

AGING IN ATLANTA

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HEALTH

Your blood pressure's 'normal'? Not so fast

Latest study says even 120 as the top number may be too high.

Jane E. Brody

c. 2020 The New York Times

So you think your blood pressure is normal? Think again.

The latest iteration of an “ideal” blood pressure – a level of 120 millimeters of mercury for systolic pressure, the top number – that Americans are urged to achieve and maintain has been called into question by a long-term multiethnic study of otherwise healthy adults.

The study, published in June in JAMA Cardiology, found that as systolic blood pressure rose above 90 mm, the risk of damage to coronary arteries rose along with it. Systolic blood pressure represents the pressure within arteries when the heart pumps (as opposed to diastolic blood pressure, the lower smaller number, when the heart rests).

The new findings suggest a need to look more carefully at why, despite considerable overall improvements in risk factors for heart disease in recent decades, it remains the nation's leading killer.

Starting in the 1940s, cardiovascular researchers have unveiled evidence that Americans live in a society that all but guarantees a disproportionately high risk of developing and dying of heart disease. Since my first weeks writing for this newspaper in the early 1960s, I've publicized their advice urging people to curb preventable risks to their hearts and blood vessels.

Although significant progress has been made along several fronts, especially drastic cuts in cigarette smoking and lowered levels of artery-damaging cholesterol, atherosclerotic heart disease still kills far too many people in this country long before they reach their potential life span. If not for a plethora of therapeutic advances, like anti-hypertensive drugs, cholesterol-lowering statins and open-heart surgery to bypass clogged arteries, life expectancy would be a lot worse for many people.

But the overall picture suggests we've still got a long way to go. For example, as Americans get fatter and fatter, two major risk factors for heart disease – Type 2 dia-

Brody continued on S2

Reimagining the holidays

By Curt Holman | For the AJC

Everyone in 2020, especially people who are older or at risk of COVID-19, realizes that the holidays will be different this year. Instead of dwelling on the seasonal traditions you can't do, such as the usual in-person gatherings, focus on the things you can do. Consider these creative ways to have fun and with your loved ones over the holidays.

Holidays continued on S4

ZOOM INTO THE PARTY

If you plan a big Zoom gathering to coincide with, say, opening presents Christmas morning, plan a short rehearsal or “test run” ahead of time to work out the bugs. You don't want to make the children wait while checking someone's Wi-Fi connection.

MOVIE NIGHT

If there's a traditional Christmas movie or show your family watches, like “It's a Wonderful Life” or “Die Hard,” schedule a remote viewing party for a designated time. Amazon Prime, for instance, has a “Watch Party” option, or you can use apps like Discord or Twitch so people in different homes can comment along to the same movie at the same time.

SOUND OF JOY

Have someone use Spotify to make a playlist of favorite holiday songs.

RECONNECT

With many people opting not to travel this year, you'll probably be interacting with your extended family and old friends remotely. Ahead of time, make sure you're up to date with everyone's contact information, including mailing addresses, mobile phone numbers and preferred email addresses. Take the opportunity to reconnect with people with whom you may have lost touch.

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COOKING

More than a ‘jack’ of all trades: Winter squash is a fall delight

By Gretchen McKay
Tribune News Service

Piled high in giant cardboard boxes at grocery stores or stacked beside the peppers and potatoes at the farmers market, these thick-skinned, bright-orange winter squashes are ripe for the picking, in several shapes and sizes.

So many will never make it onto a dinner table. For that, you have Halloween to blame. According to the National Retail Association, nearly half

of all Americans – some 152 million – usually chisel pumpkins into jack-o'-lanterns. All told, Americans were expected to spend a whopping \$687 million on carving pumpkins in 2020, or about \$100 million more than last year.

Members of the Cucurbitaceae family serve as lovely seasonal table decorations. But the gourds – which include everything from pear-shaped butternut to plump little sugar pumpkins to striped cushaws and grayish-blue monster-sized

hubbards – also are a relatively inexpensive and flavorful way to pack some nutrition into a fall or winter meal.

One of the newer varieties is ‘Tetsukabuto,’ an innovative kabocha/butternut cross with Japanese roots that's making its debut this year at Who Cooks For You Farm in New Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

“It's my favorite,” says Chris Brittenburg of the squash's sweet and nutty flesh, which

Squash continued on S2



Thai pumpkin curry is made with cubed “Touch of Autumn” pumpkin, coconut milk and red curry paste. Green beans and bell pepper add crunch, and a squeeze of lime brightens the whole dish. See recipe, S2.

GRETCHEN MCKAY/
PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE/
TNS

AGING IN ATLANTA

Squash

continued from S1

cooks up creamy like a custard in the oven. “It’s so much more moist.” This has been a pretty good year for winter squashes, says Brittenburg, who started the first-generation organic family farm with his wife, Aeros Lillstrom, in 2009. Well, so long as farmers had access to water, that is. The colorful fall fruits love hot and dry weather. But they also need an occasional drink to ensure a bountiful harvest.

“The quality has been pretty good this year,” agrees Adam Voll, manager of Soergel Orchards in Franklin Park, where butternuts, acorn and spaghetti squashes are popular buys in the farm market. Soergel also offers blue hubbard squash, a hard-shelled variety that many find intimidating. It can grow up to 20 pounds and takes a real effort to cut, but cooks are rewarded with a sweet and nutty-tasting flesh.

Hubbard is the quintessential squash to puree into a filling for pie, breads and pasta dishes. They store for an exceptionally long time if kept in a dry and cool place, Voll says.

Eating squash may be even more American than apple pie. Indigenous to the Western Hemisphere, winter squashes have been grown in North America for thousands of years. Native Americans roasted or boiled them and also preserved the flesh in syrup as jams. When the colonists arrived, they were initially skeptical of it but with time included it in their diet. The squash was among the few foods that sustained them during the long and inhospitable winters.

Today, Michigan grows the most squash in the U.S., followed by California, Oregon and Florida. The vast majority is sold fresh.

Technically, all pumpkins are a type of winter squash but not all winter squashes are pumpkins, although the terms are often used interchangeably. All belong to the same genetic family – Cucurbit.

Sweeter than the zucchini, pattypan and other summer squashes, the winter squash’s flesh is high in fiber and beta carotene. The squash is hard because it is fully ripened on the vine instead of being picked before the seeds and rinds begin to harden. Delicata squash is an exception, with its tender and edible skin.

