

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2018

FREE

AT HOME

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Dip in

Household helper: More than 100 fun and useful tips

You can win: A kid-friendly Valentine's waffle maker

It's winter: And that's one good reason to party

CALENDAR

Things for you to make and do

Friday, Jan. 12: Rip & Sip, a landscape collage workshop with Debbie Livingston, from 7 to 9 p.m. at Juxtapose Gallery, 58 Elm St., Westfield. This is not your run-of-the-mill drinking art class. Professional grade art supplies, wine and refreshments plus a discount on custom framing of your work are included in the \$60 fee. All skill levels welcome. Must register at (908) 232-3278, or visit JuxtaposeGallery.com.

Monday, Jan. 15: Many communities will host Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service activities. See spfmlkday.wildapricot.org for volunteer opportunities in Scotch Plains and Fanwood. From 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., they include collecting and sorting charitable donations, making health kits for those served by Family Promise of Union County, serving soup at an event for seniors and more.

Monday, Jan. 15: "Clearing the Way for Spring," from 9 a.m. to noon at Reeves-Reed Arboretum, 165 Hobart Ave., Summit. Honor the memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. in a Day of Service volunteer event. Dress warmly, wear sturdy shoes and bring a refillable water bottle for a morning of outdoor work. Work gloves and water will be provided. For ages 14 and up. Must register at (908) 273-8787, ext. 1616, or email t.cassin@reeves-reedarboretum.org. Session will not take place in inclement weather or hazardous conditions.

Tuesday, Jan. 16: The Art of Flower and Garden Photography with Brien Szabo, a free 7:30 p.m. workshop sponsored by Hanson Park Conservancy at Cranford Community Center, 220 Walnut St., Cranford. Take better pictures with any kind of camera, from a simple point-and-shoot, to a phone, to an expensive DSLR. Learn four composition techniques, and simple camera settings to manipulate the effectiveness of shots for more powerful and dynamic images of your favorite garden and flower subjects. Seating available on a first-come, first-served basis. Szabo has shared his pas-



Make easy-to-sew pillows at Cultured Expressions Sewing and Quilting Studio, Rahway.

sion for photography through clubs, libraries, workshops, schools, senior centers and garden expos. His work has been published in *NJ Monthly*, *Adirondack Life*, *Horticulture Magazine* and others.

Saturday, Jan. 27: "A Family Affair" at Crescent Avenue Presbyterian Church, 716 Crescent Ave., Plainfield. The Plainfield Symphony will present a free 3 p.m. concert including Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 and "The Washington Post," a march written for the newspaper by John Philip Sousa. Performance will feature Young Pianist Competition Gold Prize Winner William Chen. Call (908) 561-5140 or visit PlainfieldSymphony.org

Saturday, Jan. 27 (more dates): "Pillow Perfection," a workshop at Cultured Expressions Sewing and Quilting Studio,

1417 Main St., Rahway. From 12 to 2:30 p.m. make two pillow styles that owner Lisa Shepard Stewart demonstrated on the TV show "It's Sew Easy." The \$65 workshop fee includes use of studio sewing machines, fusible fabric stabilizer and two pillow forms. Bring your own fabrics or come early and purchase at the studio. Must register. Call (866) 683-2568. Class repeats 5:30 to 8 p.m. Feb. 14 and 2:30 to 5 p.m. Feb. 23. See the schedule at CulturedExpressions.com.

Tuesday, Feb. 13: "Galentine's Day Party" at Liberty Hall Museum, 1003 Morris Ave., Union. From 7 to 9 p.m., you and your gal pals can enjoy a fun evening with champagne, wine and snacks. Craft Galentine's Day cards and celebrate friendship. Admission is \$25 per person; 21 and older only. Reservations by Feb. 6 at (908) 527-0400. See kean.edu/libertyhall/events for more.

A garden calendar

If you're making soup with leeks (such as the spinach soup on Page 17), don't throw out the roots.

We've learned from the Rutgers Master Gardeners of Union County that leek roots (and maybe those of scallions, too) can be planted to grow on.

"You can even use the roots of leeks bought at the grocery store, giving you two leeks for the price of one," according to MasterGardeners-UC.org, the county master gardener website.

Granted, the ground is frozen now, so this might be a tip to tuck away for after the thaw. Once planted, a new leek can be harvested in 60 to 90 days.

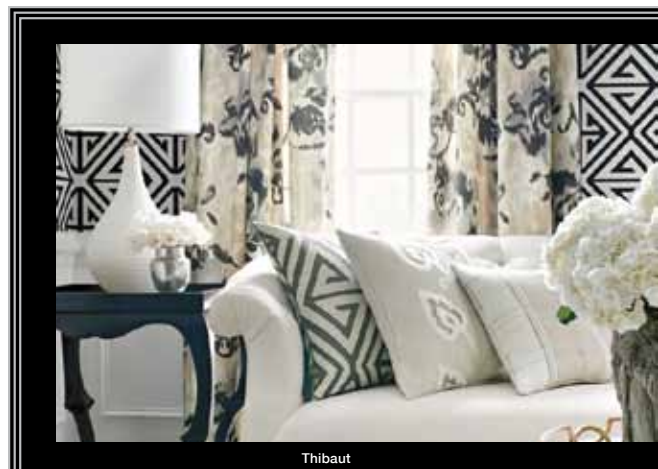
The tip is among guidance in the master gardeners' monthly calendar of garden tips, and there's a lot to do for the landscape in January and February.



For instance, if you see perennials coming up prematurely in January, firmly press them back into the ground and cover them with mulch.

If you see crocuses in February, however, dig some up for pots. "In a sunny spot indoors, they will develop blooms sooner than they will outside."

Another valuable tip: "Avoid heavy traffic on dormant lawns. Dry grass is easily broken and the crown of the plant may be severely damaged or killed."



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Lee Jofa



Lovely little waffle maker

This Babycakes brand waffle maker delivers mini waffle hearts on a stick.

For kid-friendly Valentine's Day treats, use the included recipe to whip up batter, then add the sticks before closing the bright pink lid. They'll cook in minutes.

This set includes 50 wooden sticks and a sugar shaker to sprinkle on the powdered sweetness. More Babycakes countertop

treat makers at SelectBrands.com.

Win the Babycakes waffle maker: Email us at Win@AtHomeNJ.com with your name, address and phone number by Feb. 9. Make "Babycakes" the subject, and tell us where you find At Home NJ.

Congratulations to our Nov.-Dec. winner: J. Starner of Cranford wins the prize bundle of PlaceTiles dry-erase ceramic tiles.

The cost of a free publication

"I can't believe it's free."

We hear these words often in our travels, assembling and distributing At Home New Jersey.

It always brings a smile to our faces. It's a compliment to the design and editorial standards of a publication put together by longtime print journalism pros who — during a time when the field is increasingly fragmented — simply want to continue doing what we do best.

It's a labor of love, but, in this climate, we do suffer for our art. Our aim is to continue bringing the best quality content to our readers, and results for our advertisers.

As readers, there is something you can do to help, and it won't involve visiting a crowd-funding website on our behalf.

If you go to any professional, retailer or program as a result of something you've seen or read here, don't do so silently. Please make it known that we sent you. Every word of support makes a difference.

As we look back on 2017, we'd like to take a moment to remember Kenny Meyer, the 102-year-old gentleman who jumped out of an airplane in July to set a new world record. Mr. Meyer, interviewed in our Sept.-Oct. issue, died on Dec. 5. His courage and love of life should stand as an inspiration for all.

We also look back on the year past with a spirit of gratitude. Thanks to our advertisers and sponsors who help make each issue possible, and thanks to you, the reader, whose continued interest inspires us. My wish is that 2018 will bring you good health, prosperity and the kind of joy that keeps you excited and encouraged to follow your own dreams.

Kimberly L. Jackson, Editor@athomenj.com

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On the cover: White chocolate-raspberry fondue. Photo © Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board



6



10



14

Pet friendly

Resolve to feed for better health

Obese pets are more prone to certain health conditions including diabetes, skin problems and cancer. Extra weight puts stress on a cat or dog's joints — just as it does with people — and overweight pets also exhibit signs of aging earlier than leaner pets.

In the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention's most recent clinical survey, 54 percent of dogs and 59 percent of cats were classified by their veterinary health care professional as clinically overweight or obese.

That's an estimated 41.9 million dogs and 50.5 million cats who weigh too much, according to the organization of veterinarians and veterinary health personnel committed to improving the health and lives of pets.

Carefully monitoring a pet's weight can help it live a longer, healthier life, notes the New Jersey Veterinary Medical Association.

Veterinarians have long been aware of the danger of overfeeding pets. In 2002, Nestlé Purina Pet Care Center released the results of a 14-year study that followed 48 Labrador retrievers for their entire lives. The study showed that lean-fed dogs, who received 25 percent less food than their litter mates in a control group, lived an average of 15 percent (1.8 years) longer than the dogs who ate more. In addition to living longer, the leaner dogs lived healthier lives as well. The age at which the dogs required treatment for a chronic condition such as osteoarthritis was 12 years among lean-fed dogs and 9.9 years for the others.

Beyond correcting food portions, pets, of course, also need exercise. Walking a dog is beneficial for both the dog and the human who walks along. For both dogs and cats, toys and a laser pointer can facilitate an energized and sustained play sessions indoors.

For guidance in getting your pet back on



Shutterstock

A pudgy pet is sometimes cute, but as with humans, extra weight brings many health risks.

a healthy track, ask your veterinarian about your pet's ideal body weight. If your pet needs to lose some pounds, your veterinarian can recommend a diet designed for weight loss and suggest appropriate amounts to feed.

Also, get guidance from your veterinarian on how to help your pet burn more calories and shed any excess weight.

Remember that weight loss for a pet will take time and commitment from the entire family. Be patient, the goal is to get your pet to a weight that will support a healthier life.

The Association for Pet Obesity Preven-

tion offers guidance to help determine if a pet is overweight or obese. For example, if a pet's abdomen hangs low and drags near the ground, that indicates the presence of abdominal fat, the most dangerous and biologically active form, according to the association's website, PetObesityPrevention.org.

Ideally, when observing your pet from the side, there should be "a slight tuck or upward slope of the tummy."

The site also has tools to determine a pet's ideal weight ranges and caloric needs to get to or remain at its healthiest weight.



Better foods for lean pets

Your pet doesn't have to be deprived on a weight-loss diet. A range of pet foods are formulated to provide optimal nutrition in tasty, filling choices for dogs and cats who must shed some pounds.

These are high-protein, high-fiber pet foods blended to meet a pet's specific dietary needs, including those of older pets.

