

Compliments of Jodee Harris

# essential living

402

## Explore Cityscapes in Technicolor



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Love is in the air this month, and we have a delightful collection of recipes for you and your sweetheart! Indulge in our romantic desserts that will sweep them off their feet and leave both of you swooning for more.

Once you've had your fill of sweet treats, get ready to experience March Madness like never before! Our slow cooker dips will have you crowned the MVP of game-day snacks. Whether you're cheering for your favorite team or hosting a party, these flavorful dips are sure to score big points with your guests.

If cabin fever has you yearning for a magical escape, we've got you covered with the perfect family getaway destinations. These getaways offer enchanting experiences that rival even a trip to Disney, and the best part — they won't break the bank! Prepare for a vacation filled with adventure, wonder and cherished memories.

— From the Publisher



**Which dessert makes you swoon?**

Scan the QR code to cast your vote!



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# WORD OF THE MONTH

## Sisu – ‘see-su’

A Finnish term for inner strength, determination, and resilience.

**EXAMPLE:** Show your Sisu — finish what you’ve started!



# Contents

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**02 Romantic Desserts**  
Swoon-worthy treats that will sweep you off your feet

---

**07 6 Magical Family Getaways**  
Vacation spots that beat the Magic Kingdom

---

**12 Unplugged Fun**  
Tech-free boredom busters for all ages

---

**16 Cityscapes in Technicolor**  
A journey through the world's most colorful destinations

---

**21 Slow Cooker Dips**  
Slam-dunk dips to win the crowd

---

**24 DIY or Buy**  
To make or to buy, that is the question

---

**30 Garden Carnivores**  
Explore the fierce side of flora

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# Romantic Desserts

YOU DON'T WANT TO MISS

Every Valentine's Day it's the same old, same old when it comes to desserts. Who decided that chocolate-covered strawberries and champagne were the epitome of romance? Whether it's the classic creme brûlée or the heart-shaped box of assorted chocolates, the routine isn't timeless — it's tiresome.

February 14th is celebrated with grand gestures of romance and love, so there should be no settling when it comes to the desserts. This year, trade in the traditional treats for the unique sweets! We've compiled a dessert menu with five recipes that are bold, new and surprisingly easy to make. It doesn't get any more romantic than homemade desserts, where you can taste the love in each bite.



# Chocolate-Dipped Palmiers



If your go-to bakery order is a croissant, then you're going to love these buttery palmiers dipped in decadent dark chocolate!

**PREP TIME:** 45 Minutes

**COOK TIME:** 15 Minutes

**INACTIVE TIME:** 1 Hour

**YIELD:** 24 Servings

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 sheet of puff pastry dough, thawed
- 1 c. dark chocolate chips
- $\frac{2}{3}$  c. cane sugar
- 1 tbs. coconut oil
- 1 egg yolk, whisked
- Flakey sea salt, for garnish

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. If the puff pastry dough is frozen, thaw according to instructions. Once thawed, allow to sit at room temperature for 15 minutes.
2. Carefully lay the pastry dough on a clean work surface. Mix together the egg yolk with a teaspoon of water and brush over the dough. Next, sprinkle half of the sugar over the dough to coat the top. Flip the dough and repeat this process to coat the other side in sugar.
3. To assemble the palmiers, start by rolling the pastry dough with your fingers towards the center. Tightly fold in the top and bottom edges of the dough until you hit the center. Repeat with the other side of the dough.
4. Carefully wrap the dough in plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes.
5. Preheat the oven to 450° F and line 2 large baking sheets with parchment paper.
6. After the allotted time, remove the dough and unwrap before placing on a clean cutting board. Use a sharp knife to cut each cookie roughly  $\frac{3}{8}$ " wide.
7. Then, carefully place the cookies cut-side up on the baking sheet with about 2.5" between each.
8. Place the baking sheets on the center rack. Bake for 8 minutes before using a spatula to carefully flip the palmiers. Then, rotate the baking sheets to ensure the cookies cook evenly. Bake for 7 more minutes.
9. Remove from heat and allow to cool. While the cookies are cooling, add the chocolate chips to a microwave-safe bowl with the coconut oil. Heat for 30 seconds, then stir and microwave again until the chocolate is melted.
10. Once the palmiers have cooled, dip each cookie halfway into the chocolate. Then, place on a wire rack to allow the chocolate to set. Finally, garnish with flakey sea salt.