In addition to popular orange hues, winter squashes can be yel-

THAI PUMPKIN CURRY

Serves 6. PG tested

Pumpkin curry is a standard offering on Thai menus. It’s easy enough to make at home and is a great way to use up all those veggies in your refrigerator crisper. Any yellow flesh pumpkin or winter squash will do — I used chunks of sweet sugar pumpkin. Red and green Thai curry pastes can be used pretty much interchangeably, but green is generally a bit milder than red.

- 2 tablespoons olive oil, divided

1 medium onion, chopped

2 medium carrots, chopped

3 cloves garlic

2 tablespoons freshly grated ginger

1 tablespoon ground turmeric

1 red bell pepper, sliced

2½ cups cubed kabocha squash or pie pumpkin

8 ounces green beans, trimmed and cut into 2-inch pieces
- 1 red chili pepper, sliced, optional

2 to 3 tablespoons Thai red or green curry paste, or more to taste

1 (13.5-ounce) can full-fat coconut milk

1 cup water

2 tablespoons lime juice

¼ cup chopped cilantro

Salt and pepper

Cooked rice for serving

Heat 1 tablespoon of olive oil in a large pot or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the onion and carrots and cook until softened, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic, ginger and turmeric and sauté for 30 seconds.

Add the bell pepper, pumpkin, green beans and chili pepper, if using, and sauté for 1 minute longer.

Add red curry paste, coconut milk and water, and stir well to combine. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer until the pumpkin is tender and the sauce has thickened, about 20 to 25 minutes.

Remove from heat and stir in the lime juice, cilantro, salt and pepper to taste. Serve warm over steamed rice.

Gretchen McKay

ROASTED CHEESE PUMPKIN

Serves 4

Cheese pumpkin — also known as Cinderella pumpkin — is so named because its rind looks like a squat wheel of cheese. Related to butternut squash, its smooth flesh and string-free interior makes it great for stuffing and baking.

Here, a whole pumpkin is hollowed out and then stuffed with a mix of Gruyère and Swiss cheeses, cream, white wine and honey. This dish also can be made with a butternut squash.

- 1 cheese pumpkin, 4 to 5 pounds

¾ cup shredded Gruyere cheese

1 cup shredded Swiss cheese

1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves

1 cup heavy cream

½ cup dry white wine
- 1½ teaspoons honey

Few pinches of nutmeg

1 teaspoon kosher salt

1 (12-inch) baguette, sliced thin

2 cloves garlic, peeled but intact

Vegetable oil

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Cut the top out of the pumpkin and scrape out the insides. (Save the seeds for roasting.)

Toss the cheeses and thyme together in a bowl. In a large measuring cup or bowl, combine the cream, wine, honey, nutmeg and salt.

Toast the baguette slices and rub each slice with garlic. Lay a few baguette slices in a single layer inside the pumpkin. Top with some of the cheese mixture, then pour on some of the cream mixture. Repeat this until all of your ingredients are used up. (You might have a bit left over; save any baguette for serving.)

Pop the top back on the pumpkin, place the pumpkin in a casserole or an oven-safe dish. Coat the outside liberally with oil.

Roast in hot oven for about 2 hours or until the pumpkin is tender all over and easily pierced with a fork. Let it stand for about 15 minutes.

Serve in scoops or slathers on top of toast rounds, crackers, pita chips or slices of apples.

Adapted from food52.com

low, white, green, striped, speckled, red and even blue. They can be large and smooth, or small and covered in bumps. One of the most visually striking is turban squash, a rich and nutty heirloom variety also known as Turk’s cap or French turban squash. Picture a pumpkin wearing a brightly striped hat, and you’ve got it. It’s excellent for baking and stuffing.

An added winter squash bonus is that it can last for weeks and even months because of its hard exterior.

Because they’re firmer than their summer counterparts, winter squashes

play a starring role in everything from soups and curries to lasagna, casseroles and countless desserts. They can be stuffed with meat, grains and vegetables, too.

Don’t fret if you don’t have a can of pureed pumpkin because it’s incredibly easy to make it at home. All you need to do, says third-generation farmer Patty Janoski, is to break the stem off any variety of pie pumpkin, cut it in half vertically, scoop out the seeds and bake it face-down on a greased cookie sheet at 350 degrees for an hour or so, or until the shell falls off the pulp.

“Then scoop the insides out and put it in a blender,” she says.

Don’t toss out the seeds. When seasoned with sea salt, they are perfect for snacking. First rinse the seeds and then bake in a 250-degree oven until they’re dry and crispy.

When purchasing a winter squash, look for one that feels heavy and has a dry, sturdy stem. Avoid those with soft spots, cracks, bruises or mold. Warts and minor discolorations are fine.

When it’s time to start cooking, you’ll need a sharp serrated knife to cut through the rind. A steady hand helps, too.

GUIDE TO POPULAR VARIETIES

DELICATA: Very sweet, it tastes similar to sweet potatoes. Its skin is tender and so it doesn’t have to be peeled. It can be stuffed, sliced into rings and roasted, sautéed or steamed.

BUTTERNUT: One of the most popular winter squashes, it has a distinctive bell shape. The bright-orange flesh is mild, sweet, buttery and nutty. Can be pureed for soup, roasted or cut into cubes for stews and curries.

BUTTERKIN: A hybrid between a butternut squash and a pumpkin. Sweet flesh that can be roasted and pureed for soups, stews, pasta, risotto, pies, and custards. It also can be stuffed.

SUGAR PUMPKIN: Also known as pie pumpkin, it is on the smaller side. Its firm and sweet flesh turns creamy when steamed, roasted or sautéed. The pumpkin is a classic choice for pureeing for pies and other baked goods. It also can be stuffed or cut into chunks for stew.

ACORN: It has a thick dark green or white skin and sweet orange-yellow flesh. It can be roasted, stuffed, baked or grilled with the skin on. Its small size makes it relatively easy to cut and work with.

KABOCHA: The hard and knobby green-skinned squash has a yellow-orange interior. Sweet with a nutty and earthy flavor, it has a slightly dry and sweet potato-like texture. A staple in Japanese cuisine, it’s great for soup and curries and also can be braised, roasted, stuffed or mashed.

