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THE GREEN PARENT

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MEET OUR CONTRIBUTORS
We are grateful to our writers for their insight and thought-provoking comment

GEMMA BRAY created The Organised Mum Method 13 years ago when her first baby was born. Overwhelmed as a new mother, her anxiety manifested itself as over-cleaning and she soon found herself cleaning for hours each day. Determined to stop cleaning from taking over her life she sat at her kitchen table and developed a method that took only 30 mins each day, she freed herself from the never-ending to-do list in her head and freed up her weekends. Read her approach to an organised home on page 33.

LIESL CLARK is an award-winning filmmaker and cofounder of the Buy Nothing Project. In 2013, she launched the group with a friend. In their island community, just off the coast of Seattle, they discovered that the beaches of Puget Sound were spoiled by a daily influx of plastic items washing up on shore. From pens and toothbrushes to toys and straws, they wondered, where did it all come from? From buying nothing, came the sharing economy - read more on page 49.

JENNY KARP is a mum to four adopted kids and a maker at glitterfarm.com. “I wrangle kids, make art, teach and sell my wares,” she shares. “It’s a busy, crazy life!” Take a peek inside her workspace on page 66.

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HOLLY FARRELL trained at RHS Gardens Wisley and now combines her career as a garden writer with growing her own fruit and vegetables. Find her ideas for experiments to try at home in your garden on page 63.

JENNY KARP is a mum to four adopted kids and a maker at glitterfarm.com. “I wrangle kids, make art, teach and sell my wares,” she shares. “It’s a busy, crazy life!” Take a peek inside her workspace on page 66.

WE WOULD ALSO LIKE TO THANK ALL OUR OTHER WONDERFUL WRITERS, ILLUSTRATORS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS:
Pragya Agarwal, Lucy AitkenRead, Claire Ashbourne, Maria Batalier, Lei Chan, Jessica Rae Gordon, Andy Hamilton, Hannah Hiles, Lisa Jane, Alex Johnson, Erika Kotite, Shabs Kavofie, Le Gateau Chocolat, Sarah Macheth, Isabel Mack, Zoe Masters, Carol Partridge, Tess Robinson, Rebecca Rockefeller, Byron Smith, Kim Snyder, Donna Taylor, Heather Thomas, Kerstin Unvas Moberg
I CAN HARDLY BELIEVE it – my youngest just turned one this week. A whole year old, she’s cruising around furniture and desperate to conquer the stairs. This week she tried cake for the first time (loved it – it’s in her blood!) and also went on her third protest march. The Black Lives Matter movement in Brighton is strong and inspiring and held their second march last weekend (smaller in number but still powerful). We joined thousands of other protestors marching around the city streets; Iris armed with a couple of maracas (which she waved heartily in my face). After the march, we gathered in the park for the speeches. The speakers bought me to tears several times. There was the man who told the tale of his ten-year-old son wanting to take his penknife down to the beach. He explained to his son that because of his skin colour it was too risky. Or the poet who spoke out the names of black victims of police violence to honour their lives. I realise that it’s not enough to be non-racist – that I need to use my white privilege to challenge structural, systemic racism. Michelle Obama expressed it best when she said, “It’s up to all of us — Black, white, everyone — no matter how well-meaning we think we might be, to do the honest, uncomfortable work of rooting it out.”

A good place to start is the main feature in this edition – Kids Are Not Colour Blind – it guides us to tackle racism at home through each stage of child development. I’d also recommend justiceinjune.org where you can become a better ally with just 10 minutes a day to spare. I’m working through Me and White Supremacy – a workbook centred around digging into the uncomfortable truths about white privilege.

I hope that the ideas in this issue help you get started. I’d love to hear from you about your experiences in talking with your kids about race.

With love and peace,

Melissa Corkhill, Editor
WELCOME

new this month at
thegreenparent.co.uk

MANIC ORGANIC Come and join us at facebook.com/greenparentmag for a fun filled month of Organic September goodness. We promise recipes, shout outs, competitions and more. Looking forward to celebrating with you!

CAT ADVENTURES Are you a cat person or a dog person? On 8th August come on over to our Instagram page for some cat loving! We’re marking International Day of the Cat with some of our favourite cat pics. @thegreenparentmag

YOUR WEEKEND SORTED Sign up to our weekly dose of Green Parent fun and magic at tinyurl.com/tgpweekly. Every week you’ll get an email packed with ideas to help you feel organised and in control. And plenty of fun too, we promise!

BEAUTY STORIES Want some insider natural beauty tips? Want to know what the experts have in their bathroom cabinets? We’ve all this and more for you at thegreenparent.co.uk through the month of August and September.

FAMILY DIARY

We may still be under government restrictions, but high summer makes social distancing so much easier. Discover art in the wild, go nut collecting, or spread the word of peace. Hello sunshine!

Roots and Culture - Fancy mixing some high culture with your forest stroll? Check out Forestry England’s website to find the most incredible stained glass art (pictured), giant wooden sculptures, modernist life-size figures and thought-provoking installations nestled among the trees. Perhaps you’ll follow a sculpture trail around the Forest of Dean, or be blown away by The Dream, an imposing sculpture of a girl with closed eyes representing hope for the future on the site of a colliery at Sutton Manor Community Woodland in St Helens. Art and nature; the perfect balm for troubled times.

Brave Hearts - Each year, on the last Sunday in August, the village of Eyam in the Peak District holds a remembrance service to commemorate the enormous sacrifice made by its inhabitants in August 1665. Bubonic plague had arrived – via a parcel of cloth from London – at the house of the village tailor. The plague quickly spread from house to house, but the locals made a brave decision; to stay within the confines of the village in order to stop the spread of the disease. At least 260 people lost their lives. The story has particular resonance this strange year. Things may be a little different due to restrictions, but traditionally the procession starts outside the church at 2.30pm. Perhaps you might mark the day with your own re-enactment or procession complete with plague doctors and brave villagers.

Be Together - September 21 is the International Day Of Peace, as established in 1981 by the United Nations. It's a time to get involved in the culture of peace, perhaps you might join in the minute of silence – or Peace Wave – at 12 noon, plant a peace pole, try yoga, meditation or prayer or hold a peace vigil. Or try something creative – write reflective poetry or create anti-war artwork.

NUTS FOR NUTS Green hazelnuts – or cobnuts – hang temptingly from September trees. For centuries these hedgerow treasures have been associated with druidic magic, wisdom and inspiration; why not test out the mystic powers and sit under a hazel tree to compose an autumn poem? But, to be honest, we’re all about the grub. Beat the squirrels to these fresh and sweet little nuts, and eat them on the hoof, or take them home to bake with honey and preserve them all year round, or add your stash to meringue to make it nutty and chewy.
BREAST INTENTIONS

World Breastfeeding Week runs from August 1-7. Breastfeeding is the gold standard of child nutrition, and absolutely free! However, it’s not always an easy – or even possible – journey. We asked our Facebook and Instagram followers about their feeding experiences, and where they found help, and – oh my – did the floodgates open. We’ve shared a few stories here, and will put more online.

✽ “UNTIL SOCIAL MEDIA opened the doors for mothers to discuss their potential struggles with motherhood I think many people just thought breastfeeding was automatic. It’s so important to keep this awareness up and support mental health during and post pregnancy.” francescaklottrup via Instagram

✽ “My number one advice is feed on demand. If only I had known La Leche League before, breastfeeding would have been much easier. When I had my second daughter I fed on demand which, in the beginning, was practically all the time.” Eva Wedervang-Jensen via Facebook

✽ “Breastfeeding education should be taught antenatally or even part of the school curriculum as part of nutrition. For me both breastfeeding journeys were more painful and difficult to start than giving birth. But the knowledge I’ve gained is incredible. Freedom of choice is fundamental when feeding your baby, but it should be an informed choice.” harrietmdoe via Instagram

✽ “I have tandem fed a toddler and a baby, and I have fed two children beyond toddlerhood. I intend to feed my third until she self weans. I felt I had to fight to get support each time. My ability to breastfeed successfully was intrinsically linked to my post-partum mental health. The grief I felt when my daughter refused the breast was deep and unacknowledged by society, I will be forever grateful to the NHS IBC lactation consultant who helped us get back on track. They not only saved our breastfeeding relationship but also my mental health.” Tessa Durham via Facebook

✽ “La Leche League were a massive help for me. I called them a few times for advice over the phone and also read their brilliant book The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding. I persevered until things became easier and then carried on breastfeeding until my son was five!” neatlydoesitsilver via Instagram

This is an ongoing piece, see many more stories at thegreenparent.co.uk and please feel free to share your experiences with us via our social media channels or email kate@thegreenparent.co.uk
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TIP: Anxiety & poor sleep weakens immunity

Ask a Nutritionist
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RECLAIM THE STREETS

Imagine a world free of roaring engines, exhaust fumes, and streets filled with children playing, communities growing crops and art. For one day a year, that dream can come true.

CAR FREE DAY IS A GLOBAL event when cities and towns close their roads to traffic and let the people take over. Fancy setting one up yourself? We spoke to Sarah Macbeth, design researcher and activist, who, with Transition Town Hastings, organised an event as part of the day last year about the practical side of holding a huge block party.

“Car Free Days have been in existence for many years; car drivers are encouraged to leave their cars at home allowing citizens to reclaim streets from the dominant use of road vehicles, a major source of pollutants in urban areas. Hastings’ first ever Car Free Day celebration took place on a stretch of the seafront road, and was a community run event. We wanted to challenge the ‘normal’ of a busy seafront road. Car Free Day is an important way to promote sustainable forms of transport and reclaim space for communities to come together in mutual enjoyment, to celebrate being together and imagining possible futures for the community. Air pollution is known to shorten lives and reduce the quality of life for tens of thousands of people. It has also been linked to health problems from dementia to heart disease and miscarriage. Children are most at risk, as it can stunt the lungs and affect intelligence.

The event created positive emotions amongst the attendees and participants, a transformative environment, and fostered collaborative working. There was genuine enthusiasm and hard work from those involved. When we asked visitors what they liked most about our Car Free Day event, they told us that it was the simple act of being able to be on the road without noise or pollution.”

MORE INSPIRATION
livingstreets.org.uk
sarahmacbeth.com
transitiontownhastings.org.uk

UPFRONT / TAKE ACTION
PARTY ON, DUDES!

We like to party; everybody does! However, it can be tricky to find eco-friendly, jolly party ware, and reusable plates and glasses take up an awful lot of cupboard space. Enter The Party Network, a non-profit, UK-wide directory of ‘party kits’ – boxes of tableware; plates, cups, bowls, jugs and cutlery, as well as table linen, decorations, and even pass-the-parcel bags! We spoke to Isabel Mack from the network.

“I FIRST READ ABOUT PARTY KITS LAST June. It seemed like such a simple and positive idea I was inspired to investigate more.

My background is in ecommerce and I thought there should be a way to make it easier for people to find their local kit. In collaboration with Dian Sofia from Zero Waste Near Me, I quickly discovered kits across the UK, and decided to launch a dedicated site; my accidental network! In the first eight months the network grew to 350 party kits with more people joining to get support to set up their own. Many have since added more equipment so they can hire out multiple kits each weekend.

All the party kits in the network are run independently by a mix of individuals, school PTAs, zero waste stores, lending libraries and small party businesses. Many are run as a fundraising activity and driven by a passion for looking after the planet rather than for profit.

Some kits use bamboo tableware but many use plastic, predominately the IKEA KALAS sets. This is because it’s light, durable, affordable and is technically recyclable (I’m working on that). The bamboo stuff is only ‘biodegradable’, (although it does look pretty!) There is obviously much discussion about materials and some kits are made up of entirely second-hand equipment to make them a little greener.

Hiring a kit is often cheaper and easier than buying the equivalent disposable items. But mainly it’s about reducing waste. For a party of 30 children, a party kit can save an average of 100 single-use items from landfill. The main aim of the network is to spread the word about the concept. But also I’m passionate about making this sustainable switch accessible to as many people as possible; inspiring and supporting people to set up new kits to fill in the gaps on the map.”

Find out more at partykitnetwork.uk

---

ECO PARTY EXTRAS

1. The wildlife inspired pre-filled party bags at littleotterpartysupplies.co.uk are gorgeous and very reasonably priced

2. We love the eco friendly biodegradable glitter and fair trade gifts at plasticfreepartybags.com

3. At littlecherry.co.uk you can pick up all the bamboo partyware and fabric bunting you could ever need, plus these cool coconut shell bowls.

4. Notepads, coloured pencils and seeds feature in these kids party bags with a conscience! ecopartybags.co.uk
Le Gateau Chocolat is big, bearded, and usually wrapped in bold lycra. His children’s show, Duckie, is a retelling of the ugly duckling story set in a circus. He’s part of a new movement where the world of drag intersects with children’s entertainment and education; recently we’ve enjoyed Drag Queen Story Time, where performers dress up to read to kids, and the book, The Hips on the Drag Queen Go Swish Swish Swish. We caught up with Le Gateau to find out why kids identify with and enjoy the fabulous world of drag, and what it might help them explore.

FIND YOUR SWAN

I’ve taken it all around the UK. It plays to everyone from two-year-olds to grandparents. It’s not billed as a kids’ show, as it deals with some lofty themes such as bullying, racism and body-shaming, and needs parents to engage with that. My three-year-old niece was placed at the heart of it. She had just moved back to England, and, as the only black girl in her class, was finding it hard to settle in school. In Nigeria, she wouldn’t have been ‘a black girl’, just another girl. However, here she was asked by other kids why her hair, her nose were different. I wanted my niece and children like her to see that their stories matter.

One of the reasons I chose Mark Smith, the choreographer, was because he was deaf. We incorporated signing into the show so that identity was also present, and gives Duckie a real sense of being othered. It also means that kids who are hearing impaired don’t have to wait for a signed show!

The original story comes with the promise that ‘it gets better’, but there is no magic, just mistaken identity. That’s the interesting thing to instil in the kids; you are enough. The metaphorical change has to come from you, no-one is going to magically change you into a swan. You have to invest in you, to accept and embrace the fullness of you, and that is how a transformation comes. The more you lean into how different you are, size-wise, colour-wise, whatever it is, that’s how you embrace your change.

I wouldn’t essentially cast my look in the show as drag; it’s more just theatrical. But drag is a form of clowning that kids respond to. Some drag performers become a caricature. But for me, drag serves as the antithesis of that; it allows me to be real, to distract or discombobulate. You think you’re going to get this clowning, but you subvert that expectation and give them honesty and earnestness. In the joy of clowning, your heart and your space and your mind are open to receiving real, emotional content. I kind of stumbled into making kids shows by accident, and it’s been a brilliant experience, so I am planning to make more in the future.”

Scoff more Gateau at: legateauchocolat.com
I WROTE LAST TIME ON HOW WE WANT our children to become independent and not need us. A week into lockdown my seven year old son decided to borrow a bike from his friend. Within two days he’d taught himself to ride it, with very little help from me. Emma, my partner, asked if I felt robbed of the experience of teaching him. Maybe for a second or two, but it was replaced with pride. Now I can go cycling with him.

It’s true. It took me ages to ride a bike, it took me ages to feel secure talking to adults and it took me until I was late into my twenties until I cycled for any distance over 10 miles. My son chats to adults with no trouble, in fact he’d perform for them at the drop of a hat. And, last week we accidently went on an epic 12 mile bike ride. I say accidently, only because we left without a map and got a little lost for any distance over 10 miles. My son chats to adults with no trouble, in fact he’d perform for them at the drop of a hat. And, last week we accidently went on an epic 12 mile bike ride. I say accidently, only because we left without a map and got a little lost, a fact I chose to keep from my son to save his worry. But letting go like that was just what we both needed and given the current situation, for the first time since the end of winter, I felt free.

We even stopped and sat on some grass and ate ice cream. This simple act, frowned upon in the previous week, felt like a moment I’ll never forget. Him lounging against me, sharing stories and jokes. Me feeling relaxed for the first time in months. It felt abundant, nourishing. We were filling up with something unseen and unsaid that would keep up going for some time. For the next week every time my mind drifted off it had the backdrop of the countryside on that trip. Lush, green and full of birdsong with the spring sun beaming through leaves.