# Red Velvet Bundt Cake

## INGREDIENTS

### For the Red Velvet Cake

- 1 c. unsalted butter, softened to room temperature
- 2 c. cane sugar
- ¼ c. canola oil
- 3 large eggs, room temperature
- 1 c. buttermilk
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 tsp. white vinegar
- 2 tbsp. red food coloring
- 2½ c. all-purpose flour
- ¼ c. unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1 tsp. espresso powder
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. salt

### For the Cream Cheese Glaze

- 6 oz. cream cheese, softened to room temperature
- ½ c. unsalted butter, softened to room temperature
- 1 c. powdered sugar
- 2 tbsp. milk
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract

### For the Chocolate Ganache

- ½ c. heavy cream
- ¼ c. granulated sugar
- ¾ c. dark chocolate, chopped
- 1 tbsp. butter
- 1 tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. espresso powder

This isn't any old ordinary Bundt cake. This cake has a moist red velvet interior, a cream cheese glaze and a rich chocolate ganache finish. Combined, it's the best cake you've ever had.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### For the Red Velvet Cake

1. Preheat the oven to 350° F and grease a large Bundt pan.
2. Add the butter and sugar to a large mixing bowl. Cream together with an electric mixer on medium speed for 4 minutes.
3. Pour the canola oil into the bowl and mix again to combine before adding the eggs, one at a time and beating between each addition.
4. Then, mix in the buttermilk, adding half at a time. Once combined, mix in the vanilla extract, white vinegar and red food coloring.
5. In a medium-sized mixing bowl, combine the flour, cocoa powder, espresso powder, baking soda and salt. Sift half at a time into the wet ingredients, mixing between to incorporate thoroughly.
6. Carefully pour the batter into the prepared Bundt pan. Place in the center rack of the oven and bake for 50 minutes.
7. Allow to cool in the pan for 10 minutes, then carefully release from the pan and cool to room temperature on a wire rack.

### For the Cream Cheese Glaze

1. In a medium-sized bowl, use an electric mixer to combine the cream cheese and softened butter until smooth (2-3 minutes).
2. Sift in the powdered sugar, mixing to thoroughly incorporate.
3. Next, add the milk and vanilla extract. Mix again to combine.
4. Once the cake has cooled, pour the glaze over the entirety of the cake to coat.

### For the Chocolate Ganache

1. Add the heavy cream to a small saucepan and whisk in the sugar over high heat.
2. Once boiling, remove from heat and continue to stir.
3. Add the chocolate to a medium-sized bowl and pour the hot cream mixture over the chocolate. Mix until the chocolate has melted and the mixture is smooth.
4. Then, add the butter and whisk to combine.
5. Whisk in the salt and espresso powder until the mixture is smooth.
6. Once the cream cheese glaze has set, pour the ganache down the folds of the Bundt cake.



**PREP TIME:** 35 Minutes | **COOK TIME:** 1 Hour | **YIELD:** 10 Servings



# Chocolate Truffles

It wouldn't be Valentine's Day without a little chocolate! These homemade chocolate candy truffles are better than any store-bought version!

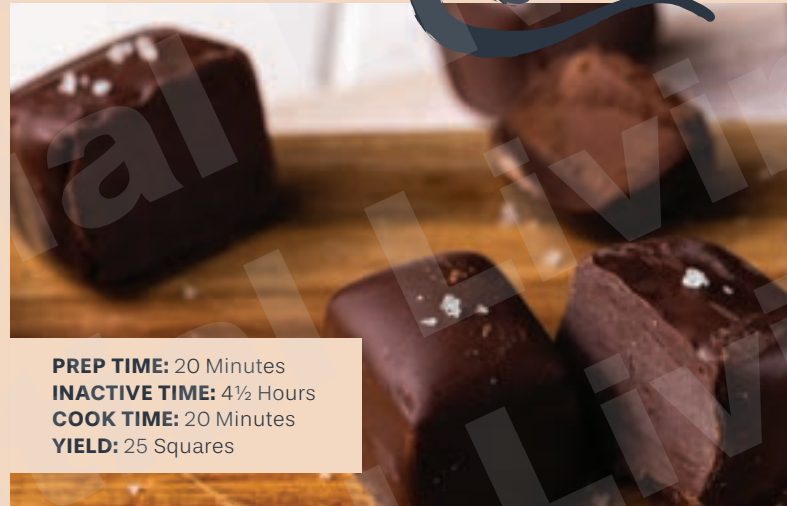
## INGREDIENTS

### For the Filling

- 1¼ c. semisweet chocolate, chopped
- ⅓ c. heavy whipping cream
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- Pinch of salt

