

A close-up photograph of a woman with long, straight white hair and bangs. She is looking upwards and to the right with a gentle smile. She is holding a black DSLR camera with a large lens, which is partially visible in the foreground. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with green foliage and a warm, golden light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is peaceful and artistic.

*Find your*  
**HOBBY**

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## GO & DO

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# *What's your* **PASSION?**

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## WHAT'S YOUR PASSION?

# You know you want a new hobby, but ...

By Metro Editorial Services

Hobbies can serve many functions. Some people turn their hobbies into careers, while others rely on their hobbies to provide a relaxing respite from the hustle and bustle of daily life. Inspiring hobbies can make life more rewarding. While many people experience some trial and error as they seek something to fill their downtime, here are a few tips to finding a hobby that will enrich your life and maybe even the lives of others:

## Consider your interests

Much like you considered your interests when choosing a career path, you can benefit from doing the same when the time comes to find a hobby. If your work remains your passion, look for ways to share that passion with others. Perhaps you can teach a class at your community's learning annex or volunteer to work with high school kids who might have expressed an interest in your line of work. If you want to leave the office behind in your downtime, consider your other interests. Avid readers may want to start a local book club, while film buffs may enjoy starting a local film appreciation group. The more passionate you are about a topic or activity, the more likely you can turn it into a successful and rewarding hobby.

## Consider your needs

Another way to find a successful hobby is to consider why you want one in the first place. If your workdays tend to be hectic and you want a quiet escape, then a peaceful hobby such as painting might do the trick. If you're looking for a hobby that can add some spice to your social life and help you meet new people, look for something that encourages teamwork or interaction with other people your age.

## Consider your availability

Another thing to consider when choosing a hobby is how much time you will have to pursue it. If your schedule is especially hectic or unpredictable, avoid hobbies that require a big time commitment, as such activities may prove too difficult to commit to. In such situations, a hobby that allows you to embrace it on your own time will likely prove more enjoyable than one where you must adhere to a schedule that you simply can't honor. If you have a substantial amount of free time, then something that requires more involvement on your part might be right up your alley, whereas hobbies that don't require much regular participation likely won't provide the respite or fulfillment you're looking for.

## Consider those closest to you

Many people find that the best hobbies are the ones that allow them to spend more time with their loved ones, whether those loved ones are their children, their parents or their close friends. Parents may want to find an activity that allows them to bond with their children, while young working professionals may want to find an activity that provides them with opportunities to spend time with their equally busy friends. Others may want a reprieve by searching for a solo hobby to offer some alone time. There is no wrong answer as long as you're enjoying your hobby.



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PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

*Inspiring hobbies can make life more rewarding.*

WHAT'S YOUR PASSION?

# How to find a hobby



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By Metro Editorial Services

Commitments to work and family can make adults feel like they have little time for much else. But finding time to pursue hobbies can benefit men and women in various ways.

A form of escapism that can provide a much-needed respite from the hectic pace of daily life, hobbies can help us reduce stress by forcing ourselves to focus on something other than the source of the stress.

In addition, hobbies can be a great way to meet new people, an important benefit for working parents who may otherwise find it difficult to meet new people.

Finding a hobby may take some trial and error, as adults may find activities that once appealed to them no longer do, while other pursuits may require more time than men and women can reasonably devote.

Adults looking for a hobby can consider these strategies as they begin their pursuits:

## Think back to your childhood

A childhood passion may provide the perfect starting point as adults look for hobbies. For example, adults who enjoyed painting as children may find they still know their way around a canvas and palette.

## Ask around

Adults who want to find a hobby to foster social connections can ask friends, family, neighbors or co-workers to recommend activities. This can help people make connections in their communities and/or reconnect with friends or family members with whom they have fallen out of touch.

## Think small

Because there is often some trial and error in finding a rewarding hobby, it makes sense to avoid making too big a commitment right off the bat. Before buying lots of expensive equipment or materials or making a large time commitment, give yourself some time to try a hobby on for size. The first activity you try might not necessarily take, and walking away won't sting as much if you had not committed much time or money.

## Consider coaching or mentoring

Athletes who still have a passion for their favorite sports, but can no longer meet the physical demands those sports require can stay involved by coaching youth sports. The same can be said for professionals passionate about their work who choose to mentor. These activities might not be traditional hobbies, but they offer a great way for adults to pursue their passions on their own time.

Hobbies can enrich our lives and provide respites from the daily grind. Finding a hobby that fits might take some time and some trial and error, but such efforts will ultimately prove worth it if adults find activities they are passionate about.

WHAT'S YOUR PASSION?

POPULAR

## HOBBIES

## AROUND THE

## WORLD

*By Metro Editorial Services*

**H**obbies allow people to explore their interests, meet new people and keep their brains sharp.

Individuals delve into all types of hobbies to keep busy and entertain themselves, but certain activities are more popular than others.

For those seeking a new hobby, these are among the most popular ones from around the world:

**Reading**

Cozying up with a book or e-reader can be a great way to explore topics and locales without having to leave home. Reading also is a way to expand vocabulary and may help to improve cognition. Reading is not a new hobby, but it is one that is inexpensive and enjoyed by millions worldwide.

**Dancing**

Dancing spans cultures and genres of music. Putting on music and letting your feet move of their own volition is one way to get dancing, but many others like to enroll in dance classes so they can master the moves. Dancing can improve flexibility, and since it is an aerobic activity, it can be a great workout, as well.

**Cooking/baking**

People always have relied on home cooking to fuel themselves and their families, but passions were perhaps rediscovered during the global pandemic, when stay-at-home orders temporarily shuttered restaurants and other food establishments. Individuals be-

gan redeveloping their skills in the kitchen, which may continue to this day. Learning to cook and bake can help people save money and create meals that cater to specific food allergies or preferences.

**Traveling**

Travel is an enjoyable pastime enjoyed by many people. Traveling gives people the opportunity to escape the daily grind, explore new places and cultures and rest and recharge.

**Painting and crafts**

Artistic endeavors attract their share of enthusiasts, as evidenced by the number of pottery shops, paint and sip businesses and other crafts-based recreational pursuits. By participating in these types of hobbies, one can learn skills and also walk away with the fruits of their own labors.

**Musical instrument**

Listening to music can help reduce stress levels and improve mood. Learning how to play a musical instrument or sing is a hobby shared by many people around the world. Reading and playing music may be one of the best ways to keep the brain healthy, says Penn Medicine, as it engages every major part of the central nervous system.

**Fishing**

Few things are more relaxing than sitting by the water trying to reel in the next big catch. Fishing for food or fun helps a person enjoy nature. It's also accessible anywhere there's a body of water nearby.

Hobbies are healthy pursuits that can push a person to learn more about their interests and goals. Go out and find yourself a new one or become reacquainted with one that you've put to the side and deserves a second look.

# MUSIC



# READING



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

# FISHING



# DANCING

# TRAVEL

# ARTS AND CRAFTS

# COOKING

WHAT'S YOUR PASSION?

# Hobbies for different personality types

*By Metro Editorial Services*

**H**obbies can provide a welcome respite from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Finding the right hobby requires the consideration of a host of factors, including one's own personality.

Here are some common personality types and the hobbies they might find rewarding:

## The athlete

Athletes can pursue a host of potential hobbies or activities that will foster their love of sports. Men and women who still have a hop in their step can sign up to compete in adult sports leagues. Depending on the sport, leagues might be available to adults of various ages and skill levels, and some may even be more focused on fun than competition.

For athletes who can no longer lace up their cleats, coaching youth sports or volunteering to coach at a nearby school provides a chance to stay involved even if competing is no longer possible.

## The reader

Book lovers also can channel their passions for the written word into a

rewarding hobby. While reading might not seem like the most social activity, readers who want to use their love of books to grow their social networks can start a book club. People of all ages and backgrounds love to read, so starting a book club can be a great way to meet an array of people.

Readers also can call

their local libraries or schools to ask about reading programs for children. Volunteer to read to youngsters, helping the next generation discover the wonders of reading.

Visit [littlefreelibrary.org](http://littlefreelibrary.org) to find a Little Free Library in your community. It might contain just the right book for you. Or it could be a great spot to

donate some of your favorite reads. If that specific library has its own Facebook page, you also can meet locals who share similar passions as you. And if you don't have a Little Free Library near you, now might be a good time to open one!

## The executive

Men and women who

have experienced great success in the world of business can pursue a host of low-stress opportunities with a goal of sharing their experiences with the next generation of business leaders.

Teaching a course at a local college or university is one such avenue, and executives can even offer to work with high school students interested in pursuing careers in business.

Teaching and mentoring might be less traditional hobbies than crocheting or woodworking, but they still provide a way for adults to pursue their passions away from the constraints of the office.

## The traveler

Those who love to travel can begin writing travel blogs where they share stories of their domestic and international travels. Use the blog to offer an insider's insight into certain cities, offering advice on obscure eateries or activities that might be off most tourists' radars. Include photos with each blog post to attract more readers.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

WHAT'S YOUR PASSION?

# NEW TRICKS



## How older adults can cultivate a new hobby

*By Metro Editorial Services*

Retirement is often characterized as a carefree time in life when adults who spent years in the workforce get to enjoy the fruits of their labors. But upon retiring, many retirees find themselves fighting boredom.

No two retirees are the same, and a host of variables, boredom among them, compels some recently retired professionals to go back to work.

Retirees who like the freedom of not working, but are confronting a good bit of boredom can consider these tips to cultivate a new hobby that can help them pass the time in a rewarding and engaging way:

### Identify new (or old) interests

Many retirees discover new passions in retirement, while others turn back the clock and revisit favorite hobbies from their youth. A good way to begin cultivating a new hobby is to jot down a list of activities you've always found interesting, but never had the time to learn or became too busy to fully invest in.

Some seniors hit the links for the first time in retirement, while others return to school to study subjects they find interesting, but did not engage with during

OLDER » PAGE 10



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## Older

FROM PAGE 9

their school years. The options are endless, and jotting down a list of new or old interests is a great way to get the ball rolling.

### Embrace new ways to engage a passion

Virtual resources like online courses and book clubs with fellow readers across the nation and possibly even the globe are a great way to cultivate a new hobby in retirement. Virtual resources can be especially beneficial for seniors with mobility issues.

### Consider locally based resources

Community recreation departments and libraries may offer an array of free or affordable opportunities for seniors to engage with a new hobby. Recreation departments may offer anything from cross country skiing tutorials to age-based hiking excursions, while libraries may offer weekly crafting sessions or wellness programs to local residents.

In addition to providing fun ways to discover and cultivate a new hobby, programs offered through recreation departments and local libraries are great ways to meet fellow retirees.

**Put your experience to use**

Retirees with years in their field don't have to go back to work to make use of their professional expertise. Contact local youth organizations

or outreach programs sponsored by churches, libraries or local law enforcement agencies and offer to share your expertise with young people. Such opportunities allow retirees to continue to engage with their professions and

help a younger generation of aspiring professionals gain valuable insight into fields they're interested in. There's no shortage of ways for seniors to overcome retirement boredom and cultivate rewarding hobbies.





**WHAT'S YOUR PASSION?**

# Helping kids find hobbies best suitable for them

*By Metro Editorial Services*

Much like adults can benefit from participating in hobbies, children can reap rewards from engaging in hobbies.

According to the Child Development Institute, hobbies give children a chance to express themselves. The CDI also notes that hobbies can play an important role in children's self-discovery and boost their self-esteem.

Some children may discover hobbies on their own, requiring little if any assistance on the part of their parents. For example, some kids may display an interest in music that parents, even those with no such musical inclination, can foster by purchasing certain instruments. But some children may need a little more prompting, and parents of such boys and girls can take certain steps to help their youngsters find rewarding hobbies.

Hobbies can enrich the lives of children. Finding the right activity may require some patience on the part of parents and youngsters alike.

## **Involve kids in your own hobbies**

Kids look up to their parents and often want to emulate what their mothers and fathers do. If possible, involve children in your own hobbies.

Gardeners can teach their youngsters how to grow and tend to a garden, while painters can host family painting nights where everyone is encouraged to create their own masterpiece. Parents whose hobbies are more adult-oriented, like woodworking, can still involve their children. For example, work with children to design a new item, then show them how the item goes from paper to finished product; just avoid allowing them to use any unsafe tools or machines.

## **Let the kids choose an activity**

While some children might take to hobbies their parents favor, others might need to be given some freedom to find their own activities. Afford youngsters this chance, recognizing that it might take some time before kids find an activity that genuinely sparks their passion and keeps them engaged past the initial allure.

## **Be a source of encouragement**

Some hobbies may prove more difficult than kids first imagined, requiring some perseverance before they can be enjoyed fully. In such instances, observe youngsters while they engage in the activity.

If they appear to be enjoying themselves, but are periodically frustrated, encourage them to keep trying. If kids appear to be disinterested in overcoming any struggles, then they might benefit by pursuing another hobby.

## **Don't hesitate to focus on fun**

Hobbies can teach kids valuable lessons and provide a sense of fulfillment, but it's important that parents not overlook the importance of fun in regard to their children's hobbies. Hobbies can provide children with the same respite from busy schedules that they do adults, and that break should be as fun as possible. And something the child truly wants to do.



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*this was our time*

WHAT HAPPENED?



