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Green fingers, muddy hands

Raising our kids the
green way



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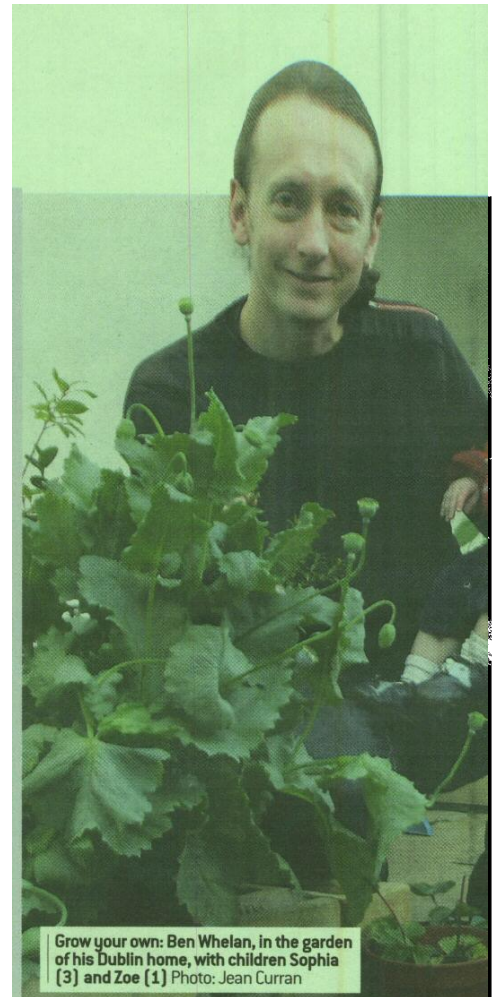
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CASE STUDY

When going green is a family affair

Are you an eco-worrier, but don't have time to be an eco-warrior? Well maybe you do. Meet two families who've opted to live a greener lifestyle by eating organics, recycling and reducing their carbon footprints



Grow your own: Ben Whelan, in the garden of his Dublin home, with children Sophia (3) and Zoe (1) Photo: Jean Curran

Rita de Brun

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THERE was a time when the term "living the good life" meant enjoying the best that money can buy. But now it means a return to a simpler, slower way of life, where we seek out and appreciate what's pure, natural and wholesome.

That's why, while food fads may come and go, for the increasing numbers of parents trying hard to make environmentally-sound choices for their families, green is the new black, and organic is here to stay.

That staying power will be fuelled by common sense, because by choosing an organic lifestyle for our families, not only are we playing our part in helping to protect the eco-system, we're safe-guarding the health of our children and nurturing a deep appreciation in them of the wonder of nature and the simple things in life.

One Dublin couple, Ben Whelan and Veronica Ryan, decided from the outset that they wanted to give their daughters, Sophia (3) and Zoe (1) a green life.

"We live a low-impact lifestyle, and while we have a car, it's used only at weekends as I cycle to and from work in Temple Bar. We are conscious of the necessity to reduce our carbon footprint, so if we can't walk or ride, we choose public transport when possible.

"Sophia and I do a lot of gardening together. We have a small space, but being inner-city based it has a micro-climate, so we grow tomatoes, peppers and herbs. We do this so our daughters will understand that food doesn't come from supermarkets,

"We believe in protecting the kids from exposure to chemicals"

Annelie Cleary, with husband Brendan and sons Pierce (10) and Dillon (12)

he says.

"Sophia enjoys making compost and it's fun to see her picking up worms from the garden and enthusiastically throwing them in. She's also into recycling; she sorts the plastic from the paper and knows that we give away the goods and clothes we no longer need.

"We want the kids to appreciate nature, so we teach them the names of plants, point out which berries they shouldn't touch, and help them to identify the birds who visit our garden," adds Ben.

"We buy local fare, where possible, and we're part of a local organic box scheme, which is perfect for us as we prefer to avoid food that has been flown across the world. These issues matter so much to us that we're moving to Ireland's first eco-village in Co Tipperary over the next year or so. For us, the draw is that it is totally geared towards sustainable living."

While most of us won't be moving house to



"What is known however, is that there is increasing evidence to support the view that organic food is better both for us and for the environment."

Cleary's viewpoint is shared by many who realise that the dangers of pesticides cannot be dismissed, as they have long been linked with a wide variety of illnesses, including chronic fatigue, allergies, irritable bowel syndrome, asthma, depression and fertility problems. In contrast, organic produce has recently been confirmed to be far healthier than non-organic fare.

Organic farmer, Dominic Crampton's children have been reared on organic food, which has either been grown or sourced by their parents.

While their youngsters appreciate good quality produce, Dominic says that there's little chance of any of them making a living from it. "They'll eat it but they won't grow it," he says. "They've seen how tough the life can be."

Organic farmers for almost 20 years, Dominic and his wife Hilda are now experiencing a growing demand for their produce from both health-conscious and environmentally-aware consumers, which sees business at their fruit and vegetable stall at the Naas Farmers' Market steadily increasing.

Organic cynics were recently silenced, when the results of research at Newcastle University confirmed that levels of antioxidants in milk from





organic herds were up to 90pc higher than those from conventional farms.

The study also confirmed that organic crops, including carrots, potatoes and kiwi fruit, were found to have higher levels of vitamin C than non-organic varieties, while organic spinach, lettuce and cabbage contained more antioxidants and minerals.

In Ireland, national consumer spending on organic produce has increased, with an average monthly spend now of €40, up from €29 in 2003. Further evidence of the growing popularity of organic food comes from the latest Bord Bia PERIScope (Purchasing and Eating in the Republic of Ireland) research, which shows that there has been a steady increase in awareness and popularity of this produce, with purchases up from 30pc in 2003 to 46pc this year. Research shows that the most frequently purchased organic food types are fruit, vegeta-

bles, poultry and dairy products, with the top three reasons given by those who buy them being health benefits, quality, and lack of chemicals/pesticides.

Helen Scully, national coordinator of the Organic Trust, says: "While existing regulations ensure that pesticide residues in products are maintained within "safe" limits, babies and young children are at much greater risk of any potential problems, as immature kidneys are less efficient at eliminating harmful toxins.

"And nobody has any idea of the effect that genetic engineering has on food products and on the health of those who eat them, so by choosing organic foodstuffs, from which genetically-modified organisms are prohibited, parents can make healthier choices for their children."

For more information visit www.organic-trust.org and www.glenisk.com



Greening up their act

ANNELIE Cleary lives in Co Offaly with her husband Brendan and their sons, Dillon [12] and Pierce [10] – all are pictured on opposite page.

"As parents, Brendan and I believe that kids should be protected from exposure to chemicals where possible. We see good food as being a vital component of their care and we choose organic because it contains less toxins, more nutrients and tastes better.

"Like most people, we recycle, but we also use eco-friendly cleaning products, such as vinegar. I avoid chemical-filled make-up and use unrefined sesame oil, which is full of antioxidants, for my skin.

"We live closely with nature and have bats in the attic, which

we wouldn't get rid of.

"Last year, the boys found a magpie which fell out of a nest and needed help. They nursed it back to health and were rewarded with frequent flying visits. I wasn't quite so thrilled, as it took every opportunity to fly into the house, and I'd have to whoosh it out again, much to the amusement of the boys.

"We don't grow our own vegetables as with both of us working, we have limited time. Similarly, when our boys were young, we chose disposable over cloth nappies, as they worked for us.

"Brendan is in the organic food business. It's a subject close to his heart as he grew up on a farm, and has a strong appreciation of nature. It is because of him that we believe in the importance of living in harmony with the environment."