HUBBARD: The extremely hard and thick skin is difficult to peel comes in grayish-blue, dark green, red or golden colors. The pumpkin is great for stuffing and baking, and is especially good for pies. It is often sold precut because it can grow to up to 20 pounds.

SPAGHETTI: The smooth-skinned and mild-flavored pumpkin’s flesh cooks into thin, spaghetti-like strands. It’s great for pasta-like preparations and gluten-free diets.

ROASTED DELICATA SQUASH RINGS WITH CHIPOTLE SAUCE

Serves 4

Delicata squash has a thin, delicate skin that doesn’t need to be peeled before eating. It is creamy and sweet, and it gets even sweeter when it is cut into rings or half moons and roasted. To spice it up, I like to dust the squash with a little chili powder and cayenne and serve it with a fiery chipotle mayonnaise for dipping.

- For squash:
- 2 medium delicata squash, scrubbed clean

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1 teaspoon kosher salt

Black pepper to taste

¾ teaspoon chili powder

¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper

- For dipping sauce:
- ½ cup mayonnaise

1 tablespoon finely chopped chives

2 teaspoons adobo sauce from can of chipotles in adobo

1 clove garlic, minced

Squeeze of fresh lime juice

Salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Trim the ends of each squash; cut in half lengthwise and scoop out the seeds with a spoon; cut the squash into half moons about ½-inch thick and transfer to a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Drizzle oil over top.

Mix salt, pepper, chili powder and cayenne pepper in a small bowl. Sprinkle spice mixture over the squash slices, then toss to make sure squash is evenly coated.

Roast in the oven, tossing around the squash on the baking sheet about half way through until the squash is tender and lightly browned, about 20 to 25 minutes.

While squash is roasting, make the sauce: Combine mayonnaise, chives, adobo sauce, garlic and lime juice in a small bowl. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Transfer the roasted squash to a platter and serve with chipotle sauce.

Brody

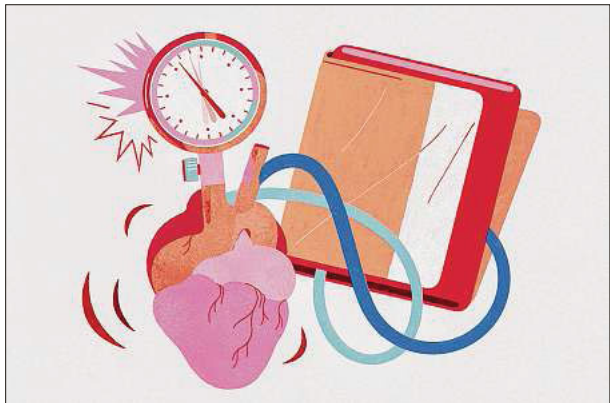
continued from S1

betes and high blood pressure – rise along with readings on bathroom scales.

Yes, there are medications to treat both conditions. But why resort to pills, including drugs with unwanted side effects, to modify risks that are within the personal control of most people?

And as shown in the study, even levels of blood pressure that are generally considered “normal” may indeed be high enough to foster the development of atherosclerotic heart disease by more than fourfold above the risk faced by people with systolic blood pressures that are physiologically ideal.

Heart experts have long known that people in traditional nonindustrial societies typically maintain systolic blood pressures in the low 90s throughout life. Unlike typical Americans, their blood pressure does not rise with age. Rather, it seems, the increase in blood pressure most common among



New research shows even levels of blood pressure generally considered “normal” may be high enough to foster heart disease. GRACIA LAM/NEW YORK TIMES

Americans as they age into mid- and late adulthood is an artifact of our sedentary lifestyles and diets too rich in calories and high in sodium, all of which result in stiff, narrowed arteries that result in high blood pressure.

The study, directed by Dr. Seamus P. Whelton, cardiologist and epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Ciccarone Center for the Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease in Baltimore, followed a cohort of 1,457 middle-aged men and women initially free of atherosclerotic vascular disease and known

risk factors for 14.5 years. As the participants aged, their risk factors for heart disease increased, along with calcium deposits in their coronary arteries and cardiovascular events like heart attacks and strokes.

The research team focused on increases in systolic blood pressure with age, adjusting the data for changes in other heart risks. They found that for every 10 mm increase in systolic blood pressure, the risk of calcium deposits and cardiovascular events rose accordingly. Compared

with people with systolic pressures of 90 to 99 mm, those with pressures of 120 to 129 mm were 4.58 times more likely to have experienced a cardiovascular event.

Still, Whelton said in an interview that it would be wrong to focus preventive strategies on blood pressure alone. People with high blood pressure, he said, “are also more likely to have higher cholesterol and blood glucose levels. The ideal strategy would focus on all risk factors – blood cholesterol, blood sugar and blood pressure. Maintaining a healthful diet, exercising, not smoking and consuming alcohol only in moderation would improve all the risk factors for cardiovascular disease.”

Levels of what doctors consider a healthy systolic blood pressure have been falling for about half a century. In August 1950, a report in JAMA suggested that labeling systolic blood pressures of 140, 150 or 160 mm as abnormally high is “arbitrary, particularly when age is concerned.” The authors suggested that raising accept-

able blood pressure levels for people over 40 “would result in a decrease in the reported incidence of hypertension and thus allay some of the widespread and unnecessary fear regarding high blood pressure.”

The latest blood pressure advisory, issued in 2017 by the American Heart Association and American College of Cardiology, considers a systolic blood pressure of 120 mm the upper limit of normal and defines 130 mm and above as high blood pressure that warrants treatment with lifestyle measures or medication.

In an editorial accompanying the new study, Dr. Daniel W. Jones, hypertension specialist at the University of Mississippi Medical Center who helped formulate the current blood pressure guidelines, wrote, “The risk imposed by a blood pressure level below the currently defined hypertensive level is continuous beginning with a systolic blood pressure as low as 90 mm mercury.”

Jones said in an interview, “Normal blood pres-

sure can be in the 90s, which is what it is in young healthy women, before the vascular system is damaged by elevated blood pressure over the years. Prevention should start with children, with a healthy diet low in salt and regular exercise, and adults should avoid gaining weight with age, which I realize is very difficult to do in our toxic food society.”

In praising me for maintaining a systolic blood pressure of 100 to 110 throughout my adult life, he said, “it’s rare for Americans to reach your age of 79 and not have hypertension.”