## WHAT'S YOUR PASSION?

# We *should* be living in the golden age of hobbies

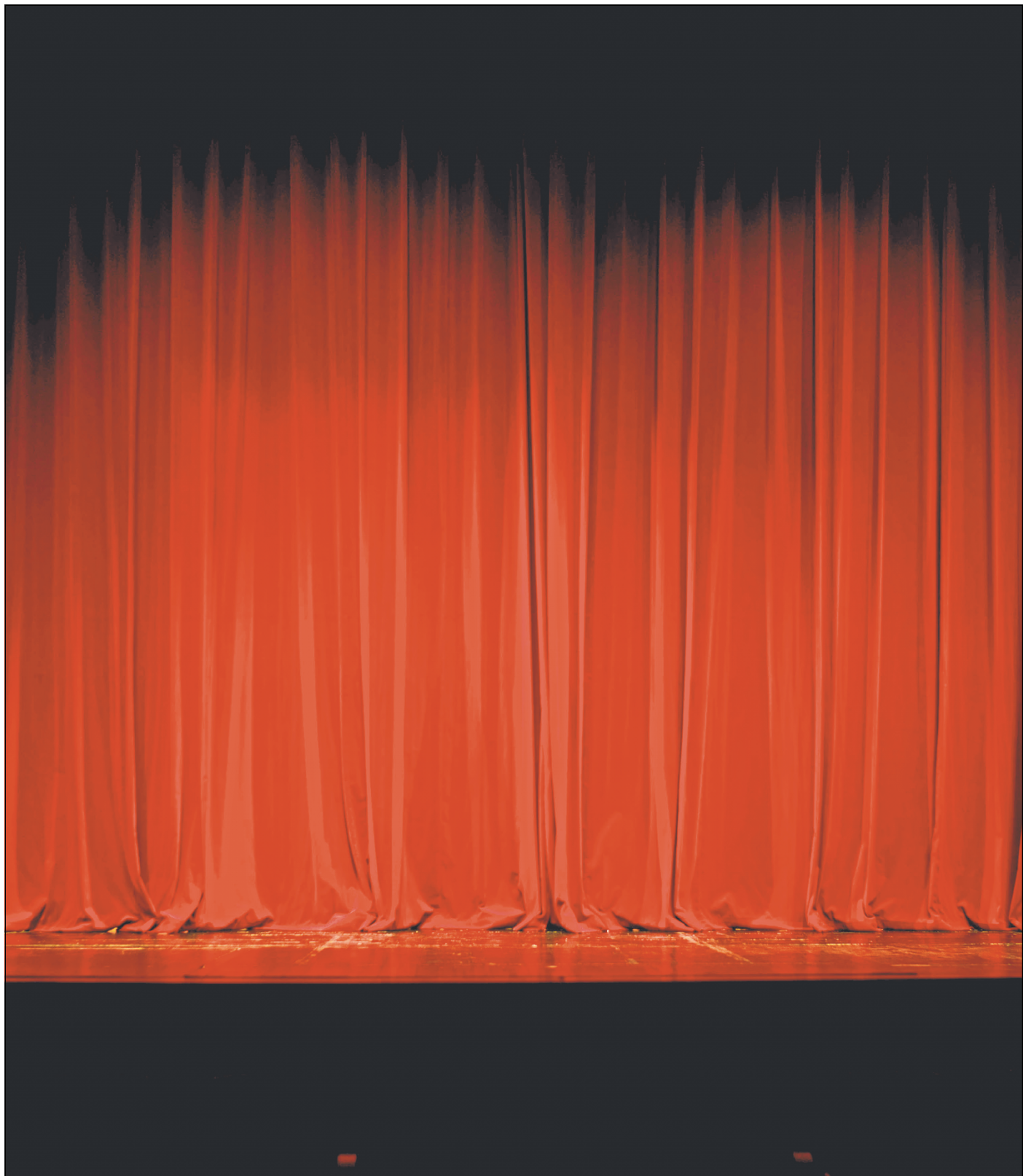
**By Jenny Singer***Special to The Washington Post*

**I**t's a first date. The drink in your hand is mostly ice. You've talked about your jobs, your days, your dogs. The conversation lulls, and you can feel the question coming. "So," the person across the table asks, "what do you do for fun?" The answer should be easy. We are supposed to be living in the golden age of hobbies. Great thinkers of the 20th century believed that innovations in technology would make work so efficient that leisure would eclipse labor. In 1930, economist John Maynard Keynes predicted 15-hour workweeks by 2030. This would leave people the opportunity to "cultivate into a fuller perfection, the art of life itself."

This would include hobbies, activities that Benjamin Hunnicutt, an emeritus professor of Leisure Studies at the University of Iowa, calls "pursuits that are their own reward." The opportunity to pursue joyful and meaningful activities was once "sort of the definition of human progress," Hunnicutt said.

But the golden age that Keynes predicted has not come to pass. Though productivity has grown dramatically since Keynes's time, the most recent American Time Use Survey found that full-time employees still work eight hours a day, the same workday that the National Labor Union demanded in 1866. Workers enjoy just under four hours of leisure time, and the bulk of that brief window is spent watching TV.

The odds are stacked against hobbies. "Work has been supercharged with meaning and purpose and identity, a charge that it never had, at least for the majority of people," Hunnicutt said. The seamlessness of streaming and the narcotic effects of scrolling make every other activity feel effortful. To pay the bills, huge swaths of Americans take on "side hustles" during hours that earlier generations might have spent building model trains or singing in



# Golden

FROM PAGE 15

a choir.

These cultural conditions mean that hobbies can feel like a kind of class signifier for those who have the time and resources to cultivate them. Instagram influencers do Pilates and pottery, while the rest of us try to decide if meal prep counts as personal enrichment. For many, hobbies can seem like another chore, an opportunity to fail at well-roundedness. Dating apps are designed such that romantic hopefuls must showcase their hobbies with the gaudy desperation of college applicants.

All of this obscures the delight and exhilaration of having hobbies. “Hobbies are something that you invest your time and energy into without that expectation of financial return,” said Jasmine Cho, author of the 2024 book “Get A Hobby.” Cho defines “hobby” expansively: “any sort of activity that grounds you in joy, can help you cope with sorrow, and can help you escape from life’s burdens.” (Cho’s hobbies include journaling, doodling, boxing, taekwondo, Legos, Gundam models and puzzles.) “It’s just a practice of flow and getting lost, or even hyper-focused,” she said. “That, in and of itself, is the reward.”

Among older people, having hobbies is linked to lower rates of depression. A study during the pandemic found that people who started gardening, crafting or woodworking for just a half-hour a day reported greater life satisfaction; those who spent more time on screens were more likely to be depressed. Essentially, researchers confirmed the wisdom of your parents when confiscating your Gameboy — you should go outside and play. A great hobby takes simple ingredients — a skein

of yarn, a piece of lumber, a group of friendly strangers — and alchemizes them into something that makes day-to-day life better. But the relentless push toward self-optimization, the pressure to monetize every passion, and the pull of consumerism can tarnish the joy of hobbies.

The 20th century think-

ers who predicted increased leisure time warned that “we’re going to have to be careful with this new freedom,” Hunnicutt said. “We’re liable to have it stolen from us by the powerful and rich among us who will want to continue us in bondage and slavery for their profit, and will turn to selling us worthless things.”

The word “hobby” was once pejorative. It comes from hobby horse — a child’s toy that takes its rider nowhere. In the early 1800s, the word hobby indicated “some trifling, harmless, half-silly, half-useless propensity.” But within a few decades, columnists had switched to arguing that “everyone should

have a hobby,” as long as the hobby could “carry the rider over the route of mental improvements to the development of his reasoning and analytical powers, and thus promote the growth of the attributes which distinguish him from the brutal and ally him to the divine.”

Where does this leave a person who watches “The

White Lotus” every Sunday night? That counts as a hobby, Cho rules, as long as it is intentional, not mindless. Surfing channels or scrolling social media is not a hobby. And if you monetize your hobby, it’s not a hobby anymore. “Once it flips into something that generates income, it becomes work,” she said.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

Content creators on social media — often in the business of converting joy into grueling comparison — sometimes insist that adults should have an exhaustive slate of hobbies. You should have one for your mind, another for your body, another for your spirit! “Even having one hobby might be a massive privilege for someone if they just don’t have time to do anything else but survive their day-to-day,” Cho said. Reading a library book or doodling are both great hobbies, she said. “Whatever you have immediate access to is a good first step.” That doesn’t need to include a \$2,000 at-home kiln.

The pressure to have an interesting hobby persists though, especially among daters. The question “So, what do you do for fun?” can feel like a test they can only fail. During the pandemic, Josh Weintraub, a Gen-X-er in Brooklyn, dated a woman who was learning a language, and she encouraged him to do the same. Weintraub, who works as an actuary, didn’t have an ear for languages, but he decided to pursue a hobby of

his own: trumpet. He signed up for lessons online from the Brooklyn Music School. The first piece he ever tried to learn was by Beethoven, and the result was a strange source of wonder. “It wasn’t completely out of reach!” he recalled. “I wasn’t good by any stretch of the imagination, but it was recognizable.”

For more than three years, Weintraub practiced in between Zoom calls during the workday and at night. Then he learned that romantic influence on hobbies goes both ways: He started dating a woman who hated jazz music. He stopped playing. Even after the breakup, he hasn’t picked the instrument back up. “Inertia is a big thing,” he said. Also, trumpet was tricky: “If I had this to do over,” he said, “I would have probably tried the saxo-



phone.” He is planning to get back on the hobby horse soon, though. And in the meantime, his dating app features a picture of him playing trumpet.

Even as a culture of constant work encroaches on the little leisure time we have, it’s a good time to be a hobbyist. Adults are coming together to jump double dutch, crush roller derby competitions and play an astonishing amount of pickleball. We badly want to be involved: The majority of respondents to the most recent Gallup poll on the subject ranked hobbies and recreation activities as “extremely or very important,” a much larger group than two decades before.

Cho said she notices hobbies trending in two directions. There are people doing more and more online — playing around with

AI, editing videos for TikTok, finding the sublime in building spreadsheets. “But I think there has been a saturation of tech and digital based engagement,” she said. “I think there will be greater trends toward going offline and reconnecting with things that you do physically with your hands.”

Most nights, after a long day of officer training at Arizona’s Fort Huachuca army base, Matthew Perry drove straight to Sierra Vista Community Theater. Rehearsals were typically 6-9 p.m. Monday through Thursday. Over the course of one year, he performed a bit part in “A Christmas Carol,” and painted and built set pieces.

Before stepping foot in the community theater, Perry, 28, had never performed in a play. But “I fell

in love with it immediately,” he said. “It wasn’t easy, but it was 100 percent a labor of love.”

Perry wasn’t the only person from his base backstage. There were also hospital employees, high school students, fast food workers and corporate types. “Once you go to perform, everyone is an equal on that stage,” he said.

Brittany Rothe, a 34-year-old mother of three who works in medical device sales in Lake Forest, Illinois, has decided to make hobbies a priority. At 9 p.m. Tuesdays, after work is done and her children are asleep, she meets friends at a tumbling gym for an evening of gymnastics practice. Rothe noticed that as soon as the structure of school sports evaporated, adults started acting like the only age-appropriate way to work out

was a solitary stint on a treadmill. Instead, Rothe and her friends challenge each other to execute 100 standing tucks. When not airborne, they chat. “It brings me energy and joy,” she said.

Rothe, who was a cheerleader in high school and college, is now working on a full-twisting layout, a skill that she was not able to master at the height of her cheer career. “I feel stronger, actually,” she said. “Without pressure, I’ve just been able to do it for fun and not be afraid to fail.”

The discipline required to learn a skill is why Janelle Gaddist, 31, picked up ballet. She danced as a child but always avoided ballet because it seemed “slow and boring.” She started in the “absolute beginner” adult ballet classes. In 2½ years, she worked her way

up to beginner, occasionally tip toeing, literally, into an “advanced beginner” class.

Her improvements are small but noticeable — the way she points her toes, her arm movements. “That’s why I love the discipline of ballet, because there’s so much to improve on, there’s so much to do, there’s this never-ending pursuit of perfection,” she said. “You feel like, ‘Oh my goodness, I’ve reached this mountain!’ And then you look over and you’re like, ‘Oh wait, there’s something else to conquer.’”

We do not live, yet, in a golden age of hobbies. But in handstands, opening nights, blasts of Beethoven and tremulous pliés, hobbyists, as Hunnicutt puts it, embrace “the freedom to become totally human.”

“Don’t be scared,” Rothe advises adults who want to tumble. “Just try it out.”



# *ARTS &* CRAFTS

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## ARTS AND CRAFTS

# *Crochet: Tips for beginners wanting to learn a new hobby*

By Metro Editorial Services

Hobbies pass the time and can lead to projects of significant personal and potentially financial value.

Needlework can be a rewarding endeavor. Some people may be familiar with knitting but less so with crochet and how it differs from traditional knitting.

Unlike knitting, which uses two needles to create items out of yarn, crochet utilizes a single hooked tool. This hook creates fabric from loops of yarn or even thinner embroidery flosses or string. Crochet can be used to make everything from blankets to clothing to hats to dolls to bags. Some social media posts even feature fences made from crochet!

Nobody is quite certain where crochet originated.

Mother Knitter, a knitting and crocheting store in New Jersey, says origin stories trace crochet to anywhere from Arabia to South America to China. The popularity of crochet in North America can be attributed to European immigration in the early 19th century. Indeed, the word “crochet” is derived from the Old French word “croc,” meaning “hook.”