The choices include grain-free foods that begin with boneless USDA-inspected beef or a blend of wild-caught fish. Other options will include chicken with fiber-boosting grains such as brown rice, oats and barley blended with vegetables such as peas, carrots and sweet potatoes.

Among the premium, all natural pet foods sold at Duke's Pet Den in Scotch Plains there are four brands using lean or weight-loss recipes. Visit the store at 417 Park Ave. in Scotch Plains for a consultation on healthy foods to meet your pet's dietary and weight-loss needs.

Monitoring pet health

The PetPace Smart Collar (shown above) is a wireless collar that continuously monitors a pet's behavior patterns and vital signs, including calories burned.

The non-invasive wireless collar, which can send smartphone health alerts to a pet's owner and veterinarian also can be helpful in developing a plan that ensures sufficient activity to help a pet maintain a healthy body weight. See PetPace.com.

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Mixed messages

Unscramble this quote about special animals from a French novelist. Solution: AtHomeNJ.com



I veebile sact ot eb
trisips meco ot atrhe.
— sjelu vneer



12 months of Rahway River

Drivers who zip along Cranford's Lincoln Avenue might not know that a river runs behind the barn-red building not far from the busy intersection at Walnut Avenue.

A new calendar might change that. The cover of the 2018 calendar produced as a fundraiser by Friends of Rahway River Parkway features the historic red building, Droscher's Mill. Taken along the river — a vantage point not seen from the road — the photo is among 12 color shots "celebrating nature and history along the Rahway River."

Back in 1737 when the former lumber mill was built at what is now 347 Lincoln Ave. East, the Rahway River would turn a water wheel to power saws. The renovated building, among the state's oldest structures, was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1974.

Friends of Rahway River Parkway hope to win similar designation for the entire Rahway River Parkway, a greenbelt of 1,100 acres of parks along the river, from Springfield to Rahway.

The organization works to raise awareness of the Rahway River Parkway and advocates for its preservation, restoration and enhancement.

The calendars sell for \$15 each and support the organization's various parkway preservation efforts. Calendars are sold online at RahwayRiverParkway.org, which has more information about Rahway River Parkway and lists area retailers that also sell the calendar.

"The calendar is something that we enjoy doing, it gets new people involved," says Scott J. Aruta, the group's president. "We have 350 to sell."

Photos for the 2018 calendar were selected in a contest that drew more than 150 submissions from area photographers.

"We anticipate bigger and better next year," Aruta says of efforts for the calendar, first produced in 2016. "We need to be creative about how we make people aware of us, and how we make people aware of the parkway and how beautiful the parkway is."

Be prepared for an emergency

Your stomach is feeling a little queasy in the hours after that meal at an unfamiliar roadside restaurant.

It's too late to call your doctor for what's probably a non-emergency. You could wait until morning to see if you feel better, or if you have apple cider vinegar in the fridge and honey in the pantry, you could mix a tablespoon of each into a cup of warm water as a precaution against food poisoning.

This is one of the home remedies herbalist Brigitte Mars has compiled in "The Natural First Aid Handbook" (Storey Books, \$12.95). She also suggests keeping on hand capsules of activated charcoal (sold at most health food stores). Two of these with a glass of water just might do the trick.

Every entry in this 186-page volume advises the reader when it's necessary to seek immediate medical attention and what to do while waiting for care. For non-emergencies, Mars offers suggestions for home remedies, often herbal, that might lessen discomfort or avoid more severe illness.

She recommends that readers contact the American Heart Association to get training in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation, and she includes an illustrated CPR guide as a refresher for those who've been previously trained. Additionally, she covers bandaging, splints and slings, as well as moving an injured person when it can't be avoided and positioning him or her for optimal recovery.

"While learning first-aid might seem a daunting task, there is really only a handful of simple techniques that everyone should be familiar with," she writes. "These techniques form the basis of almost all first-aid treatments and will prove invaluable if you're someday faced with an emergency situation." To that end, the book also includes a

guide for stocking a first aid kit.

The A to Z guide to ailments and injuries includes abdominal injuries, overdoses, electric shock, fractures, head injury, heart attack, seizures and vomiting.

Much of the book's advice is the sort you hope you'll never need, but anyone would be well served by reading it to be prepared.



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Purple reigns

Those who watch home décor trends know that each year the Pantone Color Marketing Institute selects a color that is expected to influence the hues we see around us on everything from nail polish to large appliances to cars.

This year's color is Ultra Violet. According to Pantone, it's a color that "communicates originality, ingenuity, and visionary thinking that points us towards the future."

This alluring blend of red's fire and blue's serenity can be incorporated into home décor in shades from soft lavender to the purple that Pantone last August named with Prince's "Love Symbol" in honor of the late music artist and the color he favored.

"Prince, David Bowie and Jimi Hendrix brought shades of Ultra Violet to the forefront of western pop culture as personal expressions of individuality," according to the Carlstadt-based institute's written announcement. "Ultra Violet symbolizes experimentation and non-

conformity, spurring individuals to imagine their unique mark on the world, and push boundaries through creative outlets."

Historically, a mystical or spiritual quality has been ascribed to purple, according to Pantone. "The color is often associated with mindfulness practices, which offer a higher ground to those seeking refuge from today's over-stimulated world. The

use of purple-toned lighting in meditation spaces and other gathering places energizes the communities that gather there and inspires connection."

The photo at right illustrates this effect with the interior lighting and paint in Masterbrand cabinets.

Pair Ultra Violet with golds or metallics for a dazzling, luxurious interior, or with greens or greys to evoke natural elegance, the Pantone experts suggest. "As a color that can take you in so many directions, Ultra Violet makes a statement in any space, whether it's one of tradition and elegance or unexpected boldness."



Courtesy Sherwin-Williams

Purple is expected to be an influential color in 2018. Beyond paint, the color has been appearing increasingly on housewares, such as the Bonjour infusion-style teapot shown.



Courtesy Masterbrand

Masterbrand's Omega Cabinetry brings purple into a statement kitchen. The Tunisia doors showcase a custom hue behind glass, and enhanced by LED lighting in cabinets and shelving.



Photos courtesy Arch-Interiors Design Group

A bed made every day encourages order and makes a “finished” sleeping area where it’s easier to relax. A chandeliers, right, brings luxury to a dining room and other rooms, too.



A welcoming home starts where you sleep

Do you make your bed every day?

If you don’t, resolving to do so can be a small step toward improving the condition of your entire house.

“A made bed is a ‘finished’ design that doesn’t cost you anything,” says interior designer Christopher Grubb. Making the bed daily is among his suggestions for those who aim to create a more beautiful home in 2018. For some, a resolution to get one’s house in order can be an overwhelming proposition.

“We all know it’s hard to keep our new year’s resolutions. But oftentimes they fail because we just don’t know where to start,” Grubb says. As with any big project, it can be helpful to divide the work and tackle it in smaller, more manageable tasks.

“Breaking it down and tackling a specific room each month makes it easy to stay

focused and gradually achieve your goal,” says Grubb, who owns Beverly Hills-based Arch-Interiors Design Group.

“It’s important to freshen up interiors periodically to ensure that our home truly reflects what’s important to us,” he adds. “On an emotional level, fresh design lifts our spirits and infuses a sense of positivity throughout the home.”

To that end, here are a few more suggestions from Grubb to spread over the months.

Sort it out. Empty junk drawers in your kitchen, nightstands and elsewhere to sort out what really need. Go through clothes, books and collections. Throw out or donate what’s no longer used or wanted.

Try this method. Reverse all your clothes hangers. When you wear a garment, turn the hanger back. If any hangers haven’t been

turned in 6 months, donate those garments.

Splurge on bed linens. You will sleep better on sheets that recall a luxury hotel. Replace pillows, shams and bed skirts as an inexpensive way to give bedrooms a facelift.

Clear the fridge. Not just inside, but the top, front and sides. With kids’ work, display only the newest or most important pieces.

Hide small appliances. An appliance garage is the perfect place to store them. Under-counter options also are expanding.

Manage displays. Take a hard look at your decorative objects. If you don’t love something, donate it. For a fresh feel, add new wall art or reframe what you already have.

Add storage. Try ottomans with lids. “They’re great as a coffee table and provide a place to hide toys, blankets, etc.” Adding a continuous shelf around an entire room

(about 14 inches below the ceiling) offers display space as a great architectural element.

Do details. Crown molding or a ceiling medallion are easy updates. Add a chair rail and paint different colors above and below.

Improve lighting. Change the lamps, or just the lamp shades. Using LEDs and other energy-efficient options can reduce your utility bill. For a little glamor, consider a chandelier as “jewelry” for the room.

Update furniture. Paint wooden pieces. Slipcover or re-upholster sofas and chairs. Add pillows that complement the fabric.

Paint. In kitchens and bathrooms, consider painting cabinetry and updating hardware on drawers and doors. Try “chalk paint;” it doesn’t require sanding or using a primer.

Grow herbs indoors. They bring in nature and provide fresh flavors for cooking.

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Let there be light

Winter's shorter days and often gloomy weather can make some of us wish to simply hibernate from January through March.

Improving interior lighting will help create brighter spaces that can lift the mood of any home. We got some insightful tips on illumination from Michael Murphy, the interior design expert at LampsPlus.com. Consider a few of his ideas — especially since hibernation during the dark, chilly months isn't really a practical option for us humans. *Lamps and more available at LampsPlus.com.*



Exchange low-wattage bulbs with brighter, energy-efficient ones, often guaranteed to last for years. Upgrade to bright bulbs in chandeliers, sconces and overhead fixtures.



Place floor lamps in corners. Doing so will allow light to reflect off two walls and back into the room. It's an easy way to create a brighter atmosphere without having to use extra lighting.



When windows are covered at night, sunny areas become dark areas. A smart floor lamp brightens for reading ease.



Hang mirrors on walls across from windows. This will multiply sunlight and bounce it around a space.



If you work from home, better lighting can help energize and make you more productive. To maximize lamp light, switch from dark lamp shades to light-colored types that light can more easily penetrate to better illuminate a room.



Photos courtesy Sherwin-Williams

The blue-green hue dubbed Oceanside is the Sherwin-Williams 2018 color of the year. It is stunning when wrapped around an entire room or used as an accent, as on the doors below.

Exploring color

It takes a daring nature to fully wrap a room in vivid hues. But how would it feel to walk into a space and be surrounded — enveloped, even — by your favorite color?

It's an engaging thought that's illustrated in the room above, painted in Oceanside, a blue-green blend that Sherwin-Williams has selected as its 2018 color of the year. The color is painted on the paneled walls, trim, cabinetry and the fireplace mantel. Only the shelves wear a complementary color in the brand's wonderfully named green, Espalier.