### For the Coating

- 1¼ c. dark chocolate chips
- 2 tbsp. butter



**PREP TIME:** 20 Minutes  
**INACTIVE TIME:** 4½ Hours  
**COOK TIME:** 20 Minutes  
**YIELD:** 25 Squares

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Add the chocolate to a large bowl.
2. Combine the heavy cream and vanilla in a small saucepan and heat over medium-high heat until almost boiling.
3. Remove from heat and pour over the chocolate, whisking to combine until smooth.
4. Add the dash of salt and whisk again before covering the bowl with plastic wrap. Refrigerate for 3 hours.
5. An hour before removing the chilled filling, start on the candy coating. Melt the chocolate using a double boiler by placing a heat-proof bowl over a small saucepan filled with boiling water. Add the butter and whisk to combine until the chocolate has melted.
6. Carefully spread the melted chocolate over a square-shaped candy mold. Gently pour the melted chocolate into each mold, then spread the chocolate so it coats the entire surface of the bottom and sides of the mold.
7. Once each individual mold is filled, place in the freezer to chill for at least 30 minutes.
8. After the allotted time, remove the hardened candy molds. Carefully add the chilled filling to the center of each mold before pouring more of the candy coating over the filling to cover it.
9. After each mold is filled and covered with chocolate, freeze again for 1 hour.
10. Once set, carefully pop each candy truffle out of the molds and enjoy!

# Mini Cherry Strudel

**PREP TIME:** 20 Minutes

**INACTIVE TIME:** 15 Minutes

**COOK TIME:** 20 Minutes

**YIELD:** 24 Servings

Looking for a dessert you can enjoy for Valentine's Day breakfast? If so, these Mini Cherry Strudel bites are calling your name!

## INGREDIENTS

### For the Cherry Filling

- 4 c. tart cherries, pitted and sliced in half
- ¼ c. sugar
- 2 tbsp. cornstarch
- 1 tbsp. lemon juice

### For the Strudel

- 1 package frozen puff pastry, thawed according to instructions
- 1 egg, whisked
- 1 tbsp. water
- ¼ c. granulated sugar



## INSTRUCTIONS

### For the Cherry Filling

1. Add the cherries to a small saucepan and place over medium heat.
2. In a small bowl, whisk together the sugar and cornstarch.
3. Then, add the lemon juice and mix until thickened.
4. Add the mixture to the cherries and stir constantly until the cherries have begun to break down and create a sauce.
5. After 4–5 minutes, remove from heat and allow to cool.

### For the Strudel

1. Preheat the oven to 400° F and line a large baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Allow the puff pastry to sit at room temperature for 15 minutes before unrolling onto a clean workspace.
3. Use a sharp knife to cut into rectangular strips, roughly 3 inches wide and 6 inches long.
4. Carefully place 3 teaspoons of the cooled cherry filling in the center of the strip.
5. Whisk together the egg and water and brush the long edges of the bottom dough with a small amount of egg wash before folding the other strip of dough on top. Press the sides together but leave the small edges unfolded or open.
6. Carefully transfer the strudel to the prepared baking sheet and use a sharp knife to make 3–4 cuts on the top of the strudel.
7. Repeat steps 4–6 with the rest of the dough and filling.
8. Once all of the strudel bites are on the baking sheet, brush the top of each with the egg wash. Then, sprinkle sugar on top.
9. Place in the center rack and bake for 20 minutes, rotating halfway to ensure each strudel cooks evenly. Then, cool for 10 minutes before enjoying.