Historians believe the art was connected to the French tambour embroidery of the 18th century. Books reference the use of ivory, bone or wooden hooks and steel needles. The word “crochet” first appeared in the Dutch magazine *Penélopé* in 1823. The first English reference to garments made of cloth produced by

looping yarn with a hook occurred in “The Memoirs of a Highland Lady” by Elizabeth Grant, which was written between 1845 and 1854.

Crochet creates garments by making interlocking loops of fiber, whether it's yarn, thread or even twine. Various projects can be made from this craft, but blankets, scarves and hats are among the most popular.

Crochet doesn't require a lot of supplies to get started; in fact, all you really need is yarn, a hook, scissors, and some knowledge of the more basic stitches. However, delving a little deeper into crochet basics can help the finished project look and feel how a person wants it to.

Yarn comes in different weights, colors and fibers. Heavier, thicker yarns work better with larger hooks. Yarn labels often recommend the coordinating hook size to get the ideal results. Many beginners find it best to start with a medium weight yarn, and a size H or I crochet hook (5 to 6 mm).

Crochet patterns feature various stitches. The stitches are formed by looping the yarn around the hook and pulling through the loop a predetermined number of times. Common stitches include single crochet, double crochet, half-double crochet and treble crochet. Patterns feature abbreviations of these stitches, which beginners will have to learn to slowly



PHOTO COURTESY OF ADRIENNE BRESNAHAN/METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

# Crochet

FROM PAGE 19

master the techniques and patterns.

To crochet, one starts with a slipknot in the yarn,

which will provide the anchor by which the yarn is initially cast onto the hook. Crocheting begins with making a chain, which is repeatedly passing the crochet hook underneath the string of yarn to grab on to it and drawing it through the previous loop.

This is repeated until the desired length is reached. The next stitch to learn is the single crochet, which even in its most basic form can be used to create blankets or garments. As you gain confidence with basic stitches and projects, you can eventually move

on to more complex stitches.

One of the keys to crocheting is to grow familiar with the patterns and abbreviations. Abbreviations are used to make project instructions more concise. For example, rather than writing "chain thirty stitches,"

one will see "ch 30." Single crochet becomes "sc," double crochet is "dc" and triple/treble crochet "tc." Double and triple stitches produce taller stitches. Here is an example of a round of stitches for a project: Ch 2, Dc 5. Dc 2, ch 2, dc 2 around the ch2-space.

Repeat {Dc 7. Dc 2, ch 2, dc 2 around the ch2-space} 3 times. Dc 2. = 52 sts. The last number represents the number of stitches you should have, so you can look for this number to ensure that you followed the pattern correctly.





The next tip is to recognize that certain gauge hooks are required, as is the weight of yarn or other material for projects. Hooks are sold in millimeter size, or a letter or number gauge. For example, 4.0 mm, G/6 size. The pattern should list how large the finished project will be if you follow the recommendations for hook size and yarn weight.

Crochet is typically faster than knitting, so people who want to see their projects completed more quickly can opt for this needlework. Keep in mind, however, that more yarn often is needed for crochet projects than knitting projects. Also, sometimes crochet fabric is less stretchy than knit fabric.

Some people also find that crocheting might be easier than knitting. Since crochet works with one live stitch, it's less likely to unravel accidentally than knitting, advises SarahMaker.com. Also, to fix a crochet mistake, one only has to remove a few stitches and redo the work.

Learning to crochet can be a worthwhile venture. It may take a little time to grow comfortable with the language and technique, but as you gain more experience, you can try more complex patterns.

Fortunately, there are plenty of online tutorials that demonstrate stitches for those who want to see before doing.

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**Crochet is typically faster than knitting, so people who want to see their projects completed more quickly can opt for this needlework.**

## ARTS AND CRAFTS

# Joann Fabrics closes, and a gateway to crafts goes with it

By Rachel Kurzius

*The Washington Post*

It's Tuesday afternoon, and D.C. event planner Chandon Jones is murmuring math calculations with one of her team members. They're multiplying and dividing, switching from inches to yards at a break-neck pace, before approaching the cutting corner at Joann Fabric and Crafts in Falls Church, Virginia, with a large bolt of light-brown leather.

Jones has an event the following day, and somehow both Plan A and Plan B for the menus have fallen through. "Now we're in a panic at Joann Fabric," she says, and not for the first time. She leaves with the leather she needs, but her backup to the backup is no longer available.

The 82-year-old fabric chain shuttered all 800 of its retail locations after filing its second bankruptcy within a year. Industry analysts cite the tough economic environment for specialty stores, and some customers will tell you that quality has slipped, or that the chain had lost focus. The last stores closed on May 31 after going-out-of-business sales, according to Kiplinger.

For many Joann faithfuls, though — serious hobbyists such as knitters, quilters and sewists of all levels — the closures represent something sadder and more significant: the loss of easily accessible materials, of community, and of a gate-

way to handicrafts.

Leon van der Goetz is heartbroken. He "grew up shopping at Joann," he says. He learned how to sew when he was 8 and then tackled crochet shortly afterward. He worked at the Falls Church location during the holiday season nearly a decade ago. Joann is "where I bought the first materials for my first cosplay. This was where I bought the first yarn that I crocheted with. This is where I really took first steps on a lot of different crafts and hobbies that I've had throughout my life," he says.

While he thinks specialty knitting and quilting stores will help some hobbyists, younger people "would never go to the specialty stores if they didn't have that intro, accessible place," he says. "The need that Joann really met, that a lot of other stores don't meet, is bringing together many different types of crafts in one place." (He notes that while similarly a craft store, Michael's focuses more on visual arts than textiles and fibers.)

Van der Goetz disagrees with the cliché that crafts such as sewing and knitting are for the elderly: "Fiber arts have been exploding on TikTok. ... A lot of younger people are starting to be introduced over social media, and I really see a renaissance."

As he explains during one of his last times at Joann's how he dived into weaving because he had so

much yarn that he didn't know what to do with it all, there is a shout from the aisle over: "Nobody can have too much yarn!"

Susan Kelsey, said she was a Joann customer for both herself and her business.

Joann had a much larger selection of fabrics than other brick-and-mortar retailers, she says, plus it stocked holiday-themed wares year-round, which allowed Kelsey to prepare her creations and sell them to wreathmakers in advance. Prices at online merchants are significantly higher than at Joann, she adds. Also, there is no ability when shopping online to see and feel the fabric before buying it.

Many Joann customers recall wandering the yarn- and fabric-filled aisles as children, the kaleidoscope of colors and textures beckoning them.

"It was definitely somewhere that my imagination got to sort of roam," says Rin Llhyd, now an upholsterer in Oregon. She credits Joann, in part, with sparking her interest in textiles.

Although she doesn't expect the closures to directly affect her work, she does wonder how it will change the broader fabric industry. And Llhyd worries that future generations will lose the chance to make the same discoveries she did while strolling among the assemblage of cotton, fleece, satin, organza, polyester and more.



GINA JOSEPH — THE MACOMB DAILY

Joann Fabrics in Chesterfield Township.



PHOTO BY CHUCK BENNETT, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Joann Fabrics has closed all of its stores.



PHOTO BY SUSAN SMILEY

Decorative Stitch in Shelby Township has more than 5,000 bolts of quilting fabric as well as notions, patterns, sewing and embroidery machines, and a wide array of thread.

“For people who love textiles and people who enjoy, you know, just looking at the colors and the textures and the fabrics, it’s exciting,” says Tanny Martin, who lives in Austin and makes her own clothing, as well as bags, purses and items for her home. “You go in there and it inspires you about what project you might want to tackle next.”

Martin doesn’t typically see herself as a creative person. “I was a nurse in my real life, but with sewing and fabrics, there were things I could do that stepped outside of those roles. And that was really satisfying,” she says. As someone who lives on Social Se-

curity, making her own clothes is a more affordable way to upgrade her wardrobe. “Joann really supported the people like me who really get a lot out of sewing,” she says.

It wasn’t just the merchandise, either. Fellow customers often share advice about crafting. Employees tend to be enthusiastic, asking people about their projects and offering tips.

Katie Bordignon remembers going to Joann with her mom as a kid. When her daughter was 12, she took up crocheting, so they went to Joann to buy yarn. An employee asked what she was making, “and she can’t wait to tell

them, you know, her latest project,” says Bordignon, who lives in Carol Stream, Illinois, and sells handmade ornaments on her Etsy store TuscanyCreative. “They are supportive, and they’re all crafty people.”

Joann employed 19,000 people, according to court documents. An employee at the store in Falls Church, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the company does not allow staff to discuss internal matters with media outlets, says the closure is “shocking; it’s sad.”

The employee said the “reverberations of these closures are bigger than anyone can imagine.

... This is not just crafting. This is mental health. Senior citizens do this not to go crazy. It’s about a sense of purpose.”

While the store became a valued public gathering spot in many communities, Joann is not the only place to get supplies. The demise of the chain is not synonymous with the demise of these crafts. But as an entry point to very long, even ancient traditions, it will be missed.

“I feel the connection of 50,000 years of human history as I spin,” van der Goetz says. “And I think there’s a magic in that. And there’s something beautiful in that.”

# memories



PHOTOS BY HEATHER SLINGERLAND

My nieces Lucy and Margaret pose for a photograph in costume as Mom-i.



PHOTO BY HEATHER SLINGERLAND

My mother and I recreate a scene of Mom-i watching television in her living room.



My mother and I recreate a scene of Mom-i at her sewing table, sewing textiles that were used as costumes for this project.



FAMILY PHOTOS FROM HEATHER SLINGERLAND

A collection of photographs from my childhood featuring Mom-i and other family members, photographed at Mom-i's home in North Texas in the late 1980s and 1990s. The photographer is unknown, though I suspect it was my father.

## ARTS AND CRAFTS

# Stitching a quilt of a lifetime



The quilt on the left was made from my mother's unfinished quilt squares and costumes from this project. The quilt on the right was made by Mom-i.

**By Heather Slingerland**  
*Special to The Washington Post*

**W**e called my mother's mother Mom-i. Family lore says my older sister named our grandfather "Pop-i" when she learned to speak, and "Mom-i" naturally followed.

She died when I was a teenager, and much of what I know of her comes from childhood memories and my mother's stories. Memories are notoriously unreliable, and our present selves greatly influence how we recall the past. Who was she, really? Can I hope to know her impartially?

So much of her is threaded through me. My Mom-i passed down to my mother and me her stubbornness, her independence, her light eyes, her dainty hands and her skill for sewing. A lingering sensation of not belonging — a motif woven through my own life

— seems to have been woven through theirs, as well.

With help from three generations of women in my family — my mother, sister and nieces — I recreated scenes from my childhood, which I then photographed. They included Thanksgiving dinner at Mom-i's house, Mom-i in her living room and Mom-i at her sewing table. Mom-i was a prolific quilter; my mother, a prolific quilt starter. I used my mother's unfinished quilt squares and the costumes I used in this project to make my own first quilt ... still unfinished.

As I have since I was a child, I took my camera into nature to make sense of things. I chose to set these recreations among some redwood trees because they have long been a haven for me. They also echo the project's theme. The trees pass an incredible amount of information to their seedlings under the soil — some that we understand and some that remains a mystery.



PHOTOS BY HEATHER SLINGERLAND

Costumes used for this project in the style of Mom-i lay in the redwoods.



My mother and nieces recreate the scene of Mom-i on her deathbed when she asked me to paint her toenails.



My nieces, sister, mother and I recreate the scene of Thanksgiving at Mom-i's house.



The food I made for the scene recreation of Mom-i's Thanksgiving dinner, following recipes close to what Mom-i used to make.



My mother poses for a photograph dressed in costume as her mother, Mom-i.

# *food* & DRINK

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## FOOD AND DRINK

## CHILL OUT

Yes, you can cool red wine. These are the best varieties to try

By Emily Saladino

Special to The Washington Post

With no disrespect to rosé, the coolest bottles in the ice bucket aren't always pink. At cutting-edge bars and restaurants, nothing is hotter than serving red wines with a serious chill.

"We sell three times as many chilled reds as we do 'regular' reds," says Shanna Nasiri, the owner of With Others, a twinkling wine bar in Brooklyn, New York. She keeps at least one chilled red on her by-the-glass menu throughout the year. "We fly through cases," she says.

The appeal of the style extends far beyond Nasiri's candlelit booths. Last summer, the Roost, a food hall on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., held a walkaround wine tasting devoted to chilled reds, and the website "The Infatuation" published a London bar guide titled, "Where to go when drinking chilled reds is your whole personality."

And in Croatia, winemaker Juraj Sladić adapted production methods to create Testament Dalmatian Dog Babić, a fruit-forward red wine he likes to drink with a chill. He says he was inspired by "changes we see in the market — younger people preferring lighter alcohol and fruitier wines."

It's easy to see why the chilled-red army has so many volunteers. Quality options abound at an array of prices, and you can drink them on their own or paired with just about anything, including cheese boards, swordfish and Thai curries. The style also provides a common ground when you're with a group where some prefer red, and others white or rosé. But choosing the right reds to chill is



CHRISTOPHE ENA — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Each year, on the third Thursday in Nov. at the stroke of midnight, the world welcomes in the new Beaujolais Nouveau vintage, a light red wine, produced in the Beaujolais region of southern Burgundy.

tricky. Certain styles taste bright and juicy when they're cold, and others become muted, metallic or otherwise unpleasant if you leave them in the fridge too long. That's why understanding the differ-



NAM Y. HUH — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

French bottles of red wines are shown on display at a liquor store in Niles, Illinois.

ences between chillable and "regular" reds is key.