It was just after this that he told me, apart from missing one friend in particular, he was loving lockdown. We’d found a way to give him just the right amount of freedom and fun while still being as safe as possible. I’m not sure how long we could keep it up, as well as both working and offering home education, but it is great to report that, for our son at least, we are doing something right! Even if me and his mum feel like zombies at the end of every day. Our four year old daughter is a different matter. At one point, she looked up at me at the dinner table and said, “do you miss your friends too Daddy”. This bought crashing home a difference between them. She has always been far more gregarious. She had friends all over the place. Luckily, we found a way to ease this slightly.

A walnut tree self-seeded in the garden, it was in an awkward place right next to a fence and quite close to our neighbour’s house, and when it was only three, I tried to dig it up and give it away to save neighbourly relations. This tree had other plans, its roots had already stuck right in and wasn’t budging. Yet this tree has helped both our daughter and the three year old boy next door. He stands on stairs leading up our very steep garden and our daughter climbs up the walnut. Clinging on, and terrifying me, the agile four year old now conducts many a conversation over the fence. It might not be ideal, but it means both children can have a seemingly normal time together and it is a joy to watch.

Now that the summer is coming and the big pinnate leaves of this walnut are out, they offer shade and on the many hot days we’ve been having; so dictated by the tree, this is where we sit and have our meals. It’s the perfect spot, we get to see the boy next door, we are shielded from the sun and other neighbours’ eyes, it’s right next to the climbing wall, it’s not far from our herb bed, wild salad plants are in easy reach and soon, bramble will grace our pudding table too. We were gifted this tree by a local squirrel and the bramble by a passing blackbird. These creatures have helped furnish our family with not just food but shelter from the sun and for our daughter, some emotional comfort. To think that I want to get rid of that perfect tree just to quieten an anxiety. There must be trees like this all over the world. Trees that would be perfect if we only gave them a moment to come into their own. I look at my children as we eat our dinner and hope that they can again have the space to grow so all can appreciate all that they too have to offer.

Andy Hamilton is a father of two and wild food expert. He is the author of Fermenting Everything (published by Countryman Press) He also runs courses in his home city of Bristol and you can find out more at thewildgentleman.com.
THE FIRST DAY OF QUARANTINE
WE made a list of things we could do in the coming weeks. Everything was scribbled down, even Juno’s suggestion of “Foraging mushrooms” which seemed random considering we hadn’t done this since she was a baby and there’d been neither hide nor hair of edible mushrooms on our land in recent years.

Lo. The very next day we went mushroom foraging and came back with a basket of gourmet field mushrooms. We got to know all the easily identifiable edible fungi in our area and each day tried out new ways of cooking them. I’ve always been terrified of eating wild mushies because of the saying “There are old mushroom foragers and bold mushroom foragers but there are no old, bold mushroom foragers” and it’s obvious which category I’m in with my slap-dash, give-it-all-a-crack, boomshack-a-lack approach to life. However, we discovered there are three unmistakable delicious shrooms around here and we feasted like medieval peasants for weeks.

The girls seem to have had a huge mental and emotional growth spurt over quarantine. They both began to read (much to their grandparent’s relief) and armed with the words in her reading books Ramona did “Angry Writing” - letting me know she was mad about something I’d done. It was fairly mild compared to my friend’s seven year old who wrote fifty lines about how cross she was with him, filling a whole page with “Gareth is a fukin idiet, Gareth is a fukin idiet, Gareth is a fukin idiet.” And people wonder where these kids get their energy from!

As quarantine lifted we’ve tried to maintain some of the simplicity. Ramona and Juno have entered a phase where we explore a new hike or patch of forest with a huge gang of home edders. On Tuesdays around 12 kids come to the yurt for our self directed learning collective and on Thursdays we have “adventure day” with rapidity of a curious squirrel. But these days they’ll elect to solve sums for a whole day, carrying the pages with them in the car, to the cafe, to a friend’s house. Last week they found a drawing channel on Youtube and from nine in the morning till nine at night they sat and sketched animal after animal.

Instead of driving all around the place to different activities these days we just have two days a week of planned group stuff. On Tuesdays around 12 kids come to the yurt for our self directed learning collective and on Thursdays we have “adventure day” where we explore a new hike or patch of forest with a huge gang of home edders.

At the last adventure day a kereruu, Aotearoa’s native wood pigeon, flopped out of a tree at Tim’s feet. Despite her majestic plumage and the rapidity of a curious squirrel, we were silent and awed by the presence of a major celeb. When we got there the vet took her from us and said “Great, thank you, good bye!”

We all looked at him blankly, said “Oh, we aren’t in a hurry! Will you examine her now? Can we stay?” and he bemusedly took us all into the examining room. He decided to keep her in for a while and we pressed our phone number into his palm, “Call us if anything happens, okay? CALL US.”

The next morning we turned up again and he let us see her and told us about how she ate some banana but then he said “She might be here a while so how about you leave it sometime before coming back?” laying down some boundaries as if we were professional pigeon stalkers.

Of all the birds pigeons are known for their remarkable instinct for home, travelling from unknown places across thousands of miles to find their place of belonging.

The last few months have been an extremely discombobulating time, huh? The year began with terrifying wild fires, descending into a global pandemic that utterly changed the experience of human life on earth, and then bounding into what feels like a new wave of a movement for racial justice. It feels like the closing of a loop - we are dismantling the colonialism that gave rise to the globalised capitalism that created the climate crisis and a new era of pandemics.

I have a beautiful little book written by New Zealand poet Barry Brailsford. It describes the spiritual significance of this country’s flora and fauna and of the kereruu he says “If Pigeon has come back?” laying down some boundaries as if we were professional pigeon stalkers.

“We were silent and awed as if in the presence of a major celeb” with the rapidity of a curious squirrel.

Lucy blogs at lulastic.co.uk. Read about her adventures in our next edition, out in Sept.
The most important thing on his mind every day is the progress of our berry bushes 'Will they be ready tomorrow?' he says regularly, peering at the red currants, still hard and green.

Like most families, we had anticipated regular visits to the berry bushes 'Will they be ready tomorrow?' he says regularly, peering at the red currants, still hard and green.

Like most families, we had anticipated a busy summer with working, holidays and primary school prep for Ben. We expected to have lots of unexpected time at home. In the wake of the lockdown we had some challenges on our hands. It did not escape us how lucky we were, after all we were healthy and safe and had an abundance of time home with our children, and without the added pressure of homeschooling. But, like many, what we had been given was a curveball which meant our lives and, most importantly, the boys' structure and routine had been taken from us. When the boys came to live with us, the allotment was a big part of our lives. Growing food was a way for us to relax, but this was something that was very difficult to maintain during the early stages of the adoption placement. We had always planned that this year would be very allotment focussed, but we had been preparing ourselves for the reality that the time spent there would be limited to the weekends, and the amount of actual work that we would get done with two small kids running around might not amount to much. What we found during lockdown was that we now had time. Time to spend there everyday as the kids ran around and got some exercise and helped us plant seeds, water seedlings and share in the magical experience of watching our food grow. Spending time constantly in each other’s pockets has its ups and downs, and Rebecca and I had to be even more conscious of our own mental wellbeing and self care.

When the lockdown was first announced we tried to focus on the fact that we were lucky to be together and that we were all in good health. As the weeks went on and we saw the value of being outside and growing food with our kids, we realised that we were so lucky to have the opportunity to continue our attachment to the boys, to relive those first few months of placement, cocooning in our own bubble, but with the added benefit of now actually knowing and understanding the boys and their triggers.

On the good days though we reflected on the opportunity we had to continue with food will be the lasting legacy.

Lisa lives in the South West with her wife and two adopted children.
While we live in a multicultural diverse society, race is still a very sensitive topic of conversation. Few parents would consider themselves or their children racist, with its connotations of intentional, angry, or mean behaviour against different groups of people. But even when we are not intentionally racist, we can make judgements based on skin colour and perceived race. Race is such an ingrained social construct that we can never truly dissociate ourselves from it - people are socially conditioned to assign values to someone based on their skin colour. By dismissing or keeping silent about our race and others' we reinforce the notion that people are not born equal and allow children to make their own judgement and inferences about racial equality. By saying "everyone is the same", we deny our children their own racial and cultural experiences. We also dismiss the fact that racism is still a huge issue in many parts of this world, and white-wash many significant events of racial crimes and segregation in history. Adults need to be doing this learning and work in order to raise children who are actively anti-racist, and conscious of racial justice and equality. So how do we go about raising anti-racist and compassionate children?

‘In telling our children race doesn’t matter and raising them to be colour blind, we’re actually creating more harm than good’

Here are some ideas based on age:

**TODDLERS:** Children are not colour-blind. They start developing a sense of race from the age of six months or so; research shows they look for longer at an unfamiliar face from a different race than at someone from their own race. Children start categorising and using power-based hierarchies in play based on the social cues they pick up from all the people around them, not just their parents. While 30-month-olds show a preference for children of the same race when shown photographs of unfamiliar white and black children, demonstrating in-group bias, the majority of children, both black and white, start choosing white playmates by the time they are 36 months old. Bringing a diverse set of books into their lives with characters from different cultures, reading stories set in different parts of the world, talking explicitly about how people have different skin colours is an important first step. When a young child notices skin colour for the first time, some parents find it a very tricky conversation, becoming awkward and shushing their children, tiptoeing around notions of difference. Use any questions around difference as a stepping-stone to conversations around our bodies, reassert that difference does not make us unequal. >

**WORDS** Dr. Pragya Agarwal
AGES 5-8 YEARS: This is the age children start forming a deeper sense of injustice in their own lives so it’s a good opportunity to start drawing parallels to the wider world even without a formal conversation around racism. Now is the time to introduce the history around slavery and colonialism, and the concept of how some people in the past felt right to conquer and rule other people, and why this is problematic. Kids might ask questions about their own or their friends’ skin or hair colour being different so a conversation around what makes us all different, but how we are still the same as human beings is important. Children start forming a stronger sense of in-group and out-group around now, so we need to make sure we’re aware of our own unconscious biases and that we’re not behaving in a discriminatory manner, either implicitly or explicitly, towards others in front of our children. Books that talk about friendships, and the value of kindness can help too. When children watch something about racial violence, it’s important to speak with them in an honest manner, sensitive to their age, rather than trying to dismiss any questions that come up. Such conversations should be normalised.

AGES 8-12 YEARS: At this age children can be introduced to the notions of power and privilege and how that creates difference, and why people might treat others in a mean way. Discussing their own privilege in terms of education, race, class, etc can help children unpick what they can do to help others who might not be as privileged. With the ubiquity of technology, children pick up more than we realise, including stereotypes around black, brown and Hispanic people which might result in name-calling and bullying in the playground. At this age it’s important to discuss why jokes about the way people talk, or look are not acceptable. Active engagement is necessary rather than waiting for the child to come to us and ask questions.

TEENAGERS: Now, young people are ready to tackle injustice head on, become involved in protests and be more active and vocal against any inequalities they perceive, see or hear. At this age you can introduce more books, both fiction and non-fiction, that talk about social and racial justice. Home-based projects around slavery and colonialism are crucial in helping children understand their own sense of self and identity. In forming their identity, teenagers often try to consciously separate themselves from others, resulting in deeper stereotypes and generalisations about people different to them. These have to be actively questioned and dismantled because such stereotypes are often the basis for prejudiced behaviours. Accompanying children to protests so that they have an awareness of how we can not only be non-racist but actively anti-racist and an ally is important. Discussing politics as well as supporting them in thinking critically about the information they absorb from the media and friends around them, especially from social media, is really important as information becomes ubiquitous and they’re bombarded with fake news from social media channels.
‘Kids might ask questions about their own or their friends’ skin or hair colour being different so a conversation around what makes us all different, but how we are still the same as human beings is important’

These are loose age categories: as parents, we know our children and their ability to handle such topics. While we often underestimate the depth of our children’s understanding, there isn’t a one-size-fits-all approach to discussing race. White parents usually have the luxury and privilege to not bring up race and racism with their children, while black and other parents of colour have to start talking about racism with their children from a very young age, as soon as they feel any sort of discrimination or bullying in the playground. We live in a multicultural world but there is still racial inequity, and the consequences of racism and racial inequality are real. In telling our children “race doesn’t matter” and raising them to be colour blind, we’re actually creating more harm than good. We’re not educating them in the way racial inequalities work, and we’re telling them that the experiences of a person of colour aren’t valid. We’re also dismissing their lived experience. In choosing not to teach children that their skin colour might afford them privilege, we’re making them less socially aware and empathetic towards others who don’t share those privileges. It’s not enough to tell our children that everyone is equal. We have to be actively anti-racist, particularly as they’re growing up in a society where nationalistic identities and politics increasingly take centre stage. We are different, and still we are equal. No one should be treated differently or have different rights and privileges just because of their skin colour, or their racial category. Saying this to children actually makes them feel more comfortable in their own identity and their own uniqueness. And that strong sense of self-identity is vital for a child’s mental and physical well-being.

Pragya is an award-winning author of ‘SWAY: Unravelling Unconscious Bias’ that was Guardian Book of the Week. She is a behavioural and data scientist and after a long stint as a senior academic in US and UK Universities, now writes and speaks for various national and international media outlets about gender and racial equality. Pragya has three children, and she lives in the north-west of England with her family.
Why is touch so important to an infant?
Soft touch is important because it stimulates oxytocin in both you and your baby. Oxytocin is known as the ‘love hormone’ because it encourages feelings of love and bonding and reduces stress and anxiety. Positive touch also reassures baby that you are there and will be responsive to their needs. And it encourages them to feel that the world is a safe space and that their needs will be met, which builds their confidence and allows their brain to develop optimally.

What are the benefits of babywearing?
There are so many! Aside from the benefits of oxytocin release and more opportunities for positive touch, carrying your baby in a sling allows your hands to be free so that you can care for others; other children, parents, partners and even get some work or housework done if you are juggling everything at once. It allows your baby to absorb everything you’re doing and saying which aids their development too. Babywearing can help with reflux relief as you carry them upright and the gentle motion of you moving around can also help them to settle.

How do you think our current situation (lockdown and social distancing) might impact on our babies?
I think more parents are using slings to help them with their daily lives and while babies are young they thrive from this close contact with their primary caregivers. All of the extra interactions from their primary caregivers will help them to build confidence as they grow and they will likely be positively affected as they develop. However, lock-down has also meant that babies can’t be socialised as they normally would with other people. It’s hard to know the long term impact at this point, but it could potentially affect social skills as well as immune health as babies are not being passed around as they normally would. Unfortunately, postnatal depression seems to be on the rise as parents struggle to adjust without their normal support network and other anxieties which have come to the surface through such an unsettling time. This is another reason why the benefits of babywearing are so important.

Any advice for parents wanting to lessen the impact that social distancing might have on their young children?
We have found that our kids, who are a little older now, are really missing their friends. We go out for walks with another family who live locally and they can safely play in the woods together. They don’t need to have a huge variety of people to play with, just having these regular interactions in person or digitally seems to be enough for them to feel connected.
Why is touch so important to an infant?
Skin-to-skin contact allows for certain exchanges between parent and baby - hormonal, scents, antibodies, etc. This also allow the mother’s body to act as an “incubator” and adjust its temperature based on the needs of the baby, thus regulating the baby’s temperature. It can also regulate baby’s heartbeat for the same reason.
Oxytocin is also released, which is a hormone also referred to as the “love drug”, and helps you and baby to bond more deeply. As is prolactin, which produces milk, thus increasing chances for breastfeeding success. All of this through simple touch.

What are the benefits of babywearing?
For babies, being cocooned in a baby sling, wrap or carrier will remind them of being in the womb. They are fully supported, enclosed and warm, and they can hear your heartbeat and the rhythm of your breath, much like being back in the womb. When awake, babies can take in the world with a “quiet alertness”. This means that with no stress, no adrenaline or cortisol flooding the system, they are more able to learn and take things in, and the “building blocks” in their brain are able to be built more easily. This in itself means that they show better hormonal responses to stress and better thinking skills later on in life.

