian students. "You get a real mix of people of all different nationalities, ages and ethnicities," she says. "Everyone is welcome in our community classes, so it's not uncommon to get a local businessman on loads of money baking bread alongside someone from the homeless shelter. It creates a brilliant dynamic." Indeed, classes ask for a donation of just a fiver and cover a range of subjects, from urban food growing and cooking with nettles to Ethiopian cuisine.

So, with the gözleme in the pan, houmous blitzed and Silma, a volunteer host, chopping kale, everybody's almost ready to eat. "Kale's good for your nails and it makes you sexy!" Silma tells the class, and Rose agrees, "But not without a side of chicken feet," she quips, "they're so tasty."

Although the focus is on cooking, there's an element of nutrition, too. But as Ximena explains, they're not here to preach, and they don't need to. "Just getting students to make and taste these vibrant veggie-based dishes really makes an impact on how they view meals that just happen to be meat- and dairy-free."

The kitchen does more than just teach people to cook; it shows students how to make informed decisions about what they eat and where they buy it. "We run on the principle that without a healthy planet, how can we have healthy people?" says Made in Hackney founder Sarah Bentley. "Food is the one single thing that unites the environment, animal welfare, ethics, our health and the economy."

Sarah was working as a farmer on local food initiative Growing Communities' "patchwork farms" when she first set up the kitchen, and out in the field is still



Sarah Bentley growing her own (left), students in the kitchen (right)



## "WE RUN ON THE PRINCIPLE THAT WITHOUT A HEALTHY PLANET, HOW CAN WE HAVE HEALTHY PEOPLE?"

where it all begins. This collective of small, Hackney-based food-growing sites now produces more than 100 different types of salad leaves, which are then harvested and sent to Growing Communities to form the base of its successful organic vegetable box scheme – as well as ending up in the Made In Hackney kitchen, of course.

"The veg box scheme is brilliant, and really affordable at around £8 a week – it's where we get all of our produce and we always encourage our students to sign up to it, too," says Sarah whose main aim is simple: to make seasonal, plant-based, organic produce accessible and desirable

to everyone, whatever their budget. "People think that organic, local food is a middle-class, aspirational product, but it's just been badly branded – even if it means growing a tray of salad on your windowsill, everybody is entitled to it." You can't say better than that.

To find out more, sign up to a Made in Hackney class, or to make a donation, visit [madeinhackney.org](http://madeinhackney.org).

WORDS: MALOU HERKES PHOTOGRAPHY: ADRIENNE PITTS