Here's how to approach the cooler with confidence:

### Which red wines should be chilled?

The reckless among us might say that any bottle is chillable so long as you have a functioning refrigerator, but that ignores the immense variabilities of a category as broad as red wine. Generally, the best red wines to serve cold are young and light-bodied, with bright fruit fla-

vors and low tannins.

There isn't one grape that invariably meets all these criteria, however. Instead, look for regions and key terminology to identify which reds are suited to the ice bucket.

One place to start is in Beaujolais, a region of France known for reds made from its signature grape, gamay. Many of these wines are fermented in stainless steel or cement rather than oak, which puts flavors such as juicy raspberries and cherries front and center. They're often in-



# Wine

FROM PAGE 27

intended to be enjoyed soon after bottling, because fruity notes can fall back as wines age.

Elsewhere in Europe, France's Loire Valley has several grape varieties that make great chilled reds. "In the Loire, grolleau, pineau d'aunis, and even some cab franc do really well with a chill," says Nasiri. She's similarly fond of Italian varieties like schiava from Alto Adige as well as Sicilian frappato.

Or try grenache from the Central Coast of California, Australia's McLaren Vale or parts of France's Rhône Valley. "You can chill it, and it shows this elegance," says Nikita Malhotra, head sommelier of the wine festival La Paulée and a partner at Smithereens restaurant in New York City.

## Which red wines should not be chilled?

Serving temperature has an enormous impact on how wine tastes and behaves in your glass. Typically, sommeliers serve light-bodied white wines and rosés at roughly 45 to 55 degrees to amplify freshness. "You're trying to get at all those fruit notes," explains Malhotra.

Wine professionals usually pour full-bodied reds such as cabernet and zinfandel in the 55 to 65 degree range. These wines often have higher alcohol levels and more discernible tannins, and a slightly higher temperature helps keep all those components in harmony.

If you serve these big, hearty wines in the 40 to 45 degree range used for chilled reds, you risk flattening their complexity. Low temperatures can tighten tannins and create a vaguely tinny impression — "nothing you'd want from a wine," Malhotra says. "It's important not to get overly excited about chilling all your reds."

## What makes a red wine chillable?

Certain winemaking techniques reliably produce light reds with zippy flavors, too — for example, blending red and white grapes, or using carbonic maceration. The latter entails starting fermentation within each individual grape, rather than after the clusters are crushed and the juice is exposed to the tannic skins. Nicknamed carbo, "it's a good shorthand for wines that are going to be more fruit-forward and a bit lower tannin, which will all lend itself to a nice chill," says Meri Lugo, the managing partner of Domestique, a natural and low-intervention wine store near Bloomingdale in Washington, D.C.

Last year, when the Domestique team redesigned their website, they added a section devoted to chillable reds to meet rising consumer demand. In the brick-and-mortar store, people ask staffers about reds to chill "a couple of times a day," Lugo says. While low-intervention winemaking is certainly not the only way to produce reds that taste great cold, the Venn diagram of people who love natural wine and are interested in chilled reds is nearly a circle. It comes back to the playfulness and approachability of serving a red wine ice-cold, Lugo says.

But enthusiasm for this style isn't a fleeting trend. Lugo links it to the ways that generations of winery workers shared cold glasses of the light, fruity first presses of each vintage during harvest. "Those 'farmer wines' have a lot of the same characteristics as chillable reds," she says.

"All new things are old. They all have their place in history."

Whether you choose to contemplate global agricultural heritage while sipping an ice-cold carbo grenache is up to you, of course. But few things are cooler than the ways that wine connects us to far-flung people and places.



## FOOD AND DRINK

## COBBLERS, CRUMBLES, SLUMPS AND GRUNTS

*A guide to baked fruit desserts*

**By Becky Krystal**  
*The Washington Post*

**T**here are few types of food, let alone sweets, that everyone can agree on. But if I had to pick one with widespread, if not universal, appeal, it would be rustic, nostalgic and casual baked fruit desserts. You know the kind: best served warm, ideally with a scoop of vanilla ice cream, and easily made with whatever fruit you have around. As to what to call the various types? That's another matter entirely.

If you've ever wondered what the difference is between a cobbler, crisp, crumble and a buckle — oh, and let's throw the Brown Betty, slump and grunt into the mix — you're not alone. And with good reason: There's no agreed-upon definition for this class of beloved American desserts, and the names often vary by region or even family.

I appreciate this overarching definition from the 2006 edition of "Joy of Cooking" by Irma S. Rombauer, Marion Rombauer Becker and Ethan Becker that captures the breadth of the genre: "This family of desserts is based on biscuit or pie dough, dumplings, breadcrumbs, or crumbled toppings; the fruit may be cooked under, over, or inside the dough, or between dough layers. A few are adapted from European pastries, but most are American inventions, simple home cooking."

Summer is prime time for these types of desserts. The fruit is abundant and varied. The desire to celebrate it is irresistible.

"They're so comforting and nostalgic, and they make use of fruit that is often local, in season, for a brief period of time, and it's definitely 'seize the day,'" says Anne Byrn, who researched some of the most well-known options for her 2024 book, "Baking in the American South."

Also, "it's hot and it's not time for an elaborate cake," says cookbook author Virginia Willis.

Regardless of the season, home cooks appreciate the appeal of desserts that rely on pantry staples and are often flexible enough to swap the fruit as they see fit. Even better, underripe or overripe berries and stone fruit are just fine when baked into one of these dishes.

Plus, "the threshold is low," Willis says. You don't need much in the way of skill to stir together a cobbler or crisp. The low-risk, high-reward stakes make them an ideal treat for even beginning bakers.

So which one should you pick? Let's get into the differences — and similarities — between some of the most popular options.



Peach Apricot Cobbler

TOM MCCORKLE — FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

# Cobbler



PHOTO BY DEB LINDSEY — FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Blueberry Cobbler

Of all the categories of desserts here, the cobbler is the most confounding. It doesn't help that not everyone can agree on how the dish got its name. One theory is its easy-to-assemble nature, the way you can simply, well, cobble it together. Another convincing explanation I came across in my research indicates the name is more about the appearance. "Cobblers have been made since at least the mid-1800s, getting their name from the top, which looks like cobbled streets," Nathalie Dupree and Cynthia Graubart write in "Mastering the Art of Southern Cooking." "With no bottom crust and just a topping over the fruit, they are sometimes called the 'lazy girl's pie.'"

One style of the dessert features a pielike crust draped over the top. That's the kind of peach cobbler inextricably tied to the South's Black community. Byrn, who grew up eating it in Tennessee, ranks it among the top three sweets of the South,

along with poundcake and banana pudding.

Another common style of cobbler showcases biscuits or a biscuit-adjacent topping on the fruit. Byrn says this "newer" cobbler may be a product of the 1950s self-rising flour fad. Chef Scott Peacock, Lewis's co-author on "The Gift of Southern Cooking," writes that he recalls his mother even using canned biscuits for the topping.

There's also the batter cobbler, in which fruit is piled into the center of a skillet before a mix of melted butter, flour, sugar and milk gets poured over the top.

To further cement his point that in Alabama, "we called anything a cobbler that had fruit covered by a baked topping," Peacock describes the offering at one local restaurant that served peach cobbler made with canned fruit, dry Duncan Hines yellow cake mix and melted butter.

# Crumble

Here's another dessert where the distinction is clear as mud, as you've probably seen the terms "crumble" and "crisp" thrown around interchangeably. A crumble always has a pielike filling and a streusel-like topping made with flour, butter and sugar. "The butter is cut into the dry ingredients, and the mixture spooned onto the pie filling without further preparation, after which the pie is baked," according to "The Oxford Companion to Food" by Alan Davidson. "The butter melts and binds the solid ingredients into large grains, but they do not form a solid layer like a true pastry. The texture can only be described as crumbly."

After that, things get less definitive. Sometimes oats are added to the topping. Sometimes you'll find nuts in there, too, at which point you might actually have our next category of dessert.



Summer Fruit Crumble

PHOTO BY STACY ZARIN GOLDBERG — FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

# Crisp



PHOTO BY SCOTT SUCHMAN — FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Strawberry Roasted Rhubarb Crisp

There's very little daylight between crisps and crumbles, but for those who have tried to draw the line, the inclusion of oats and/or nuts in the topping may be what sets the former apart, though that's not always the case. Byrn notes that crisps are particularly well-suited to a delicate fruit such as blueberries, as they offer a saucy contrast to the crunchy topping. "An approximate ratio of three parts fruit to one part topping makes a perfect crisp," opines "Joy of Cooking." If you are looking for a shortcut, try incorporating granola into the topping along with the flour and butter.

# Buckle

A buckle is a type of cake in which the fruit may be folded into the batter or spread in a single layer. It also boasts "a generous crumbly streusel topping," "Joy of Cooking" says. "The cake buckles, or crumples, in spots from the weight of the topping before the batter sets, creating pockets of caramelized sugar and butter."



PHOTO BY JUSTIN TSUCALAS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Raspberry Buckle

# Slump/grunt



PHOTO BY SCOTT SUCHMAN— FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Peach Almond Slump

Much like crisps and crumbles, people tend to bandy about slump and grunt interchangeably. These desserts are more associated with New England, Dupree and Graubart write. Both are typically made on the stovetop and feature dumplings that steam in cooking.

“Grunts are steamed in a mold in a pot of water and inverted when served — somewhat resembling a warm fruit shortcake,” according to “Joy of Cooking.” “Slumps are cooked in a covered saucepan and served dumpling side up in bowls — more like a hot, sweet soup or stew under dumplings. If the grunt is perhaps named for the sound it makes when unmolded, the name ‘slump’ seems to describe the eventual fate of the dumplings.”

# Brown Betty

The Brown Betty (“Nobody remembers who Betty was,” says “Joy of Cooking”) leans into the thrifty nature of these fruit desserts by incorporating stale bread or dried bread-crumbs, along with plenty of butter. Many recipes specify building the fruit and crumbs in several layers, though you can also just do a single layer of each. Willis describes it as a kind of fruity bread pudding also closely affiliated with New England, which makes sense given it often stars apples or pears.



PHOTO BY JUSTIN TSUCALAS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Apple Cranberry Brown Betty

## FOOD AND DRINK

# Homebrewing helped spark the craft beer boom

## Now interest is waning

By Courtney Iseman  
Special to The Washington Post

On the first Thursday in October, the only homebrew supply shop in New York City held its final homebrew swap. John LaPolla, who owned Bitter & Esters with business partner Douglas Amport since 2011, said the event was “a love letter to our customers, and they gave the love back. It was just a giant mix of appreciation and sadness.”

Ten days later, at 5:59 p.m. on the shop's last day of operation, one of those loyal customers made the final purchase.

“People were coming in (during the final days) saying goodbye to me while I was still working,” LaPolla said. “They’d say, ‘how do you feel?’ And I’d say, ‘I don’t know, I’m still finishing it.’ Now, I feel untethered ... which is OK. It’s another chapter in life.” LaPolla said he plans to move out of the city, but first, he would attend a meeting of a local homebrew club for some closure.

The story of Bitter & Esters — the loss of both a homebrewing supplier and the community gathering place it provided — isn’t unique. Over the last few years, homebrew stores have shuttered across the country, and while the exact number is difficult to pinpoint, there’s anecdotal evidence in the announcements.

Among the 2024 casualties: Atlantic Brew Supply in Raleigh, North Carolina; Vermont Homebrew Supply in Winooski, Vermont; and Salt City Brew Supply in Salt Lake City. In late November, My Local HomeBrew Shop in Falls Church, Va., became the latest, just three months shy of its 20th anniversary.

Around 540 homebrew shops appear on the American Homebrewers Association’s directory, though many survive because they’re also hardware stores, or sell beer and wine. The business closures reflect a steep decline in homebrewing interest in the United States. The AHA’s own membership is down. It had about 45,000 members between 2016 and 2019; in a 2023 year-end annual survey, it counted only 30,000. After consecutive years of underwhelming attendance at Homebrew Con, the biggest national homebrewing event held by the



PHOTO BY CLAY WILLIAMS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

John LaPolla, co-owner of Bitter & Esters, closed the shop in 2024 after 13 years in operation.

AHA, this year’s convention was rolled into the Great American Beer Festival while the AHA decides how to proceed.

Local homebrewing groups are also downsizing. In Southern California, SoCal Cervceros club president Marvin Gomez says membership has dropped by 50 members to 52 over the past three years. Brooklyn’s Brewminaries club still counts 130 active members, but that’s also down from its peak, says president Kari Vaughn.

Where have the homebrewers gone? What does their absence say about craft beer at large, which is facing its own struggles with interest and sales? And what does a possible future for homebrewing and the community aspect that has long been central to its appeal look like?

“Homebrewing clubs provide an important social outlet,” Vaughn said. “You make friends, you learn alongside each other. There’s a great satisfaction that comes with DIY, especially when it’s something you can then share with people.”

Chris Anderson, owner of Maryland Homebrew supply shop in Columbia, says the people are what have kept her in the homebrewing world as opposed to commercialized craft beer: “I was offered different jobs in the beer industry when I was working at (Maryland Homebrew), before I bought it, but I loved this community so much I didn’t want to leave it.”

The drop-off in homebrewing and community spaces for it may feel sudden to longtime enthusiasts. For more than three

decades, homebrewing thrived as a hobby.