How do you think our current situation (lockdown and social distancing) might impact on our babies?
I think young people are hit just as hard as us but in different ways - for us we have had to mentally and physically adjust our entire lifestyles, but we have the advantage of knowing why we are doing so. Our little ones may not be able to connect the logic to their feelings. And human touch and skin to skin contact is so important to both babies and kids.

Any advice for parents wanting to lessen the impact that social distancing might have on their young children?
It’s important to focus on self-care for parents, because if you are ok, then baby will thrive. What are you doing to make sure that you are going to come out of this lockdown, emotionally healthy? Can you spend more time in the garden or is there a park nearby? Can you carve out time for yourself every day?

How has babywearing supported you these last four months?
Emily Chorley
Being able to go off roading with both my little ones
Natalie Harwood
The freedom to explore without a pushchair
Christina Crook
Exploring new paths in our local woods that we could never navigate with a pram

Shabs Kwofie at amawrap.com speaks about the amazing ways that skin-to-skin contact benefits our babies.
OSCHA HAVE BEEN crafting baby slings in Scotland for 10 years. That’s 10 years of happy parents and babies snuggled up in their British woven, ethically made slings and they have the community to show for it.

When mum, Zoe, started the company in 2010 she couldn’t have dreamed of the incredible online community her brand would foster over the next decade. With over 28,000 members in their community-run ‘Oscha International’ Facebook group and nearly 9,000 parents in ‘Clan Oscha’, Oscha’s own parenting and wrapping Facebook group, their online spaces have long been places of support and friendship for thousands of parents from all over the world. So it seemed only natural that when the COVID-19 crisis hit and the world was sent into lockdown, these online communities would become networks for advice and reassurance.

Zoe says, “When we started to see our customers in Europe and around the world being affected by lockdowns, school closures and concerns for the safety of their families, we immediately moved our small team’s focus to our online community. Clan Oscha has always been a place for us to chat, share and develop ideas with our customers and our community, but in the midst of the upheaval around COVID we saw that we could provide an important community space in this difficult time.”

Zoe and the Oscha team saw that they could provide a safe place for parents to share their experiences and for Oscha, and other parents, to provide support. Whether it was sharing Zoe’s experience flexi-schooling her children, the Clan sharing their ‘top tips’ for homeschooling or simply giving parents a forum to discuss the highs and lows of working from home with small children - the Clan soon became an invaluable resource. The Clan also helps to keep things lighthearted, by sharing uplifting pictures of their children in colourful slings and coming together over a love of babywearing, members of Oscha’s online community were able to keep their spirits high during a time of crisis.

Online community groups have always been at the heart of Oscha. Zoe was already involved in online wrapping groups when her twin boys were born just 16 months after her daughter. Wraps soon became a day-to-day lifesaver for her, as did her membership of forums such as Natural Mamas. Zoe soon saw that with her combined passions for design and babywearing she could create something unique for babywearers, and she knew that her online community would be there to help her realise her vision. When Oscha released its first woven wraps things quickly grew as babywearers from around the world excitedly discovered Oscha’s colourful, yet elegant aesthetic. It was the online sling community who really spread the love for the new company and that is why community remains central to Oscha mission.

Today, you can get involved by searching ‘Clan Oscha’ on Facebook, where you can ask advice for your next sling or even collaborate with like-minded parents to come up with new designs through Oscha’s pre-orders!

Oscha continues to handcraft their slings and carriers in the solar-powered Scottish workshop. Made with responsibly source yarns and zero waste, their ethical slings are the perfect way to start your babywearing story. oschaslings.com

Babywearing in Times of Crisis: How online communities brought calm during lockdown

We asked Clan Oscha what Oscha means to them:

“The friends I’ve made, being able to take my beautiful daughter anywhere, finding the new ‘me’ in motherhood.” Hannah

“Whatever you need to accomplish: There is an Oscha for that!” Sofie

“Ethical’ is such an important aspect of what makes Oscha amazing.” Helen
What's in the Bag?
Learning through everyday play

TIME TO PLAY
Early play, with gentle encouragement and reassurance from you, nurtures curiosity, confidence and self-esteem. It even helps your baby begin to manage their emotions. The chance to explore everyday objects gives your baby the skills needed to gain independence.

Physical
BIG AND SMALL MOVEMENTS - Physically exploring objects strengthens muscles and helps your baby discover how to control and co-ordinate their body. Your baby gains control of the larger, “gross motor” movements of the head, body and limbs first, then learns to control the smaller “fine motor” movements of their hands, feet and fingers. Mastering these skills and learning how to balance and adjust their position leads to crawling, walking, running and jumping.

HAND-EYE COORDINATION - Newborns have a grasp reflex, whereby they automatically grip objects placed in the hands. When this fades, they learn to pick up objects at will. First, a baby follows an object with their eyes. To reach out, curl their hands around it and pick it up, they need to be able to control and coordinate their movement with what they see. This is known as hand-eye coordination. Handling objects refines their fine motor skills. As their coordination improves, they will form a pincer grip between their thumb and fingers, which is essential for skills like tooth brushing or catching a ball.

CROSSING THE MIDLINE - When babies follow a moving object across their field of vision or reach across with the right hand to something on the left side, they cross the midline – an imaginary line down your baby’s middle separating the right and left sides of the body. Crossing this line coordinates both sides of the brain, which helps your baby to use opposite sides of the body at the same time, aiding skills such as crawling, and eventually helping to coordinate eye movements to follow words across a page.

Awareness
SPACE AND DISTANCE - Playing with everyday objects helps your baby to develop spatial awareness – a sense of >
Your baby also starts to discover the various properties of objects, for example, a ball will roll away but a sock won’t.

**EARLY MATHS**
- Maths is about so much more than numbers and counting. It is through investigating objects that your baby begins to understand ideas such as size, shape, weight, volume and quantity. Your baby also starts to discover the various properties of objects, for example, a ball will roll away but a sock won’t.

**IDEAS FOR OBJECTS TO PUT IN THE BAG:**
- Ball; Stick; Paintbrush; Sock; Bath Toy; Scarf; Cardboard Box; Paper; Soft Toy; Wooden Spoon; Building Blocks; Cups

**RIGHT OR LEFT?**
- As your baby explores objects, they may use either hand before developing a preference for one hand or the other.

**Communication**

**BODY LANGUAGE** - Body language is your baby’s very first language. As you watch your baby play, notice how they use their eyes to show interest in something, glancing between you and the object in a meaningful way. You can show your mutual interest by following the direction of your babies gaze.

**BUILDING VOCABULARY** - Naming and describing objects helps your baby to form an image of it in their mind and to link the word to the object. Your baby is developing their memory and building up a bank of words. You will see this recognition in action when your baby starts to use objects in appropriate ways during play, such as trying to put a sock on their foot.

Research has found that immersing babies and young children in language, even ideas and words that are beyond their understanding, helps to develop a wide vocabulary, which is linked to complex thinking and is the foundation for doing well in every subject at school.

**MORE INSPIRATION**
- **READ** Play and Learn with your Baby Forward by Nigel Clarke £14.99 DK
wrap your baby in unconditional love!

Not just a carrier, but a way of creating connections, building bonds and confidence.

Carried babies are calmer and happier, feeling comforted and unconditionally loved, while you remain physically active and in the same time having your baby closer for cuddles and kisses, building a better emotional connection between yourselves.

MAIN RETAILER
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Reusable Menstrual Care & Zero Waste Living
EarthwiseGirls.co.uk

Reusable, Sustainable, Simple
We carry a huge range of reusable menstrual products. Pick up our Award Winning Buy 3 Give 1 set of Earthwise Pads and we’ll donate a pad to a girl in Kenya!
Menstrual cups, sponges and more also stocked
Have a more sustainable period
www.EarthwiseGirls.co.uk
Raise a BOOKWORM

When to introduce books to your child to ensure a lifelong love of reading by Alex Johnson
IT'S NEVER TOO SOON TO START
reading together, even while your
baby is still in the womb. Research
indicates that reading to your child
before they are born (especially
during the third trimester) not
only appears to relax them, but might
also help with early language learning.
Don't get too excited about giving birth
to a baby genius, though, because it’s
more a matter of stimulation and help
with brain development – playing
music is also a good idea, but doesn’t ensure they
will be writing operas at playschool.

Once they do emerge, you can start
with rhymes and simple stories. Obviously
they will not understand everything
you are saying, but they will enjoy the
sound of your voice and the images from
books you are showing them. They will
also learn how books function and will
certainly want to grab them – especially
if they make a noise or have a mirror
– and probably nibble them too.

READING TOGETHER
Before you start, make sure there are no
other distractions in the room, such as
the radio, television or other screens. You
want this to be dedicated reading time,
not something to be rushed through or
interrupted to deal with texts and emails,
which can wait until you’ve finished.

However much you’ve been looking
forward to reading The Wind in the Willows
to them, that’s a bit much for a six-month-
old (I read bits of Samuel Pepys’s diary to
my eldest to try to soothe him to sleep –
he has not turned into a Pepys fanatic in
later life). It’s better to start off with board
books: wordless books made out of cloth or
sturdy cardboard. Our earliest ones were
essentially half a dozen pages of colourful
or black-and-white patterns and shapes,
with bits hanging off them to pull or rub
to make a noise. All three of my children
loved these, and they are certainly good
for showing how books can be pleasurable
items to enjoy from a very early age.

DON'T GO TOO FAST
As your child gets a little older, instead of
jumping straight in, it’s better to chat about
the book’s title and what’s on the cover.
While you’re reading, don’t be afraid to stop
the flow every now and again to comment
on what’s happening or draw attention to
a picture – pictures can tell a story as vivid
as the words on the page. Richard Scarry’s
books are especially good for looking
at closely, with plenty of action in every
square inch. Writer and illustrator Rob
Biddulph’s books are also a treat for little
eyes to examine. As well as plenty of detail
in the illustrations, they feature accessible
rhyming texts and plenty of opportunities
to join in and guess what happens next. His
first book, Blown Away, is particularly lovely.

Indeed, research with three- to five-
year-olds indicates that going slow can
be very effective, and that pausing to give
your child time to predict what word is
coming next – and then pausing again after
speaking the word, to let them consider it >

BLACK LIVES IN BOOKS
It’s important that you try to offer
books that are diverse so that children
can see themselves and their peers
mirrored in what they read, through
characters who are similar to them
or issues which are immediately
relevant to their day-to-day lives.

The Centre for Literacy in Primary
Education’s Reflecting Realities
report is the first UK study to look at
representation in children’s literature,
and was first published in 2018. The
aim of the study is to quantify and
evaluate ethnic representation and
diversity in children’s publishing in
the UK. Of the 11,011 children’s books
published in the UK in 2018, only 7
per cent featured black, Asian and
minority ethnic (BAME) characters,
up from 4 per cent in 2017. Of these
books only 4 per cent had a BAME
main character, up from 1 per cent
in 2017. Over a quarter of the books
submitted only featured BAME
presence in the form of background
characters. BAME pupils make up
33.1 per cent of the school population
in England. Consider race, gender,
social status, disability & religion.
Look especially for work from authors
who write about these issues from
their own first-hand experience.
improves the ability to remember and use the word again in a different scenario. As a general rule, in the same way that you usually need to talk more slowly when you’re speaking in public to make yourself clearly understood, don’t go too fast. Conversational speed is faster than audiobook speed so you should aim for the latter, especially when you start and are less familiar with the characters and the action. Sometimes you’ll want to speed up to add excitement to the story, of course, or slow down where it’s warranted, and you can also adjust how fast the characters you’re acting out speak, a helpful variant when you’ve run out of accents. But in general, if it feels like you’re reading too slowly, you’re probably actually going at about the right pace. Slowing down is also helpful since it allows children more time to understand unusual or old-fashioned words and complicated passages. As a trainee journalist, the first lesson I was taught when writing was to think like a reader. Similarly, when you’re reading out loud, think like a listener – your son or daughter doesn’t want this to be a broadcast performance; they’ll enjoy it more if there’s plenty of interaction and it feels like you’re doing something with them rather than at them. Try to read for at least ten minutes a day (though don’t beat yourself up if you miss a day or can only do less than that). If you can do more, that’s great, but start at an achievable figure so that it becomes a regular habit and take it from there. Even ten minutes a day is more than an hour a week. If you make reading a regular part of your children’s bedtime routine at a young age, you yourself may also find the later part of the day more manageable when it comes to turning out the lights. The Book Trust recognises this and has some excellent suggestions on its website as part of its Bath, Book and Bed campaign.

single session (you might even read them twice or three times in one go), but others might take a week or even a month. And of course you don’t have to read just one title: you can read a few shorter books at one sitting, or a short book and part of a longer book – any mix you like!

### Rereading

It’s good to get children to take part in the reading with you, so ask them what they think, or get them to join in with lines they remember or act out certain parts when you’re rereading favourite titles. When I read The Gruffalo by Julia Donaldson to my boys, I always used to pause to let them finish a stanza. We read Each Peach Pear Plum by Allan Ahlberg so many times that in the end it became a feat of memory. I would turn the pages and they would speak the accompanying descriptions which they’d learned by heart. Sometimes I would deliberately get the order wrong so that they had the opportunity to scold me and show me how it ought to go.

Studies of language acquisition show that children whose parents read them the same book over and over again are better not only at picking up new words, but also understanding them, compared to children who moved on to new titles quickly. Research also indicates that when children reread books, how they talk about them becomes more sophisticated as they gain a better understanding of their complexities. So grin and bear it, and although you’ll be relieved when you can move on again, it’s worth keeping some favourites around in case they fancy revisiting them.

### More Inspiration

**READ** How to Give Your Child a Lifelong Love of Reading by Alex Johnson (£12.99 CLPE)
GET ORGANISED

Gemma Bray tells Hannah Hiles how to keep your house under control in just 30 minutes a day

If you feel like your house and your life spiralled out of control during lockdown, you might want to give the Organised Mum Method (TOMM) a try. Of course, it’s not just for mums – although 98 per cent of founder Gemma Bray’s followers are women – and it promises to get your home clean and clutter-free in just 30 minutes a day (with weekends off).

The former doula came up with TOMM after the birth of her first child 14 years ago and has followed it ever since.

Gemma, who has three sons, now has almost 200,000 followers on Instagram, a podcast, an app, and a book called The Organised Mum Method, with her second book, The Organised Time Technique, due to be published in September.

Can you explain the Organised Mum Method briefly? Why does it work?

It’s an eight-week rolling cleaning method, which builds on what you did the previous week. Each day Monday to Thursday is allotted a room – living room, bedrooms, hall and stairs, and kitchen – and you do 30 minutes and then stop. Every Friday you tackle a different zone in your house, so everywhere gets a deeper clean every eight weeks, and there are a few light jobs that you do every day.

I believe the reason it works is because it’s simple and doesn’t over-complicate things.

How did you come up with it?

It was out of necessity for myself! I had just had my first baby and I was cleaning far too much. I was stuck in a romantic ideal that to be the best mum you should have a gleaming kitchen, a rosy-cheeked child and be wearing white jeans. Of course, the reality was very different and I was trying to over-compensate.

I hadn’t been seeing friends – and we know that’s so important for our mental health – and fortunately I managed to rein myself in and realise that I needed to do things differently.

I developed a way of compressing the cleaning so that it didn’t leak into my whole day. It was hard to stick to it because I was used to “grazing” all day with cleaning, but I forced myself to get it done in 30 minutes. And because it worked I stuck to it. That was 14 years ago and I still keep to it.