Those who might be overwhelmed by an abundance of a single color can, of course, use it more sparingly in impactful doses. As an example, the room at right shows double doors wearing Oceanside, and the color is echoed subtly in a nearby window treatment. "People today have a growing sense of adventure, and it is making its way into even the coziest corners of our homes," says Sue Wadden, director of color marketing at Sherwin-Williams. "We are craving things that

remind us of bright folklore, like mermaids and expeditions across continents.

"Oceanside is the color of wanderlust right in our own homes. Green-blues in deep values, such as Oceanside, respond to changes in light, which is a quality that creates intense dimension.

"Blues evoke a multitude of moods and associations depending on hue, shade and application," Wadden says. "They are universally perceived as intelligent, honest and interesting — making blue the most beloved color worldwide." And let's not forget the calm nature of blues.

"Oceanside is reminiscent of multi-tonal blues found in nature, offering a memorable, yet calming effect," Wadden says. "As with other colors found in nature, Oceanside can channel healing and tranquil emotions, but also spur heightened levels of creativity."

She suggests the color for bedrooms, reading nooks or a home office, where it might support clear and creative thinking.





1 In origami, fold lines both guide and help shape creations. To make the treat boxes shown in Step 8, place a scrapbook paper square printed-side down. Fold it in half both ways from corner to corner. Then, fold all corner points to center, as started above.



2 With the all four points still folded in, fold the paper exactly in equal thirds, from top to bottom as shown above. Only flatten your creases when you are satisfied that both the sides are at equal length with the center. Unfold the top and bottom folds.



3 Keeping the corner points folded in, fold the paper into thirds from side to side. The repeated folding and unfolding will create lines that make it easier to bend and shape your box. Open the side-to-side folds.



4 Unfold top and bottom corner points. Leave side points folded. Begin shaping box by pushing in diagonal bends inside the two square folds on each side. (Triangular creases from previous folds should make this easier.) Overlap folded triangles to form box.



5 Holding box shape in place, push down the top point as shown to secure the shape. (If shaping the box is difficult, it's helpful to watch an instructive video. We recommend "How to make a paper box that opens and closes" by Stuart86 on YouTube.)



6 Turn the box and repeat the diagonal folds, overlapping to form what will become the back and top of the box. Some add a dab of glue to the overlapped edges, but that isn't necessary when an accurately folded box is closed.



7 Tucking in the lid of the finished box will reveal how well you've done. It takes practice to make a box perfectly even on all sides. And even when the top does tuck in neatly, a small sticker or a bit of clear tape helps secure a gift within this tiny package.



8 The project, from "Origami for Mindfulness" by Mari Ono, is made as shown with 6-inch squares of printed paper included with the book. "If you use a larger piece of gorgeous paper, you can make it into a wonderful accessory gift box," Ono writes.

Fold your way to productive relaxation

"Most adults have less time to be relaxed, as they are always busy paying attention to many things." This is the observation of origami expert and author Mari Ono.

In her book "Origami for Mindfulness" (Cico Books, \$19.95), Ono proposes a creative shift in focus for busy people.

Her latest book meshes coloring with origami, and half of the 61 patterned or colored papers it includes are intended to be filled in with colors of the user's choice before they are folded into one of the book's "35 calming projects."

"Like origami, the process of coloring is a meditative one that reduces stress and enables you to feel inner calm," writes Ono, who also has penned several origami books for children. She notes that research in Japan is increasingly uncovering the therapeutic value of origami for adults.

"At hospitals and care centers all over Japan, origami has been introduced into programs for the patients' cerebral

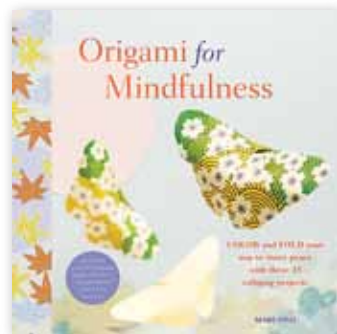
activation and well-being," she writes. "This is because when they are folding origami paper, the brain activation becomes high and when they are creating something, the concentration mode becomes high."

Focused activity to produce beautiful creations also provides a healthy distraction.

"When we are working to create the models, we sometimes forget the time and become really enthralled in the activity," she writes. "Such time allows us to free our mind from worldly thoughts, and this has the effect of releasing stress."

Beyond that, origami's exact folding is a fun challenge to form shapes ranging from flowers to animals to decorative containers, including gift boxes. The book's projects also include a garland of folded paper hearts, perfect to make and hang for Valentine's Day.

The candy tray at right and the treat box with instructions illustrated above are also among project options. Each model is rated one to three stars to indicate the level of difficulty.



Photos by Geoff Dann

Themed paper folded into a cute container for party treats.

Ono discusses origami's origins and how it reflects on the importance of straight lines, rectilinear shapes and precision in Japanese architecture and culture. Historically, sturdy paper has been used widely in Japan. Not only for writing, but for sliding doors, screens, lanterns, fans and clothing, she notes.

Don't waste ... freeze



Daria Yakovleva

Do you frequently throw out spoiled milk or bread or bananas? Your freezer can help.

Why cry over spoiled milk?

In a house without hungry, milk-guzzling teenagers, even judiciously purchased quarts can go to waste.

Maybe you, in a household of one or two, were craving a hot chocolate, or you needed a cup of milk for pancakes or some other recipe. Then the rest of it just sits in the fridge for days. Going bad.

It doesn't have to happen. We've, surprisingly, just learned that milk (along with butter and some cheeses) can be frozen without suffering too much harm.

According to DairyGood.org, a website of the National Dairy Council, all you need to do to freeze milk is put it in freezer-safe containers and leave a little room at the top of each for the milk to expand, as all frozen liquids do. The fat might separate from the rest of the milk when frozen, they note, but that's normal and can be fixed with a good shake or stir after the milk is fully thawed in the fridge for the next use.

The explanation: "The protein and miner-

als are the first to thaw; the water in the milk thaws later."

While freezing will suspend the spoilage process, the council recommends using thawed milk as quickly as possible.

Just as thawed loaves of sliced bread don't always make the best sandwiches, thawed milk might not be at its tastiest for drinking from a glass. But freezing milk is a smart way to avoid waste if you use milk mostly for recipes, or the occasional hot chocolate.

A great tip: Consider freezing milk in ice cube trays if you just need a bit for recipes.

Don't go, bananas!

First they're green, then they're yellow, then they're spotted, and then they're brown. It seems to happen in so little time.

You can save your bananas from the compost heap if you peel, cut and freeze them before they go soft.

Thaw them when you're ready to make bread or muffins. Throw a few frozen chunks in the blender for a smoothie.



Personal trainers Marty and Kim Musikant own Active Life Fitness in Garwood.

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Wing toss

Sauce comes first for our Super Bowl party winners

Wings are now so popular that they've become the costliest chicken parts. Not only do they cost more per pound than the highly desired breast pieces, the buyer pays a premium for very little meat when you consider the pile of bones left behind. And if you buy whole wings, there's the labor-intensive process to separate them, and unused tips to throw out if you don't make stock. But when wings are well-cooked and well-seasoned — with or without fiery heat — they're tasty little appetizers that are so much fun to eat. In most of the following recipes, wings are tossed in sauce before baking, so dipping isn't essential. Each is oven baked, shortening prep time and avoiding fried calories. In testing, we preferred a 45-minute cooking time for moist meat that separated easily from the bones. We also tried the recipes with skinless chicken thighs, but there's something special about wings that makes them take seasonings in a party-perfect way.



Lemon-pesto wings

(4 servings)

3/4 cup store-bought basil pesto
1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
1 lemon, zested and juiced
2-1/2 pounds chicken wing pieces (about 24)

1. In a bowl large enough to hold all wings, combine pesto, red pepper flakes, lemon zest (the grated peel without any white pith) and juice. Toss wings in about a third of the pesto mixture. Cover and refrigerate at least one hour or overnight.

2. Heat oven to 400 degrees. Place wings in a single layer on a sheet pan covered with baking parchment. Bake 40 to 45 minutes, until fully cooked, browned and crisp.

3. Place remaining pesto mixture in a heat-proof bowl. Use tongs to add cooked wings. Toss to fully coat and serve.

Nutrition information (per serving): 464 calories, 36g fat (9g saturated), 86mg cholesterol, 654mg sodium, 4g carbs, 2g fiber, 0g sugars, 29g protein

— Adapted recipe, photo courtesy National Chicken Board

Sweet hoisin chili wings

(8 servings)

5 pounds chicken wing pieces (about 48)
1/4 cup Lee Kum Kee sriracha sauce
1/4 cup Lee Kum Kee sweet chili sauce
1/2 cup Lee Kum Kee hoisin sauce
2 tablespoons Lee Kum Kee sesame oil
Cooking oil spray

1. Mix sriracha, sweet chili and hoisin sauces. Place wings in mixture, toss to coat. Cover and refrigerate 2 hours.

2. Preheat oven to 400 degrees for 15 minutes. Place wings on sheet pans

lined with baking parchment lightly coated with cooking oil spray. Bake 35 to 45 minutes, until fully cooked.

Note: Lee Kum Kee sauces are sold at Asian markets. Sauces from other brands are sold at area supermarkets.

Nutrition information (per serving): 359 calories, 23g fat (6g saturated), 86mg cholesterol, 407mg sodium, 7g carbs, 0g fiber, 5g sugars, 28g protein

— Adapted recipe, photo courtesy Lee Kum Kee



Beau monde buffalo wings

(4 servings)

2-1/2 pounds chicken wing pieces (about 24)
1 teaspoon Spice Islands Beau Monde Seasoning
1/2 teaspoon Spice Islands black pepper
1/2 teaspoon Spice Islands crushed red pepper
Cooking oil spray
1/4 cup butter
1/4 cup hot sauce

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Season chicken with Beau Monde and peppers. Coat a shallow sheet pan with cooking oil spray. Place chicken on pan and bake for 40 to 45 minutes, turning once.

2. Melt butter in a large sauce pan and combine with hot sauce. Toss chicken in sauce to serve.

Nutrition information (per serving): 399 calories, 31g fat (13g saturated), 116mg cholesterol, 971mg sodium, 0g carbs, 0g fiber, 0g sugars, 28g protein

— Adapted recipe, photo courtesy Spice Islands



Oven-fried wings

(3 servings)

Cooking oil spray
 2-1/2 pounds chicken wing pieces
 2 teaspoons all-purpose seasoning, divided
 1-1/4 cups all-purpose flour, divided
 2 large eggs, beaten
 1/4 teaspoon baking powder

1. Cover a sheet pan with parchment paper. Mist with cooking oil spray. Set aside.
2. In a large, lidded container, season chicken with 1 teaspoon of your favorite all-purpose seasoning. Add 1/2 cup flour to container, shaking to fully coat wings.
3. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Place beaten eggs in a shallow dish. In another dish, whisk together remaining flour, baking powder and remaining seasoning.
4. Working one piece at a time, fully dip a floured chicken wing piece into egg. Then roll in seasoned flour to coat and place on baking sheet. Mist with cooking oil spray.
5. If needed, bake half the wing pieces at a time for 40 to 45 minutes. Repeat with remaining wings. Toss in favorite sauce to serve.