In 1978, President Jimmy Carter legalized the activity, which had been banned since Prohibition. The following year, Charlie Papazian founded the American Homebrewers Association. Homebrewing competitions, clubs and shops proliferated as Americans learned to make beers that weren’t available on the light lager-dominated market. Several of those hobbyists went pro, opening the first contemporary craft breweries, including Ken Grossman with Sierra Nevada Brewing Company and Jim Koch with Samuel Adams.

Homebrewing continued as a farm team for the burgeoning craft beer industry. After a 2013 law change in New York enabled taprooms to exist, frequent hobby homebrewers and Bitter & Esters regulars opened their own breweries in New York: Finback Brewery in 2014, Strong Rope Brewery in 2015 and KCBC in 2016. Gomez says SoCal Cervceros members launched California breweries Hermosa Brewing, Feathered Serpent, Brewjeria and Norwalk Brew House, among others.

Co-founder of KCBC Tony Bellis was an integral member of the Bitter & Esters community, as he went from customer to staffer. The shop opened right as he was staying home with his newborn son and was homebrewing often, while also planning a career transition into beer. “I was that homebrewer walking in, ‘I want to open a brewery,’” Bellis said. “John and Doug were probably like, ‘Oh, sure.’ But

soon, he landed his first brewing job at the now defunct Greenpoint Beer Works, and LaPolla and Amport asked if he would teach a homebrewing 101 class at the shop. “That place is really pivotal in my starting a business,” Bellis said of Bitter & Esters. He also came to meet Bobby Rolandi, working retail at the shop, who has been KCBC’s head brewer since the brewery opened.

Bellis sees Bitter & Esters as a driver of growth and diversity in homebrewing and craft beer. Not only did staff and customers end up going pro, but the shop was fertile ground for inclusive homebrew clubs like Brewminaries, which grew out of the customer base. “Suddenly there were younger people homebrewing, and more women in the homebrewing scene,” he said. “That ended up trickling down into the professional brewing world.”

By the mid-2010s, the Brewers Association counted more than 4,000 breweries across the country, and some in the industry began to worry that craft beer’s ubiquity could threaten hobby homebrewing. Anderson says while it wasn’t as significant as the current decline, she saw an early drop in homebrewing activity around 2015 to 2016 compared to what she calls a heyday in 2012.

“What changed the structure of (homebrewing) ... was access,” said Mike McGarvey, a co-founder of Washington D.C.’s 3 Stars Brewing — the brewery had a homebrew shop that closed in 2020, and the entire business shuttered in 2022. “There were a handful of breweries that were well thought of but you couldn’t get to ... then suddenly, people had options wherever they were.”

Despite the dip, homebrewing carried on. “I was asked back then if I thought breweries would hurt my business,” LaPolla said. “I thought, ‘Do restaurants hurt grocery stores?’ If you’re into something, you want to make it.”

This rang true for plenty of homebrewers, and the activity surged in the early months of the pandemic with people stuck at home. Taprooms were closed indefinitely and people were seeking busy-making activities to fill the time — alongside sourdough starters and jigsaw puzzles. Per the Associated Press, one of the best known homebrewing suppliers, Northern Brewer, reported a 40% to 50% spike in sales in the first month of the pandemic. But as restrictions lifted, many of those would-be brewers abandoned their projects just as new knitters forgot their sweater attempts.

LaPolla believes post-lockdowns, people wanted to get outside of their homes and back to enjoying food and drinks in restaurants and breweries. Now, even if their amount of discretionary spending is similar, people allocate those funds elsewhere. Some homebrewers say they are experiencing sticker shock when shopping for ingredients and deciding it's just not worth the investment. Vaughn says liquid yeast has gotten "crazy expensive," and Kendall Alvarez Eskew, owner of Jersey City homebrew shop The Thirsty Quaker, says he's noticed some suppliers have stopped selling supplies in sizes accessible to homebrewers. Sanitizing solutions no longer come in four or 16 ounces; Five Star's Defoamer once came in two-ounce packages, and now Eskew can order it only by the gallon.

Longtime homebrew enthusiasts might also just be aging out. Award-winning homebrewer Annie Johnson refers to the large percentage of homebrewers over the age of 50 when she lists factors for the decline, such as "health reasons, boredom, getting serious for retirement ... the physical nature of homebrewing — even though (some things) are automated now, it's still quite physical with a lot of lifting." A 2018 AHA study found 38% of members were from Gen X, compared to 30% Millennials and 28% boomers.

It's a generational dynamic affecting craft beer itself: Many of the old guard fans now consume less alcohol for health and lifestyle reasons. Research shows Gen Z isn't backfilling the gap — instead, they're chasing flavors across categories such as ready-to-drink cocktails and functional, nonalcoholic beverages. There's optimism about craft beer, however. Alcoholic beverage preferences tend to be cyclic, a pattern behind amaro's recent resurgence, for example. Brewers like Brett Taylor, co-founder of Brooklyn's Wild East Brewing, point to the first craft beer industry crash, in the 1990s, during which many of the first-generation breweries folded — but plenty survived, and craft beer grew bigger than ever.

"I don't think after a 9,000-year run, beer is suddenly going to fall out of favor with people, or that Americans will decide they don't like beer that tastes like anything and just want to drink macro (brewery offerings)," Taylor said.

But how much does craft beer's future hinge on homebrewing's vitality? If people aren't homebrewing, who are tomorrow's professional brewers? They might be brewers taking different pathways. Because of the brewery boom, there are more entry-level jobs that let hopeful brewers get a foot in the door. Several universities also offer an educational springboard into brewing, McGarvey notes, pointing to the Beer Brewer Professional Certificate program at the University of Richmond.



PHOTO BY CLAY WILLIAMS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

The hydrometer is used to measure the sugar content of the wort before and after fermentation. The flasks are used to make a yeast starter which gives the brewer healthy yeast and more of it.

Still, homebrewing remains a viable tool for anyone interested in going pro. McGarvey says craft beer's popularity made trade professions desirable and, even as strictly a hobby, LaPolla reasons that people often return to an interest in making things by hand, whether that's homebrewing or knitting. One such hands-on hobby is bringing a younger generation into homebrew shops right now: LaPolla, Alvarez Eskew and Anderson have had customers stocking up on

supplies for mead. The fermented honey and water-based beverage with ancient roots is more accessible for beginners than beer and has been lauded for its sustainability — instructional videos have been trending on TikTok.

"You don't have to do as much cooking (to make mead), and it takes up less room," Anderson said. She's been bringing in other supplies, too, in response to customer interest in cheese, yogurt and sourdough



PHOTO BY CLAY WILLIAMS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Home brew supplies at Bitter & Esters, New York's last homebrew shop, which closed in 2024.

starters. Alvarez Eskew also stocks ingredients for making kombucha and shrubs. At a recent Brewminaries event in Brooklyn, Vaughn says members made nonalcoholic beers, ciders and hop waters, and executive director of the AHA Julia Herz has been using her homebrewing equipment to make cherry soda, among other beverages.

Advanced brewing technology may also be a boon for homebrewing as new at-home systems can reduce initial knowledge barriers for first-time brewers. Pinter, for example, is a tabletop setup; users simply add yeast to wort and wait for fermentation. U.S. CEO of the British company Paul Benner believes the streamlined system is more welcoming.

"(Homebrewing) is an expensive hobby to get into right away," he said. "It takes up a lot of space, a lot of time, a lot of commitment. The beer quality may not be great right away for new brewers, and I think people get burned out quickly." Pinter guarantees consistent results, which Benner — a longtime homebrewer himself — hopes gets more new homebrewers into the fold, even if they then move onto traditional setups.

Some shuttered shops have moved their operations online, including Minnesota-based Northern Brewer, More Beer and Craft A Brew. But while user-friendly at-home kits and online retail options may appeal to Gen Z, these won't replace what many consider to be homebrewing's greatest benefit.

"Online, the community space is lost," Bellis said. "Bitter & Esters was a space for homebrewers to get together, do bottle shares, swap ideas — that's going to be a big miss. Because what homebrewing is all about is sharing the thing you make with other people, getting their feedback and seeing their enjoyment."



# *outdoors &* **GARDEN**

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## GARDENING



# Tips for the beginner and a guide to perennials

By Metro Editorial Services

Gardening is a popular hobby all over the world.

Ruby Home Luxury Real Estate estimates there are 71.5 million gardening households in the United States alone. That translates to around 185.9 million people engaged in some form of gardening, which places the U.S. among other countries where gardening is wildly popular, including Australia and China.

A greater number of people are showing interest in gardening, which is a rewarding hobby that's good for the mind and the body. Those who are new to gardening may need a crash course to get started.

These pointers can help anyone foster a newfound passion for gardening:

## Choose the best location

Spend time in the yard and decide where to house a garden. A far-off corner may get the most sun, but will you forget about the garden if it is too far away? Ideally, the garden should be located where it will get at least six to eight hours of sun each day. There also should be a water source nearby. The spot also should be convenient so that it is easy to go and pick your vegetables or prune your flowers. (They're yours! You did that!)

## Start small

If you're new to gardening, begin with a small garden footprint to get your feet wet. A raised garden bed can be a good starting point because it is contained and easy to maintain. As your experience (and garden) grows, you can add to the garden size the next time around.

## Amend the soil

It's possible but unlikely that the soil in the backyard is the perfect mix to grow healthy plants. It's more likely that the garden will need some soil modification. You can test the soil makeup with do-it-yourself kits or work with a garden center. A garden typically requires a mix of compost to add nutrients to the dirt; peat moss or coconut coir to help with water retention and to make the soil lighter; and vermiculite that helps to retain water.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

A compost bin set up at the same time as the garden allows gardeners to continually produce nutrient-rich food to add to the garden.

## Plant starter guide

It's best to keep a few things in mind when planning the garden. Think about what will grow well in your climate. (Michigan spans three different growing zones — 4, 5, and 6 — with the northern and western parts of the state falling into zones 4 and 5 and the southeastern region and areas along Lake Michigan in zone 6.) Consider

how big the garden will be and the size of mature plants. A small garden will not be able to accommodate corn, for example. Also, how would you like the space to look and what will be its function? Is this a purely aesthetic garden or one that will be food-bearing?

## Start seeds inside

If you'll be starting a garden from seeds, it's best to start indoors before your region's frost-free date. This way the delicate plants will get the needed care and can establish before they go outdoors in the ground. Keep them humid by covering the seedlings in plastic wrap. You can start the seeds in different containers, even empty egg cartons. Transplant to larger containers after the seedlings grow a second set of leaves. Once you're free from overnight frost, you can place the established, strong seedlings in the ground.

An automatic watering system, such as a timer hooked up to the sprinkler, can keep the garden well watered, which increases the chances of success. Then it will only be a matter of weeks before the garden can be enjoyed throughout the season.

## Think perennials as they last a long time

Gardening is a rewarding hobby that provides a great reason to get outdoors. Getting one's hands dirty in the garden often pays off with a colorful, awe-inspiring and aesthetically appealing finished product.

Perennials are plants that live multiple years. Even though perennials may die above ground each winter, their roots remain alive, which is why the colorful blooms typically return anew once warm weather makes a comeback.

Gardeners who want to capitalize on the hardiness of perennials can consider these plants for their gardens:

- **Coreopsis:** Coreopsis are perennials that thrive in a wide range of conditions, including various types of soil. So gardeners who find their soil is predominantly clay as well as those with sandy soil may be able to successfully plant coreopsis on their properties. Better Homes



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

## Tips

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& Gardens notes coreopsis are native to the United States and produce colorful blooms that can withstand hot and dry weather throughout the summer.

- Russian sage: Russian sage produce purplish-blue flowers that BHG notes retain their color for weeks. Russian sage can be planted in a variety of the hardiness zones defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and many gardening experts recommend them to gardeners whose local climates tend to be especially hot and dry.

- Hellebore: BHG notes hellebore are ideal for gardeners who want some color in the early days of spring. Hellebore, sometimes referred to as “Lenten Roses,” have an early flowering season, so their blooms, which can be pink, white, purple, yellow, green, rose or pur-

ple, can be a welcome sign in spring.

- Baptisia: Gardening experts note these purple-blooming perennials thrive in sun. Gardeners who want perennials with particularly long life expectancies can consider baptisia, as experts note they can live for many decades. Baptisia are drought-tolerant, and they can grow in soil that may not be considered great for other plants.

- Coneflower: The unique look of coneflowers has generated many enthusiasts of these perennials that bloom from early summer to fall. Coneflowers are highly adaptable, making them capable of growing in various zones and soil types. Once established, coneflowers are considered very drought-tolerant.

Perennials can add aesthetic appeal to landscapes year after year. Speak to experts at a local gardening center to identify the perfect plants for your specific garden.



## OUTDOORS

# 10 ways to get a better outdoor space without spending a lot of money

By Dina Cheney

Special to *The Washington Post*

Outdoor spaces are often treated like afterthoughts, but they should get top billing this time of year. The good news: You don't need much effort — or a ton of money — to spruce yours up.

"Even one little settee with a couple of colorful pillows can make a huge impact," said Gideon Mendelson, the founder and creative director of Mendelson Group in New York.