I find that a lot of people who come to the method from over-cleaning struggle to put a full stop on housework. Many people also find they clean the same thing over and over – and this was true for me too. My thing was hoovering but I wasn’t moving the furniture around and really getting it done, I was just going over the same places. With TOMM you know the whole house is being covered. >
People who are starting from a place of complete chaos usually find it clicks in week three or four. It’s become a bit of a phenomenon – what do you make of that? It’s really weird! It’s amazing but also shocking to me. It was just a private thing that friends and family used to rib me about until my oldest son dared me to share it about three years ago. At that time no one was really talking about cleaning on Instagram. It was all holidays, models and jetset lifestyles. I was a stay-at-home mum and I thought “who is going to want to see me talking about mops?”. I thought people would think I was sad and that it would fizzle out after three months. It started slow but after six months it picked up. Ninety-eight per cent of my followers are female and the majority have young children. A lot have children under two and they are craving what I craved – to find that balance and not lose themselves in motherhood.

Where should someone start if they want to get their house under control? I say start in one of the main rooms of the house, like the kitchen or the living room. I would start in the kitchen. You don’t even have to do the whole room. Just choose one drawer or one cupboard and get started. People who are starting from a place of complete chaos usually find it clicks in week three or four. It can feel like two steps forward and one step back. It is definitely slow progress, and I struggled with that in the beginning, but that’s the whole point. Once things are under control you just have to keep going and keep up the momentum, and you’ll have it licked.

What is your least favourite household task and how do you make it easier? And your favourite? One hundred per cent it’s the oven. I detest cleaning the oven. If there is one thing that I recommend people to buy for their house, it’s reusable oven liners. They are so cheap, only about a fiver. If you’re trying to get the oven clean with bicarb and water you’ll be there a year and a day, but with these liners you just rinse them under the tap. My favourite thing is still hoovering. It’s not a messy job and you can see the impact straightaway.

Tell us about your new book! TOMM was always a small part of a much bigger thing. When I was pregnant with my second baby and when he was a newborn my first marriage broke down. I was running a business, looking after two children and suddenly doing things on top that I didn’t expect, like sorting out finances and dealing with solicitors. I was using the method and realised how successful compartmentalising my time was, not just with the cleaning. Basically the new book is TOMM for your life. It’s “how to get your life running like clockwork”, looking at what’s serving you, what’s dragging you down.

It’s focused towards the modern woman and will help you audit your life and time so that you are left with the things you need to do and the things that you want to do – and how to do that without feeling guilty.

MORE INSPIRATION

READ Dig deeper into the method and download handy free check lists on Gemma’s website at theorganisedmum.blog

JOIN There are more than 93,000 members of the official TeamTOMM Facebook group – join them at facebook.com/groups/theorganisedmumgroup

LISTEN Gemma posts a daily 30-minute playlist on Spotify (search theorganisedmum) and co-hosts a regular podcast called Life Laundry.
1. Pop in Nappy in Sunshine, £17.95, closeparent.com
These are the most sustainable nappies so far from Close Parent - each one made with 2 ½ plastic bottles. In a variety of new pastel colours, choose from cloud, sky, coral, mint or sunshine, these nappies are onesize featuring poppers on the front to adjust to fit your little one.

2. Baba and Boo Ocean Print, £14.95, babaandboo.com
These pocket nappies have a pocket at the back, where you put the absorbent inserts. Each one comes with two bamboo mix inserts. Super soft, absorbant and very easy to use.

3. Baba and Boo Surfing Print, £16.50, babipur.co.uk
This one-size, birth-to-potty pocket nappy is pale blue with a fun design featuring some super-cool surfing dogs, and is part of the Baba + Boo Senses collection.

4. All in Two nappy, £18.75, tickle-tots.com
This cloth nappy fits from 10lbs-35lbs.

5. Swim Nappy, £10.99, totsbots.com (below)
Swim nappy for a super comfy fit. 100% breathable with a soft microfibre interior gives a comfortable and stretchy fit with no chaffing, both in and out of the water. Elasticated legs and waist catch any accidental number twos and the hook & loop fastening means no mess at change time too.

6. Gelato design, €25, eu.charliebanana.com
Each nappy comes with two deluxe inserts that are highly absorbent and soft, making them great for both daily and overnight use.

7. Under the Sea, £16.50, littlelambnappies.com
A great value pocket nappy, which comes with two bamboo boosters. The cover is made from stretchy knit and coupled with a clever popper configuration so you can alter the size and fit as baby grows. It generally fits from around 10-12lbs up to potty training.

beach bums
Kit your baby out in these sunshine yellow or seaside inspired nappies from our favourite brands
Recently some of our readers received a box of lockdown treats from us. From family games, activity books, inspirational reads for children and books for parents, they give their reviews here...

**THE TALE OF A TOOTHBRUSH**

*M.G. Leonard & Daniel Rieley*  
£12.99, Walker Books

“We liked the bright colours used throughout this book, and the illustration style. My daughter said she wished she could colour the pictures herself, and went off to draw having read the book! We’re talking a lot about the climate, our impact on the world, and what we can be doing about it. The children really liked how the various animals were helping the toothbrush find home. It’s definitely one I can imagine us reading often over the next few years.” *Alison*

**Rescue & Jessica**

*Jessica Kensky and Patrick Downes,*  
£7.99, Walker Books

“I really liked this book; it promoted many opportunities to discuss topics that wouldn’t naturally come up, around disability, injury, help, support. My children were still talking about Jessica and the book days later, but at the time of reading found it a bit too long in places. They also found the presentation of the two stories running simultaneously confusing for the first reading. I would definitely buy this book, and would recommend it to others looking to encourage their children to think about life experiences beyond their own.” *Alison*

**Nature Anatomy Notebook,**  
*Julia Rothman*  
£14.99, Storey Publishing

“This is a beautiful notebook – the illustrations are stunning and quality of the paper is very appealing to hold in your hands, inviting you to open it. I will admit to keeping this one for myself! I’ve been looking for something like this to make records of what we’re seeing in the garden during lockdown and this is perfect for that. It is split into seasons, with spaces to add year/month, your written notes and illustrations. There are a few pages where the author demonstrates ‘how to draw...’ and some diagrams on ‘The anatomy of...’, which are sparse throughout the notebook but informative and useful. Mostly this is a beautiful notebook which feels and looks good, so invites you to use it and look after it. I’ll definitely be taking up nature journaling as a result.” *Suzanne*

**Hive**

£16.95, Gen42

“Hive is a wonderfully tactile game that builds on the strategy and planning of chess to create an open and interesting logical puzzle. In this two player game you are placing beautifully weighted hexagonal pieces, each representing insects, with the aim of completely surrounding your opponent’s Queen Bee tile. Each insect moves differently, ants scuttle unlimited around the edges of the tiles, whilst stag beetles can only move one place but are able to “climb” over other tiles. Learning how best to use each of their abilities to both thwart your opponent’s plans whilst pushing your attack is a lot of fun and each game delivers learnings to take into the next. My thirteen year old loved it and we concluded it’s a great little compact game to take away on holiday.” *Simon*
**A BOTTLE OF HAPPINESS, PIPPA GOODHEART & EHSAN ABDOLLAHI, £7.99, TINY OWL PUBLISHING LTD.** “This book is so colourful! The images although slightly abstract are so appealing and fun, we spent ages poring over the pictures. The story follows Pim and his dog, Tiddle, who decide to explore the other side of the mountain where they live. We liked the story of how, although Pim’s people seemed to be poor they were rich in ways which the other side were not. We discussed how all people have riches of different kinds and how nice it is when we stop comparing how much things are worth but share with each other. My daughter said ‘I like it when they shared stories and I really liked the pictures’.” **Gail**

**TALES OF THE MUSHROOM FOLK, SIGNE ASPELIN, £10.99, FLORIS BOOKS** “This was the clear favourite in this household and has been read many times over! It is quite like the flower fairy books where each flower has a fairy assigned to it which embodies some of the flowers characteristics. Here characters are assigned to different mushrooms. We have had some other books illustrated by Signe Aspelin and my daughter loves the pictures - they are very whimsical with lovely added details to look for on each page. Although we know quite a lot about the things growing in our garden we are not very familiar with mushrooms so this was an excellent addition for us. We would highly recommend this book. My daughter said ‘I loved that the people were mushrooms, my favourite mushroom was the brain mushrooms’. Her only criticism she could think of was that she wished there were more mushroom families included.” **Gail**

**MINI RABBIT NOT LOST, JOHN BOND, £6.99, HARPER COLLINS CHILDREN’S BOOKS** “This book felt a bit different - in a good way! I liked the clothbound hardback cover which is much more tactile than the standard smooth cover. We really liked the illustrations, both stylistically and the beautiful colours used. We particularly liked the changing use of tone through the book. I also really liked the weight of the paper. The children enjoyed finding the creatures hiding on most pages. And I don’t want to give it away but the ending of the story made all of us giggle! I can imagine buying this book as a gift for a new parent or a young child – I imagine up to around five, although my seven year old did enjoy it. It’s a great family picture book.” **Alison**

**POP TO THE SHOPS, £10.50, ORCHARD TOYS** “The Orchard Toys games are always winners in our house as they are bright and colourful and easy to play. The game was easy to set up and is mainly aimed at increasing coin recognition and handling money. I would say that it’s best aimed at children aged six or over, though you could play with it slightly younger children they would need some level of support. The game itself has play money included which my daughter loved, she also liked the idea of going to the shops and spending her own money but having to buy set things rather than just what she wanted to buy did cause some problems! The aim of the game is to be the first player to buy six items without overspending.” **Gail**

**JOAN PROCTOR, DRAGON DOCTOR, PATRICIA VALDEZ & FELICITA SALA, £13.99, ALFRED A. KNOPF BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS** “It is always refreshing to see a picture book with a female lead character combined with a topic not considered ‘feminine’. My ten year old is a dragon fan so this book was snatched up and read immediately! My child was upset by the story being set in a zoo, whereas I was very taken with the female lead being a real scientist in the early 20th century. However, we then shared it together and discussed the female protagonist in more detail, particularly within the constraints of her time period, how she might be considered inspirational and what we might learn from the story. I’d recommend it for children aged 7+ and would suggest sharing it together to support a deeper understanding of its content.” **Suzanne**
UNDER THE BODHI TREE
DEBORAH HOPKINSON & KAILEY WHITMAN
£11.95, SOUNDS TRUE INC
“Under the bodhi tree is a story of the early life of the Buddha. The illustrations in the book are peaceful, serene and really appealing to my daughter. We were both unfamiliar with the story of Buddha so it was new for both of us. The story follows the beginning of life for the Buddha, or Siddhartha, as he was a boy who was fairly sheltered by his parents. When he begins to see injustice in the world he is immediately drawn to helping others but feels overwhelmed and seeks out his own way to deal with his own turmoil and that within the world. We have had some books on different world religions before but they tend to be more non-fiction or ones that follow a child practising the religion or festival rather than the origins behind it. It’s almost poetic in its wording so is very easy to read aloud and engaging for children to listen to. It was a lovely introduction to the life of Buddha, I would just be ready to answer questions afterwards!”
Gail

TOWN IS BY THE SEA, JOANNE SCHWARTZ & SYDNEY SMITH, £7.99, WALKER BOOKS
“Town is by the sea is a story of a little boy who has found himself born in a town which because of its geography, will dictate the direction his future life will take. The story switches between the normal everyday life that happens for the boy, and then switches to what is happening for his father. His father is a coal miner and the illustrations show what life is like for him underground, under the sea. The illustrations in the book are beautiful and make the sea seem to shimmer-contrasting greatly with the darkness in the coal mine. It is an interesting book from a historical point of view. It led to some interesting discussions about energy use. It prompted us to discuss the impact when coal mines collapsed or were shut down. This is probably not a book we would have necessarily chosen but it led to some excellent family discussions. My daughter said ‘I really liked the pictures in the book but I felt sad for the boy’. There is some mild peril in the book as a picture shows the mine collapsing and it’s not immediately clear that the father is ok so it may not be completely suitable for sensitive children.”
Gail

FOREST ADVENTURES
CLAIRE GILLMAN, SAM MARTIN & JOHN BLANEY
£12.99, MODERN BOOKS
“I really liked the look of this book - this felt like something I’d pick up and look at if I saw it in the bookshop. The ideas are grouped which made actually using the book feel possible as I could see when we would use the ideas. Most of the ideas could be adapted for using with younger children (and some are relevant with no adaptation) but as a whole it felt well pitched for those aged seven and over. I particularly liked the nature crafting and cold-weather ideas. The instructions are clear, and I liked the skill and length of time guides. I’d definitely recommend this book and can imagine buying it for friends who enjoy spending time outdoors with their children for inspiration, especially now when they are running through their go-to ideas more quickly than ever!”
Alison

KINGDOMINO, BRUNO CATHALA, £17.99, BLUE ORANGE GAMES
“We liked everything about Kingdomino – made with quality materials, bright artwork, very little assembly required, in a smaller box with simple instructions, so we were up and running with the game within five minutes of opening it. We played as a family of four: two adults, ten and seven year old. It isn’t always easy to find a game which engages everyone enough, but this was definitely it. Based on the concept of dominoes, your challenge is to build your territory and then score based on the number of crowns you collect. It is a great way to throw a bit of simple multiplication into game play. The rules are straightforward, with extra elements to add to make it more challenging for older players. It doesn’t require much space to play and the box is small enough that it could easily be taken on a camping holiday. Highly recommend.”
Suzanne
Specialist day and residential provisions for children and adults with learning differences and disabilities in England, Wales and Scotland. Ruskin Mill Trust’s unique method of Practical Skills Therapeutic Education (PSTE) enables individuals to forge a sense of identity, gain qualifications, independent living skills, and re-imagine their own potential for a brighter future.

Ruskin Mill Trust remains open as usual and is still accepting admissions.

Applications and referrals are taken all year round. Contact us today to find out more or to arrange a visit at a time to suit you.
HUMMINGBIRD, NICOLA DAVIES & JANE RAY, £11.99, WALKER BOOKS “My daughter adores hummingbirds! The book follows the journey hummingbirds make every year, mixing it with the stories of individual families and their connection to this little bird, along with interesting facts about them. We liked the map at the beginning as it was easy to see and understand where hummingbirds are found and the journey they make each year. Despite knowing a bit about hummingbirds we found out new facts - for example hummingbirds use spider silk in their nests so that it can gently stretch as the chicks get bigger. It was nice to see the story connecting a little girl and her grandmother and their relationship to the birds as well. My daughter commented afterwards that she would like to send her grandparents a letter like the girl in the story. We were sad to hear that hummingbirds are finding migrating difficult now with the arrival of more buildings and cities, it made us investigate migrating birds and the difficulties that they may face. This then led us to look at our own garden and town and think about what we could do to help migrating birds here too. My daughter said ‘I love the hummingbirds and I liked learning more about them.’”  **Gail**

60 CLASSIC OUTDOOR GAMES, KATIE HEWITT, £6.99, COLLINS & BROWN “The cover and illustrations for this one weren’t to my tastes (old school Ladybird-esque), but I really like the book and the way the games are grouped - particularly those games that take up lots of space and those better suited to a party. Lots of the games are familiar (hopscotch, pin the tail on the donkey, stuck in the mud) but remembering them is harder! This feels like a book that you might buy for a particular purpose - a holiday or party (or maybe lock-down!) - but one that you’d likely use many times after the event. I can imagine this being a great book for bridging generation gaps and encouraging family stories to be shared about the time when your Aunty did…!”  **Alison**

OLD MASTERS ROCK, MARIA-CHRISTINA SAYN-WITTMENSTEIN NOTTEBOHM, £9.99, PIMPERNEL PRESS “This is one of those books that I didn’t know we needed until it arrived for review! We are complete novices to the world of art, and needed this book to be unintimidating and easy to understand! The structure of the book was straightforward, divided into themes so we were able to pursue specific interests. The layout of each page included fun facts, descriptions of the artist and, most usefully, prompts for questions about the artwork in hand. All of us learned how to observe different interpretations, different art techniques, the influence of time period etc. This is a great book to start your journey into art appreciation, without the pressure of standing in a museum or art gallery, with some excellent support for parents/carers to encourage discussion about art with children.”  **Suzanne**

BRITISH WILDLIFE HANDBOOKS, CAMILLA DE LA BÉDOYÈRE & DUNCAN BREWER, £10.99, MILES KELLY “This is a set of three books that look at wildlife, birds and wildflowers and trees, effectively ‘spotters guides’. They’re good and clear and my five year old was able to identify both plants and wildlife using them. My daughter loves spotters guides and we have quite a few old ones. What set these apart though are that they have their own journal entries on each page so that the children can put their own rubbings, leaves, drawings and observations on each one. In the observation notes it encourages children to use nearly all their senses in order to explore around them and be able to identify nature. My daughter said ‘I loved the nature books and took them with me on our walks. I spotted birds in the hedge and flowers we didn’t know.’”  **Gail**

THE QUEST FOR EL DORADO, £35.99, RAVENSBURGER “In The Quest for El Dorado players are racing through jungle, over water and stopping off at villages to be the first to reach the fabled city of Eldorado. The different terrain is negotiated by playing cards that match that particular terrain. Everyone starts the game with the same cards but as you progress you can purchase upgrades that will allow you to move quicker towards your goal as well as remove weaker cards from your hand. This core mechanic of managing your hands to ensure your best cards come out as often as possible is fun and accessible. My thirteen year old mastered this quickly and went on to thrash me! The modular board allows for different layouts and the game can be enhanced with the optional “caves” to explore and gain valuable help allowing for a different experience each game.”  **Simon**
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"THERE WERE A FEW THINGS THAT INSPIRED my partner Warren and I to start Young & Learning. After having children and receiving loads of toys from friends and family that were only used once, or were low quality and broke quickly, we wanted to do our bit to help reduce waste. I also have a passion for child development and trained in that area.