When I asked why doctors don’t put more emphasis on maintaining youthful levels of blood pressure, Jones said that in the 1960s medical schools taught that blood pressure should rise with age to assure an adequate blood supply to the brain.

“Only in recent decades has it been accepted that it’s actually better for the brain, kidneys and heart to keep blood pressure down as people age,” he said.

AGING IN ATLANTA

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Fall cooking inspiration from Kroger's Chef John

Fall is here, the weather is cooling, and chefs and home cooks alike are looking to the fall harvest for inspiration. With their crisp textures, vibrant colors and sweet to tart flavors, apples offer the perfect ingredient to match the mood of the season! Though available year-round, apples are at their best from September to November. Different varieties lend themselves to sweet as well as savory dishes. Look for apples that are firm, smooth-skinned and free of bruises and gouges. Avoid apples that have a musty smell, and store them in a cool, dry place. Be sure to wash well prior to use.



Kroger's Chef John looks to the fall harvest for holiday cooking inspiration. COURTESY OF KROGER

HERB-ENCRUSTED APPLE & FENNEL STUFFED PORK CHOPS

- 6 Tbsp unsalted butter, divided
- 2 cloves fresh garlic, minced
- 1 medium yellow onion, sliced
- 2 Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored and sliced thin
- 2 bulbs fennel, washed and thinly sliced
- ½ cup sun-dried cherries
- ½ cup brandy or cognac
- 4-6 boneless pork loin chops
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Preheat oven 350°
In medium skillet, melt three tablespoons butter over medium heat and sauté the garlic, onion, apple and fennel until tender. Add cherries and brandy and cook until alcohol is evaporated. Set aside and allow to cool. Season with salt and freshly ground pepper.
Cut a slit into the side of the pork loin chop, leaving the three opposite sides uncut. Stuff the chops with the above filling. Season the chops with salt and freshly ground pepper.
In large preheated skillet add remaining three tablespoons of butter and seasoned pork chops. Cook until brown on both sides, turning once. Place in 350° preheated oven for 5-10 minutes, until internal temperature reaches 165°.

The Kroger School of Cooking was created to provide a facility for culinary enthusiasts to explore the art of cooking and healthy living in an environment that removes inhibition and fosters learning, creativity and the development of relationships. To learn more, contact the Kroger School of Cooking at 770-740-2068.

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AGING IN ATLANTA

Holidays

continued from S1

Season’s greetings

■ Consider reviving the old-fashioned tradition of Christmas cards, either sending out store-bought or customized holiday greetings through the mail or adapting them for email or text messages.

■ For the most personalized cards, take photos of everyone in your household in holiday attire and send those out. You could also compile holiday photos throughout the years and make digital photo albums or videos for sharing.

■ Consider using the mail for a variation of the Flat Stanley and Elf on a Shelf concept. Mail a paper elf or similar object to relatives with kids, have them take a photo of it next to their Christmas tree or other decorations and send it on to other relatives.

■ Try using texting or emails to sends holiday messages in series, taking inspiration from the likes of advent calendars, the eight nights of Hanukkah and more. Every day send an image or graphic representing, for example, one of the 12 days of Christmas, starting with a partridge in a pear tree, then two turtle doves, etc.

■ Be consistent: If you do it at the same time every day, even skeptical family members will start looking forward to it.

■ If you’re ambitious, mail holiday care packages with seasonal treats.

Dreaming of a Wi-Fi Christmas

■ Over the course of 2020 you’ve probably gotten familiar with Zoom and other platforms for videoconferencing, which can be adapted for holiday parties. You may want to enlist someone, such as a tech-savvy grandkid, to be “tech support” for the group and to make sure everyone’s connection works.

■ Consider making virtual versions of special occasions like lighting the candles on the menorah, putting the star on top of the Christmas tree, saying grace before the big holiday meal or counting down to midnight on Christmas Eve. Don’t impose your idea on the others, but make sure they’re on board ahead of time

■ As an icebreaker, consider playing an uncomplicated game like bingo that can easily be adapted for Zoom.

■ When having a virtual meal or holiday party, share recipes for traditional refreshments such as eggnog, cookies or potato latkes, so everyone can prepare the same item and have a more communal experience. You can say grace together, share New Year’s resolutions or have a toast with hot chocolate or a seasonal libation.

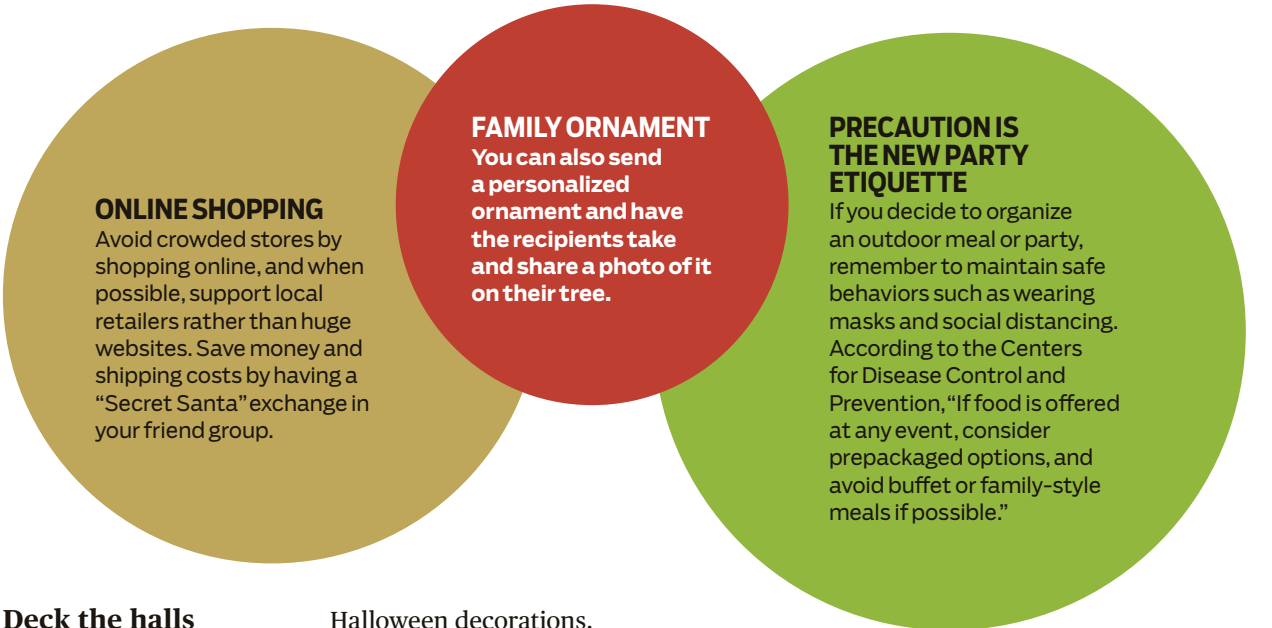
■ Mail children pre-wrapped presents ahead of time. Then, when it comes time to open them, make sure the young ones are on Zoom or otherwise “on camera” so their relatives can watch the festivities live. You may even want to try putting the grandparents on Zoom on an iPad or phone, secretly place the device in a box and then have the children open it for a “surprise visit.”

