



BETWEEN THE ROWS
WENDY SCHMIDT

The joy of growing houseplants

When I was growing up, I started keeping houseplants. The first kind of plants I collected were “wandering Jews.” They come in plain green (*Tradescantia fluminensis*) or variegated purple striped leaves with a silvery sheen (*Tradescantia zebrina*). *Tradescantia* is the spiderwort family, native to the new world from Canada to South America. They’re easy to propagate by planting a single leaf.

The “day flower” is also a member of that big family. It is a groundcover vine with the same shape of flower, hardy and found growing outdoors. Day flower is herbal and medicinal.

Spider plants are very prolific relatives and easy to propagate. All of these plants grow readily from cuttings. African violets (*Saintpaulia*) are of the gesneriad family — closely related to cape primrose (*streptocarpus*) and gloxinias.

The African violets found growing in the wild today are mostly in Tanzania and Kenya, protected under trees and other foliage, out of direct sunlight.

All of the houseplants I mentioned have similar requirements for successful growth.

- filtered sunlight (sunny windowsill not in direct sunlight)
- loose soil so that the roots get air and water, and the soil needs to almost dry out before you water again

- you can water from the top, but better results are obtained when setting the pot in a pan of water 30 minutes.

If you have garden comments or questions, please write to greengardencolumn@yahoo.com. Thanks for reading!

Making sense of the new federal dietary guidelines

Barbara Quinn
Monterey Herald

They’re here ... the long awaited and debated 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA). What’s the big deal? This document — updated every five years by the Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services (HHS) — represents the most current science-based advice on what and how to eat and drink for our best health.

If you’re looking for this newest installment to insist you eat this or don’t eat that, you may be disappointed. Rather, the 2020-2025 DGAs focus on a “pattern” of eating that has been shown to carry health benefits. Within that pattern, we can make choices that best fit our individual needs and preferences.

I like that. There’s room here for meat eaters and vegans alike. And for the first time, these guidelines are presented according to our life stages, including pregnancy, infants and toddlers.

These updated guidelines do, however, advise us to limit — at every life stage — our intake of four dietary components: added sugars, sodium, saturated fat and alcohol. There’s not room for much of these in any healthful dietary pattern, say experts.

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Abel Uribe/ChicagoTribune-TNS

Potato hash with poached eggs prepared and styled by Shannon Kinsella.

BRINGING BACK THE CLASSIC BRUNCH

JeanMarie Brownson
Chicago Tribune

Brunch. The dine-in restaurant occasion I miss most during this pandemic.

I’m not really thinking of those all-you-can-eat grand buffets (although that sounds decadently delightful). Rather, those leisurely outings with good friends that involve wait-staff, luxurious food and a way-early-for-me cocktail or two. A stroll might follow to aid digestion and keep the conversation flowing, before the need to nap pulls me to the couch.

These days, working at home means the couch often doubles as desk. The cocktail hour creeps into consciousness at dusk. The snack drawer beckons all day.

This January, I declare time to cook our own restaurant-worthy brunch dishes. Eggs covered in a creamy sauce, bacon-y potatoes, seed and nut pancakes sweetened with jam. It makes no matter to the cook when you enjoy them — Sunday morning, Tuesday evening or Friday lunch.

I never have enough pancake recipes.

Whole grain, buttermilk, potato, lemon ricotta — we love them all in our family. My pet peeve is the metallic taste of excess leavening found in boxed mixes and some recipes, so I nearly always make my own dry mix. Ingredients on hand inspire the use of various flours, seeds, nut and fruit additions. A love of muesli cereal translated into the version below, chock-full of oats, almonds and dried currants.

I stock bags of frozen cranberries for this speedy cranberry, fig and ginger jam. Make a double batch and package in small refrigerator containers to gift to your former brunch buddies with the dry pancake mix and instructions for cooking.

Bacon and potatoes are a match made in heaven — especially when indulging in breakfast-for-dinner. The hash that follows can be served in individual skillets topped with an egg — reminiscent of pancake house skillet meals.

Like many, I struggle to poach eggs so they look beautiful and stay soft-set. The

best technique I’ve found is simply to keep the barely simmering pan of water swirling when you add the egg. The movement of the water helps coat the yolk with the white. Once done, after about 3 minutes, use a slotted spoon to transfer the egg to a bowl of lukewarm water. The eggs hold in this manner nicely while you reheat the potato mixture to piping hot. Top everything with a lemony, mayonnaise-based sauce — easier than making hollandaise.

I always enlist help while cooking brunch — someone to act as the barista and bartender while I concentrate on the stove. Serve mimosas with the pancakes and bloody marys with the bacon potato skillet.

Fortified, we reminisce and marvel at the skills of the staff at our favorite brunch spots. Let’s support them in these difficult times by ordering takeout meals, tipping generously and sending donations. New memories are on the horizon.

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The magic of movie theater buttered popcorn, made at home

Bethany Jean Clement
The Seattle Times

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, I went to the movies a lot, often alone, and I’d see pretty much anything, because the golden-salty greatness that is movie theater popcorn makes seeing almost anything worthwhile.

I’d order the large size (only a dollar more — they’re practically paying you to get it!), eat until my mouth hurt, then put the rest in a plastic bag to take home.

Yes, I brought a plastic bag to the theater expressly for this purpose.

And over the course of a dozen pre-COVID-19 Dinner at a Movie reviews, it was my total pleasure to learn more about the nuances of movie popcorn from Seattle Times film (and book, and popcorn) critic Moira Macdonald. I miss the movies and I miss Moira — but I can still see both of them, if only on a home screen. I’ve probably missed movie popcorn an inordinate amount over the last 17 years, I mean, 10 months.

But enough about me — it is a special irritant of articles such as this, promising The Best-Ever

Pandemic-Times Life Hack, that a lengthy first-person preamble usually must be endured. Let’s also truncate the parts that explain the genesis of the idea (pathological jealousy of friends’ new in-home theater-grade popcorn maker, unwillingness to purchase one), the science of popcorn (hey, there’s water in there!), and all the permutations/hardships of the development of the recipe (so many different kinds of oil! So many batches!! I’ve been so thirsty lately!!!).

Really, all credit here is due to the miracle of modern(ish) food science, specifically the proprietary process that brings us all Flavacol. This violently orange powder — it is the exact color of Kraft Macaroni & Cheese dust — is made of salt, artificial flavor, two shades of FD&C Yellow and magic. It comes in a charmingly vintage-design quart-sized milk canister (unless you want to order, say, a 45-pound pail) from Gold Medal Products Co., out of Cincinnati (slogan: “Snacks, Smiles & Success!”).



Dreamstime-TNS

The golden-salty greatness that is movie theater popcorn can come to life at home.

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