# 6

## MAGICAL FAMILY GETAWAYS

**P**lanning a memorable family vacation without breaking the bank can often seem like a daunting task. While the allure of Disney is undeniable, their hefty price tags can leave you feeling more stressed than relaxed at the end of your trip. Fortunately, there exists a multitude of delightful destinations that offer unforgettable experiences without draining your wallet.

# 1

# WISCONSIN DELLS

WISCONSIN



## Activities

Known as the “Waterpark Capital of the World,” Wisconsin Dells offers a plethora of affordable family-friendly water parks and attractions. Enjoy thrilling slides, lazy rivers and wave pools at popular waterparks like Mt. Olympus Water & Theme Park. Take a scenic boat tour along the Wisconsin River and explore the stunning rock formations of the Dells. If you need a

break from the water, check out mini-golf, go-karts and interactive museums such as the Tommy Bartlett Exploratory and Ripley’s Believe It or Not!

## Dining

Enjoy family-friendly restaurants like Moosejaw Pizza & Dells Brewing Co., famous for their delicious pizza and brews. Don’t miss the chance to try local favorites like Wisconsin cheese

curds or indulge in sweet treats at the numerous ice cream parlors and candy shops in the area.

## Lodging

Look for hotels and motels along the main strip, Wisconsin Dells Parkway, where you’ll find accommodations with amenities like pools, water park access and complimentary breakfast.

# GATLINBURG

## 2



### Dining

Try local favorites such as the Pancake Pantry or the Old Mill Restaurant, known for their Southern-style comfort food and generous portions.

### Lodging

Gatlinburg has lodging for every family, including hotels, motels and log cabin homes. There are also nearby campsites to turn your vacation into a camping trip.

### Activities

Nestled in the Smoky Mountains, Gatlinburg offers a wealth of family-friendly activities. Explore Great

Smoky Mountains National Park and embark on scenic hikes to discover stunning waterfalls and panoramic views. If you're looking to add some

thrill to your vacation, check out the rope course and ziplining at Anakeesta.

## 3

# BLACK HILLS

### Activities

Begin your adventure by visiting the iconic Mount Rushmore National Memorial and learning about the country's history and heritage. Explore the stunning landscapes of Badlands National Park, where you can hike among unique rock formations and encounter wildlife. Take a scenic drive through Custer State Park to spot herds of bison and other wildlife, and don't miss the opportunity to witness the majestic beauty of the Needles Highway. For a memorable experience, visit the Crazy Horse Memorial, an ongoing monumental sculpture dedicated to Native American culture and heritage.

SOUTH DAKOTA

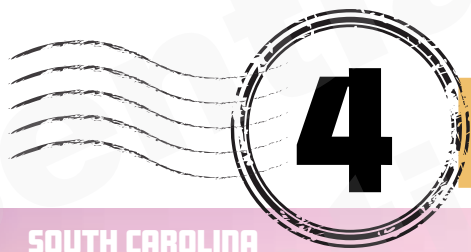


### Dining

Enjoy a meal at local diners like the Alpine Inn in Hill City, known for its delectable burgers and European-inspired dishes.