■ Midnight Mass and other religious gatherings will involve some kind of risk, but your family’s church or place of worship may offer virtual services that can be attended by anyone, no matter how far away they are.

■ Similarly, if there’s a traditional Christmas movie or show your family watches, like “It’s a Wonderful Life” or “Die Hard,” schedule a remote viewing party for a designated time. Amazon Prime, for instance, has a “Watch Party” option, or you can use apps like Discord or Twitch so people in different homes can comment along to the same movie at the same time.



You’ve probably gotten familiar with videoconferencing, which can be adapted for holiday parties. You may want to enlist a tech-savvy grandkid to be “tech support” to make sure everyone’s connection works. STOCK.ADOBE.COM



Deck the halls

■ Outdoor activities are safer than indoor gatherings, so this year, go all out by decorating the exterior of your home with lights and inflatables. Set up a “Best Decorations” contest with neighbors – or even family members in other states. Consider creative combinations such as a “Nightmare Before Christmas” display that incorporates

Halloween decorations.

■ Pick a night to have a family drive to see the neighborhoods that have gone all out with light displays. You can even make a socially distanced caravan with local friends or family members while talking on the phone.

■ Some attractions are designed specifically to be enjoyed while driving, such as Callaway Gardens’ Fantasy in Lights or places

of worship with live or even drive-thru Nativity scenes.

■ If you get a group together for caroling or otherwise singing holiday songs, make sure everyone keeps masks on to reduce the risk of spreading the airborne virus.

■ The weather may not cooperate, so make a backup plan if you have

to reschedule. If possible, set up a heater or a fire pit and consider seasonal variations on “campfire” activities like s’mores with holiday themes.

No matter what you do, be sure to take lots of pictures and share them with your loved ones. You’ll still be able to make memories in 2020.

HEALTHFUL LIVING

Centenarian shares secrets to longevity

Retired Episcopal deaconess always went her own way in work, faith, life.

By Rita Giordano
Philadelphia Inquirer

PHILADELPHIA — The rain came down in near-biblical proportions on a recent fall afternoon, but that wasn’t about to deter the St. Martin-in-the-Fields congregation members and other well-wishers from parading their way to the Germantown porch of the day’s much-loved honoree:

The irrepressible, indomitable Rena Graves, who turned 100 years young that day.

Some revelers wore hats; the retired deaconess was known to be a snappy dresser. Ms. Rena herself wore a birthday tiara for the occasion. Her porch was decked out with balloons and flowers. There was a band, a harmonica player, and the West Powelton Steppers came to perform. And, of course, everyone made a big deal about the 100 years.

Everyone except Ms. Rena.

“Age was not important to me. I never thought about it,” she said, grinning. “I just live my life, and I live every day. I think you live a better life that way.”

What a life it’s been. And she still has plans. “She’s 100, and she’s tackling the computer,” said Betsy Masters, a fellow congregant and

friend. “She can bring great wisdom to any situation. She’s just a very special person. We love her.”

For her birthday, her St. Martin’s friends printed a memoir they helped Ms. Rena compile. She’s already well on her way to finishing her second book, about her insights into the aging process.

“Her whole life was helping other people,” said Barbara Dundon, another St. Martin congregant. “That’s what deacons do. It’s a life of service.”

Rena Graves was born Rena Ruffin, the youngest of three children, raised by her mother and grandmother. The grown-ups cleaned wealthy people’s houses, and the children, from a very young age, helped out, doing laundry and ironing. They moved around the city: South Philly, North Philly, West Philly.

Her mother put her in William Penn High School, then a mostly white school, because she thought the education was better. The teenager had her first experience with racism in the 11th grade, when she spoke with a counselor about her future plans. She said she wanted to be a social worker or a dietitian.

“When I said that to her, she said to me, ‘Well, you don’t have to go to college to learn how to cook. Just get a job in somebody’s house.’ I knew then that was a racist remark.”

It wouldn’t be the last time, but it didn’t stop her. Ms. Rena went her own way in work, faith, and life.

She worked many different jobs: cleaning, taking care of children, attending to those with special needs, laboring in factories. With each job, she made sure she earned at least a little more than the one before.

“I used those jobs as steppingstones,” she said. In 1957, she was hired by Honeywell. Several years in, she was promoted to line supervisor. Her mostly white co-workers’ friendliness turned cool.

“I didn’t pay them any mind,” she said. “I knew I had a job to do.”

By the time she retired from Honeywell after 25 years, she had bought her own home, her own car, and she had her own money.

“I was so independent, you wouldn’t believe it.” She had good times, too. She and nine female friends called themselves Just Ladies. They went on outings locally and to dinner and shows in places like Washington and New York. One day, one of the ladies invited her to a family picnic in Chester, Pennsylvania. She caught the eye of a cousin of her friend. His name was Preston Graves, a custodial supervisor with the Chester school district.

“He said to me, ‘I’m coming to your house.’ I

said, ‘Yeah, right.’”

They were wed in 1977, but their bliss was short-lived; Preston died of prostate cancer in 1981. Ms. Rena never thought to marry again.

“He was a wonderful, wonderful man,” she said. “I knew the kind of man that I had, and I wasn’t going to look for another one because I knew another one wasn’t there.”

Ms. Rena followed her own mind when it came to church, too. She was raised Baptist, but as a young woman, she decided something else might suit her better. She settled on the Episcopal Church.