Curvy balance boards create endless opportunities to learn and grow through play. They promote imagination and creativity at the same time as keeping children active. They are high quality toys that will grow with your children; they will be used for different things at different ages. My design was inspired by Waldorf, focused on a play-based approach and adding movement to learning.

Children use the boards to learn through play a large variety of skills, from motor skills, balance, creative thinking, and social skills. But they also learn through movement. Nowadays, children are not as active as they once were, and a Curvy balance board encourages movement without realising. The highest form of balance is sitting still, but in order to be able to sit still, children need to move! Though different experiences in movement, children’s vestibular system will mature and eventually they will be able to sit still and focus, skills that are needed to start school. Movement and spatial awareness are also the way that children learn to write.

We are not just another business, we are a social enterprise and have a social and environmental mission embedded in our company; to support child development and reduce waste in toys. For every purchase we also donate a Waldorf comforter doll to the Buddy Bag foundation who put together essential supplies for children in emergency care after fleeing violent situations at home.

Parents don't always see the boards the same way as their kids. If we are at an event and parents ask us what the boards are, I say, observe your child. Kids love them! They run to them and find new ways to play. “I'm on top of the world” has to be my all-time favourite comment from a child playing with one of our boards!"

Find out more at youngandlearning.co.uk
“I PLAY HURDY-GURDY IN A medieval reenactment band, Rough Musicke, and realised that there were gaps in the day to be filled as the band didn’t play continuously at events. So I took out a small corn dolly kit to make harvest favours, and came home empty-handed. It was a lightbulb – or should I say tallow candle – moment, and I started an Etsy shop to keep my hand in over the winter.

The craft is red-listed by the Heritage Crafts Association; there are few people carrying it out or passing on the skills to another generation so there is a real prospect of it fading away. So, learning it meant hours of frustration at the kitchen table!

My favourite piece is the Border fan. This is associated with a particular area of the British Isles, in this case, the English/Welsh border. It is an attractive piece and one which I teach at my workshops - people are always pleasantly surprised at what they can achieve in a short time. Most people can manage the easy 3 braid hair plait but have a go at the compass plait which uses four strands. The instructions are on the Guild website – many people will recognise this as a scoobie pattern.

I love using natural materials that will, ultimately, break down without any environmental impact. Having said that, corn dollies will keep for years; I know of one display that was put together over forty years ago and is still intact! Obtaining the materials is not as easy as you might think: old-fashioned wheat used for corn dollies is only grown by a few specialists and has to be specially cut - on modern farms everything goes through the combine and the straw is smashed. I enjoy creating forms that link with our cultural past as well as using the traditional techniques to create new designs. It fascinates me that the craft appears to have developed in disparate places globally using a variety of materials and I always have a new project in mind: some rice straw is currently awaiting my attention for a Japanese shimenawa!”

Find out more about Carol’s workshops and see her incredible designs at thewheatweaver on Facebook  
etsy.com/shop/thewheatweaver  
Find the Guild of Straw Craftsmen strawcraftsmen.co.uk  
Buy straw at simplystraw.co.uk

harvest home

Lammas falls on August 1, a celebration of bounteouness and newly harvested grain. Traditionally, this is the time of year that corn dollies were made from the last few stems of wheat, twisted and bound together to form a safe haven for the spirit of the harvest. The dolly would be ploughed back into the soil on Plough Monday in the early new year. Wheat weaving connects us with our past, and is a creative and rewarding past-time. We spoke to expert Carol Partridge about her art and the stories behind it.
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**HEALTH / NUTRITION**

**ASK A NUTRITIONIST**

Jenny Carson, senior nutritionist at Viridian Nutrition answers your questions about family health

**Q** My son is five years old and eats predominantly bread and pasta. I am hoping to make food more interesting for us as a family but in subtle ways. Can you offer me a couple of tips for reluctant veggie eaters please?!

Making food interesting for children is a worldwide challenge and often specialists recommend that children are included in the preparation of meals to develop a bond between the child, their nutrition and the food. Adding herbs, spices or even a squeeze of lemon can contribute to making bland vegetables more palatable. Try mixing pasta ribbons with a spiralised vegetable to introduce new food. Similarly, cauliflower ‘rice’ and using cauliflower in pizza bases can work well too.

**Other alternatives to try:**
- Corn tortillas stuffed with houmous and veggies;
- Oatcakes with cream cheese;
- Buckwheat, rice or lentil pasta with pesto or tomato sauce;
- Try food bowls rather than sandwiches. Corncakes with chilli and guacamole;
- Almond or coconut flour cakes and pancakes; Spiralised veggies with pasta sauce.

**Q** I’ve been diagnosed with osteoporosis during my pregnancy. Is there something that I can do from a dietary perspective to help ease the symptoms please?

The onset of osteoporosis during pregnancy is a condition that is generally rare, and little is known about the cause which makes preventative measures quite difficult. Although some observational data links subclinical lowered bone density status, coeliac disease or anorexia to osteoporosis during pregnancy. Symptoms may present in the third trimester and improve after birth although breastfeeding too was associated with continued lowered bone density.

The best course of action is to work closely with your healthcare practitioner to maintain bone health. However, in dietary and lifestyle terms lots can be done. The most important nutrients for bone health are calcium, vitamins K and D3 plus magnesium and vitamin C. Therefore, meal planning for the inclusion of rainbow coloured fruit and vegetables, especially leafy green vegetables, nuts and seeds are rich vegetarian sources of calcium and magnesium, while small oily fish such as sardines are great for those following a pescatarian diet. While fermented foods can provide vitamin K2 and fruit and salad items are great for vitamin C. However, supplementation may be considered for adequate amounts of vitamin D3 in winter months or for those with no sun exposure. Up to a few years ago vitamin D3 was only extracted from animal sources, namely sheep’s lanolin, yet a recent discovery showed that vitamin D3 is produced by lichen and subsequently high-quality vegan vitamin D3 are available. Studies show that dietary improvements plus weight bearing exercise can improve bone density. Therefore, you may consider walking, swimming or prenatal exercise classes.

In some individuals bone density may remain lowered during breastfeeding and so, advice should be sought from your healthcare professional.

**MORE INSPIRATION**

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HERE ARE SOME WAYS TO GET YOU STARTED. THERE ARE SO MANY METHODS OF SHARING, AND DIVERSE FORMS OF THE FOLLOWING IDEAS EXIST AROUND THE WORLD. CAN YOU CREATE YOUR OWN SPIN ON THEM AND INTRODUCE SOME OF THESE IDEAS IN YOUR COMMUNITIES?

1. **Host a clothing share.** Have people bring any clothes they’re done with and lay them all out on a table. You can separate them by kind or just let people look through the piles. It’s fun to do it in someone’s home, or try it on a dry sunny day in a public park. You’ll be impressed with all the cool new togs you’ll come home with. Some groups have a point person who then takes all of the clothing that is left over and turns it into a round-robin for those who missed the event (see #3).

2. **Start a meal club.** Get a group of culinary minded friends together and start a meal club. This takes batch cooking to a new level and varies your meals while you use only one recipe in your own kitchen. So, if there are five of you, then you make five lasagnas, for example, and get four other homemade meals in return for your family! If people in your group have freezer space, it’s great to do this monthly and choose foods that freeze well. Everyone cooks on the same day (Sunday seems to be the most popular choice), then meets up to swap finished food all at once. It can also be done with fresh foods. Just assign a day to each person for their bulk cooking. Who doesn’t want a break from cooking some nights?

3. **Launch a round-robin.** Round-robins are a collection of items that you send into your community for people to pass around, take what they want, and add to. We often create a collection for specific sizes of children’s clothing, for example. But round-robins can be created for women’s and men’s clothing, makeup, kitchen supplies, and toys.

4. **Create a garden share group.** When Liesl first moved to Bainbridge Island, she started a group called Island Garden Share, where she invited people to come to her house...
once a month and bring with them perennials, cuttings, and veggie starts from their gardens to share with the group. Each participant would go home with new plants and veggies to put in their gardens. It was a garden plant potluck of sorts and saved everyone so much money in starting new perennial beds. Another added benefit? It was the best way to meet others who shared a passion for growing perennials and vegetables.

Go gleaning. When it’s harvest time, find apple trees, blackberry bushes, grapevines, pear trees, any fruits or vegetables growing on public land that would otherwise go to waste, pick the produce, and share it with everyone.

Create a “Buy Nothing, Share Freely Holiday Shop.” We’ve run a free Christmas shop for years, a party where people bring items that are gift-worthy and both children and adults can take any item they’d like to give to family members and friends. Everyone goes home with armloads of gifts for the holidays.

Build a Little Free Library. Little Free Libraries have been a thing for years and they’re such a cool gift to give the world. Build a little weatherproof box that can hold books, and put it out at the end of your driveway or other safe location accessible to your neighbors (apartment lobbies are perfect, with permission from your building manager). People will come and take what they like and add to the collection. Visit littlefreelibrary.org for all of the details, including building plans and a global map of Little Free Libraries.

Start a library of things. Lending libraries are not only for books! We’ve seen libraries for tools, seeds, housewares, and fancy clothes, all started up as innovative local resources for neighbours to share. Choose an item or items you’d like to steward, like cloth napkins for events (this saves so much on paper waste), metal cutlery, wineglasses, plates, camping gear, snowshoes, carpet steamer, etc., and your neighbours will thank you. Choose the item you’d like to loan to people, let everyone know, and be the go-to person for that much-needed thing.

Create a fleet of “free bikes” and set them free for people to ride from place to place. We did it, and spray-painted the bikes with a “ride me” sign on them.

Start a Fix-It Fair. These are so essential! Assembling local engineers, electricians, carpenters, seamstresses, and MacGyvers for a Fix-It Fair can go a long way to prevent things from going into the landfill. You may already have one nearby, so just type “Repair Café” or “Fix-it Fair + [your county or region]” into your browser and see what pops up.

Start a monthly “Really Really Free Market.” Minneapolis has a successful free market that has benefited many families. You could start one in your city or town, too. Minneapolis’s Market is very popular. People contribute what they no longer need and pick up what they do. Here’s what they put out in the local newspaper to spread the word: “Everything here is FREE: offer what you’d like to give and take what you would like to receive. Food, music, and company are as welcome as objects. Please treat everything as a gift, and please take back with you any things that you have brought that nobody has taken.”

Garden communally and share produce. If you have growing space, turn it into a neighbourhood garden. Sharing the land and work will increase yields, bringing food and joy to more people. You can also contribute your excess produce to a Grow Free cart, a beautiful movement of colourful carts started in Australia where people share their excess produce and take what they need from the carts. Why not start a cart for your community? This idea from Down Under deserves to take root around the world.

MORE INSPIRATION

READ The Buy Nothing, Get Everything Plan by Liesl Clark and Rebecca Rockefeller

EXPLORE Start your own Buy Nothing group in your neighbourhood with guidance from buynothingproject.org

'Green Parent
YOUR STORIES

Catherine Goldsmith
Berwickshire Swap run childrens’ clothes swaps in village halls, in the Scottish Borders. People donate outgrown childrens’ clothes, pay £1 entry fee then they are free to rummage and take away what they need for no extra charge. We usually have tea and cake too so it’s a nice way to get to know other families. facebook.com/berwickshireswap

Linda Robson-Burrell I’m opening Linda’s Little Free Library in my front garden in South Devon. Lots of people in our community here kindly donated books they were decluttering.

Vikki Mason We have a phonebox library which includes puzzles, a community garden, a plant swap group as well as a nappy library and a kids clothes swap. One of the village schools has set up a party ware loan scheme too.
BEGINNER’S MIND STARTS WITH nurturing your ability to form questions, and at the same time free yourself from knowing the answer. It feels great! Have you ever watched a child look at a leaf or a spider or a box with obvious delight? In the process of learning, children don’t assume they know what they see. They simply take joy in exploration. Imagine how much joy you could find in what you perceive to be the mundanity of everyday if you were to do the same.

Cultivating your Beginner’s Mind is your ticket to childlike wonder. It is also your ticket to gradually building your knowledge of the intersection of the natural world and the way we have designed our food system, enabling you not only to make choices that better suit your values, but also to channel forward the creative inspiration for change. You begin to see the world differently. Food is a marvellous place to start. Regularly asking endlessly adaptable questions – such as: What part of a plant does this food come from? What value does this food offer to other parts of nature beyond feeding humans? or What meaning does this food hold for me, beyond being food, and why? – will help you to perceive food as a conduit to the entire natural world. The value of all food in your life, from a full-on celebratory meal to a morning cuppa, will grow. As it does, eventually, your behaviours will shift as your world becomes more wondrous.

CREATE A RITUAL

Beginner’s mind questioning enables your mind to develop a better understanding of how your lifestyle reflects your values and brings renewed wonder to your everyday life. But, how do you translate intention into habitual action, particularly if you are trying to bring about change? The answer is a commitment to bringing new awareness and meaning to the rituals we all partake in each day. Be it birthday cake, Sunday lunch or Thanksgiving, food rituals fill us with a sense of security and meaning. The things we do ritualistically are extensions of who we are as people. Quite often in life we inherit rituals without questioning their relevance. Rarely do we set our intent to developing rituals that enable us to create change in our life and the life that surrounds us.

Heady as that sounds, in reality many of the rituals we partake in already mirror the cycles of nature because they stem from a time when people saw themselves as a part of nature, not beings who could dominate it. Take Halloween, for instance. Its origins go back 2,000 years to the time of the Celts living in Great Britain and northern France. After the autumnal equinox, when misty mornings and long dark nights began to draw in as the fertile world became dormant for months on end – it was bound to be frightening! People put lights in their windows and made offerings of food to the spirits to appease them. Every Halloween, when we have fun carving out faces in candlelit pumpkins to set on our doorsteps and windowsills, or give treats to children dressed as ghosts and ghouls who come knocking, we are re-enacting the same cycle of life in connection to nature that our distant ancestors did. Every food ritual presents an opportunity to better understand the language of nature and to weave a web of significance that serves all.

5 ways to practice mindfulness in the kitchen

1. Let your body catch up with your brain
2. Know your personal hunger signals
3. Cultivate a mindful kitchen
4. Understand your motivations to eat
5. Connect more deeply with the food on your plate

MORE INSPIRATION

READ The Mindful Kitchen by Heather Thomas (Quarto)
WATCH What are our Rituals with Food at themindfullkitchen.org/what-are-our-rituals-with-food
Win an eco-friendly baby essentials bundle from TotsBots worth over £200!