### Lodging

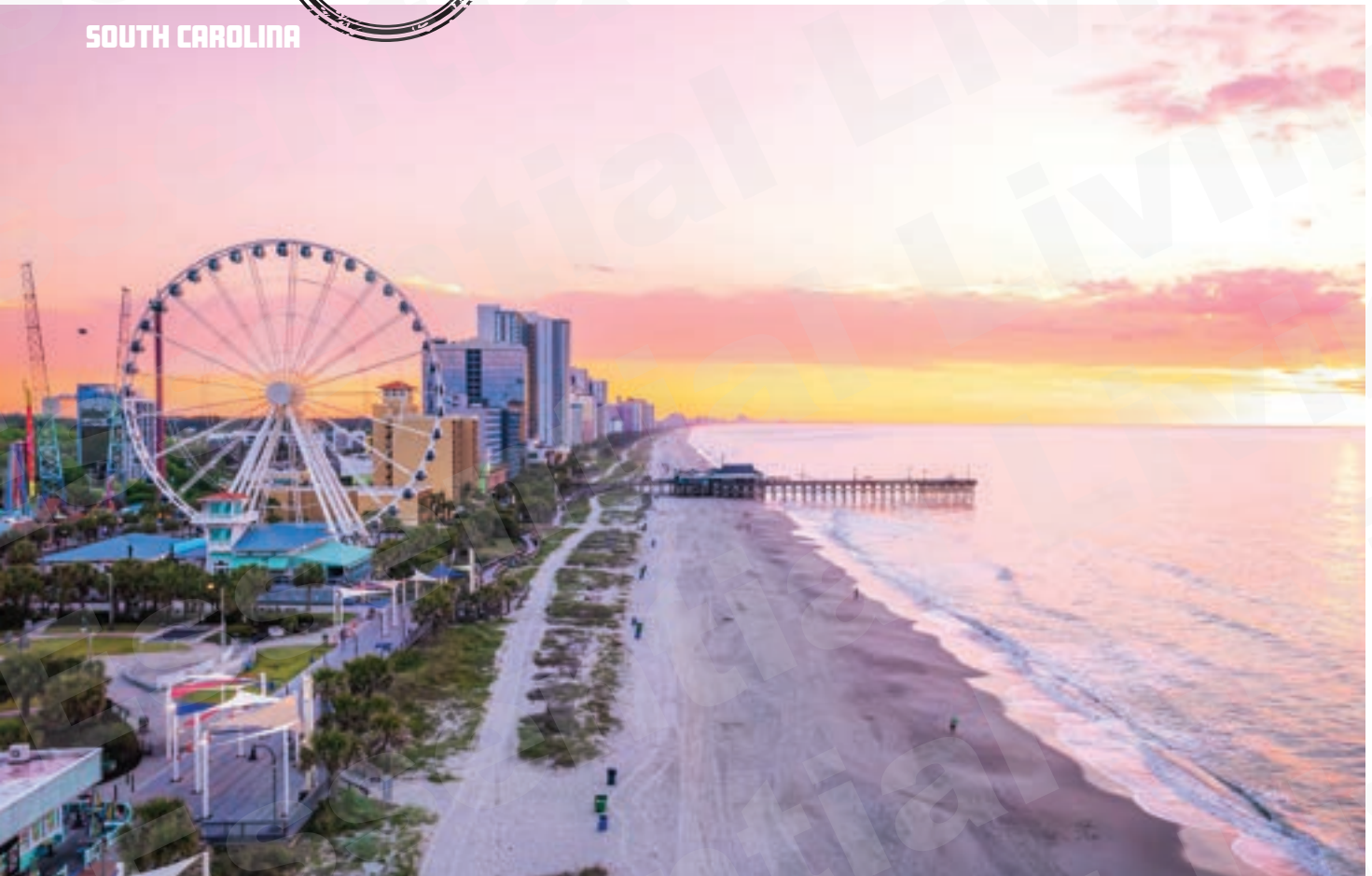
Consider staying in Keystone, a small town near Mount Rushmore, or Custer, a charming community nestled near Custer State Park.



# 4

# MYRTLE BEACH

SOUTH CAROLINA



## Activities

Myrtle Beach is a popular family-friendly destination along the East Coast. Enjoy miles of pristine beaches perfect for swimming, building sandcastles and soaking up the sun. Explore the Myrtle Beach Boardwalk and Promenade, lined with arcades, shops and amusement rides, or take a boat tour to spot dolphins along the coast.

## Dining

Enjoy seafood buffets offering an array of freshly caught delicacies or savor Southern cuisine at local

favorites like the Original Benjamin's Calabash Seafood or Sea Captain's House. Explore the Myrtle Beach Boardwalk for casual dining spots serving up classic beach fare like burgers, pizza and ice cream.

## Lodging

Consider staying at family-friendly resorts that often provide amenities like pools, on-site restaurants and beach access. Vacation rentals, condos and campgrounds are also available, catering to different preferences and budgets.

**Enjoy miles of pristine beaches perfect for swimming, building sandcastles and soaking up the sun.**

# BRANSON

# 5

## Activities

Branson, located in the picturesque Ozark Mountains of Missouri, is renowned for its family-friendly entertainment options. One of the highlights is Silver Dollar City, a renowned amusement park that offers thrilling rides, live shows and demonstrations by skilled craftsmen showcasing traditional arts like glassblowing and blacksmithing. Explore the park's 1800s-themed atmosphere and indulge in delicious treats like funnel cakes and homemade ice cream.