“I like pomp and ceremony,” she explained. In 1985, she was ordained a deacon and loved that it let her help people. She retired a few years ago, after serving in several churches in West Philadelphia and Germantown. From 1987 to 1997, she also worked as a chaplain at Wissahickon Hospice.

The Rev. Helen Williams, one of the friends at her 100th birthday party, remembered meeting Ms. Rena when they worked together at the hospice.

“I said, ‘Where did this fireball come from?’” Williams recalled.

Fireball indeed. Age has never been a barrier for Ms. Rena. She was in her 80s when she earned her master’s degree in theological studies. In recent years, City Council has honored her for

her long history of civic activism. Writing poetry is one of her latest avocations.

And about 13 years ago, feeling the need for new spiritual home, she found her way to St. Martin. She was visiting churches, looking for a new congregation. She went to a Sunday pre-service forum at the Chestnut Hill church and was taken by the friendliness of the congregants. She already knew some of them, but the fact that there weren’t many other Black congregants didn’t faze her.

“When we sit and talk to each other, we learn from each other,” she said. “I say to myself, ‘God has me here for a reason. I think he wants me to get Black and white people to sit down together and talk.’”

And while she served as deacon for other congregations, St. Martin, which has embraced racial justice and inclusion as important missions of its faith community, became her church family.

“Here I am now at St. Martin-in-the-Fields, being loved by these people,” she said.

She says she never had a birthday party until her 95th, when the folks at St. Martin’s stumbled upon her age and decided to make a fuss. They’ve given her a party every year since. The Sunday school kids make hats to honor their resident classy dresser. She loves it.

Ms. Rena seems decades younger than her age, especially in conversation, but she says cooking and getting around have gotten to be a bit difficult. And since the pandemic hit, her doctors have cautioned her to stay home. Her St. Martin friends have organized a meals ministry to keep Ms. Rena fed and well-cared for.

Because of COVID-19 precautions, she also had to miss registering folks to vote in person as she has done the last 10 years, bullhorn in hand. This year, she could only work the phones. Which, of course, she did.

“You can’t stop her from trying to get people to vote,” said Carol Duncan, a St. Martin’s deacon.

And neither pandemic nor rain wasn’t about to stop her 100th birthday celebration. Her guests all were treated to goodie bags containing cupcakes, ice cream and inspirational bookmarks. They shared the lawn with signs for “Black Lives Matter,” “Hate Has No Home Here” and Ms. Rena’s choice for president and vice-president.

Ms. Rena’s secrets to living long and staying are pretty simple: no fast or processed food; live a good, clean life; and never stop being willing to learn.

“Life is always different,” she said. “You need to be able to accept and endure – accept how life changes and endure the changes. And thank God for all of it.”

AGING IN ATLANTA

STYLE AND DESIGN

Elegance of the Scottish countryside at your table

‘Outlander’ series inspires designs that transport you to a different time.

By Katie Laughridge
Tribune News Service

I find so much inspiration from talking with like-minded creatives about style and design. One of these talented souls is tablescapist Suzanne Zingg. If you follow her on Instagram, you know she makes stunning and unique tabletop designs right in her own home. A couple months ago I had the pleasure of sitting down with her to chat. One thing led to another, and an idea was born. Turns out we are both big fans of plaid and the book/TV series “Outlander.” For those unfamiliar, “Outlander” by Diana Gabaldon is the story of an Englishwoman from the 1940s who gets transported the 1700s Scotland Highlands. Though the storyline is quite exciting, the true beauty lies in the landscape and design of the setting. We decided to collaborate and bring the rustic elegance of the Scottish countryside to a table.

After our initial talk, I was so excited to start searching for items for Zingg to play with. The look could have easily led to tartan overload, so we knew we had to bring in



Other elements help balance out the tartan and the feeling of the idyllic country setting without being overly literal. TNS

other elements to provide balance and the feeling of the idyllic country setting without being overly literal. To achieve this, we used pheasant accessories and incorporated stags. The animal imagery is important to the overall vision and represents the importance of the land and all it provided during the time period we were looking to re-create. Of course, we had to use a spot of plaid, and the neu-

tral tartan throw blanket is the perfect touch to this bucolic table.

To achieve a sophisticated yet wild feel, we mix and matched natural elements like wood, glass and pottery with more polished textures like copper, silver and porcelain. Zingg has a great eye for balance when it comes to setting a table, and seeing what she achieved with the product is truly stunning. The display she



The display created with tablescapist Suzanne Zingg brings to mind an elegant yet lively evening feast. A table setting can transport you to a different time and place. TNS



To achieve a sophisticated yet wild feel, we mix and matched natural elements like wood, glass and pottery with more polished textures like copper, silver and porcelain. TNS

created brings to mind an elegant yet lively evening feast I can imagine enjoying with Clan MacKenzie, full of great conversation and even better food (thanks, Mrs. Fitz!). I love when a table can transport you to a different time and place. If only we could figure out

how to transport Jamie to our table.

We have many elements for this look that haven’t even made it to the table yet. With stalks of wheat, metal chargers and plenty more plaid waiting in the wings, the look can be transformed into a display fit for any

home – and just in time for Thanksgiving.

Adapted from nellhills.com. Katie Laughridge is the owner of Kansas City interior design destination Nell Hill’s. For more information, contact Katie at info@nellhills.com.

FOOD

A family cookbook can help keep connected

Variety of ways members can organize project.

By Julia Turshen
Washington Post

While the term “ambiguous loss” was coined by Pauline Boss in the 1970s, the phenomenon feels ever-present today. So many of us are suffering from the physical absence of loved ones and activities that typically fill our lives with connection. In missing the things that help us feel present, we feel untethered. Making a family cookbook, a collection of recipes by and for loved ones, is one way to combat this feeling. It’s a sure way to feel connected and purposeful.

Anyone anywhere can make a family cookbook for very little, if any, money, whether you’re an adult feeling far away from those you love and you’re looking for some glue, or you’re a young person at home when you would typically be involved in an after-school program or other extracurricular activity. Here’s how to do it:

Make a list of “family.” The most important step is to remember that “family” is yours to define. It could be parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins, or it could be friends from school, or it could be a mix of peers and elders in your community.

Decide your format. Family cookbooks can be printed or digital; they can also be a series of videos, almost a documentary of family recipes. You could narrate recipes and record others doing the same and make a family cookbook podcast or think of it as an album, each recipe a song.