Here's how to freshen up your piece of the outdoors, whether it's a balcony, deck, terrace, patio or yard:

## Clean up

It's much easier to see your space's potential when it's clean and clutter-free. Start by weeding out unnecessary stuff (pun intended). Sell or donate that bike you're no longer using (maybe you'll even earn some money you can put toward this project). Prune and deadhead any plants you plan to keep. Then give the area a good cleaning. Rent or borrow a power washer to remove dirt and mildew from surfaces, said Tamara Belt, the founder and owner of Hawthorne Garden Design in Washington.

## Make a floor plan

Planning your space won't cost a dime, but the result — a more polished look — is priceless. Figure out whether you'll use the area for gardening, reading or hosting. Then "get

measuring tape and create a floor plan," Peter Dunham, the principal at Peter Dunham & Associates in Los Angeles, said in an email. He recommends cutting out pieces of paper to represent a couch, table and other key elements, then rearranging them to help you decide on a layout. "Treat outdoor spaces as you would indoor party venues," Dunham added. "Create areas that promote togetherness and conversation, even on a small scale."

## Add screening

Protect yourself from the sun with a tabletop or freestanding umbrella. Or if you're craving privacy, try a lattice panel with climbing plants, a row of containers filled with tall plants, or a decorative metal screen. To help disguise utility panels or a grimy exterior, try an artificial living wall.

## Dress up the floor

Covering a cracked cement or worn wood floor surface doesn't have to be an expensive project. Ikea makes interlocking, removable deck tiles that are a snap to install and don't require tools or adhesives. They come in wood, artificial grass or plastic that simulates wood, and range in price from \$20 to \$60 for nine square feet. (If you're in a rental, check your lease to make sure they're permitted.) Soften up hard flooring surfaces with a natural fiber or patterned indoor-outdoor pick.

## Use what you have

Chances are, you have stuff around the house that you can repurpose or refinish to use outside. "You can restain wood furniture — it's a weekend project," Belt said. "It may sound overwhelming, but once you get the supplies, it's inexpensive." Several years ago, she and her daughter revived an old wrought iron rocking chair with a coat of lime green spray paint. Or you can simply refresh your outdoor furniture, which is even easier. Buy a set of new cushions for a tired outdoor couch or use a colorful tablecloth to hide stains on a table. "Dress up simple outdoor sets from Target or Ikea with beautiful block printed tablecloths (my favorite finds are on Etsy)," Ariel Okin, the founder of Ariel Okin Interiors in New York, said in an email.

## Shop secondhand

"Don't jam (your space) up with lots of things. It's not relaxing if there's too much going on," Belt said. But if you need (or want!) additional furniture or accessories, source them from vintage shops, eBay or Facebook Marketplace. Not only will you save money, you'll avoid a sterile, generic feel. "I like outdoor space to look eclectic, not like I just bought a furniture set," Mendelson said.



CHRISTA TIPPMANN PHOTOGRAPHY

A hanging chair adds whimsy to this space.



On the porch of his Long Island home, Gideon Mendelson of Mendelson Group included teak seating, a metal mirror and console table, a ceramic garden stool, and vintage gears.

ERIC PIASECKI



## Space

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### Choose your planters wisely

If you're going to splurge on something, Belt said, planters are the place to do it. A set of coordinated vessels will help create a cohesive look, and higher quality materials, like ceramic, tend to last longer. Budget \$300 to \$500 for these pots, preferably in two or three different heights. Also consider adding some small hanging planters for extra lushness. And be leery of self-watering pots, Belt said. The name is misleading; you still have to water the plants. Plus, water can pool on the bottom, leaving your plants vulnerable to root rot.

### Buy plants that will go the distance

For her first apartment, Belt made the mistake of loading up on plants in early spring, without paying attention to their expected lifespan. Then she had to replace them twice that year as plants died off. Don't make the same costly mistake. Read labels carefully and choose varieties that will thrive in your space from spring through early fall. Also make sure they are suited for your USDA Plant Hardiness Zone and the degree of sun versus shade on your property. Drought-tolerant picks, including dead nettle, portulaca, sedum and mountain mint, are smart choices if you won't be around often to water, Belt said.

### Mind the sensory details

Drown out noisy neighbors with a small gurgling water feature. To neutralize unpleasant smells, add a few pots of aromatic herbs, like rosemary and lavender. They're inexpensive, easy to cultivate and can elevate your cooking. Plus, with your eyes closed, you might (almost) convince yourself you're in a garden in Tuscany.

### Layer lighting

Including different sources of light will add dimensionality to your space and make it more versatile. Swoop string lights overhead to illuminate the entire area. Then arrange votives, or candles in hurricanes, on a table for a warm glow. Or for a more structured look, try a couple of portable LED table lamps. Just remember to store portable lamps inside when not in use.

JEN PACKARD

A privacy screen can help carve out a space for solitude, as in this design by Tamara Belt of Hawthorne Garden Design in Washington, D.C.

## GARDENING

# A beginner's guide to vegetable gardening

By Kate Morgan

Special to *The Washington Post*

If you have a newfound interest in gardening, you're not alone. In the years since the pandemic, America has more growers than ever. But while a horticultural hobby can be rewarding, and even beneficial to your physical and mental health, starting a vegetable garden can seem a bit intimidating.

The truth, though, is that anyone can grow vegetables, whether it's in a big backyard or a tiny window box. The best time to start planning an edible harvest is in the early spring, so use these pro tips to set yourself up for success.

## Pick the right plot

Though it may seem obvious, the first step to starting a garden is figuring out where to put it. "You want a spot that's sunny, so we always suggest people pick the southern-facing side of their property," says Dan Kemper, a master trainer at the Rodale Institute. "If you can get eight to 12 hours of light, that's what we would consider full sun. That's where most plants will do their best."

There are a lot of ways to create a garden: if you have the space, you can sacrifice some lawn or build raised beds. If you don't want to put plants directly in the ground, you can also grow veggies in containers. That's a great way to get started, says Nancy Awot-Traut, horticulture expert with seed and plant company Burpee.

"I would recommend new gardeners go with containers first, especially if they're in a smaller space like a condo," she says. "If you are doing a raised bed or going into the ground, don't go too big. I always tell people to start with under 50 square feet."

You can always add on to your garden, but the more space — and plants — you have, the harder you'll have to work. "There's watering and weeding and looking for bugs, and a lot of people don't really want to put that much time into it," Awot-Traut says.

## Source the right soil

Once you've chosen the spot, you should assess the soil. A good growing medium should be rich and loose, without a lot of rocks or roots, and the dirt should absorb water without holding onto too much of it.

"If the soil is constantly wet, that's an issue," Kemper says. "We want to have nice drainage. If your existing soil is too wet, you can plan to make raised beds where



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

you just put soil on top of the ground so that it can be a little bit better drained."

There's plenty more to learn about your soil beyond its moisture content, Kemper adds, and there's an easy way to determine what you're working with. "At least once every three years, if not once a year, you should be doing a soil test," he says. For a small fee, some state agriculture departments offer testing, as do the local extension services of many universities. "If you have low nutrient levels, you should be adding in compost or manure or some type of organic fertilizer," Kemper says.

Even if you're buying high-quality soil and compost, either in bags or by the truckload, keep in mind that you eventually will need to add nutrients.

"The soil needs to be fed," Kemper says. "People get the idea that they're going to be 'natural,' and never use fertilizer or manure or anything. They'll end up tapping out the nutrients of the soil and then nothing will grow. You always need to think of your soil as the crop itself: you have to keep feeding it because it's alive."

## Pick the right plants

Deciding what to grow — and when to plant it — starts with determining your hardiness zone. The U.S. Agriculture Department maintains a map that breaks the nation into growing zones based on temperatures and average first and last frost dates. Knowing your zone can keep you from planting too early, a common mistake that often results in plants getting zapped by a late frost. Even veteran gardeners should take a second look at the

map: For the first time since 2012, the USDA made updates for this growing season that moved roughly half the country into a new zone.

Michigan spans three different growing zones — 4, 5, and 6 — with the northern and western parts of the state falling into zones 4 and 5 and the southeastern region and areas along Lake Michigan in zone 6.

Other than simply paying attention to the forecast, Awot-Traut says there are some basic ways to know when it's warm enough to plant. "If you're sitting on the ground in your garden and you're cold, it's too cold for plants," she says. "Or, you can stick your finger in the soil about an inch deep. If you can comfortably leave it there for a minute, it's warm enough to plant."

Seed packets are often printed with detailed information about when to plant, and whether seeds should be sown directly in the garden or started inside. "For a first-time gardener, I'd say if a seed packet says to start indoors, put it back," Awot-Traut says. "It's a couple of steps up because you need seed-starting equipment, and among beginners I see a lot of failures, so I don't recommend it."

Having a successful first season can be a big confidence-builder, so experts suggest sticking with easy-to-grow varieties at first. "I recommend summer squash or zucchini, bush beans, cucumbers, lettuce and cherry tomatoes," Awot-Traut says. "It is really hard to fail with a cherry tomato."

Some plants are a bit more finicky, Kemper says. Broccoli and onions, for example, aren't plants he suggests to newbies.

On the other hand, "hot peppers are great starter plants," he says. "They can take a hurricane or a locust swarm and still come out on top."

And whether it's your first or 50th growing season, Kemper says, everyone should be growing garlic. "I don't think there's anything easier," he says. "You pull off a clove, stick it in the ground in the fall, mulch it, and wait for the next summer's harvest. You don't have to do anything else: Just set it and forget it."

A vegetable garden also doesn't have to be limited to, well, vegetables. Adding some flowers and herbs can attract beneficial bugs and deter pests. "You can plant something like marigolds, which are great for attracting pollinators," Awot-Traut says. "They also help to keep some of the bugs away without worrying about spraying."

The most important piece of advice when it comes to choosing plants is simple, she adds: "Don't plant anything you don't want. Radishes are easy to grow, but if you don't like radishes, don't plant them!"

## Have the right attitude

There are lots of growing practices that can make a garden successful in its first year, and no shortage of advice and resources to help new hobbyists learn the ropes and avoid common pitfalls. Planting things too close together, for instance, can promote bacterial and fungal growth. Healthy plants need space to grow, Kemper says. "Spacing them out allows maximum airflow, and that reduces disease."

Pests and birds can also hurt your harvest, but netting or row covers can protect the plants. Weeds can rapidly get out of control, but mulching can help with that, Kemper says. "We use straw or leaves raked off the lawn," he says. "You can use wood chips. Some people get creative with newspapers or cardboard."

But no matter how hard you try, the reality of gardening is that something will probably go wrong. "You might need to do some experimenting," he says, "which means a little bit of success and failure."

Failure — whether it's an herb that withers, a tomato that never fruits or a squash bug invasion — is part of the hobby, say the pros, and it's the best way to learn. It's bound to happen, Awot-Traut says, so don't let it stop you from growing.

"To start, you don't have to spend a lot of money and you don't need a lot of things," she says. "If you want to be a gardener, wherever you are, you just have to start gardening."

## GARDENING

# How to grow your best tomato

By Kate Morgan

Special to The Washington Post

The tomato might just be the quintessential summer produce. It's the first thing many new gardeners want to plant, and some growers spend decades trying to perfect it.

It's a staple in cuisines around the world, and with more than 10,000 varieties, there's almost assuredly a tomato for everyone. And whichever kind you choose, it will taste better homegrown.

"What you enjoy fresh and warm from your garden is so markedly different from what you can buy in the store," says Scott Daigre, a California-based gardener and producer of "Tomatomania!" billed as the world's largest tomato seedling sale. "And what a great-looking garden prize. Yeah, cucumbers are cool, but a big fat heirloom tomato? That's sexy."

Daigre compares tomato cultivation to fashion. "Every year, you've got to have that new trendy thing, and that's cool and fun." But there's also something nostalgic about tomatoes, he adds: The flavor of an heirloom might transport you to your grandfather's garden or a childhood Fourth of July barbecue. "It goes way beyond the fruit," he says, "and gets at family, and celebrations and all these things the tomato signifies."

Whether your garden is in its first year or its 50th, use these expert tips to make this your best tomato season yet.

## Pick your plants

First, consider what you plan to do with your harvest. If you want to make a big batch of sauce, go for something like a classic Roma or San Marzano. For a sweet, abundant snack, pick a cherry or grape tomato. If you want big, colorful slices, any number of heirloom varieties might fit the bill.

Also think about where you intend to put your plants, and how much sun and space they'll have,



PHOTOS COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

says Craig LeHoullier, a North Carolina-based gardening educator and author of "Epic Tomatoes."

"If you have eight hours of sun, you can grow any tomato," LeHoullier says. "But the key to remember is the bigger the tomato, the more hours of sun you need."

If you intend to grow a massive Gigantomo or Mortgage Lifter to enter in the county fair, you'll need all-day exposure. But "for people who only have two or three hours of sun on their back porch," LeHoullier adds, smaller varieties like cherry tomatoes can thrive in limited light.

Next, think about space. There

are two main tomato types: determinate and indeterminate. "Space-challenged gardeners or canners may want to look at determinate varieties like Roma," LeHoullier says. "They're well behaved, and perfect for those cone-shaped tomato cages because they'll stay nicely within the bounds of that. But they put out their crop in a short time frame: A Roma will only grow three or four feet tall, and then you'll pick 25 pounds of tomatoes in a one- or two-week period."

An indeterminate provides fruit all season long, but it's much more unruly. "Probably 95 percent of tomatoes are indetermi-

nate; they grow monstrously tall and all over the place," LeHoullier says. "You need a strategy for how to corral them." That usually means more robust support than a store-bought tomato cage, such as an elaborate system of staking or trellising.