Nutrition information (per serving): 428 calories, 21g fat (6g saturated), 139mg cholesterol, 705mg sodium, 24g carbs, 1g fiber, 0g sugars, 32g protein

— Photo courtesy National Chicken Council



Savory Spice buttermilk Buffalo glazed wings

(4 servings)

2-1/2 pounds chicken wing pieces (about 24)
 1/2 teaspoon Tableside Salt and Pepper Seasoning
 1 cup reduced-fat buttermilk
 4 tablespoons Buffalo Wing Sauce Seasoning, divided

1. In large bowl, season wings with Tableside blend. Mix with buttermilk to coat. Cover, refrigerate 2 to 24 hours.
2. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Place chicken in a colander to drain excess buttermilk. In large bowl, mix buttermilk-coated wings and 2 tablespoons Buffalo Wing Sauce Seasoning to coat. Place wings in one layer on a

sheet pan lined with parchment. Bake 40 to 45 minutes, turning halfway through cooking time.

3. Use tongs to place cooked wings in a large, heat-proof bowl. Mix in remaining Buffalo seasoning to coat. Let rest 5 to 10 minutes. The seasoning will dissolve to produce a glazed finish. Serve warm.

Nutrition information (per serving): 334 calories, 20g fat (6g saturated), 87mg cholesterol, 812mg sodium, 7g carbs, 0g fiber, 4g sugars, 28g protein

— Adapted recipe courtesy SavorySpiceShop.com; spices available at Savory Spice Shop in Westfield. Photo courtesy National Chicken Board

gs





Photos by Faith Mason

Socca success: Spread batter thinly and evenly in oven-heated pan. Edges brown quickly, so we removed from the oven to cut after 10 minutes. Immediately return to oven and turn off heat to toast until crisp, about 15 minutes.

Short&sweet 2 get u cook'n

The “Recipe Shorts” cookbook by trained chef Andrea Stewart presents each recipe in no more than 140 characters.

This Twitter-inspired format covers options with full-color photographs for breakfast and brunch, soups and salads, super-fast suppers, easy entertaining, simple sides and desserts.

Here, S&P isn't for Standard & Poor's, but salt and pepper. Black pepper on its own is “bl ppt,” water is H₂O, and grated is “gr8'd.” C=cup, T=tablespoon, t=teaspoon and so on.

The good: These abbreviated recipes really illustrate how easy it can be to get in the kitchen and make something impressive.

Want fish? It takes 10 minutes in the oven for salmon or grouper and even less time to pan-sear a tuna steak. Or just tuck fish sticks into tacos. Making cauliflower-chorizo hash is as easy as “Fry high heat chorizo & chop'd onion + cauliflwr florets & diced sw. pots, cook til tendr + handful spinach, top w/ poach egg.”

What's not-so-good is that recipe instructions sometimes suffer with Stewart's social media shorthand. The limited

type sometimes means missing steps the cook has to figure out or Google search. Some recipes don't list cooking time, for example, presenting a challenge for beginning cooks who might be drawn to this format. While the box tells you how to heat fish sticks or boil pasta, there's unlikely to be packaging guidance to properly cook duck breasts, lamb cutlets or the tomatoes, zucchini and eggplant in a tian.

Still, “Recipe Shorts” introduced us to socca, a flatbread popular in Italy and France. Using less water, Stewart's version produces tasty gluten-free crackers from the blend of chickpea flour, olive oil and salt.

We tested with besan flour, available at Indian markets in Iselin. We also used Bob's Red Mill garbanzo bean flour (from Clark ShopRite). Both are ground chickpeas, but they produced different results that required multiple tests. (No fault of Stewart, and an excuse to make more.) The Bob's Red Mill flour needed more water (about 3/4 cup) to get the consistency of thick pancake batter. More socca tips at right above for a recipe to enjoy.



Recipes in brief

Angela Stewart's “Recipe Shorts” (Kyle Books, \$16.95) isn't the first Twitter-inspired cookbook, but her version stands out for the selection of recipes.

For winter, when many remain tucked in at home, we like the options below to inspire entertaining. The featured crackers are perfect for the quick dips shown. Try the avocado-white bean blend without seasoning as a creamy, non-dairy substitute for sour cream in any dip recipe that wouldn't suffer from the hint of green.

Socca crackers

Whisk 1C chickpea flour, 1/2C H₂O, 2T olv oil, 1t salt. Rest 60min. Heat 2T oil 2 smoke, lrg pan, pour battr, bake 500F~15min til goldn

Feta dip

Whiz 8oz feta w/1/2C ea ricotta & rst'd red peppers, 2T lemjuice, splash EVOO+1t ea fresh thyme, oregano & chilli flakes

Avocado bean dip

Whiz 1 can cannellini beans, 1 avo, 1/2t garlic, handful fresh parsley, 4T ea lemjuice, EVOO. Season w/sea salt

Warm artichoke dip

Drain & pulse 1 can artichoke hearts w/1C ea mayo, gr8'd Parm, 1/4 t grlic pwdr, 2T parsley. Ovenprf dish, bake 350F~45min

Chew your bowl



The USDA's MyPlate guidelines suggest filling at least half our plates with vegetables and fruits at every meal. A fun way to help accomplish that is to have lunch or dinner stuffed in a vegetable (or a fruit, if you get technical about our suggested tomato and avocado options).

The National Onion Association suggests onion bowls. Slice top and root ends from onions so they stand upright. Hollow out centers. (Save tops and centers to sautee with other veggies.) Place onion cups in a large skillet with an inch of water. Cover and simmer gently until soft, about 20 minutes. Or bake them in a covered dish with a little water. Fill as desired.



Cheesy tomatoes: There are many ways to stuff a tomato, and since a large tomato has only 33 calories, zero fat, 7 grams of carbohydrate and 2 grams of fiber, it's a filling base that lets you go a bit indulgent when stuffing. The tomatoes above are filled with corn, green peppers, scallions and Wisconsin Muenster cheese. Each has a single slice of crumbled bacon. Search "stuffed tomato" at EatWisconsinCheese.com for two recipe options.

Chili avocados: Make a batch of your favorite chili and spoon servings into seeded avocados for a creamy complement that can help tame the heat if your chili is hot stuff.

Half of a large avocado has about 240 calories, 10 grams of dietary fiber, 13 grams of carbohydrate and 3 grams of protein. Avocados are high in fat (about 22 grams for a half avocado), but about 75 percent of their fat is good, unsaturated fat.

The monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats in avocados have been famously part of "flat belly" diets where they replace saturated fats. See the LoveOneToday website of the Hass Avocado Board for more nutrition information and recipes.

To enjoy avocados, always pick fruits that feel slightly soft to the touch. Avoid rock hard avocados and super-soft ones (unless you are making guacamole).



H. Alexander Talbot

Peeled cloves of black garlic are a sweet choice for sauces, soups, sides or even snacking.

Eat garlic like candy

Forty minutes in a 400-degree oven can change garlic from sharp and raw to comfortingly mellow. So what would happen if you turned down the heat and slow-roasted garlic for days — say, 30 or more?

Its carbohydrates would break down into sugars, slowly caramelized, resulting in black cloves retaining some of their scent and a savory bit of their characteristic flavor.

The dominant presence of black garlic is always sweet, however. Among various tasters, it has called to mind hints of chocolate, molasses, figs, licorice, coffee. The texture can be melt-in-your-mouth moist or slightly chewy like Fruit Gems candy. There are a variety of American producers, including chefs who continuously roast bulbs for their own use. Typically sold as whole bulbs, each can have different qualities depending on the species of garlic used and variations in the roasting or "high-heat fermentation" and aging processes used by its various producers.

McCormick recently introduced a black garlic salt with roasted garlic, cocoa powder and other flavors. It smells appetizing, with a pleasing taste. But for all the nuances of black garlic, first try the whole bulb. We found them locally at Savory Spice Shop in Westfield; about \$4 per bulb.



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Valentine's Day treats for your sweets



Raspberry-white chocolate fondue

(12 servings)

1 cup fresh raspberries
1-1/2 teaspoon granulated sugar
1/2 cup heavy cream
8 ounces white chocolate, chopped
4 ounces Wisconsin mascarpone cheese
1 tablespoon hazelnut liqueur
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
Dippers: Fresh berries, marshmallows, cubed pound cake, graham crackers

1. Mash raspberries with sugar in a large bowl. Press raspberry mixture through a fine mesh sieve to remove seeds. Set strained juice aside.

2. Add heavy cream to a double boiler or a glass bowl fitted over an inch of simmering water in a large saucepan. (Do

not allow bowl to touch water.) Warm the cream, gradually add white chocolate, stirring constantly between each addition until melted. Add mascarpone; stir until smooth. Stir in hazelnut liqueur, vanilla extract and reserved raspberry juice.

3. Transfer mixture to a warm fondue pot. Keep warm. Serve with berries, marshmallows, pound cake and graham cracker sticks for dipping.

Nutrition information (per serving): 242 calories, 15g fat (9g saturated), 26mg cholesterol, 31mg sodium, 19g carbs, 1g fiber, 18g sugars, 2g protein

— Adapted recipe, photo courtesy Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board



Fall in love with cheese and wine: For Valentine's Day, a simple spread is in order. Get ideas to pair cheeses with a variety of wines, beers and spirits using the Cheese Cupid tool, under "Pairing and Sharing" at EatWisconsinCheese.com. The award-winning tool features 11 red wines, 6 white wines, 18 beers and hard ciders, as well as bourbon, brandy, rum and scotch. You can start with your drink or your cheese. There are 28 easy-to-find cheese options, from Asiago, Brie and Camembert to Gorgonzola, Parmesan and Romano. There's also a Cheese Cupid app for Android and Apple mobile devices to be consulted while you shop.

Chocolate walnut butter

(12 servings)

1 cup California walnuts
1/8 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon walnut or vegetable oil
1/3 cup chocolate chips
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon, optional

1. Grind walnuts and salt to a paste in the bowl of a food processor. With processor running, add up to a teaspoon of oil, a little at a time until walnut butter binds together. (Use a bit more, if needed.)

2. In a double boiler or microwave,

gently melt chocolate chips. Stir into the walnut butter. Add cinnamon, if you'd like. Spread on toasted nut bread or serve warm for dipping with apple slices, banana chunks or the socca crackers on Page 14.