For printed versions,

you can go as analog as handwritten recipes and stories, and maybe even some illustrations, on paper that you photocopy for family members and then bind.

This is how I made my own family cookbook, right when I was out of college and was lining up my first real job working on a published cookbook. There are a handful of “Turshen Family Cookbooks” in existence, and when I look back at my own copy now, I’m delighted to have all of my family recipes in one place in a way that feels homemade, just like the food I most like to cook.

Consider images. You could add black-and-white illustrated outlines of things and make it a family cookbook/coloring book. You could do color copies and include photographs. For a more polished, less handmade printed version, you can do a quick Internet search for one of the myriad templates and services available for you to fill in the blanks, and they will do the printing and binding. The same range is available for digital cookbooks. It can be as simple as a Word document or as detailed as each field filled in a premade template.

Pick an organizing principle – or not. Is it just a collection of favorite recipes? That totally works. You can also use a flexible outline that will allow you to get more specific while also maintaining openness. For example, will you want your cookbook to include such categories as breakfast, lunch and dinner recipes? Or soups, salads, main courses, side dishes, dessert and drinks? Maybe organize it seasonally.

If you’re not sure, that’s OK. You can just gather a bunch of recipes and then

see if a natural outline emerges. Or take a look at your favorite cookbooks and study how their chapters are organized. There’s no right way of doing this, but it is helpful to have organization in mind when you start gathering recipes. This will inform whether you’re asking for specific recipes or just gathering whatever comes your way. You can also think outside of the box. For example, all the recipes can be responses to one or more questions such as “what do you most want to eat on your birthday?” or “what is your favorite holiday dish?” or “what recipe are you most known for?”

Start gathering. As with any group project, it’s helpful to reach out to the people on your list with clear expectations. This can be as formal or as informal as you like, but in your reaching out, explain what you’re making, who else you’re reaching out to, what exactly you’re asking for, when you’d like it by and how you’ll be sharing it when it’s all set. When it comes to the ask itself, refer to the format and ask accordingly.

Be specific about how you’d like to receive the material. You can ask your contributors to write a recipe for you, or set up a time for you to interview them on the phone about how they make their recipe, or you can request people take a video of themselves making the dish and then you can write down the steps. In addition to the recipes, also collect the stories behind them. Ask people why they chose that specific recipe and/or if it brings up any memories.

Decide how much recipe consistency you want. The recipes you gather will likely come to

you in a mix of styles. You can choose to keep the mix, or put all of the recipes in a uniform style. Traditionally this means a list of ingredients in the order they’re called for in the recipe, plus clear steps for how to make the dish.

One of the greatest things about a family cookbook is that you can choose whatever conventions you like and dismiss whichever ones you don’t. Some people have grandmothers like mine who keep recipes on notecards with specific measurements and refer to them each time they make something. Others have relatives and friends who cook by feel and intuition. There’s room for all of us, and whether your family cookbook contains precise measurements or descriptive prose that just describes how a dish is made, it’s all valuable.

Start putting it together. Take these recipes, the stories behind them and any artwork you want to include and lay them out page-by-page. This can be on literal pieces of paper and you can cut things out with scissors and paste them, or you can do all of that with corresponding keyboard clicks. Whatever shape your cookbook takes, it’s the collection of items that makes the sum such a celebration of its parts.

Share the cookbook. Send copies to everyone. Bring the book to life by doing an in-person potluck if it’s safe (i.e. outdoors with social distance) or through a virtual potluck where everyone cooks a recipe from the cookbook and you gather online to talk about what you’re eating and how it felt to cook it. Just as making it can help you feel connected, so can cooking from it.



Mini Holiday Frittatas can be frozen and warmed up in the microwave. DEB LINDSEY/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

MINI HOLIDAY FRITTATAS
6 servings (makes 12 mini-frittatas)

Consider adding this easy, make-ahead recipe to your family cookbook . Whisk together a few eggs, milk and some fillings, pour it all into a muffin pan and you’ve got breakfast. Not only that, you can make these tasty little frittatas weeks in advance and pop them in the freezer. Just warm them up in the microwave for a couple of minutes. Baking with a small ball of mozzarella or other type of cheese inside makes for a nice, gooey surprise when you cut into them.

Make ahead:
The baked, cooled frittatas can be individually wrapped and frozen for up to 2 months. From food writer Kristen Hartke.

8 large eggs
¼ cup whole or low-fat milk
4 teaspoons seeded, minced red bell pepper
2 teaspoons finely chopped chives
½ teaspoon celery seed
½ teaspoon sweet paprika
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
Twelve 1-inch mozzarella balls (plain or marinated)
Small sweet or hot peppers, for garnish (optional)
Small basil leaves, for garnish (optional)

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Line a standard-size, 12-well muffin pan with baking paper or silicone liners.

Whisk together the eggs and milk until well blended, then mix in the bell pepper, chives and spices. Place a mozzarella ball in the bottom of each muffin cup, then evenly distribute the egg mixture among them, so that each cup is about three-quarters full.

Bake (middle rack) for about 30 minutes, until the frittatas are puffed and set; they will deflate a bit as they cool.

Serve right away, garnished with the peppers and basil, if desired. Or allow them to cool to room temperature before storing. If freezing, place the frittatas (unmold them first from the silicone liners, but paper liners can stay on) on a baking sheet and set them in the freezer until frozen, then you can place them in a plastic zip-top bag or other freezer-safe container.

Nutrition per serving (using low-fat milk): 160 calories, 13 g protein, 1 g carbohydrates, 11 g fat, 4 g saturated fat, 260 mg cholesterol, 330 mg sodium, 0 g dietary fiber, 1 g sugar

AGING IN ATLANTA

ASK THE EXPERT

How can I transform my house’s unused space?

By Paul F.P. Pogue
Angie’s List

With winter coming on and a year where you’ve probably been inside more than usual, it’s an ideal time to rethink how you use your existing space. You can find many uses for those areas of your home that may have gone to waste until now. Combat cabin fever with these relatively simple home upgrades. As an added bonus, contractors who do this kind of work are in the middle of their slow periods, which means you can often hire quickly and get a good deal on materials and labor.

1. Reclaim your crawl space

Repurpose this overlooked corner of your home by turning it into a storage area. The most important step is installing a vapor barrier, which will stop moisture from entering your home through the space’s damp dirt floors. This option isn’t for everyone, so consult a professional waterproofing service to see what’s possible for you. Expect to pay between \$1,500 and \$3,000 for this service.