TotsBots are passionate about making the best reusable products, in the kindest way possible to our planet, inspiring and enabling parents to make choices that have a positive environmental impact for the future of their children. All of their reusable nappies and wipes are ethically made with love in their UK based factory by a super talented team.

This reusable baby bundle will help you reduce your household waste without hassle! One lucky winner will receive:

- 5 EasyFit Star All-in-One Nappies
- 2 Bamboozle Night Time Nappies with waterproof cover
- Biodegradable nappy liners
- 10 pack of super soft reusable wipes
- Happy Changing Mat
- Waterproof Nappy Bag
- 5 pack of GOTS Certified Organic Muslins

HOW TO ENTER: For your chance to win simply enter online at: link.thegreenparent.co.uk/totsbots
CLOSING DATE: 30th August 2020

Win a Jar of Calendula and Marshmallow Balm

Lyonsleaf won a Gold Medal in the Green Parent Beauty Awards Nappy Cream category last year for their remarkable Zinc and Calendula Cream. Now, we are giving away 10 jars of their 30ml Calendula and Marshmallow Balm, which is also shortlisted this year for the baby balm category, but it’s also brilliant for hands ravaged by lots of handwashing. Lyonsleaf are a go-to brand for sensitive skin, their website is brimming with 5 star reviews from customers with eczema, psoriasis, perioral dermatitis, acne and many other skin issues. Their products really are 100% natural, their eco credentials and recyclable packaging are impressive and they grow their own herbs and hand make the products at their farm on the Mendip Hills in Somerset. What’s not to love. Lyonsleaf.co.uk
ENTER HERE: link.thegreenparent.co.uk/lyonsleaf
CLOSING DATE: 9th September 2020
Win a mineral makeup starter kit and a mascara - all vegan products

If you’ve ever wanted to try pure loose mineral makeup that’s fully Vegan, enter now and cross your fingers. English Mineral makeup’s award winning vegan mineral makeup starter kit includes a foundation, blusher and illuminator, and our signature buffing kabuki. EMM’s vegan lashes mascara, tested on humans and created for the most sensitive eyes is also part of this gorgeous prize. Knowing what you are made of is everything! englishmineralmakeup.co.uk

HOW TO ENTER: Visit link.thegreenparent.co.uk/emm and answer this question: What is the special relationship shared by the founders of The English Mineral makeup Company?

CLOSING DATE: 31st August 2020

Win a beautiful selection of natural soap from BrambleWood Soap Co.

The prize includes a wonderful selection of 11 handmade botanical soap bars, worth over £50. BrambleWood Soap Co products are all lovingly made by hand in small batches in the heart of Dorset with only wonderful, natural and organic ingredients. All products are free from palm oil, artificial fragrances, colours, parabens, SLS, SLES and phthalates. www.bramblewoodsoap.co.uk

HOW TO ENTER: For your chance to win simply enter online at: link.thegreenparent.co.uk/bramblewoodsoap

CLOSING DATE: 30th September 2020

Akamuti £50 Voucher Giveaway!

This is your chance to win one of five £50 vouchers we are giving away. Glow naturally with our gorgeous range of skincare products inspired by nature! Our 100% natural ingredient lists are short and sweet, designed to promote healthy, happy skin from top to toe. Our people and planet friendly creations are bursting with botanical goodness and flower power. Choose from luxurious beauty butters and moisturisers, cold process soaps and aromatic balms... happy browsing!
akamuti.co.uk

HOW TO ENTER: Visit link.thegreenparent.co.uk/akamuti

CLOSING DATE: 31st August 2020
FOOD / SCHOOL

BOXING CLEVER

Back to school means back to packed lunches. It’s easy to fall into formulaic habits, so we asked our readers and friends for their ultimate lunch-time tips. Try something new!

✽ Include something frozen – an orange, or yoghurt, say – and it’ll keep the rest of your lunch cool, and thaw out just enough to eat by midday. Alternatively freeze quarter of a bottle of water, and top it up in the morning for a home-made icepack.

✽ Vegetable and cheese muffins travel well and make a great soggy sandwich alternative.

✽ Make Bliss Balls (sesame seeds, dates and ayurvedic spices bound together with ghee) in bulk. One a day will give your kids a healthy energy kick to see them through playtime.

✽ Bean salads are sturdy enough to survive a bumpy bike ride to school. Add hard-boiled eggs, smoked fish, edamame beans or roasted butternut squash.

✽ If your child struggles to eat a whole apple, cut it into slices and use rubber bands to hold them in place. The ‘jigsaw’ apple won’t go brown.

✽ If the school allows hot meals, invest in a food flask. Make up extra portions of evening dinners and give them to your kids the next day for lunch. Macaroni cheese, lentil curry, and vegetable soups all work beautifully. Great for cold days.

✽ Theme your weeks and go global! Try Chinese noodle salads, dim sum and dumplings, Indian tiffin, Spanish snacks and Greek pitta and dips. Include little flags, fun fact Post-its, and label the food in your chosen country’s language.

✽ Save on packaging and money by buying in bulk. Visit your nearest bring-your-own-container store to stock up on nuts, wasabi peas, dried fruit, trail mix and spicy Bombay Mix, then decant into small reusable containers.

✽ Keep a packet of emergency wraps in the freezer for emergency standby on run-out-of-bread days!

✽ We love Buddha Bowls! Prepare the ingredients at the beginning of the week, and encourage your kids to help mix up a different combination to take to school or work daily. Include quinoa, chickpeas, chopped onion, avocados, seaweed, roasted squash and potatoes, sugar snap peas, tomatoes, radishes and sweetcorn and build your own bowl each morning! Take a dressing in a separate bowl and wave goodbye to sogginess.

✽ Include surprise notes and doodles in your lunches. Look up illustrator Rob Biddulph on social media and be inspired by his incredible Post-it Note cartoons he draws for his daughter. Or get creative and label your dinners; “Poison”, “Snot Sandwich” and “Scab crisps” have all made our kids smile.

✽ Bake tear-and-share loaves and freeze them for the ultimate easy lunch snack.

PACK IT IN

1. Keep Leaf Insulated lunchpack, £18, littleacornstomighty oaks.co.uk Made from 100% organic cotton canvas. Perfect for lunches and snacks. Durable, lightweight and easy to clean. Lead Phthalate and BPA free.

2. Beeswax Wraps, £10, peacewiththewild.co.uk Say goodbye to single use cling film, these wax food wraps are washable, reusable and biodegradable. Made with only natural ingredients the beeswax wraps won’t leach any chemicals into your food unlike plastic wrap.

3. Two Tier Lunchbox, £21.95, asliceofgreen.co.uk Rectangular stainless steel lunch box with clip closure, consisting of two tiers and a separate mini container which fits inside.

4. Bambu full utensil set, £20, ethicalsuperstore.com Organic bamboo cutlery set, which includes a knife, fork, spoon, spork, chopsticks, bamboo straw and a straw cleaning brush packed in an organic cotton mesh bag to keep them altogether.
**FAMILY TIME IS, IN MY OPINION, THE MOST nourishing and exhausting experience you can have. It challenges you and completes you all in the same breath. To allow mealtimes to be enjoyable rather than stressful, I have put together this collection of recipes to make it easier to nourish your whole family.**

Each dish is simple to make, with no hard to find ingredients, no complicated methods, no time consuming preparation, just delicious, quick to make meals.

These recipes are flexible in every way. Don’t have broccoli? Swap it. Don’t like carrots? Swap them ... The recipes are interchangeable and work for the whole family.

Whether you are pregnant with your first child or have a house full of little ones, the recipes are put together so that everyone in your household can enjoy them.

Batch cooking and freezing food has been a saviour for me from day one. Your freezer is just a cold larder! If you have multiple children, work and a hungry partner, stacking a freezer full of purées, stews, risottos and sauces is the easiest way to get dinner on the table in 10 minutes.

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Natasha Corrett wants to make family food easier and more nourishing for everyone.

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**sweet potato gnocchi**

**SERVES:** 2 children  
**PREP:** 10 minutes  
**COOK:** 30 minutes–1 hour

This was a winner with Rudy during the weaning process – just make them a little longer so they can pick each one up like a fish finger. Simon and I love this too with a delicious chilli tomato sauce and a fresh rocket and parmesan salad.

- 195g sweet potato  
- 35g gluten-free self raising flour, plus extra for dusting  
- 1 heaped tsp cornflour

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C Fan.
2. Bake the potato whole for 50 minutes, then leave to cool. You can then just peel the skin off and chop the potato. Alternatively, steam the sweet potato by heating 5cm of water in a saucepan. Chop the sweet potato, place in a sieve and add to the pan, without touching the water, and place a lid on top. Steam for 20–25 minutes until soft (do not allow the water to boil as the potato will get too wet and the gnocchi won’t work).
3. Mash the cooked sweet potato with the back of a spoon in a bowl. Add the gluten-free flour and cornflour to the bowl and mix well.
4. Cover a work surface with flour and, with two small teaspoons, shape the mixture into small balls and drop onto the floured surface (you don’t have to be too neat). It is a wet mixture, not like a normal gnocchi that you roll. Sprinkle with a little more flour and gently rock each one backwards and forwards (as if you were rolling it) just so the flour sits on the surface of the sweet potato. Press the back of a fork gently onto each one, this will help the tomato sauce to stick to the gnocchi.
5. Boil a very large pan of water, drop each gnocchi into the pan and cook the gnocchi for 3 minutes.
6. Take out of the water and put into a bowl with some olive oil. Serve with any sauce or pesto.
**green pancakes**

SERVES: 2 children  
PREP: 10 minutes  
COOK: 10 minutes  
I love pancakes – they are quick and simple to make even with a toddler hanging from your leg! Introducing greens into a food they already love is also a wonderful way to add more veg to their repertoire and these are great for the whole family. You can pretty much use any vegetables to make different flavours too.

- 2 tbsp olive oil  
- 1/3 tsp ground cumin  
- 1/4 courgette, grated  
- 2 broccoli florets, finely chopped  
- 50g spinach  
- 2 tbsp water  
- 2 tbsp plain flour  
- 1 tbsp store-bought pesto  
- 1 egg

1. To a frying pan, add 1 tablespoon of the olive oil, the cumin, courgette and broccoli and cook for 2–3 minutes.  
2. Add the spinach and water and continue to cook until the vegetables are soft. Take off the heat and put into a blender with the flour, pesto and egg and blend until smooth.  
3. Using the same frying pan, add the other tablespoon of olive oil into the pan and bring to a medium to high heat. Spoon heaped spoonfuls of the mixture into the hot pan and leave to cook for 1–2 minutes until golden on one side, then flip and cook on the other. Keep warm while you repeat until all the mixture is finished. Serve straight away or pack into a lunch box with hummus and raw veg to take away.

**leftover porridge bars**

MAKES: 8 bars  
PREP: 5 minutes  
COOK: 15 minutes  
There is nothing worse than leftover porridge. I hate the waste, but it doesn’t matter what happens, there is always some! I therefore came up with a little solution of making granola bars, which we all love. You can keep 2–3 days worth of old porridge in a container in the fridge before making these to ensure you have enough.

NUTRITIONAL NUGGET
Oats are rich in beta-glucans, a type of fibre that is linked to improved immunity and gut health.

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C Fan. Line a 20cm loaf tin with baking paper.  
2. Put the dates and warm water into a blender and pulse until they make a coarse purée. Add to the rest of the ingredients and mix together. Spoon into the lined loaf tin and spread so that it is 1cm thick.  
3. Bake for 15 minutes, then take out and leave to cool. Cut into squares or bar shapes. The bars can be kept in an airtight Tupperware for 3 days.

- 100g dates  
- 60ml warm water  
- 150g leftover porridge  
- 60g rolled oats  
- 2 tbsp desiccated coconut  
- 2 tbsp chia or flax seed
saffron sticky toffee cake

MAKES: 8 slices
PREP: 30 minutes
COOK: 30 minutes

This cake was inspired by a trip to Marrakesh a few years ago. My husband and I went for dinner and had a kind of toffee pudding infused with saffron. Now I’ve re-created it, I’m never having sticky toffee again without saffron – it’s amazing and not so strong that children won’t like it. I’ve added a quick custard, but you can also have it with ice cream or cream. Don’t miss out on the date syrup though as it’s essential! You can use any leftovers for lunch box extras.

- 100g butter or olive oil
- medium pinch of saffron (8–10 strands)
- 130g gluten-free plain flour
- 50g cornflour
- 1 ½ tsp baking powder
- ¼ tsp salt
- 70g coconut palm sugar or brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 100g maple syrup or honey
- 100ml water
- 200g dates

CUSTARD
- 500ml milk
- 2 tbsp vanilla extract
- 2 tbsp maple syrup
- 2 eggs
- 2 tbsp cornflour

DATE SAUCE
- 100ml (scant ½ cup) date syrup
- 100g butter

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C Fan. Line a 20cm round baking tin with baking paper.
2. Put the butter and saffron in a pan. Cook for a couple of minutes over a very low heat until it starts to bubble, but don’t let it burn. Take off the heat and leave for 30 minutes (or more) to infuse.
3. Weigh out the flour, cornflour, baking powder, salt and sugar into a bowl and mix well. To a blender add the eggs, maple syrup, water and dates and blend until the dates are still recognizable, but not in chunks. Once the butter is infused, add into the wet mixture.
4. Mix the wet mixture into the dry ingredients and combine well so there are no lumps. Pour into the tin and bake for 30–35 minutes. The cake is ready when a skewer inserted in comes out a little wet.
5. Meanwhile, make the custard and date syrup. Heat the milk in a pan with the vanilla and maple syrup over a medium heat. Bring to almost boiling, then remove from the heat. Make sure it’s not too hot when you do the next part as the eggs will scramble. Beat the eggs and cornflour in another bowl until well combined.
6. Pour the hot milk over the eggy mix and whisk in well. Pour back into the pan and cook over a gentle heat for 10 minutes, stirring until it thickens and coats the back of the spoon. If you are making the custard ahead of time, be sure to cover the surface with clingfilm to avoid a skin forming.
7. To make the date syrup, heat the date syrup and butter in a saucepan over a medium heat. Pour over the sticky toffee cake and serve with the custard on the side.

“I’m never having sticky toffee again without saffron – it’s amazing and not so strong that children won’t like it”

more inspiration

READ Family Kitchen: Simple Healthy Meals for Everyone by Natasha Corrett (Mums Know Best)
EXPLORE Find recipes at Instagram @natashacorrett
YOUR MEDICINE BAG

sweet pickings

The Bramble or Blackberry is ripe with abundant charms

Going Blackberrying is a favourite foraging expedition. Fingers and lips stained dark purple, arms scratched by sharp thorns, but triumphant with enough of the blackberry harvest to eat fresh or cooked and turned into delicious jams and crumbles. In the Celtic Tree Ogham, the bramble is the sacred wood for the 10th lunar month.

Abundant Growth
Blackberries are part of the rose family and have the characteristic flowers, leaves, and thorns similar to those found on wild rose bushes. With their long, thorny canes, they are a common sight arching among the English lanes and hedgerows, scrambling over fences, spreading quickly to make huge impenetrable barriers if left untended. They grow well in almost any soil, particularly a sandy one, in sun or shade, but like most plants, they will flower (delicate pink and white flowers from June through to September) and crop (August and September) better if they find some sunshine.

Natural Healer
Blackberries are revered for their antioxidant properties. Rich in Vitamin C, A, Omega-3, Potassium and Calcium, all parts of the plant have been used for healing. Native American Indians used a concoction of the roots and leaves to help with stomach and digestion problems. The leaves are high in tannins, and are a natural source of salicylate – a component of aspirin, which helps to relieve tissue inflammation.

Chewing the leaves for bleeding, diseased gums and gradually loosening teeth is a remedy that goes back hundreds of years. The 16th century herbalist, John Gerard suggests in his ‘Great Herbal’, a recipe of blackberry leaves that had been first boiled in water with honey, alum and a little white wine to make a mouth rinse for ‘fastening’ the teeth.

