

Learning how to live the good life

OCTOBER WORKSHOPS

- Pastels and Still Life – hands on – Tuesday, October 2.
- The Cutting Garden – planning for next year – Thursday, October 4.
- The Orchard – cider making for Christmas, at the walled garden, Hackthorn Hall – Saturday, October 6.
- Grow Your Own – The Kitchen Garden, part five – Thursday, October 11.
- Baking, Decorating and Sugar Craft – Friday, October 12.
- The Healing Garden – Women's Health – Saturday, October 13.
- Pies and Pastry – demonstration and hands on – Thursday, October 18.
- Wine Making – hands on – Saturday, October 20.
- Visit to York Gate Garden, Leeds – Thursday, October 25.
- Preserves – jams, jellies, cordials, syrups, bottling and drying – Friday, October 26.



Have you ever wished you could become self-sufficient? Growing your own produce and then transforming it into delicious fare? Editor LAURA STUART-COOK enrolled on an ice cream making course at Home Farm House, in Somerby – and discovered learning the good life could be easier than you thought ...

When Australian city-dweller Victoria Merrick relocated to rural Lincolnshire just over a decade ago, her outlook on life altered completely.

The picturesque surroundings of her new home in Somerby, near Brigg, coupled with a sudden abundance of spare time, sparked in Victoria a desire to achieve self-sufficiency – and to teach others how to do the same.

Now Home Farm House is the setting for a series of workshops on sustainable living, forgotten domestic arts and traditional rural crafts and skills.

And, never one to shy away from hard work, Victoria also runs a successful B&B, where guests can sample her home-grown produce and culinary expertise.

“This is our sixth season of workshops on sustainable living and they grow more popular every year,” she explained.

“I think there has been a real resurgence in people wanting to learn traditional skills and crafts in recent years and we allow them to enhance their skills in a beautiful and relaxing setting.

“I always look forward to meeting the wide range of people who travel to visit us and we love sharing our house and garden with them.

“Every year has seen a broadening of the range of workshops on offer so there really is something to appeal to everybody.”

The workshop series, charmingly titled Learning The Good Life, includes everything from cooking and kitchen skills, to gardening, animal husbandry, and seasonal crafts.

The Journal attended an ice cream making

course hosted by chef Matthew Bellamy, who is the head of hospitality, business and computing at the Grimsby Institute.

Guests are welcomed into the beautiful country kitchen at Home Farm House and treated to the finest freshly ground coffee – a reminder of the cosmopolitan coffee houses and barista courses which our host ran in Sydney.

Victoria, the great granddaughter of Australia’s fourth Prime Minister Sir George Reid, swapped her hectic city lifestyle for the quiet rural idyll after moving to London to set up an Espresso School and meeting and marrying husband Shaun, who lived in Somerby.

She added: “I started the workshops on a small scale, inviting a few local crafts and business people to share their knowledge, but now they come to me asking whether I would be interested in running a course on a particular subject.

“We have 40 acres of garden, woodland, lake and fields at our disposal which provides us with dozens of potential locations for the workshops. The painting and still life workshops in particular can take advantage of the grounds.”

During the half-day ice cream making workshop, Matthew demonstrated how to make a variety of frozen treats, including strawberry ice with basil, lemon granita, mango sorbet and a decadent rum, raisin and toasted hazelnut parfait.

Guests were able to ask questions and, of course, taste Matthew’s creations at each stage of their development – all in the name of education, of course.

Matthew, who was previously worked in both Greece and the French Alps, said: “People are definitely putting more of an emphasis on entertaining at home nowadays



Matthew Bellamy gives a lesson on the art of making ice cream at Home Farm House, Somerby, home of Victoria Merrick, below. PICTURES: David Haber



and there is a real appetite for courses which equip you with skills to help with that.

“It’s fantastic to have the opportunity to use Victoria’s home and host these courses because it’s a totally different audience to teaching students.

“I think there is a huge future in creating intimate schools like this where people can come and learn about food and wine. One of the key lessons to learn is that you won’t create a perfect product, like a Carte D’or ice cream, at home, but you can create something just as tasty but far more rustic – and that is part of the charm.

“As well as ice cream making, I’ve already done knife skills, cooking with seafood, and Christmas cake decorating. I just hope to inspire people to have the confidence to give the skills I’m showing them a go at home.”

During the ice cream making workshop, each participant was presented with a recipe pack to take home and treated to a delicious homemade lunch. Many of those taking part

had already benefited from one of the Learning The Good Life courses and had come back for more.

And Victoria believes the growing popularity of the workshops is thanks to an increasing awareness of the benefits of sustainable living.

“All of the workshops focus on mending and re-using, rather than throwing away; on growing your own produce and improving wellbeing,” she explained.

“At the moment, that level of frugality is only popular with a minority, but I believe with the continuing poor economic climate and dissatisfaction with the ‘buy now, pay later’ culture, it will soon become a mainstream way of life.

“If you’d asked me 15 years ago what I would be doing now I certainly wouldn’t have predicted this, but I wouldn’t change it for the world. Who wouldn’t want to live the good life?”

■ To find out more, call 01652 628560 or visit www.learningthegoodlife.co.uk

Well, I understand it is supposed to be summer; I have to keep reminding myself as it has seemed like autumn! The bad weather has really not helped our produce and we have had to be very creative with the produce that has done well from the rain.

One ingredient that we have had in abundance due to the weather is our tomatoes. As such, we have created a somewhat unusual dish, making the most of our great-tasting tomatoes.

The set gazpacho that is encased in a mock tomato skin is a really simple flavoured dish that enhances the summery taste of tomatoes and has proved an extremely popular dish with guests.

I was very excited to be a speaker for Slow Food at their stand at the Great Yorkshire Show and I was really disappointed that it was cancelled because of the weather after the first day. I was also delighted to be invited to become a member of Slow Food’s Chef Alliance.

Their philosophy of supporting small-scale producers, good-quality local ingredients and sustainably produced food is something that I have been passionate about for many years.

Over the past three years at Winteringham Fields, we have been able to grow our own herbs and vegetables and rear our own livestock.