2. Upgrade your spare bedroom

Convert your spare bedroom into a space you and your whole family can enjoy. An interior decorator can turn your long-delayed dreams into a reality with a decor plan, materials and installation. Your options can include a workout room, craft room, a meditative reading area or any other idea you can think of. You can even convert a spare bedroom into



A guest bedroom can be converted to a spacious walk-in closet, workout room, craft room, a meditative reading area or any other idea you can think of. DREAMSTIME

the luxurious walk-in closet of your dreams.

3. Rethink your unfinished basement

If your basement is unfinished and underused, don’t wait any longer to maximize its potential! Set up that home theater you’ve been dreaming of, or add a guest bed and bath to take full advantage of the extra square footage. Alternatively, install a game room for family time and relaxation. Basement refinishing costs an average of about \$10,000, but it’s well worth it due to the comfort and utility it adds to your home, not to mention interest from buyers if you ever sell.

4. Odd nooks, crannies

Perhaps you have a large bedroom and dream of an elaborate window seat. Maybe a well-placed breakfast nook could breathe new life into your kitchen. You can install built-in shelving in otherwise unused space to add both functionality and beauty. A remodeling or interior design pro can help create a space that’s both eye-catch-

ing and functional.

Bonus round: Prevent package theft this season

Online shopping is easier than ever, but that convenience comes with a cost in security. Fortunately, you can take steps to prevent gifts from vanishing before they make it through the door. Internet-enabled doorbell cameras are getting more affordable; some cost less than \$100. Many shippers now give you options to customize delivery times to make sure you’re there to receive the package. You can require a signature to make sure the delivery makes it straight into your hands. A locking drop box provides perhaps the most safety; it can be bolted to your home or the porch. Expect to pay between \$100 and \$250 depending on the size of the box.

Paul F.P. Pogue is a reporter for Angie’s List, a trusted provider of local consumer reviews and an online marketplace of services from top-rated providers. Visit AngiesList.com.

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AGING IN ATLANTA

THE JOY OF BIRDING

How to find flocks of fun feathered friends

If you feed them they will come, and keep on coming.

By Paul Stenquist
New York Times

Hosting a gathering of friends at your home may not be advisable at this time, but getting together with a flock of feathered friends is a great diversion. During the pandemic, birding has become a popular escape with sales for seed suppliers, birdhouse builders and other bird-related businesses “through the roof,” according to Audubon Magazine.

Extending an invitation to the bird community is simply a matter of offering a meal. A backyard rich with trees and shrubs is an ideal place to hold the get-together, but a patio or rooftop will suffice. Provide a bounty of goodies, and birds will gather like eager children. Once the birds become regular guests, you can enjoy hours of entertainment watching the beauties, identifying them and, if you wish, photographing them.

Set the table

You can attract birds with a single feeder of mixed bird seed, but drawing a large and varied population requires multiple feeders, each offering treats meant to attract certain species. Tubular feeders, fitted with perches too small for large birds, are meant to attract finches and other small birds. This type of feeder can be filled with thistle seed – a favorite of finches – or mixed-seed finch food, which supplements the thistle

seed with sunflower chips and millet, and attracts a greater variety of small birds.

A feeder with perches spacious enough for large birds, filled with a wild bird food blend that is rich with nuts, fruit and sunflower seeds, will attract cardinals, blue jays, grackles and other big birds. A cage hung from a tree and containing suet cakes laced with peanuts or fruit is a favorite of woodpeckers, but other species will indulge as well. Red hummingbird feeders and orange Baltimore oriole feeders filled with sugar water will attract these magnificent specimens. Oriole feeders generally include a spike for mounting a section of orange and a cup for grape jelly – a favorite of the pretty black-and-orange birds.

Patience, please

With feeders in place, patience is required. The birds will discover your banquet, but it could take weeks. Sparrows may show up first, and other small birds will follow. Soon blue jays, cardinals, grackles and others will arrive. Hummingbirds will stop by in the warmer months.

Once your feeders are established, you’ll see birds you haven’t seen before. Exactly what species you’ll encounter depends on where you are. In Michigan over the summer, an array of feeders attracted Baltimore orioles, tufted titmice, red-bellied woodpeckers, rose-breasted grosbeaks, warblers and pine siskins. During spring and fall migrations, birds on their way through your area

may drop in for a snack.

When your home has become a favorite feeding ground, you can sit back and enjoy the show. A printed field guide, like “The Sibley Guide to Birds” or “The Stokes Field Guide to the Birds of North America” will help you identify your visitors. If you’d rather go digital, the Audubon Bird Guide app is helpful.

Watching birds battle for position at the feeder is entertaining, as is taking note of the way they come and go. Some birds, including sparrows, fly rapidly in a straight line, like miniature missiles, flapping their wings frantically. Others, including finches, flap them intermittently, rising and falling like a roller coaster. Some birds have elaborate dining habits. Nuthatches pluck a seed from the feeder, wedge it in a tree-bark crevice and pound it with their beaks to break it open. In spring, you may see sparrows race back and forth from the feeder to nearby branches, where their young wait to be fed.

Get a closer look

Observing birds with the naked eye is entertaining, but most birders use binoculars. You can get a good pair for less than \$150, or you can spend \$3,000 on the best models. Audubon publishes a guide to binoculars that offers choices at every price level. Look for models that provide 8x magnification or more, so a bird will appear at least eight times larger when viewed through them than when viewed with the naked eye.

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John Cashen is a survivor in more ways than one. In 2005, the New Orleans resident lived through Hurricane Katrina and later reunited with his family in Georgia. John summoned that fighting spirit again when he was diagnosed with lung cancer in summer of 2019. Although specialist after specialist recommended surgery, John – determined to find a non-invasive solution – found a true partner in his cancer journey at Wellstar Health System. There, radiation oncology experts used stereotactic ablative radiotherapy (SABR) to deliver precise, targeted radiation in high doses, eliminating John’s cancer without surgery. These days, John relishes time spent with his grandchildren and builds authentic, Mardi Gras parade floats, bringing a bit of New Orleans to his adopted home state of Georgia. [wellstar.org/peoplecare](https://www.wellstar.org/peoplecare)



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