FOLKLORE
Folk names for the blackberry include bumblekites, bounty thorn, skaldberry, blackbutters, blackbides, gatterberry. In Gaelic it is the prickle thorn - dris-muine. According to some English folklore, passing under the archway formed by a bramble branch will cure (or prevent) all manner of afflications, including hernia, ruptures, pimples, and boils.

Most of all, blackberries are for eating in abundance. Right off the bush or sprinkled over shortbread and smothered in cream, or added to a bowl of cereal, they also make great jams and wines and are delicious in pie alone or in combination with other seasonal fruits. The dried leaves may be added to herbal tea blends – see recipe.

BLACKBERRY TEA

MAKES 1 MUG

• 1 handful fresh green blackberry leaves.
• 1 mug water
• Honey
• (Optional) small pieces of stem, bark or clean root and a few ripe berries for colour

Simmer the green leaves (and bark if used) in the water for about 10 minutes (do not boil as this may reduce the vitamin content). Strain into cups and add honey. Use this hot, as a refreshing vitamin and antioxidant filled tea, or cold as a gargle for sore throats or as an astringent mouthwash.

Recipe
SLOW DOWN

Recipes to make use of a glut from the garden (or an abundant veg box!)

Byron Smith with Tess Robinson

SMOKY BABA GHANOUSH
Cucumber and Ginger Smoothie

Harvesting a cucumber is one of our greatest garden joys – once you try a freshly picked cucumber, the supermarket ones will never suffice again. The crunch and sweetness of a homegrown cucumber are delightful, but you can also turn these green wonders into a super refreshing and tasty smoothie. Try this smoothie on a warm summer’s morning, and you’ll be hooked.

SERVES 2

USE

- 1 large cucumber, sliced
- 1 teaspoon grated fresh ginger
- 1 banana
- 185 ml fresh coconut water
- Handful of ice cubes
- Pinch of ground cinnamon

DO
1. Place all the ingredients into a blender and blend until smooth.
2. Pour the smoothie mixture into two glasses.

Lemon, Courgette and Rosemary Bread

This one is for people who adore a savoury loaf. It’s great toasted under the grill with some shaved cheese on top. Savoury, earthy and sweet, this is the perfect morning snack. We always bake two loaves at a time – one for us, and another for our neighbours. That way, we know we’ll get treated to some of their kombucha when brewing time comes around!

MAKES 2 LOAVES

USE

- 600g spelt flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 115 g walnuts, roughly chopped
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped rosemary
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 4 eggs
- 185 ml melted coconut oil
- 125 ml melted butter
- 1½ tablespoons grated lemon zest
- 1 tablespoon honey >>
"We always bake two loaves at a time – one for us, and another for our neighbours"
**FOOD / RECIPES**

**DO**

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F). Grease two 21 x 11 x 7 cm loaf tins with coconut oil.
2. In a large bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, walnuts, rosemary and salt.
3. In a separate bowl, whisk the eggs. Stir in the courgette, coconut oil, butter, lemon zest and honey.
4. Slowly add the dry ingredients to the wet, stirring as you go.
5. Divide the dough into the two loaf tins. Bake for 40–45 minutes or until the loaves are golden brown. You'll know each loaf is ready when you gently press down on the top and it bounces back.
6. Transfer the loaves to a wire rack and allow them to cool in the tin for a few minutes. Take the loaves out of the tins and place them on the rack to cool completely.
7. Serve slices with butter and ricotta, or toast them under the grill with some cheese.
8. Freeze a loaf if you like or give it to a neighbour.

**choc mint mousse**

**SERVES 4**

This mousse is the perfect dessert for when you've forgotten to make dessert! A refreshing, healthy and easy twist on the classic crowd-pleaser, this dessert is so simple and yet so delicious. The mint washes away the sins of any feast, and it is one of the easiest herbs to grow. Every home garden should have some mint growing in it. It can thrive in a large pot if you only have a sunny little balcony or windowsill.

**USE**

- 2 medium aubergines.
- 65 g tahini
- 60 ml lemon juice
- 3 garlic cloves, finely minced
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons parsley leaves, finely chopped + extra leaves for garnish
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

**DO**

1. Prick your aubergines on all sides a few times with a fork. Place them on the barbecue and cook them on medium-high heat for 35–40 minutes. The skin will darken a little and begin to smell smoky, but don’t worry – this enhances the flavour of the dip. Set the aubergines aside and allow them to cool slightly.
2. In a medium-sized bowl, mix the tahini, lemon juice, garlic and salt.
3. Slice the aubergines in half lengthways. Drain the excess liquid. Scrape out the flesh with a spoon and add it to the tahini mixture.
4. Mash the aubergine flesh into the tahini mixture with a fork until it is smooth but with a bit of texture remaining. Allow the mixture to cool to room temperature and then stir in the parsley. Drizzle the dip with olive oil and garnish with the extra parsley leaves.

**more inspiration**

READ Slow Down and Grow Something: The Urban Grower’s Recipe for the Good Life. Cultivate. Cook. Share. by Byron Smith and Tess Robinson Murdoch Books

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**CHOC MINT MOUSSE**

**smoky baba ghanoush**

**MAKES 500 ML**

Growing aubergines makes you look like a great gardener. They are so prolific – one minute there’s nothing, and the next you’ve got enough to feed an army. The plant is lush and the fruits are abundant. This is a classic baba ghanoush we love for an afternoon snack or to lather on sandwiches. We prefer the texture slightly lumpy; if you like it silkier, feel free to use a food processor instead of the good old fork. We enjoy making ours on the barbecue, but you can also make it in the oven on high heat.

**USE**

- 4 large avocados, peeled, halved and stone removed
- 20 g mint leaves, finely chopped
- 235 g honey
- 105 g cacao powder
- 125 ml coconut cream
- Pinch of sea salt

**DO**

1. Place all the ingredients into a food processor and blend until smooth.
2. Pour the mixture into serving glasses. Refrigerate for 1 hour before serving.

Oh and if you like crunch, add some cacao nibs to the top just before serving. We often replace the mint with half a teaspoon of finely chopped fresh chillies – chocolate and chilli were made for each other!
Green FINGERS

Science experiments and projects in the garden

FUN AND LEARNING GO HAND-IN-HAND, and where better to start than in the garden. Growing things is naturally engaging, and kids can learn such a wide variety of skills. Here you’ll find a few of our favourite activities to really dive into learning inspired by your garden.

As a family, it’s probably important to be able to enjoy the garden in different ways. There are many ways to introduce changes that don’t affect the end use. For example, what about allowing the grass to grow longer in places, and letting more wildflowers grow in it? The bees and other wildlife will appreciate the extra nectar, and it shouldn’t affect any play. Remember, what is needed from the garden will change over time, and so it, too, can evolve with small, gradual changes that can be just as exciting as introducing big new features, or planting up new borders. >
SOIL TYPE
Other than light levels, soil type is the main factor that will affect which plants will thrive. Soil can be sticky clay that bakes hard in dry summers and is prone to waterlogging in winter. It could be dry and sandy soil that drains water away well in winter but needs a lot more watering in summer. Or it could be somewhere in between. Clay helps to hold on to more nutrients, making the soil more fertile, but sand helps with drainage. Each soil type supports different types of plants.

EXPERIMENT: Can you make a soil sausage?
To find out where your garden is on the clay to sand scale, take a small scoop of soil from a few places around the garden and mix them all together. Wet it slightly, then take a small handful. First, roll it into a ball. If it feels gritty and doesn’t hold well, the soil is sandy. If it holds in a ball it has some clay. Next, try rolling it into a sausage shape. If this is possible there is a greater proportion of clay in the soil. If the sausage can be bent into a ring, it is heavy clay.

EXPERIMENT: Test the soil’s acidity
Another great experiment is to find out whether the soil is acidic or alkaline (or neutral). Most plants grow best in a neutral to slightly acidic soil, but extremes of acidity or alkalinity can make growing difficult. Purchase a pH testing kit from a garden centre or online and follow the pack instructions.

For a more detailed analysis of the soil, RHS members can send a sample to the soil science laboratory for testing.

How to improve the soil
The ideal soil is in the middle of both the clay–sand scale and the pH (acid/alkaline) scale. Don’t despair if the soil is at one extreme or the other, as all soils can be easily improved over time. The best way to do this is to add plenty of compost or well-rotted manure every year. Give it a sniff – good-quality compost and well-rotted manure shouldn’t smell bad!

There is increasing evidence that it is best to leave the soil to its own devices, allowing worms and other soil creatures to incorporate a layer of compost put on the surface every year, rather than carrying out a lot of digging. This allows the complicated soil structure and ecosystem to continue undisturbed, and saves a lot of work for the gardeners – a win-win situation.

However, when creating a new area of garden, some digging can be beneficial. Lawns especially can lead to the soil beneath becoming very compacted, so turning the soil over and digging in plenty of compost before planting can help aerate it and improve the drainage.

Making a new border
The terms beds and borders are often used interchangeably by gardeners, but both mean an area of ground that houses a selection of plants, as opposed to lawn or paving. Typically, borders have something behind them, such as a hedge or wall, and are longer and thinner than a bed, which can be isolated in the middle of a lawn (sometimes called an island bed). Borders also typically contain longer-term plantings of shrubs and perennials, whereas beds are used for bedding (annual) plants. However, it’s not necessary to get the terminology right to have a beautifully planted garden!
GROWING SALAD LEAVES

Growing a selection of different salad leaves – from dark and spicy to sweet and crunchy – means there will be something everyone will like.

Varieties to try - Many retailers offer packets of mixed varieties, which are a good choice in a small space. To create the salad art below, you will need a few packets of individual varieties – try green and red lettuces, rocket, pak choi, sorrel and purple basil.

Sow - Sow direct where they are to grow, sprinkling the seeds in a thin line or sparingly over the top of a pot and covering with a thin layer of compost. Rather than sowing the whole row at once, sow part rows every two weeks to ensure a good supply over the whole summer and into autumn. First sowings can be made from mid-spring; the last sowing in late summer.

Grow - Keep well-watered, especially in hot weather when plants can bolt (flower and then make seeds), which results in bitter, tough leaves. Pull out any bolted plants and discard.

Pick - Harvest the oldest leaves (those around the outside) each time, starting when the plant has reached about 5–10cm in height. Always leave a few leaves on the plant.

PROJECT: Salad art

Why not create a living picture by sowing different colours and types of leaves in patterns? Geometric designs, such as squares and stripes, are the most straightforward, but why not try spirals or faces? Sprinkle the pattern over the soil with sand first to help get the seeds in the right place.

Alternatively, make a globe of salad using hanging baskets. Ambitious gardeners could even try using purple leaves for landmass and green for oceans to create a lettuce earth.

Take two hemispherical (half-globe shaped) hanging baskets and a bag of sphagnum moss (available from garden centres or online).

1. Stuff moss into each basket, then wire them together into a globe.
2. Top up the moss by pushing it through the gaps so it is a relatively tight ball.
3. Soak the whole thing in water for ten minutes then stand it over a bucket until the excess has dripped away.
4. Carefully push the rootballs of small lettuce plants into the moss, spaced evenly around the globe (about 10cm, apart).
5. Hang in a sunny spot and water and/or spray daily to keep the moss damp, mixing in some liquid feed regularly.
6. The lettuce will grow to cover the whole ball.

What’s the most unusual container you’ve used for growing?

Eleanor Garfunkel
Old chimney pots

Vicky Seviour-Crockett
We have a herb wheelbarrow, and old plastic drums with lilies

READ

RHS Get Growing by Holly Farrell, Published Frances Lincoln, rrp £14.99, available from online retailers and bookshops

‘RATHER THAN SOWING THE WHOLE ROW AT ONCE, SOW PART ROWS EVERY TWO WEEKS TO ENSURE A GOOD SUPPLY OVER THE WHOLE SUMMER’
A ROOM of one’s own

Erika Kotite introduces a little piece of heaven in your back yard

PHOTOGRAPHY: Kim Snyder

SHE SHED, HEN HUT, LADY LAIR. call it what you want, the newest iteration of a woman’s private space is looking more and more like a small but splendid room built in the backyard. She sheds are mushrooming on properties near and far in a wonderful array of sizes, styles, and uses. From Australia to Alaska, Texas to Ukraine, women are staking claim to a completely personal space to call their own.

The beauty of a she shed is its small footprint, making it easy to fit onto your property and still afford a unique getaway for your creative pursuits—gardening, meditating, reading, painting, or simply hearing yourself think. Most she sheds are built with simplicity at the forefront. They are often not insulated but stocked instead with cozy quilts and pillows. Light is supplied by the sun or maybe by a few battery-operated lights. The idea is to be free of responsibility, using the space to unwind and to do exactly what you want.

Part of the fun of a she shed is using salvage and recycled finds. You’ll finally have a perfect use for that wonderful carved door you bought at an estate sale five years ago. Your shed provides the space for that collection of old clocks or tinted seltzer bottles buried in the closet.

As women, we handle a heavy load of responsibility: jobs, marriage, children, household chores, and social obligations. Often we are part of the “sandwich generation,” in which we take care of both our young ones and our aging parents. Days will go by in which we must ask ourselves, “Have I had one minute alone, in the quiet, to myself?” She sheds are a refuge of comfort, filled with promise and your treasured possessions. They are there for however you want to use them. A she shed is for you, and you alone.

MEET JENNY!

Jenny Karp is a mixed-media artist in California who also sells organic paint online. The busy >
Jenny Karp’s she shed reflects her Hawaiian background and the rustic ranch that her mother was raised on. Wide French doors open onto a spacious room with painted plywood floors.
wife, mother, and business owner yearned for a place where she could create art and shoot video tutorials. The answer was a shed designed by Dana O’Brien of A Place to Grow/Recycled Greenhouses.

“I worked out the design with Dana, and in four weeks we were ready to go,” Karp says. “The rest of the time was spent finding materials and making the money that I needed to build it.” Three months later, Karp walked back in to O’Brien’s shop with about half the money necessary. O’Brien suggested that Karp look for her own windows and doors instead of purchasing them from her inventory. A friend of Karp’s had some windows stored in her barn. They were fifty years old but had never been used, and she gave them to Karp for the shed. Another friend provided an old French door. With the savings, along with reusing the wood from a pergola in Karp’s yard that had to be torn down, the shed’s budget was met and the construction began.

Karp wanted an aesthetic that combined the feel of a beach house (she is originally from Hawaii) with the down-to-earth practicality of a ranch. “My mom grew up on her family’s ranch, so I wanted my shed to be rustic and mostly made of recycled wood,” Karp says. The shed’s design incorporated plenty of windows, including in the doors. With so much natural light, Karp can set up her video camera to shoot from the outside looking inside—the windows open wide for this purpose as well as for ventilation.

**BUILDER’S NOTES**

1. For shed foundations, a flat surface is ideal (and easiest). Jenny laid down unmortared bricks, which are sturdy and also drain water through the openings.

2. Keep your shed watertight. Pay careful attention to cracks and openings; caulk everything thoroughly. Doors, windows, and roofs must be built with proper sealing, such as weatherstripping and flashing. If possible, let your nearly finished shed go through a rainstorm or two to see what needs fixing.

3. Greenhouses often have semi-transparent roofs made with polycarbonate panels. These corrugated panels allow light in and keep the rain out. This could be a good option for illuminating your own she shed.