Tomatoes can take a long time to go from seed to ready-to-plant, so in most USDA hardiness zones they should be started from seed indoors in February or March. Many gardeners skip this step, opting instead to buy seedlings from a local nursery or greenhouse.

There are a few common errors to avoid: First, don't be tempted

to buy the biggest one. A slightly smaller plant is more likely to develop a strong root system once it's in its permanent pot or plot. But don't buy the smallest plants, either. Look for straight, healthy stems about the thickness of a pencil, and leaves with no yellow or brown spots.

## Plant tomatoes in the proper place

Tomato plants need high-quality, nutrient-dense soil, but it doesn't have to be in the ground; tomatoes lend themselves very well to container gardening, Daigre says. Fill containers with a premium potting soil, he suggests, "and that means not cheap. Cheap potting soils are dust. You want something with a lot of ingredients: bat guano, forest products, oyster shell, lobster shell ... whatever you can get."

And it doesn't have to go into a traditional plant pot. "Anything that holds water and also drains can be a tomato container, as long as it's big," Daigre says. In addition to giving the roots ample room to grow, "it's important that you get that plant enough real estate so that it's not hot one minute, cold the next, or wet one minute, dry the next," he adds. "I've seen people plant in old troughs, buckets of various kinds, baskets of various kinds. It just depends on what's in the garage and what's big enough."

Daigre does recommend lighter-colored containers, which absorb less heat on a sunny day. "In a black pot on concrete or asphalt, the sun just fries the roots all summer," he says. "One of our mantras in container gardening is 'Guard the pot.' When the summer gets hot, that means insulate: Push other plants around it, put a canvas around it, put some old curtains around it. Then your plant's in a container more like the ground, its roots are deep and cool, and it can concentrate on making tomatoes."

## Protect your tomato plants

The plants need a lot of food to produce tasty tomatoes. Daigre suggests adding a tiny amount of liquid fertilizer each time you water.

Once they're established, tomato plants are fairly hardy, but they're still susceptible to fungi and other diseases, not to mention hungry pests. Some common problems include blossom end rot, which causes a soft black spot on the bottom of the tomato and "is not a disease," according to LeHoullier, "but a plant's reaction to being stressed while it's growing. That stress interrupts calcium uptake." Reduce stress in the hottest part of the day by installing a soaker hose or drip irrigation system.

You can reduce other diseases by spacing the plants far apart and ensuring good air circulation and sun exposure, but "anybody who grows tomatoes is going to experience two things that makes the leaves ugly," LeHoullier says. He points to two fungi — early blight and Septoria leaf spot. The former causes drooping, yellowed leaves; the latter forms small brown and black dots or grayish areas. Both can be dealt with by removing affected leaves to prevent the fungus from spreading.

"Your plant will be fine," LeHoullier says, "with some garden discipline and hygiene." It's also important to protect the plants from pests and critters. Deer are the worst problem, he adds, "because they'll eat your garden up. The only thing I've found (that works to deter deer), other than a really tall fence or an electric one, is a motion-detector sprinkler."

Most gardens will have aphids — small green or red insects that gather on stems and under leaves — but they're not a major concern, LeHoullier says. "Eventually, ladybugs will come in and take care of all those aphids."

But remove hornworms — large green caterpillars with white stripes — immediately. "Take them off and put them in your bird feeder," says LeHoullier. Unless, that is, they have what looks like grains of rice stuck to them. Those are the larvae of a predatory wasp, and they'll take care of any worms you miss.



## Water tomatoes wisely

Once summer is in full swing and tomato plants are in their heaviest production windows, they need less water. "In the early part of the season, the plant is putting water into stems and roots and leaves," Daigre says, so plants in the ground should be watered deeply about every three days, and potted plants once or twice a day.

"At the end of the season, the priority changes," he says, "and a lot of that water's going into the fruit. So, if we get freaked out at the end of the season thinking, 'My plant needs more water because it's got 53 tomatoes,' and run out with the hose every 15 minutes, well, it's putting all that water into the tomatoes, and you're not getting the product that you could have."

Water just enough to keep the



plant from looking droopy, he says.

## Plan for next year's garden

Once the fruit ripens, it's time to harvest and enjoy your tomatoes — and start thinking about how to grow them even better next year. That's part of the fun, LeHoullier says. Many gardeners grow tomatoes all their lives, constantly working to perfect the craft.

"On one hand, tomatoes can be as tricky as roses," he says. "But a

gardener who pays attention, really treats it like a hobby and loves to spend an hour a day looking at their plants can do well."

But, he adds, sometimes plants just don't survive, or they barely produce. "Gardeners should always remember this is just this year: The only way for a gardener to learn is usually to screw something up. Next year is another garden, where you can try different varieties, try growing them different ways, experiment and learn even more."



OUTDOORS

# *alone with*



# *nature*

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

# IT MAY ALLEVIATE SOME LONELINESS

By Meeri Kim

*The Washington Post*

Loneliness has become a global public health concern. In the United States, then-Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy issued a public health advisory on loneliness, stating that the risk for premature death from loneliness is akin to smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day. Countries including the United Kingdom and Japan have appointed “ministers of loneliness” to help tackle the problem.

The adverse health outcomes linked to loneliness, including anxiety and depression and a greater risk of heart disease and dementia, are many and well-documented. However, finding effective solutions has been a challenge. It’s unclear whether person-based interventions like cognitive behavioral therapy or social skills training actually help.

What if, instead of trying to “fix” the individual, strategies focused on shaping the environment in a way that facilitates social connection?

Recently, researchers have been trying to leverage nature as a way to bring people together and reduce negative feelings about social isolation. They say living in what is known as a “lonelygenetic environment” — one dominated by cars and concrete instead of grass and trees — can cause or aggravate loneliness.

Even if you live in a lonelygenetic environment, experts say, spending just an hour or two in nature per week — whether in the form of a park, botanical garden or your own backyard — may help people feel less isolated.

“Much research emphasizes the absence of quality relationships, certain personality characteristics like introversion, and a perceived lack of social skills as determinants of loneliness. This has resulted in a conventional narrative of blame, shame, and weak solutions,” said Xiaoqi Feng, professor of urban health and environment at the University of New South Wales in Australia. “But we are not destined to be lonely — it is the environments we create that



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

are lonelygenetic.”

## Changing how people think about loneliness

Feng, who coined the term “lonelygenetic environment” in 2022, wants to change how people think about loneliness. Instead of stigmatizing loneliness as a failing, she says the condition is a natural outcome of urban planning and societal systems that have long neglected human health and social needs.

For example, dependency on cars for transportation limits the spontaneous meetings with other people that can happen in a walkable neighborhood. Lack of tree cover leaves residents more exposed to heat and rain, discouraging them from spending time outdoors in public spaces. And having no nearby parks leaves people deprived of a “third place” outside of the home and workplace to engage with members of the community.

“Neighborhoods that are cooler because of trees, that are beautiful because of greenery — they get people outside and physically active. They get people more likely to trust each other, independent of political or other divides, and talk,” said Matthew Browning, associate professor of behavioral, social and health sciences at Clem-

son University. “And when we feel bonded to our community, we feel less lonely.”

In a 2024 study, Browning and his colleagues found that greater residential green space was associated with a reduced risk of loneliness in a group of 8,383 middle-aged and older adults. In general, the term “green space” refers to open areas covered with vegetation, such as parks, gardens and natural landscapes. They used satellite imagery to calculate the density of vegetation in a given area and measured the proportion of public parks. The results held even after controlling for possible confounders such as income, education and age.

Similarly, Feng and her colleagues looked at the effects of urban greening in a 2021 study involving 8,049 city dwellers in Australia. Green space was measured as the percentage of land cover of parks, nature reserves and other protected or conserved areas within circular regions up to a mile from their homes. Having 30% green space in the surrounding region was associated with 26% reduced incidence of loneliness over four years in adults generally and 52% in those living alone.

More recently, the researchers have investigated the amount of

time people spend in nature and its relationship with loneliness. A 2024 study involving 3,043 Australian adults found that participants who spent more time in green spaces or blue spaces — outdoor areas that include water such as oceans, lakes and rivers — were more likely to feel relief from loneliness. Just one to two hours of being in nature per week was associated with a 69% increase in the odds of finding relief at four months and 110% at 16 months compared with less than one hour.

“There is some evidence that those who spend time in nature are less likely to report being lonely,” said Julianne Holt-Lunstad, professor of psychology and neuroscience at Brigham Young University. “But those are correlations, so then we have to understand why would that be the case, and if you put people in nature, does that actually reduce loneliness?”

## How nature may help reduce loneliness

Holt-Lunstad, who studies the link between social connection and health, suggests a number of possible mechanisms. Being in public spaces such as parks or hiking trails increases the chances of social interaction and can foster a sense of feeling like you’re a part of something bigger than yourself, such as the natural world or humanity. Exposure to natural environments may also lower levels of stress and anxiety.

One proposed approach for tackling loneliness as a public health issue is through social prescribing, where physicians connect their patients with nonmedical services in the community similar to how they prescribe medication. An ongoing global research project called Recetas — “Reimagining Environments for Connection and Engagement: Testing Actions for Social Prescribing in Natural Spaces” — is putting nature-based social prescribing to the test in six countries with an aim to reduce loneliness and improve quality of life.

Recetas, led by environmen-

tal health researcher Jill Litt at the Barcelona Institute for Global Health, has recruited 1,200 people, who have reported feeling lonely in a survey, for participation in group activities in urban green spaces. The activities include visiting gardens, birdwatching, park walks, bike rides, and exploring area forests.

## How to use nature to be less lonely

Other expert tips for using nature as a remedy for loneliness include:

- Dedicate a little time to nature each week. As little as one to two hours per week could be enough to benefit, Feng said, and it doesn’t have to involve rigorous physical activity. “Do anything you find pleasant: sitting, walking, birdwatching, drawing, noticing the beauty of natural landscapes,” she said. “Give yourself permission to take time out from the usual daily demands.”

- Nature comes in many forms. An ongoing study by Browning and his colleagues investigates the amount of time a representative sample of Americans spends outdoors in nature. “What we find is that nature is, for most people, not going to a national or even a state or local park,” he said. “It’s watching their kids play soccer outside or grilling in the backyard. These places are all nature.”

- Move meetups from indoors to outdoors. Instead of meeting a friend at a restaurant or bar, try taking a neighborhood walk or sitting at a park bench together.

- Join an outdoor class or club. Check your area parks and recreation department or join a walking, hiking or biking group to meet people with shared interests.

- Being alone is okay, too. Being in nature by yourself can still have positive effects, such as stress reduction and improved mood.

“Contact with nature creates a space for restoration, recovery, and connection,” Litt said. “It allows people to open up, feel a sense of connection with others, and experience the rhythms and cycles of life.”

## GARDENING

# Grow your mental well-being and cultivate friends

By Richard Sima

The Washington Post

Looking for a simple change that can improve your physical, mental and emotional health? Try gardening.

People garden indoors and out, in different weather and climes and with different intensities and goals. Research consistently shows that gardening has a positive effect on mental health and well-being. And emerging research suggests that gardening may also be a way into healthy behavioral changes writ large.

Why is gardening such a healthy hobby? Research suggests there are two main pathways that lead gardeners to mental well-being. One is through the connection with nature and its aesthetic beauty. But another, perhaps surprisingly, is how gardening can also be a way for us to connect with other people.

"I feel like it's just about bringing the pieces back together of what makes us human," said Jonathan Kingsley, senior lecturer of health promotion at Swinburne University of Technology in Australia.

## Why people enjoy gardening

Gardening can be a rich, multisensory experience, and gardeners typically cite the gardens as a source of pleasure and joy, escape or curiosity and learning.

"It's the taste, the texture, the sensation ... wind on your face and your hair, just feeling the elements of nature. And it helps people feel alive, awakening in some way," said Jill Litt, a senior researcher at the Barcelona Institute for Global Health. "These are things that are very therapeutic."

Recent research suggests that the smells of nature may impact well-being, and nature sounds such as birdsong also boost mental health.

Like other nature-based activities, gardening may derive some of its benefits from reducing stress. The attention restoration theory hypothesizes that natural stimuli may decrease mental fatigue by gently holding our attention with "soft fascination."

But one trait that makes gardening stand out is that it "requires ac-



COURTESY, OAKLAND COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Sheriff's deputies work with Pontiac children at Micah 6's community garden as part of the deputies' Plant the Seed outreach initiative.

tive participation" and "getting the hands in the dirt," said Litt, who's also a professor of environmental studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder. "You have to do something."

With weeding, watering, digging, sowing, pruning and other such horticultural duties, gardening can be a physically demanding hobby. And physical exercise has also been shown to improve mental health.

## Growing greens and cultivating connections

Gardening may not only help connect us to nature, but with other humans. Community gardening in a shared space can build trust, as people look after one another's plots of land, and offer help and advice. This social growth is slow and steady, grounded by a shared purpose, a sense of belonging and learning. "All of it's textbook on how you build strong relationships," Litt

said. And the "garden calls them to come back, because they have a responsibility."

But even gardening at home is linked to greater social connectedness. In earlier research, Litt and her colleagues found that home gardeners were more socially involved — more likely to communicate with local elected officials or participate in parent-teacher associations, for example — than nongardeners.

Home gardeners were also more likely to positively rate the aesthetics of their neighborhood. Both the increased social involvement and aesthetics ratings were associated with better health. Participating in community gardening further enhanced these effects.