Nutrition information (per tablespoon): 106 calories, 9g fat (2g saturated), 0mg cholesterol, 25mg sodium, 5g carbs, 1g fiber, 4g sugars, 2g protein

— Adapted from recipe by Mollie Katzen; photo courtesy California Walnuts

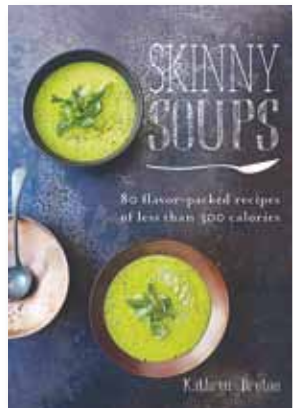
KITCHEN EXPLORER

Soup: Fresh ideas for fresh ingredients

In “Skinny Soups,” the recipes all come in at less than 300 calories per serving, and most recipes make four servings. This makes it easier to try out new ones and then double the proportions when returning to favorites.

Soup cookbooks and soup recipes aren't in short supply, but author Kathryn Bryton has come up with 80 recipes that incorporate fresh ingredients in fresh ways.

For busy lifestyles, she devotes a chapter to “15-minute soups.” These include roasted red pepper and chickpea, lettuce and gorgonzola, egg-drop and scallion, and chunky zucchini and shrimp with dill. Her single-serving Mason jar noodle pots — one with cooked chicken, one with thinly sliced salmon and another with walnut-miso — all feature calorie-free shirataki noodles mixed with an assortment of chopped vegetables, soy sauce and other Asian seasonings. Each blend is refrigerated in a lidded glass jar. To serve, 1-1/4 cup of boiling water is added, and



they're ready to eat in 5 minutes. We've used hot broth in a similar soup (see Page 13 of Jan-Feb 2014 issue at issuu.com/athomenj). The cookbook also includes recipes for soup accompaniments. Pumpkin seed-prune rye soda bread, roasted cherry tomato rye bruschetta, hazelnut-cranberry-chia-seed oatcakes and buckwheat tortillas are options.

What we love: This is a cookbook that encourages exploration with less familiar ingredients. It also uses familiar ones in new ways. Oatmeal is used to add body to the featured spinach soup, for example. For adventurous cooks, here are ways to try black sesame seeds, the Korean hot sauce gochujang, and sumac (a tangy spice ground from the dried berries of *Rhus coriaria*, which is not poison sumac, *Toxicodendron vernix*).

The previously mentioned shirataki noodles originated in Japan but are now available beyond the refrigerator section of Asian markets and more frequently found, still packaged in water-filled bags, and refrigerated in supermarkets.

One quibble: Bryton never suggests removing seeds from the fresh tomatoes used in her soups. It's worth noting that these are soups that she likely processes in the bowl of a high-powered blender. Since encountering tomato seeds in a smooth soup can be off-putting, those who prefer to puree soups in the pot with an immersion blender should remove the seeds from fresh tomatoes before adding them to smooth soups.



Photos by Laura Edwards

Sumac, a spice of Middle Eastern cuisines, has grown more widely popular. Here, it joins pomegranate to garnish a sweet potato and tomato soup from “Skinny Soups” by Kathryn Bruton.

Sweet potato-tomato soup

(4 servings)

1 medium onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, chopped
1 red chile, seeded and chopped (optional)
1 teaspoon sumac
1/2 tablespoon coconut oil
2 medium sweet potatoes, peeled and chopped (about 3 cups)
3 to 4 vine tomatoes, peeled, seeded and coarsely chopped (about 1-3/4 cup)
3-1/2 cups chicken or vegetable stock
1-1/2 tablespoons pomegranate molasses
Optional garnish: small bunch of cilantro leaves, 1/2 cup chopped roasted salted peanuts, pomegranate arils, lime wedges

1. Sauté onion, garlic, chile (if using) and sumac in the coconut oil and 1 tablespoon of water until soft and translucent— about 5 minutes.

2. Add sweet potatoes, tomatoes and stock, bring to a boil. Simmer, covered, for about 20 minutes, until potatoes are tender. Let cool a little before adding pomegranate molasses. Blend until silky smooth and season. Garnish as desired.

Nutrition information (per serving): 220 calories, 5g fat (2g saturated), 6mg cholesterol, 364mg sodium, 37g carbs, 5g fiber, 1g sugars, 8g protein

— From “Skinny Soups” by Kathryn Bruton (Kyle Books, \$19.95)

Spinach and oatmeal soup

(4 servings)

1 small leek, sliced (white part only)
1 celery rib, chopped
1/2 tablespoon olive oil
1/3 cup old-fashioned rolled oats
2 cups vegetable or chicken stock
14 ounces spinach
1 cup almond milk
1 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
Handful of fresh basil (see note)
Salt and pepper

Sauté leek and celery in olive oil and 1 tablespoon water for about 5 minutes, until softened. Stir in oats, followed by stock. Bring to a boil and simmer for 5 minutes.

Add spinach (in batches, if necessary, allowing each batch to wilt before adding more). Simmer a few minutes to soften spinach slightly. Add almond milk, nutmeg and basil. Blend until smooth. Season to taste.

Tester's note: We loved this soup before adding the fresh basil, which seemed overpowering. We'd consider it optional.

Nutrition information (per serving): 126 calories, 5g fat (1g saturated), 4mg cholesterol, 308mg sodium, 16g carbs, 3g fiber, 5g sugars, 7g protein

— From “Skinny Soups” by Kathryn Bruton (Kyle Books, \$19.95)



EVERYDAY HELPERS

Household tips using items you already have around the house



Salt and lemons

- The first time you wash vibrantly colored clothes or towels, add a cup of salt to the wash water to help them retain their color.
- Remove rust from cast-iron cookware by rubbing with half a lemon dipped in salt. Immediately re-season by coating the cookware with cooking oil and heating.
- After cutting meats, rinse off your wooden cutting board, sprinkle it with a handful of table salt and rub with the juice of half a lemon. Also removes any lingering odors.
- Rub your hands with salt or a cut lemon before washing to remove onion and garlic aromas. (Rubbing a metal fork, knife or spoon handle between your palms under running water also works.)
- Grind lemon peels in the garbage disposal for a citrus scent that eliminates foul odors.
- Cheese makers use brines to discourage mold on aging cheese. Salt also can protect cheese from mold in a home refrigerator. Soak a clean cloth in a cup of water with a teaspoon of salt, wring it out and use to wipe away early signs of mold from hard cheeses.
- For natural mildew elimination in the shower, keep a strong solution of salt and water in a spray bottle and spritz the shower's mildew-prone surfaces after every use.
- Dead Sea salts with wonderful fragrances are certainly luxurious, but plain table salt also has a place in skin care. In a bath, scrub wet elbows, knees and ankles with a handful of salt for an invigorating scrub that rubs off rough dead skin. Rinse and moisturize.



Petroleum jelly or WD-40

- Rub your hands with petroleum jelly before painting to more easily remove drips.
- Coat metal tools and shovels with petroleum jelly or WD-40 to protect from rust.
- Remove grime from a garage sale or thrift shop find by rubbing with petroleum jelly.
- Want to reuse a pretty glass bottle? Soak it in water to remove the label. If any the adhesive remains, rub on petroleum jelly and let it sit overnight. Use a dry rag to rub clean.
- To prevent locks from freezing, try spraying WD-40 into the key holes. Got a frozen car lock? Keep matches or a lighter on hand to heat up the end of your key. Quickly put the heated key in the door or trunk lock, and it should thaw enough to turn. Repeat if necessary.

Toothbrush

- Use a toothbrush to clean your grater.
- To prolong the life of a blow dryer, unplug and use a dry toothbrush to clean its filter.
- Use a toothbrush to scrub bathroom grout and corners inside windowsills and frames.



Clear nail polish

- Brush clear nail polish on costume jewelry to discourage tarnishing.
- Avoid lost buttons by applying a dab of clear nail polish to the thread at the center of the buttons on your clothes. This will prevent the threads from coming loose.
- Use clear nail polish to patch small holes in a window screen, and to fill in small nicks on wooden floors, in glass or Plexiglas.
- Got a damaged vinyl floor? Grate some of a scrap piece, blend the fibers with clear nail polish and paint it on for discreet repair.
- If your car gets dinged by a shopping cart, apply a coat of clear nail polish to keep the scratch from getting worse. This will also discourage rust from forming.
- Tighten loose doorknobs by removing the knob and dipping the screw that holds it in place in clear nail polish. Screw the knob back in place. The nail polish will dry to provide a tighter seal for the knob screw.
- If shoe laces fray, dip the ends in clear nail polish, squeeze them into shape and let dry.



Hydrogen peroxide

- Cutting your finger in the kitchen presents the added threat of exposing your wound to bacteria. Hydrogen peroxide can help prevent infection of your wound and also remove any blood stains from your clothing or kitchen linens. Just pour a little of the solution on the fabric and watch it fizz away the stain. Blot, rinse and repeat if needed.
- Hydrogen peroxide has been used straight and in blends to attack grass stains. The latest blend circulating among blogging moms has hydrogen peroxide mixed with blue Dawn dish soap. One version uses two parts hydrogen peroxide to one part Dawn. Another option: equal parts hydrogen peroxide, Dawn and baking soda.



Baking soda

■ You've likely tested baking soda's stink-fighting effectiveness in the refrigerator, but it also takes on odors — and stains — in other places. Read on for ideas.

■ If that great read you found at the library's book sale comes with a musty scent, put it in a plastic bag with a cup of baking soda. In a week, wipe off the book and the bad odor.

■ Does your dog smell between grooming appointments? Try sprinkling him with baking soda. Rub it into his fur then brush him vigorously. Much of the dirt and odor will be removed along with the baking soda.

■ Try baking soda on any surface where odor is a problem, then shake, wipe or vacuum. Works on upholstery, pet beds, toys, garbage cans. Also, put a box in a closet.

■ Sprinkle baking soda in smelly shoes and leave overnight. Brush out the baking soda along with any foul odors it has absorbed.

■ Got an oily stain on your shirt? Sprinkle baking soda, corn starch or talcum powder liberally onto the stain and rub it in. Let it sit overnight. The next day, wipe away the powder with a towel. It will have absorbed all or most of the oil. Repeat as needed, and then the shirt can be laundered.

■ Try baking soda to absorb oily stains on non-washable wallpaper or even concrete.

■ Baking soda balances pH in the washer to improve cleaning. Add 1/2 cup of baking soda and use half the amount of bleach you normally use for whites. Need to rid clothes of cigarette or cigar smoke? Add a cup of baking soda during the wash cycle.