**MORE INSPIRATION**

**READ** She Sheds: A Room of Your Own by Erika Kotite (Quarto Knows)

**EXPLORE** Jenny’s art at glitterfarm.com
Ways to Travel the World
(without leaving home)

Unpack our five ideas to create the sights, sounds and smells of a holiday abroad

1 Canvas Intentions
A change of sleep scenery makes you feel as if you’re somewhere new. If you have a big enough garden and your own tent, pitching it on your lawn and sleeping under canvas is a mini holiday. Tell stories around a fire or barbecue, toast marshmallows and sing songs before you tuck up for the night. If you’re feeling super-adventurous, make your own shelter or sleep under the stars. If you don’t have outside space, improvise indoors. Make a blanket tent and illuminate it with fairy lights before bedding down for the night in it. Or create a new sleeping space under a table, behind a sofa or under the stairs. Pack a midnight feast or get up before dawn for more new experiences and sensations. >
2 Listen Up

The aural rhythms of a country can transport you immediately. Whether it’s crickets chirping, waves crashing, or the beep-beeps of little mopeds, taking a sound bath in a country’s native noises gives a sharp impression of the place. Try searching archives online for market noises, jungle recordings, or seaside soundscapes, then turn off the lights, turn up your speakers, and immerse yourself in them. Alternatively, delve into the music of a region. Find out what pop artists top a country’s charts, and sing along, or delve back further and listen to traditional rhythms and melodies online or on record. Perhaps you might buy or make appropriate instruments or rhythm makers and play along.

3 Get Swotting

Part of the joy of holidaying is trying to speak a new language, or dusting down the long-forgotten words of one you may already know. Children’s brains are elastic, and learning to speak French, German, Chinese or Welsh comes far more easily to them. Use a phrase book or an app to learn, or, better still, meet or chat online with a friend who’s a native speaker. Or watch films you know well dubbed into foreign languages, or with the subtitles turned on. Learn funny words, act out silly scenarios using your new language, or throw the odd word in randomly in everyday chat. “Felices vacaciones” everyone!

4 Beach Life

Missing the feeling of sand between your toes and the warm surf? There’s nothing that can really replace a sun-drenched, tropical paradise, but it’s fun to give it a shot. If you’ve got a large outdoor space, why not set up a summer-long beach? Use play sand to form a miniature shoreline in your garden or on your balcony, dig out a sun lounger and parasol, and keep a paddling pool full of water on hand to take a ‘dip’ in. Root out your inflatables, balls and beach games, and spend your afternoons at the ‘seaside’. If you’ve no outside space, scale things down, and make sensory trays of sand and warm salty water to dip your feet into while you sit in a sunny spot. Don’t forget your mock-or-cocktails!

5 Mondo Menu

There’s no better way to get to know a nation than by trying out its food. Why not theme your shopping around a different country each week? Some supermarkets run Spanish, French, eastern European and Asian events, which may help you find more obscure eats, or, for a more immersive shopping experience, head to your nearest specialist shop or market – some neighbourhoods can feel just as Chinese, Indian or Polish as the real deal! Once you have your ingredients, search online for ‘street food’ rather than just ‘recipes’ for the most authentic cuisine. Try recreating a café you might find in your chosen country; create a menu in the language, decorate a table appropriately and strew it with twinkly lights, and have a proper big night out in your house or garden.
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Pick of the best eco threads for your little ones in the late summer sun

**SCOTTISH ADVENTURE**

Frugi have infused playful, colourful accents of the rugged Scottish Highlands and Islands to present their new collection of organic children’s wear and accessories. The Frugi design team wrapped up warm, donned their wellies and walking boots and had a fantastically Scottish adventure. From Glasgow, Loch Lomond and Tobermory to the Isle of Skye, Ben Nevis and Edinburgh they were inspired by their beautiful surroundings from the flora and fauna to stunning snow-capped mountains, lochs and landscapes...along with a fleecy friend or two. Think cheeky red squirrels, happy hares and hedgehogs, busy sheepdogs, playful puffins, hungry Highland cows, and other playful critters. GOTS certified cotton is used throughout the Frugi range making the clothes super-soft and snugly and ideal for little one’s sensitive skin. welovefrugi.com

**GROW YOUR OWN!**

The Grow Your Own range recently launched at Piccalilly and has been super popular. Launched in conjunction with a Grow Your Own’ campaign, encouraging parents to start growing fruit and veg with their children, it’s been a hotbed of activity. “We encouraged customers to share their experiences on social media and hashtag in ‘piccalillygyo’,”, says brand founder Hannah Evans. “And we had a wonderful response!”

**PERFECT PATTERNS**

The latest collection at Pigeon Organics is inspired by the warm Mediterranean sun, beautiful tiles and colourful textiles. All clothes by the brand are 100% organic and made in a small number of factories which adhere to fair labour practices. “We work with hundreds of small independent retailers - we want to support vibrant high streets in our towns and cities,” says founder Jane Shepherd. “Not everyone can be expected to buy organic products all the time, but we hope that when people have the choice, they will think about the positive benefits to the environment, to the farmers and their families, that organic farming can bring. We also try to minimise our own environmental impact, so all of our company’s electricity comes from renewable sources and we are currently in transition to compostable bags for our packaging.”

Visit pigeonorganics.com
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PASS IT ON

Each year, Oxfam run Second-hand September, a time to take a pledge to buy no new clothes for a month. However, for many of us, pre-loved shopping, passing on, and making clothes last is a way of life. We asked you to give us your best tips!

“*There is a swapshop across Northern Ireland, no money passes hands, people offer what they don’t need and others ask instead of buying. It works really well.*” **Vicky Seviour-Crockett** via Facebook

“Where did the jumble sales and sense of community go? I spend a fortune on my boy’s clothes even though they’re ‘cheap’ from supermarkets, I don’t have time to shop on eBay as I work full time as part time won’t cover all the bills. We used to get bags of hand-me-downs from people my mum knew and loved rifling through jumble sales at village halls and schools. We need to make this happen again, as there’s so much senseless waste, the poor are becoming poorer, and I’m also uncomfortable thinking about the ethics of cheap clothing.” **Naomi Cox** via Facebook

“We have set up a local swap in Berwickshire, mostly focusing on childrens clothes. People donate their unwanted clothes, and for a £1 entry fee you can rummage and take what you need for free. We are looking into becoming a charity so we can make clothes available as emergency clothing parcels. It has grown into something amazing.” **Catherine Goldsmith** via Facebook

“We keep all our stained clothes that are perfectly fine and dye them all in one go. Either tie dye or a block colour. I find kids clothes are too small to deal with one at a time but after time there is enough to dye. Your children may have grown out of them but it means when you pass them on they can be used and not just turned to rag.” **Maxine McVeigh** via Facebook

“My best tip is to get friends to look out for things you need. We have a WhatsApp group that we use to list things we all need – it’s not too long to keep manageable – so just before I go into charity shop I remind myself what they’re on the lookout for and see if I can pick it up. We pass the clothes around after the children grow, so I usually end up seeing it again!” **Maxine McVeigh** via Facebook

“We buy a lot of organic kids clothes from small shops when they have sales. I buy unisex so they suit both my boy and girl. We also buy and sell on Facebook pages that are brand-specific (Duns and Maxomorra), and with the money we make or buy more in bigger sizes to put away or rotate.” **Steph Walters** via Facebook

Find out more about Secondhand September at oxfamapps.org

‘WE PLAN AHEAD AND HAVE A ‘BIG BOY’ BOX FOR THE NEXT SIZE THINGS. WE ALSO PASS ON OUR CLOTHES’
HOROSCOPES

Donna Taylor explores the heavens to find out what’s in store for you in the coming months

Leo 23 July - 23 Aug
Everyone’s batteries run down occasionally, usually when we’ve been doing too much of what we have to do and not enough of what we love. If you’ve been feeling flat, August gives you a prescription for attending to your own needs and engaging in activities that jump start your soul. Then as inspiration begins to flow, it will be time for a new beginning of some sort. As Goethe said, “Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now.” This renewal of energy will then lead you to be so much more productive, and September brings financial rewards for your increasing efforts.

Virgo 24 Aug - 22 Sep
“Notice what happens when you follow your intuitive feelings. The result is usually increased energy and power, and a sense of things flowing.” - Shakti Gawain. We live in an increasingly rational and technological world which makes the intuitive faculty harder to reach. Don’t let this happen to you, particularly in August when you will have a direct line to your unconscious, that rich fertile place where ideas, solutions and inspiration can be found. By tuning in to your inner self and following its promptings, you will sail into September with a stronger sense of who you are and what you need to do next.

Sagittarius 23 Nov - 21 Dec
“The realist sees reality as concrete. The optimist sees reality as clay.” - Robert Brault. There is an adventurous feel to August making this the month to take a trip or believe more fervently in a dream, and the more able you are to remember that you shape your reality with your thoughts, the more miraculous life will begin to be. There should be no stopping you by the time September rolls around and this is a month when you can begin to move forward in your life as success and achievement beckon.

Capricorn 22 Dec - 20 Jan
“The snake which cannot cast its skin has to die.” - Friedrich Nietzsche. You’ve probably shed a few skins in recent years as you have been in a time of profound change and transformation, and it’s this willingness to let go of what you were attached to that has led you to a place of strength. August sees a rebirth of sorts, when you can further let go of ideas, beliefs and situations that no longer serve you, and the result will be a renewal. And then the adventure begins, which is where September finds you.

Aquarius 21 Jan - 18 Feb
“A part of kindness consists in loving people more than they deserve.” - Joseph Joubert. Relationships and your personal life take centre stage during late summer and the challenge may be to not just forgive others but to allow them to forgive you too. We all make mistakes; we all treat other people less than graciously from time to time, but now is the opportunity to direct your attention into your relationships so that they become a source of strength and nourishment. From that place, intimacy will grow.

Aries 21 Mar - 20 Apr
Frank Capra. If you can stay within your limits and not bite off more than you can chew, if you can remember to rein yourself in when it feels more tempting to over-stretch yourself or take on mighty giants, this could be a fun time, especially if you focus on being creative and allowing your instincts to guide you accordingly. The more you push against something the more problems you’re likely to have, but if you can let go and simply enjoy life, you will find success.

Taurus 21 Apr - 21 May
There is a domestic theme running through August, making this the ideal time to enjoy family activities. This has to be balanced against pursuing your own agenda, for Uranus in your sign requests that you remain true to your ideals. Ultimately though, the late summer months are a great time to return to base, to nurture yourself, explore your creativity and to enjoy what is around you. As George Moore said, “A man travels the world over in search of what he needs, and returns home to find it.”

Gemini 22 May - 21 June
“No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.” - Albert Einstein. Whatever problem you have in your life, and no matter whether it’s a recurring issue or something more recent, August brings the likelihood of a break-through. This could be a time of insight and revelation which could propel you into a new phase of life – just remember to ground yourself in the process. September will be a calmer softer month as the natural desire will be to return to base and hunker down.

Libra 23 Sep - 23 Oct
“Some have entertained angels unaware.” - St. Paul. The world is full of people who would like to help, given half the chance, and sometimes those people can be messengers from God. An overheard fragment of conversation, a smile from a stranger, or a friend appearing when you need a boost can all be methods of divine intervention. During August your world will light up if you can engage more with others and welcome their assistance. Then in September, it will be time to rest and reflect.

Scorpio 24 Oct - 22 Nov
There is a dynamic feel to late summer, making August the time to make a move, start a new project, change your direction or set yourself a goal. The only word of caution is to not over-stretch yourself or become frustrated if things don’t happen as quickly as you’d like or in the way you planned. A little flexibility will help you achieve your goals in a sane and healthy way. Remembering to take time out to be with friends and enjoy the social side of life, especially in September, will make the whole process more enjoyable.

Cancer 22 June - 22 July
“In life, you don’t get what you deserve, you get what you negotiate.” - Chester L. Karass. Few people feel comfortable asking for what they want; good examples of this include asking the boss for a pay rise or haggling for a better price on goods. But as the Sun and Mercury align in your money zone you may be surprised at what you can get if you ask for it. September is the month to reassess your direction: are you happy with where you are going? If not, know that a positive attitude will lead to your success.

Pisces 19 Feb - 20 Mar
There is beauty in the perfect order of the cosmos and it’s worth asking where we would be if the sun didn’t rise at a set time each day, or if the seasons didn’t come at their allotted time, if the leaves didn’t fall from their trees or the moon forgot to show up at night. Life - as any parent knows - works better when there is order and routine, and August brings the opportunity to create better results by living within a regular rhythm. As Mike Murdock says, “The secret of your future is hidden in your daily routine.”

Capricorn 22 Dec - 20 Jan
“The snake which cannot cast its skin has to die.” - Friedrich Nietzsche. You’ve probably shed a few skins in recent years as you have been in a time of profound change and transformation, and it’s this willingness to let go of what you were attached to that has led you to a place of strength. August sees a rebirth of sorts, when you can further let go of ideas, beliefs and situations that no longer serve you, and the result will be a renewal. And then the adventure begins, which is where September finds you.
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THERE IS A BEWILDERING ARRAY OF children’s books for parents and carers to choose from. In my 20 years of parenting I have seen the children’s sections in book shops grow from a couple of shelves at the back to engulf an entire floor. This is amazing. In a fairly short space of time the industry has boomed. Everyone values and knows of the virtues of reading with children. But which books are any good? How do we decide what will appeal to young children? How can we choose books that are really going to meet the needs of our children at different ages? It’s not simply a matter of taste either. As a lover of children’s literature I have picked up the popular, cool books that I see advertised on social media and…. well there is often nothing of substance there. Or they just don’t meet the age requirements and level of development that they’re aimed at. We need help choosing books that will nurture our children as they grow. Books that help create and anticipate future book lovers and further enrich a young child’s understanding rather than confuse.

Elinor Goldschmied wrote a book on respectful child care called People Under Three. She notes: Firstly an infant grasping an object asks, “what is this?” To find this out they hold the item, turning it over, feeling the texture, sucking to help figure out temperature, weight, shape, depth. They do this with everything they come into contact with. Providing as many natural objects as possible (rather than a bunch of plastic toys) gives an infant extremely rich and rewarding play experiences and support their understandings of the world through these objects and how they behave.

Secondly as they mature, infants wonder; “what does this thing do?”. Then they can be observed sliding a small object through a tube, stacking items on top of each other, throwing, manipulating, banging things together. What noise does this make? What happens when I put it here?

By the time a toddler reaches two years of age or thereabouts they begin to ask themselves thirdly; “what can I do with this?” And we can begin to see humour and imagination; the banana becomes a telephone, a bowl is a hat, the little blocks are fed to the cat as ‘food’.

The content of books at the beginning stage might not seem relevant as an infant figures out just what this object, a book, is. It’s made of something that gets wet and can come apart, it sometimes makes a ripping sound, it has images and can make adults sing or clap. The sounds adults make when reading are joyful, repetitive, predictable. The images or contrasts of colour or familiar scenes are mostly secondary but can grab an infant’s interest especially when combined with an adult making familiar actions or with a sight of the real object or experience.

When a child no longer needs to constantly mouth or throw the book, the content becomes of greater interest to the child. Books for this age may seem to adults fairly boring. Books about a child putting on their clothes, books with objects that a child sees every day. These are the books we need to look for. Familiar sights establish connection. Relatable pictorial content that matches a child’s life is important here. So a book featuring giraffes and monkeys at this age had zero relevance or comprehension for my children, we didn’t live on a game reserve, they had never ever seen giraffes (or aliens, pirates, astronauts, rabbits wearing clothes or skyscrapers). But a book with a child jumping in a puddle, or having a bath, or a squirrel in a tree, or a cat lying on the windowsill was engaging because there was already a lived experience to match. Books with clapping and rhyme and gestures or songs that you sing at other times also forge familiarity and connection.

Adults often want to bombard children with books about flying to the moon in a frying pan or with strange creatures that don’t actually exist in nature because they want to ‘stimulate their child’s imagination’. Wait! Hold on. Wait until you see your child’s imagination develop in parallel in their play. There is plenty of time. Stick to recognisable a little longer; relax and allow your child to begin to understand their world and life around them first.

When we see children’s emerging creative and inventive play with objects; when a box becomes a sailing boat, or they’re pushing and rolling something that has the noise of an engine then you know the time is right to introduce fantasy and this will support exactly where they are in their development.

Using these sorts of observations of your child’s play can vastly help the sort of book selections you make. No longer are they random but thoughtful and compatible with experience and early childhood development.

Claire is a home maker, home educator, sometimes even home birther. Mother of four seeks sanity by writing about daily life. Beauty, mud and dog hair included.

Claire Ashbourne considers how to make nurturing book choices for young children.

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