

# *Inn & Out* OF ST. VINCENT & THE GRENADINES



2019 EDITION

## Luke Punnett

### GROWING AND SHARING

By Sally Miller

As a young Vincentian in search of his future, Luke Punnett's early path in life took him off to India, where he came perilously close to departing this world via a severe case of malaria.

That near-death experience had a profound effect on his psyche and upon returning to the Caribbean, to Barbados where his family was living, he went to ground by living with a Rastafarian community in what we in the West Indies call 'de bush'. While to some people that might seem a bit wayward, his back-to-nature lifestyle introduced him to the wonderful world of organic farming. And, having developed a love for nature as a little boy growing up in the countryside of St. Vincent, Luke embraced everything he learned with a passion.

The rest, as they say, is history.

Luke picked himself up, studied permaculture in Trinidad, returned home to St Vincent where he met Alexandra, the love of his life, and together they set up a farm high up in the verdant lushness of the mountains.

Today they operate a Community Supported Agriculture initiative subscription service, delivering weekly boxes of fresh organic produce to households throughout St. Vincent and the Grenadine islands. Their product list is long and varied, including the usual salad ingredients, herbs, root crops, fruit and vegetables, as well as unusual items like white turmeric and vanilla beans. It all depends on what's in season. They also keep bees and Alexandra makes yogurt from fresh cow's milk.

Luke is an avid devotee of permaculture, which means using a conscious design process to mimic systems and patterns found in nature, in order to produce a varied yield abundantly and sustainably. Permaculture views nature as the greatest teacher and seeks to work with nature rather than against her. It involves the stacking of plants into multi-layers reflecting the natural structure of a forest, except in Permaculture it is a productive food forest or forest garden. Trees are a critical part of Permaculture systems cycling both water and



nutrients from the ground below and creating the important micro climate in which other plants thrive. Such systems start with larger trees such as mango and scaling down to smaller fruit trees like avocado, over paw-paw, over banana, over okra, over lettuce, with herbs and pumpkin vines grown in between. In recognition of his expertise, Luke was commissioned to build a permaculture forest garden for a homeowner in Mustique.

Luke's philosophy is all about caring and giving back, both to the land and his community. Having firstly invited farmers to visit his farm to inspire them and share his new-found knowledge that makes so much sense for the economy and ecology of St. Vincent, he is now also teaching Permaculture 3-days a week at the Richmond Vale Academy, a Danish run agricultural project in the north of St. Vincent.

Luke is very optimistic about the future of his country. The government has recently legislated to ban the use of styrofoam, glyphosate (Roundup) and the hunting of turtles. There is a large geothermal project under construction to cut the use of oil for energy. And with legalizing medical marijuana on the horizon, St. Vincent is poised to supply a very high quality, organically grown product.

The Punnetts continue to dream of the future, with plans to expand into eco-lodges and open their Chatoyer Gardens Permaculture Farm to organized tours. Meanwhile, they have to leave the mountains Tuesday to Thursday each week and move to 'town', where Alexandra home schools their three children, River, Lily and Benjamin Sky.

This chosen path is not by any means an easy one, but Luke Punnett and his family love it. They are happy and proud to build a life for themselves that is based on a healthy and harmonious relationship with nature.



# meet a Vincy



River, Benjamin, Cole, Luke, Lily and



A selection of organic vegetables grown at Chaloy's Garden



River with a beautiful head of organic broccoli