■ The drain-clearing mix of baking soda with a vinegar chaser will be more effective if you trap the bubbling action inside the drain. Pour 1/2 cup baking soda as deeply as possible into the drain, follow with 1/2 cup vinegar, then push a stopper into the drain opening. Wait 5 minutes, remove stopper and pour boiling water down the drain.



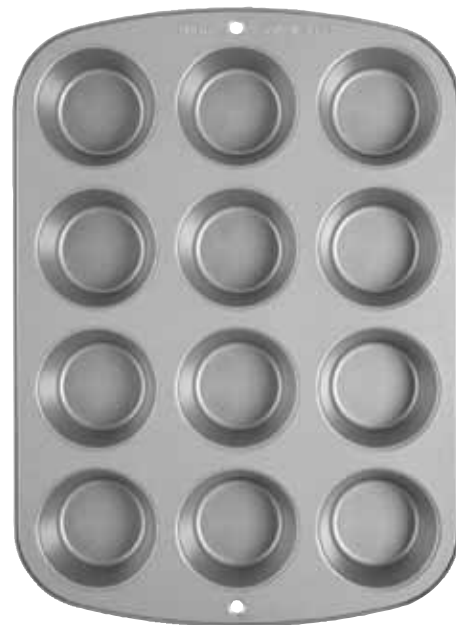
Charcoal

■ Put charcoal in a stocking in your refrigerator or a stale closet to absorb odors.

■ To reduce moisture in the basement, place piles of charcoal in out-of-the-way places. It should also cut down on unpleasant odors.

■ Divide enough charcoal for one grilling into paper bags. When it's time to fire up the grill, put in a whole bag and light it.

■ Keep a few charcoal briquettes in the tool box to absorb moisture that can rust tools.



Muffin pan

■ Baked potatoes for a crowd? Pick small-sized potatoes that will fit in a muffin pan, then bake with one end sticking out. They'll cook more quickly.

■ Beyond muffins, mini meat loaves and portion-controlled mac and cheese, you can get more out of your muffin pan if you freeze in it. Make a big batch of oatmeal in your favorite flavor. Divvy it into a silicone muffin pan and freeze. Remove the resulting frozen oatmeal discs and store them in zip-top bags. You will then have single servings to heat as needed.

■ Turn your muffin pan into a time-saver for parties by lining it with paper muffin cups and adding scoops of ice cream.

■ Freeze party punch in muffin cups and add citrus slices or berries. You'll get large, festive chillers that won't dilute the punch.

Vinegar

■ Polish a stainless steel sink with white vinegar and baking soda on a damp sponge.

■ Soak sponges overnight in two cups of warm water with a cup of vinegar to freshen them. Rinse with hot water before using.

■ If eggs crack during boiling, add a little white vinegar to the water. It won't change the egg's taste, but will keep the whites from leaking out. To prevent cracking, always add a little vinegar to the boiling water.

■ Soak cloudy drinking glasses in full-strength white vinegar to remove hard water stains and make them sparkle again.

■ To restore dull linoleum or vinyl floors, add a cup of vinegar to a gallon of hot water in a bucket, mop the floors and rinse.

■ Got hard-water stains in your toilet? Fill a bucket with about a gallon of water and pour it into your toilet to flush out most of the water. Then pour in a quart of vinegar and let it sit overnight. Brush the stains away in the morning and flush for a clean toilet.

■ If you park outside in winter, discourage ice formation by spraying your car's windshield with a mixture of one part water and three parts vinegar. Start by mixing 1/4 cup water and 3/4 cup white vinegar.

■ To keep your washing machine cleaning efficiently and smelling fresh, run a full wash cycle with a half gallon of vinegar once a year. Alternately, using a cup of vinegar in an empty wash every few months also will help keep the washer and its hoses clean. Be sure to go through the rinse cycle. Wipe areas above the water line with a vinegar-soaked cloth to remove any residue from those areas. Use warm water to wash away all the vinegar. Vinegar helps remove dirt, soap residue and mineral deposits.

■ A cup of white vinegar added to the dishwasher before running a wash cycle will help remove grime and soap residue.

■ To make sure your towels keep their drying power, occasionally add a cup of vinegar to the washer's rinse water. It will help remove residual laundry detergent that can block a towel's absorbency. White vinegar is mild enough to not harm fabrics, but it has enough acidity to dissolve alkalis in soaps and detergents. It also gets rid of suds and soap deposits to leave fabrics soft and fresh.

■ Want those gym socks to come out clean? Mix a cup of white vinegar into 3 cups of water and soak them overnight.

■ To remove perspiration stains, rub them with full-strength vinegar before laundering.

■ To clean mirrors and windows, mix a cup of white vinegar and a cup of warm water in a spray bottle. Spray the glass, then use microfiber cloths to clean and wipe dry.

■ Use 1 cup ammonia, 1/2 cup vinegar and 1/4 cup baking soda in a gallon of hot water



to get rid of mildew on decks or wood furniture. Rinse, let dry and apply outdoor stain.

■ Make a stain-removing solution by mixing equal parts white vinegar, dishwashing liquid and water in a spray bottle. Spray on stains, rub in, soak 15 minutes and launder.

■ Boil 1/4 cup vinegar and a cup of water in a microwave-safe bowl to deodorize a microwave and make splatters easier to wipe.

■ Keep vinegar in a spray bottle to attack pet accidents in the carpet. Soak up as much of the urine as possible by putting down layers of paper towels and walking on them until they are soaked. Repeat until towels remain nearly dry. Spray vinegar on the stain. Most of the urine smell is due to ammonia, a highly alkaline substance. Distilled white vinegar is acidic and helps neutralize it.

■ Items soiled by pet urine can be made fresh again by neutralizing with a cup of vinegar added to the wash cycle.

■ Spritz a rusted screw with white vinegar, wait a few minutes, then try to loosen it.

■ After pruning trees, remove sap from your hands by dipping an old toothbrush in white vinegar and using it to scrub off the sap.

■ Wash produce with 2 tablespoons of vinegar in a pint of water. Rinse well.

■ To soothe the agonizing itch of athlete's foot fungus, soak feet 15 minutes in 4 cups of warm water with 2 cups of white vinegar.

Winter is a great time for pruning trees

It's cold and there's a considerable threat of snow and ice, but January and February are good months to get outside and prune trees and shrubs to get them ready for spring.

"Pruning deciduous trees and shrubs is ideal during the winter because it's easier to see the form of the tree and branching structure without leaves," according to a tip sheet from RS Landscaping in Midland Park.

"The plants also respond well to being pruned at this time of year because they are not actively growing, and are less stressed due to heat or drought."

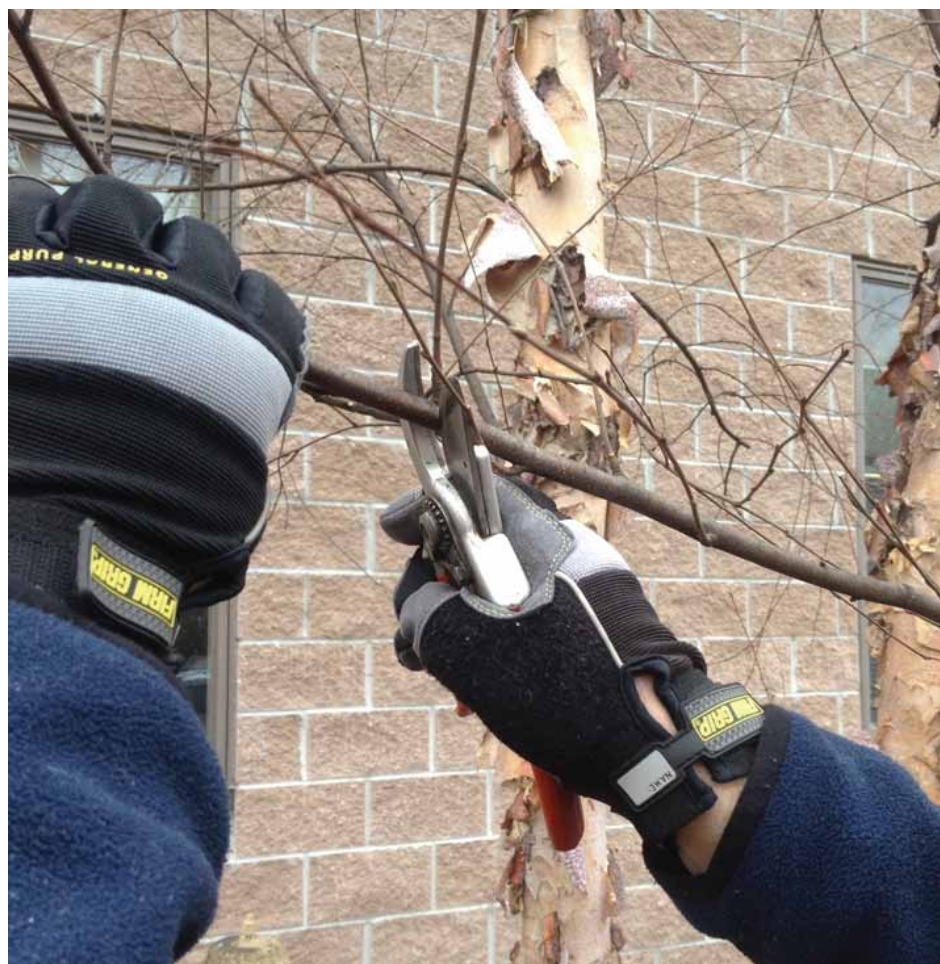
There are a few good weeks of dormancy left before there's danger of making cuts that would trouble trees and shrubs. Consider pruning throughout winter, if possible.

For those who'd do the work themselves, RS Landscaping offers the following tips for a successful winter garden shape-up. Following them will prepare deciduous plantings (those that shed their leaves annually) for spring and help gardeners get an early start.

First, use hand pruners to remove dead or damaged branches. Pruning cuts should be made outside of the bark collar, the flared base where a branch meets the trunk. Cut as close to the adjoining branch as possible, and be sure the cut is angled to let water run off instead of sitting on a flat, open surface. When water sits on the open wound of a tree or shrub, it can creep in through the wood, causing rot or allowing fungus and insects to take residence. These conditions can ultimately kill the plant.

Next, look for crossing or tangled branches to remove. Crossing or touching branches can rub away bark, causing wounds that risk infection.

To determine which branch should stay and which should go, look at the direction of the branches and decide which is more dominant. It's important to always use clean, sharp hand pruners to cut away small branches up to the size of a pencil.



Courtesy RS Landscaping

Leafless trees and shrubs in the winter landscape reveal form for more accurate trimming.

Use hand pruners to remove weak, fast-growing branches called suckers and water sprouts. Suckers are whip-like branches that grow straight up from the tree or shrub's trunk, robbing it of nutrients. Pruning these away before spring will ensure that the plant gets what it needs for optimum health.