Other research has found that gardening in the front yard, where the fruits of your labor are more visible, may also foster social connections and better mental health, said Lauriane Suyin Chalmin-Pui, an independent researcher in Britain specializing in the influence of

gardening on well-being.

In one study, Chalmin-Pui and her colleagues transformed 38 bare front yards into gardens for 42 participants. Three months later, the study participants reported lower stress and had healthier cortisol patterns.

The gardens provided more opportunities for participants to bump into their neighbors, and the plants provided an easy conversation starter. When Chalmin-Pui followed up with the participants after a year and a half, she found that people had gotten to know their neighbors.

Some had lived on the same street for 10 years. "But it was only after they both got plants in their front yard that they actually struck up a conversation," Chalmin-Pui said.

Chalmin-Pui recalled another study participant who was dealing with mental health issues and physical disability. The woman told her that the plants were a "lifesaver" and that "it was the first time that she had felt human in years."

"She felt that she was keeping them alive," Chalmin-Pui said. "And the fact that she was keeping them alive meant that she was capable of doing something."

## Gardening as a way to lasting behavioral change

Many of the studies investigating the health benefits of gardening are observational and correlational, so it is difficult to know whether it was the gardening that caused the health changes or whether certain types of people who already had these health behaviors were more drawn to gardening.

In the first randomized controlled trial testing the effect of community gardening on health, Litt and her colleagues worked with 37 community gardens in the Denver and Aurora, Colorado, area to more directly test how gardening impacts health. For the study, 291 participants who had not gardened within the past two years were randomly selected to receive a community garden plot or remain on the waitlist.

Compared to waitlisted partici-

pants, those who gardened had increased moderate to vigorous physical activity — on average, 40.6 minutes more per week. They also consumed more fiber — about 1.4 grams of roughage each day. After one season of gardening, they also reported lower levels of stress and anxiety.

Though the size of behavioral change was modest, it was a tangible start in line with other health behavior interventions. "We see gardens as an agent of health behavior change," Litt said.

After the data collection ended, the waitlist participants were also given a garden plot, and over half started gardening the following season, Litt said.

## How much gardening do you need?

Researchers are still digging up the details on what "dose" of gardening reaps the most mental health benefit.

In a study published last year surveying 4,919 middle-aged and older adults in Australia, Kingsley and his colleagues reported that gardening for at least 2.5 hours each week was associated with better self-reported mental well-being and life satisfaction. These benefits were stronger for adults 64 and older.

The time in your garden oasis is "competing against other forces that are impacting your mental health every day," Kingsley said. Though the study was correlational, Kingsley theorizes that 2.5 hours per week in the garden may be a sweet spot to meet that threshold.

For beginners, you can start small. Just a few potted plants indoors is still gardening. Some plants, like mint, are vigorous growers and may be easier for beginner gardeners to keep alive. But growing plants you personally enjoy is probably key, Chalmin-Pui said.

And don't be afraid to get your hands dirty and make mistakes.

Gardening is "a kind of trial and error and just experience thing, which is life," Kingsley said. "You'll have lots of failures and wins in this. And that's just what life is."

## GARDENING

# SIZE MATTERS

## These gardeners have one goal: Grow absolutely massive veggies

By Kate Morgan

Special to The Washington Post

When it's time to pick his pumpkins, Eric Miller throws a party. Friends and neighbors arrive at his backyard in the Milwaukee suburbs, gathering in a patch about half the size of a regulation basketball court. It's enough space to produce dozens of pumpkins, but Miller grows exactly two. Harvesting them is a delicate operation involving straps, lifting rings and a borrowed bit of heavy machinery, because these pumpkins are behemoths. Last fall, he managed a personal best of 1,526 pounds.

Miller, 45, is part of a community of gardeners with one goal in mind — to grow massive produce. They arrive to state fairs and other competitive events with giant onions, tomatoes, leeks, beets, eggplants and more, all chasing the glory of a record-breaker.

There are colossus cultivators all over the globe, but much of the largest produce on record was grown in a U.S. state that's not typically known for its agriculture.

"Alaska has, like, super-extreme daylight hours in the summertime," says AnnMarie Young, a 24-year-old painter who moved to Anchorage four years ago. "Some parts of the state get 24 hours of daylight, which make vegetable growing really amazing. The plants just don't know when to stop, so they get really big."

Each year, the Alaska State Fair hosts what Young calls "the Super Bowl" of giant cabbages. In 2024, she attended a cabbage-growing class, "just for giggles," she says, and left with a seedling of her own that she tended throughout the summer.

"By the time August came along, I had a pretty big cabbage in my backyard," she says. "It was the size of a basketball. It was huge, and I was getting really excited, telling all my friends they needed to show up to the competition, and that I would probably place."

Of 13 entries, Young's 16.4-pound cabbage came in dead last; still, she was proud.

"It was a great time," she says. "I could not get the smile off my face."

The winner, with a cabbage that weighed



PAVEL BEDNYAKOV — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Alexander Chusov poses with his national record-breaking pumpkin weighing 1,801 pounds prior to the exhibition of giant vegetables at The Moscow State University Apothecaries Garden in Moscow, Russia, on Sept. 13, 2024.

close to 98 pounds, was legendary giant-vegetable grower Scott Robb. But he still fell short of his own world record of 138.25 pounds, set at the 2012 Alaska State Fair. Robb also holds the world record for kale (105 pounds, set in 2007), and his 39-pound turnip held the record from 2004 until 2021 (the current record turnip was nearly 64 pounds).

Young documented her Alaskan cabbage-growing process on social media, and the video she made about her last-place finish went viral, with more than 13 million views between Instagram and TikTok.

### A deep-rooted legacy

Kevin Fortey, a gardener in Wales, faces much different growing conditions than Alaska's midnight sun.

"In the U.K., no one year — no one day — is the same," he says. "The problem with our climate is we're not blessed with sunshine, so we have to grow a lot of things indoors, and start plants very early, trying to get things

oversized."

Fortey, 46, owes his interest in giant vegetables to his late father, who started a friendly pumpkin growing contest with his buddies at the pub in the 1980s. Within a few years, Fortey says, "the pumpkins were getting so big they couldn't fit them through the pub doors."

Carrying on his father's legacy has made Fortey something of a local celebrity. He has secured a dozen world records for various vegetables, and he ships seeds and gives talks to growers all over the world.

"We've even engaged with growers in Oman and Kuwait, and they're trying to set up competitions over there," Fortey says. "It's quite difficult to grow in sand," or where temperatures routinely climb over 100 degrees, "but they're growing hydroponically and finding a way."

The building blocks of a big harvest are simple, Miller says: Pick a seed with good genetics, enrich your soil and protect the plant.

Once vegetables get to a certain size, he says, "they kind of just want to rot and die



AL GRILLO — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Alaska gardener Gene A. Dinkel checks out the scale that weighs his cabbage at 91.6 pounds to place the giant vegetable as the largest cabbage in the Giant Cabbage Weigh-Off at the Alaska State Fair in Palmer on Sept. 3, 1999.

on you."

He keeps fans pointed at strategic points on his pumpkins to try to ward off problems with fungus or rot. But gardening — even at a grand scale — is unpredictable.

"A squirrel can come in and chew away a cucumber. Plants can wilt or die," Fortey says. "When we get too much rainfall, something like a pumpkin or marrow (a mature zucchini) can split. We're really battling against nature."

### A heavyweight hobby

Fortey secured one of his records with a 200-pound marrow and another with a 53-pound beet. The current pumpkin world record holder, horticulturalist Travis Gienger, turned up at the 2023 Half Moon Bay pumpkin weigh-off near San Francisco with a 2,749-pound entry.

But getting there isn't easy. It's a time-consuming hobby. "Between May and September

# Massive

FROM PAGE 47

or October, I'm pretty much spending an hour per day per plant," Miller says.

It's thirsty work, too: He estimates each of his pumpkin plants drinks between 100 and 150 gallons of water each day.

And sometimes, all that effort leads to heartbreak.

"In 2023, I had a really good one growing, and I lost it right around Labor Day weekend," Miller says.

A heat wave led to premature ripening and rot. "It was right around 1300 or 1400 pounds when I lost it," he says.

In that case, he dug a hole and buried the pumpkin before it could get offensively smelly.

Most years, after they're weighed, Miller carves and displays the pumpkins before eventually composting.

"After the vegetables are weighed and displayed at the Alaska State Fair for a week, they donate them to the Alaska Wildlife Center," Young says, "and there's an event where all the bears and moose and musk ox and bison are just ravaging these giant pumpkins and cabbages."

Fortey tries to ensure his produce has purpose, too. His record-setting marrow, he says, was donated to a local food bank.

"I think a lot about what you can do with the vegetables afterward. It's not just about growing — it's about eating," Fortey says. "Each of the food bank parcels got just one slice."

For Fortey, the world records are nice, but his passion around giant vegetables is more about bringing people together.

"It's about getting people to dig in the dirt, rather than sitting and worrying about the world," he says. "It's an intergenerational activity that's getting some community back into our world."

At Young's cabbage class, she says, her instructor told her that in giant cabbage competitions, "everybody is an old-timer, so they're trying to spark young people's interest."

She's already making plans to start her seeds early this spring. Last year's cabbage taught her a lot, she says, and even if she gets another last-place finish, Young says she's hooked on the hobby.

"I think what's great is that anybody can do this," she says. "You don't have to be athletic; you don't have to be talented. If you have a backyard with sunlight, there's nothing stopping you."

## OUTDOORS

# This man picked up e-biking at age 94. In 2 years, he rode 2,000 miles

By Sydney Page

The Washington Post

Ed McLaughlin, 94, noticed one of his neighbors riding an electric bicycle, and he wanted one, too. Just months after undergoing a hip replacement, McLaughlin got one for himself.

"You need to exercise every day," said McLaughlin, now 97, adding that he prefers cycling to indoor fitness activities. "It's a lot more interesting to see the wildlife and feel the wind and sun and fresh air."

He said it's never too late to take up a new hobby.

"It's easy to sit and spend your time in front of the TV, but pretty soon, you will lose your muscles and interests, and not function as well," McLaughlin said.

Now, he rides his bike every morning with his neighbor Jim Stone, 78, who gave him the e-bike idea.

Both men are residents at Good Samaritan Society-St. Martin Village, a retirement community in Rapid City, South Dakota. They ride about 6.5 to 7 miles per day together.

Their e-bikes are equipped with motors that make pedaling easier. They still get exercise, but there's less strain on their muscles. McLaughlin opted for a tri-cycle, which has more stability and balance than a two-wheeled bike.

"We just started going, and we've been going together ever since," said Stone, who moved to the retirement community with his wife three years ago from Richmond. "In two years' time, we've gone 2,000 miles."

Over the years of riding together, the men have become close friends.

"A lot of our interests are similar," McLaughlin said. "It was a natural friendship."

Every morning, they meet for breakfast, then they ride together. They rarely miss a day.

"There's a park at the halfway point, and we stop for a little bit and watch the kids play on the play-



PHOTOS COURTESY GOOD SAMARITAN SOCIETY-ST. MARTIN VILLAGE

Ed McLaughlin and Jim Stone have become close friends through their rides.



Ed McLaughlin, 97, on his e-bike, which he rides every day for about 7 miles.

ground," Stone said. "Then we finish off with a coffee at the lodge."

Occasionally, when they're feeling ambitious, they'll do a 20-mile ride.

"He never thought he'd do that again in his life, and we've done it more than once," Stone said of McLaughlin.

McLaughlin, an Air Force veteran, was the mayor of Rapid City from 1991 to 1997. He then became a public school principal and su-



Ed McLaughlin and Jim Stone riding together last summer.

perintendent, and later a college instructor. When he and Stone bike, it's common for passing drivers to honk, wave or pull over to greet them.

"He knows everyone," Stone said of McLaughlin, who has lived at Good Samaritan Society-St. Martin Village for 10 years. McLaughlin's wife died in 2016, and he lives on his own.

McLaughlin said he has always enjoyed biking, though it became a serious hobby only over the past two years. He also regularly takes

yoga and water aerobics classes, as well as art lessons.

"I think it's important that a person find an activity they enjoy," McLaughlin said. Since biking daily, "I feel better," he said, explaining that he feels stronger and more mobile.

Although e-bikes and e-trikes are less physically strenuous than regular bikes, they are still great for fitness and can improve cardiovascular health, while reducing the risk of injury. Studies show that staying busy — whether through work, hobbies or volunteering — improves longevity.

While it often becomes harder to do certain activities as you get older, "you have to learn to adjust," said McLaughlin, who has five children, six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

For him, adjusting meant swapping a traditional bicycle for an e-tricycle — and making it part of his daily routine.

"Keep finding things that you can do and do those things on a regular basis to maintain your strength," McLaughlin advised.

Stone — who is also a veteran and spent most of his career running restaurants, then a printing company before retiring three years ago — said McLaughlin is a source of inspiration for him.

"It has put more spark in his life when we get out and have a good time," Stone said, adding that he has seen McLaughlin's physical condition steadily improve over the years. "I never thought I'd be here at this time, let alone looking at him 15 years beyond me."

"If he can do it, I can do it," Stone continued. "We push each other."

Their enthusiasm has gotten others in the retirement community moving, too.

"Seeing them together and watching them pedal ... I think it gives them confidence to try new things as well," said Jana McCorden, senior director of Good Samaritan Society-St. Martin Village. "I think it helps their overall quality of life."