Finally, trim length from branches as

needed to clear walkways and paths. Remember to always cut growth back to the next branch. Stubs are unsightly and unhealthy for the plant.

Trimming branches also helps reduce the chance of damage from the weight of snow or ice. Always remove heavy snow from trees and shrubs to prevent damage.

Tool talk

The two main types of pruners are anvil or bypass pruners. Anvil pruners cut by pushing a sharp blade against an "anvil" — a broad, flat surface. Bypass pruners work more like scissors, slicing a stem between two sharp blades. Bypass shears and bypass loppers are recommended by pruning experts over the anvil type. They tend to make a cleaner cut, which promotes faster healing. Anvil pruners crush the stem, leaving a ragged cut that will be slower to heal. They are useful, however, for removing dead plant material, as when clearing perennials at the end of their season.



If you didn't prepare your pruning tools before storing them, be sure the blades are clean and sharp enough to cut without scarring any limbs.

The Fiskars bypass hand pruning shears shown are all-steel construction with cushioned grips for more comfortable use. They are widely available and highly rated, selling for less than \$15.



Verde

Creeping thyme offers scented pink, blue or white blooms.

A beautiful way to fight weeds

Once established, plants known as groundcovers can reduce landscape maintenance by covering bare ground and challenging areas so weeds have less chance of taking over.

Groundcovers are perennials that spread quickly, often low-growers that form a green carpet that prevents weeds from getting the sunlight and space they need to grow. Some offer the bonus of seasonal flowers, attracting bees, butterflies and birds with color and fragrance.

Requiring little maintenance, evergreen groundcovers don't lose their leaves in winter, remaining attractive all year.

For those now planning their garden improvements for spring, start small and experiment with a few of the following options. Use strong performers more widely in the landscape.

A few to consider are barren strawberry (*Waldsteinia ternata*), shade-loving barrenwort (*Epimedium*) and creeping thyme (*Thymus praecox*). Smaller succulents (*Sedum acre*, *Sedum album* and *Sedum spurium*) offer a variety of drought-tolerant choices. Taller options are catmint (*Nepeta*), coral bells (*Heuchera*) and lady's mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*), which are recommended as deer resistant weed fighters.

Groundcover planting tips

- Work the soil thoroughly and remove all weeds.
- Water diligently for the first few seasons to help groundcovers establish themselves with strong roots.
- To get groundcovers off to a good start, add compost or organic fertilizer to the soil before planting.
- When selecting any garden plant, be sure it is not classified as invasive, a plant species that can grow out of control.
- Don't be afraid to interplant different groundcovers. The traditional groundcovers ivy (*Hedera*) and dwarf periwinkle (*Vinca major*) take on new appeal when growing together.
- Consider planting in sloped areas, where they can prevent soil erosion and eliminate the need to mow.
- In fall, plant flower bulbs such as snowdrops, daffodils or tulips among groundcovers for seasonal interest in low beds.

ABOUT THE HOUSE

Restoring your vinyl siding

Brush away pollutants

Q. I'm interested in your professional opinion of vinyl siding restoration products. I'm sure you are familiar with the fading and chalkiness that happens to vinyl over the years.



HENRI DE MARNE

Some products claim to restore the vibrancy of the original color and also "protect" this restored look for years to come. What products do you recommend for the cleaning and restoration of vinyl siding?

A. Rinse the siding with a hose (do not use a pressure washer) to wet

the pollutants that have accumulated over time. Use a soft bristle brush to help loosen the pollutants. Start at the bottom and rinse upward, keeping the siding wet at all times.

Follow this by washing the siding with a mixture of 3 parts white vinegar to 7 parts water. It should remove most of the pollutants and oxidation. Add a cup of TSP-PF per gallon of water if the water and vinegar solution doesn't do the job well enough.

If you are not happy with the results, you can follow this with an application of one of the vinyl-siding restoration products on the market. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's directions, as they vary by manufacturer.

If you decide to paint the siding, apply a coat of acrylic-bonding primer and let it dry completely. Apply a latex siding paint, using a synthetic-bristle brush or a paint roller. Be sure to paint each board completely from end to end to prevent streaking. Once the paint is thoroughly dry, apply a second coat, using the same process.

Painting garage walls

Q. Our painted, drywalled garage walls are peeling. Our neighbor said the previous owners painted the drywall but did not prime it first. How can we solve the peeling problem? Can we repaint the inside garage walls with latex after sanding the peeling areas?

A. A garage is subject to moisture and considerable temperature fluctuation. If the previous owners didn't use greenboard, they should have. Greenboard is a type of drywall used in areas where moisture may be an issue. Greenboard's paper covering, which is green on one side, is treated to resist moisture and, in some cases, mold growth. Additionally, any drywall should have been primed and painted with two coats of a quality exterior latex paint.

You can sand the peeling areas, prime the walls with Zinsser Bulls Eye 1-2-3 Gray

Primer and paint them as mentioned above. However, there is the strong possibility that peeling will continue and be aggravated by the additional weight of the new coats.

Cleaning a skylight

Q. I have a skylight that, on the outside, is full of sap and dirt. What's the best product to clean it?

A. Try washing the glass with warm water to which ammonia has been added. Be careful walking on the roof or, better, have a contractor or handy person experienced in walking on roofs do it for you.

Water stains on glass shower

Q. I'm happy to see you are publishing your blog. Many people benefit from your knowledge, including me a few years ago. I now have a new problem: hard water stains on my shower glass walls. The well water seems to have almost etched the glass. Do you know of any way to fix this?

A. Try the most ecological way first. Spray lemon juice onto the glass, let it stand for 20 to 30 minutes and rinse off with a squeegee. Or cut a lemon in half and rub the stains with it, let it stand for 30 minutes, rinse and squeegee. Or spray white vinegar and carry on as above.

If this is not successful, spray white vinegar, let stand for 30 minutes. Then, gently rub the stains with baking soda applied with a soft, non-abrasive pad. Rinse thoroughly and squeegee. You can add lemon juice to the vinegar to increase its potency.

There are many commercial cleaners, but they need ventilation and should be applied while wearing rubber gloves. Follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully. Some effective commercial cleaners are also toilet bowl cleaners, The Works, Kaboom, etc.

Tightening furniture joints

Q. There used to be a product called wood-swell or wood-lock or something of that nature, which was very useful for tightening joints on chairs, beds, etc. It would eventually wear out, but as a temporary fix it was ideal. I can't find it anywhere. Is there any comparable product on the market today?

A. There are a number of products to tighten loose joints in furniture. I have not done comparative testing, but any of the following should help.

WonderLok 'Em Loose Joint Repair is available at Rockler.com or from your local Ace Hardware Store; Swel-Lock is available on Amazon; WesternWoodDoctor.com sells Chair-Loc.

Henri de Marne has shared his expertise on residential construction, repair and remodeling with readers of his nationally syndicated column for more than 40 years. Contact the author and learn more at HenriDeMarne.com.



Courtesy Shack Shine

At a home's roofline, icicles usually signal blocked rain gutters or insufficient insulation.

Icicles can mean trouble

Managing a home's stormwater drainage system is among the season's crucial tasks.

If the rain gutters are still full of fall leaves and other debris, they will overflow when rain can't drain properly. Water spilling over gutters can enter around windows, beneath siding and through other areas, risking damage to siding, walls and more.

At the ground level, excess water can seep into a basement, threatening a home's foundation. Beyond that, constantly moist soil and damp woodwork encourages termites.

Yet another concern is melting snow that can't drain through blocked gutters. The melted snow freezes into ice, exacerbating blockage and causing ice dams that can push up shingles at the roof's edge. This presents a problem if water gets under the shingles and leaks into the house through the roof. Add to that the fact that ice-filled gutters are heavier than normal, and the weight can cause them to break away from the house. All this points to maintenance.

Being vigilant about keeping gutters clear and downspouts free of clogs is the answer. The role of gutters is to carry water from a home's roof into downspouts and a good distance away from the foundation. It's also a good idea to monitor downspouts to be sure they are intact and free of clogs.

According to Shack Shine, a home exterior cleaning service, the frequency of gutter clearing will depend largely on a home's landscape. In an area without trees, an annual cleaning might be sufficient. Homes surrounded by trees, however, will require more frequent clearing, as gutters will be filled with leaves.

A final caution: Icicles can form on clogged gutters when it's cold enough for the spilling water to freeze. However, icicles on a home's roofline after snowfall can indi-



Brad Volpe

Downspouts are essential in managing rainwater from a home's roof. Repair any breaks to avoid leaks, and use extenders to divert water away from the foundation.

cate that attic insulation is insufficient.

Warm air rises, and without an insulating barrier to contain it, warmth will escape through the roof, melting the snow. Water runs down the roof and freezes into icicles at edges of the roof or on the gutters.

Call a roofer about any large, heavy icicles. They also pose a safety risk if they break off and fall on people or property.

Valentine's Day: Flowers, candy and angst

By Brad Volpe

For most folks, Valentine's Day is about love and romance. For me, it's merely a sign that February — that hardest and most wintry of months — is halfway over. Meaning spring is that much closer.

To be honest, I've often felt awkward, if not outright annoyed, on Valentine's Day. You see, I've spent plenty of them without a significant other.

So when I get to the office and some flashy gal has a bouquet of obscenely beautiful roses dwarfing her desk, it makes my skin crawl a little. It's like an advertisement: "My pookie loves me enough to send these expensive flowers to the office for the world to see!"

Yech.

I've always been surprised that more people don't stick up for "singletons" on Valentine's Day. Or that singletons don't organize their own anti-Valentine's Day. Then again, most singletons prefer not to draw attention to their loner status. *And* they hate being called singletons.

That said, I'm always up for candy. But there again, even the candy on Valentine's Day is not as exciting as that of Halloween, Christmas or Easter.

Whitman's Sampler? Awesome if you get to the box early enough, so you can snag a crunchy one instead of a "creme" one. (Don't you hate those people who break open a piece of chocolate candy to see what's inside, and then put it back if they don't want it? I say: You break it, you eat it. It's basic Valentine's Day candy etiquette.)

How about "motto hearts," those chalky little heart-shaped candies that say "BE MINE" and "KISS ME"? They taste like Pepto Bismol. Though admittedly, motto hearts are one hilarious candy, and quite the conversation piece.

We won't even get into pink Peeps.

All my complaining aside, I've always believed in romantic love, and in honoring those we romantically love with special gifts.

The first woman I ever fell in love with, apparently, was Zsa Zsa Gabor. I was born in the late '50s, back when the statuesque Hungarian blonde was a fixture on television. I'm told that one of the earliest sentences I put together was inspired by Zsa Zsa. She was on "What's My Line" or some such show, and I, a mere toddler, turned to my mother and said, "She's pretty, Mommy."

Kindergarten crushes

The next girl I fell in love with was Patty Regan, who had curly, light-brown hair and a cute little pointed nose. We were both in kindergarten, but not in the same classroom. Patty was in Mrs. Brown's class, while I was in Mrs. Palm's. I never told Patty how I felt.

One day, I was eating a box of Cracker Jack — "candy-coated popcorn, peanuts and a prize," went the jingle. The prize was always some junky little thing in a paper pouch



Collage by Brad Volpe

The holiday dedicated to romance may sometimes feel like an obligation. But the need to express affection to a loved one is human nature.

In this case, it was a tiny plastic trophy — one piece with two tiny halves, which you broke apart and snapped together into a tiny trophy. I took that, and put a peanut from my Cracker Jack into the little cup. It fit perfectly, to tell you how tiny this thing was. I brought the peanut trophy to school.

Without asking permission, I walked out of Mrs. Palm's classroom and into that of Mrs. Brown, carrying the prize.

"Look, children, we have a visitor," said Mrs. Brown.

Without saying a word, I held up the peanut trophy.

"Is that for me?" said Mrs. Brown with a big smile.

"No," I said, and her expression changed somewhat. "It's for Patty Regan," I added, pointing artlessly at Patty.

The classroom erupted in giggles. Mrs. Brown asked Patty to come up to accept the gift. Patty did not seem happy. She took the prize and wordlessly returned to her desk.

I stumbled back to Mrs. Palm's classroom, kind of in a daze. Had I expected Patty to smile and hold up the peanut trophy to the cheers of Mrs. Brown and her class? I don't remember. But what did I know? I was 5.

Later that year, I fell for another girl in kindergarten, one with white-blond hair and a ready smile. I remember once saying something to her that, in retrospect, sounds like a line that a skeezy guy would use on a woman in a tavern (and probably get laughed off

for it). But I swear, it was just the honest emotion of a 5-year-old, expressed without calculation.

I said to her: "You're pretty. If you don't believe me, just look in the mirror."

Elementary engagement

In fourth grade at Catholic school, I had a powerful crush on Kathleen Farrow, who had long, sandy-blond hair and a face like Bridget Bardot. I never spoke with her, mind you. I just worshiped her from afar.

One day, I put a quarter into a vending machine that dispensed little prizes. (Good entertainment was hard to come by in the days before the iPhone X.) I got what looked, to my fourth-grader eyes, like a rich lady's ring. Of course, it was a plastic nothing, but it was big and sparkly. I knew immediately who I wanted to give it to.

At recess the next day, I went up to Kathleen Farrow, who was jumping rope with some other girls. I said "Here," and held out the ring. (I didn't say, "I like you" or "I think you're pretty." I just said, "Here.")

Kathleen took the ring without comment. She didn't say "Thank you" or put it on a finger. She then turned and resumed jumping rope with her friends.

Well, one of those "friends" must have finked to Sister Inviolata. After recess, Sister said, "Mister Volpe? Miss Farrow? Please stand." The two of us stood while every kid

in the classroom eyed us with curiosity.

Finally, Sister Inviolata said to me, "Did you give this young lady a ring?"

"Yes, Sister."

"Did you accept a ring from this young man?" Sister asked Kathleen.

"Yes, Sister." Kathleen was looking down and starting to appear flushed.

"Don't you realize that now, you're going to have to *marry* this boy?" Sister said.

Kathleen started sobbing. My only thought was: "But I'm too *young* to get married!"

I think it's human nature for a fella to want to give a token of affection to a gal he's sweet on. He wants to let her know that to him, she's the most special person on the planet. (And, not least, that he wants to hang on to her.) My only quibble with Valentine's Day is that it feels like an obligation.

Go to any supermarket on the evening of Feb. 13, and you'll see what I mean. I remember once being in a line of 10 people at a cash register, and — no exaggeration — three dudes in line were cradling roses. I should add: These were *supermarket* roses. Which are not exactly what Donald sends to Melania.

I suppose it's nice to have a day set aside for love, though. I mean, if there's a National Corn Chip Day, there can be a love day.

But if you really want to knock your special lady off of her stilettos (or out of her orthopedics), give her flowers on one of the other 364 days of the year. Just because.

ASK DR. BARB

Internet flies wrong on the birds and bees

Dear Dr. Barb,
I am concerned about how easy it is for children to access explicit material online and that it will lead to irresponsible actions kids aren't mature enough to handle. A friend recently caught her 12-year-old daughter viewing sexually explicit material on a mobile phone. What would you suggest for a parent dealing with the many sexual cues to which children are exposed?

Dear Reader,

In many communities, it is commonplace for pre-teens or “tweens” to have mobile phones. And as they are spending more and more time connecting with each other online, parents may be unsure where to draw the line between safe technology use and healthy social connection. Kids feel pressure to not be left out, and parents really do not want this to happen to their kids either.

However, among such challenges, the internet has made pornography more accessible and prevalent than any time in history. In her 2016 book, “Girls and Sex,” journalist Peggy Orenstein writes that 40 percent of all kids between 10 and 17 have been exposed to online pornography, many times accidentally.

Sexual material can be very confusing and even frightening for a 12-year-old. In this situation, I would suggest openly talking with the 12-year-old about her thoughts, understanding and feelings about the images. This creates an opportunity to help her understand sexuality in an age-appropriate and healthy way. Talking with a child, as opposed to being punitive or creating fear and shame, would encourage the necessary parental talk about

“the birds and the bees” that helps satisfy a child’s natural curiosity about sex.

The overabundance of sexual images in the media and easy access to online pornography can provide distorted perceptions about healthy relationships and sexuality. Although it is entirely appropriate for tweens and teens to want to explore romantic relationships, young people may easily confuse true emotional intimacy with nudity and sexual intercourse. They may be inclined to send nude or suggestive photos of themselves to someone they like, not realizing the consequences of their choices if such photos are shared.

Without parental guidelines and limit setting, most tweens and teens cannot safely navigate these issues on their own. As social media becomes increasingly widespread, kids may face situations they are unprepared to handle. As an example, a child may be sent an inappropriate sexual image and then be asked to share that image with others.

Much of what a parent can do to help kids use technology in safe and healthy ways is basically using good parenting skills, such as ongoing conversations about how to make good choices when using social media. A parent really must talk with their child about the consequences of their actions when they post, message, text or share images.

Parents also need to become well versed in mobile apps and the language of social media so they can talk openly and knowledgeably with their kids. Popular apps and messaging tools like Instagram and Snapchat are constantly changing. Parents must stay informed about features, percentage of users under age 18 and the minimum age to use. Additionally,

parents should discuss the potential dangers in a child hiding apps and social media accounts, as sexually explicit material can sometimes be accessed through them.

In such cases, monitoring your child’s safety will be more important than respecting his or her privacy. It may be necessary to keep track of passwords and downloaded apps, and to randomly check photos and other files stored on a child’s phone. Safety must be the first priority for a middle schooler, and parents should feel comfortable having 24-hour access to their child’s phone and passwords.

In her book “Social Media Wellness: Helping Tweens and Teens Thrive in an Unbalanced Digital World,” Ana Homayoun writes that how parents talk to their children has the most powerful impact on them making proactive and pro-social decisions about social media and technology use.

She advocates parents working collaboratively with tweens and teens so they learn to use social media in a way that promotes healthy, responsible behavior and good values in both online and real-life communities. In addition to encouraging a balance of online time with enjoyment of off-line activities, this would prompt kids to speak up if they see uncomfortable online images and behaviors. When parents work together with their kids around such goals, teens and tweens will think twice before lying and sneaking around.

Parents also should keep in mind that they model appropriate use of technology for their children. Adults have to set good standards. If parents are texting while driving or replacing family time with their own excessive social media use, kids will have



BARBARA ROSENBERG

difficulty trusting them. Of course, without trust, the follow-through in collaboration and cooperation between parents and kids will be less successful.

Barbara L. Rosenberg, Ph.D., is a licensed psychologist whose Summit practice serves individuals of all ages, as well as couples and families. She previously chaired educational and social programs for the Essex-Union County Association of Psychologists. Contact her through BarbaraRosenberg.com.

Entertaining for meaningful social connections

On cold winter days, your home can be a little warmer. Just invite some people over. Not for their body heat, but for what Melissa Michaels describes as “the life-changing experience of community.”

Her sixth book, “Simple Gatherings: 50 Ways to Inspire Connection” is, in part, a guest-centered volume on friendship building during parties and other events.

“Wander around periodically to make sure everyone is feeling included,” she advises hosts. “Connect guests who have things in common. Make as many introductions as possible.”

Michaels is a rare sort of party planner: an introvert who manages to be a people-person. “I’ve found ways to work around my weaknesses and have a lot of fun with my strengths,” she explains.

She also says she is “not drawn to cooking.” So she relies on Costco and Trader Joe’s for appetizers and other party foods to fill the buffet table. Michaels also never frets that her house isn’t perfect. It only has to be “clean enough.”

“There are endless worries, excuses and challenges that could prevent us from accepting the title of hostess,” she writes. “But if we think that genuine hospitality means doing



Michaels focuses on what she says are the things guests remember, and chapters of her book are built around them. They are “the atmosphere, the feast, the conversation, and the special touches.” Within those four categories, she covers the

it all perfectly, we’ve missed the point.”

Instead, the would-be host or hostess should remember that “the purpose of hospitality is to make people feel comfortable, not to impress them with our amazing talent or skill.

“When you stay focused on your guests, you can take care of the small details in a way that makes them feel celebrated and comfortable in your home.”

essential lists, invitations, music and more. She also offers advice on overnight guests, outdoor gatherings and kid parties.

There are more reasons to gather than birthdays, brides, babies and other occasions and milestones, and she has ideas. Her suggestions: afternoon tea, appetizer mixers, “girls night in,” book or movie discussions, Bible study, group crafting or scrapbooking, game night, coffee breaks or game nights.

The book also includes a few recipes and crafty projects such as making luminaries where Mason jars are half filled with Epsom salt to anchor tea lights, votives or pillar candles and then tied with ribbons safely away from any flame.

“Nothing says ‘welcome’ like light,” she says.

Michaels, who frequently writes about home décor and organization in her books and blog “The Inspired Room,” also suggests ways to manage a party space. She loves “stations”—areas designated for welcoming guests or serving a certain type of food or conducting a specific activity. These areas help compartmentalize a home for parties and improve the flow of people traffic. They also become “conversation hubs,” she says.

A tip: Set your table a day ahead to be sure you have all you need. Cover the table with a sheet to keep everything clean.

Coming in March ...



Courtesy McCormick

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