## Dining

Explore local flavors at family-friendly restaurants like Grandma Ruth's, where you can savor homestyle cooking and delicious pies, while Danna's BBQ serves up mouthwatering smoked meats and Southern sides.

## Lodging

Along the famous Highway 76 Strip, you'll find a multitude of hotels and motels that cater to families seeking affordability and convenience. For a

more home-like experience, consider vacation rentals or cabins in the surrounding area, which can offer additional space and kitchen facilities.



MISSOURI

# 6

# SEATTLE

## Activities

Seattle, known for its vibrant culture and natural beauty, provides plenty of family-friendly activities. Visit the iconic Space Needle and enjoy stunning city views from the observation deck. Explore the Pacific Science Center, where interactive exhibits and planetarium shows captivate curious minds. Discover marine life at the Seattle Aquarium or embark on a cruise around Elliott Bay to catch sight of seals and other wildlife.

## Lodging

Consider staying in nearby neighborhoods like South Lake Union or Belltown for more affordable options. Vacation rentals or apartment-style accommodations are also great choices for more space and amenities.

## Dining

Seattle boasts a vibrant food scene, offering a variety of budget-friendly dining options. Explore Pike Place Market, where you can find favorite eateries like Piroshky for delicious pastries and Beecher's Handmade Cheese for macaroni and cheese. Of course, leave room to indulge in Seattle's famous seafood at places like Ivar's Fish Bar.

Whether you opt for thrilling water parks, breathtaking natural landscapes or beachside fun, these affordable vacation spots offer unforgettable experiences that will even leave change left over for next year's vacation.



# unplugged

# FUN

In today's digital age, it's easy to find ourselves glued to screens and constantly connected to technology. While technology has its benefits, it's also important to take a step back and engage in activities that don't rely on screens or gadgets. That's where these tech-free boredom busters come in! From hands-on DIY projects to thrilling adventures, get ready to unplug and reignite your imagination!



## EGGSHELL GEODE



### Turn Eggshells Into Dazzling Crystals!

Transform ordinary eggshells into jaw-dropping geodes with just a few household materials. Discover the magic of science as you dissolve Epsom salt in hot water, then watch as crystals form inside the eggshells over a few days. The end result? Beautiful geode-like structures that will leave you in awe!



## ESCAPE ROOM CHALLENGE AT HOME



### Unleash Your Inner Detective!

Get ready for a thrilling adventure without leaving the comfort of your own home! Create your very own escape room challenge using clever puzzles, mind-boggling riddles and hidden clues.

Put your problem-solving skills to the test as you and your team work against the clock to crack the codes and complete the challenge.



## DIY SOAP MAKING



### Create Your Signature Suds!

Step into the world of soap making and unleash your creativity! Gather soap base, essential oils and silicone molds to craft your personalized bars of soap. Melt the soap base using a double boiler or microwave, stirring until smooth. Add your desired essential oils for fragrance and, if desired, colorants for a personalized touch. Lightly grease the silicone molds and pour in the soap mixture, gently tapping to remove air bubbles. Allow the soap to cool and solidify for a few hours or overnight. Once hardened, carefully remove the soaps from the molds and store them in a cool, dry place.



## FAMILY COOK-OFF



### Battle It Out in the Kitchen!

Turn your kitchen into a lively battleground with a family cook-off! Form teams and set a time limit to create innovative dishes. Add a twist of excitement by incorporating a secret ingredient that must be used in each dish. When time's up, gather for a blind taste test and let the flavors and creativity shine. Have everyone cast their vote to see who will be crowned the master chef of the family!



## DIY TERRARIUM



### Build Your Miniature Green Oasis!

Embrace nature and create a captivating mini garden in a jar with a DIY terrarium. Layer rocks for drainage, add activated charcoal to keep it fresh and then carefully arrange plants to your liking. Mix and match textures, colors and sizes for a visually appealing display. Place your terrarium in a sunny spot, mist it occasionally and watch your green oasis thrive and grow.

Consider setting aside a day each week to disconnect from modern-day gadgets, gather friends and family and explore the wonders of the world off screen.

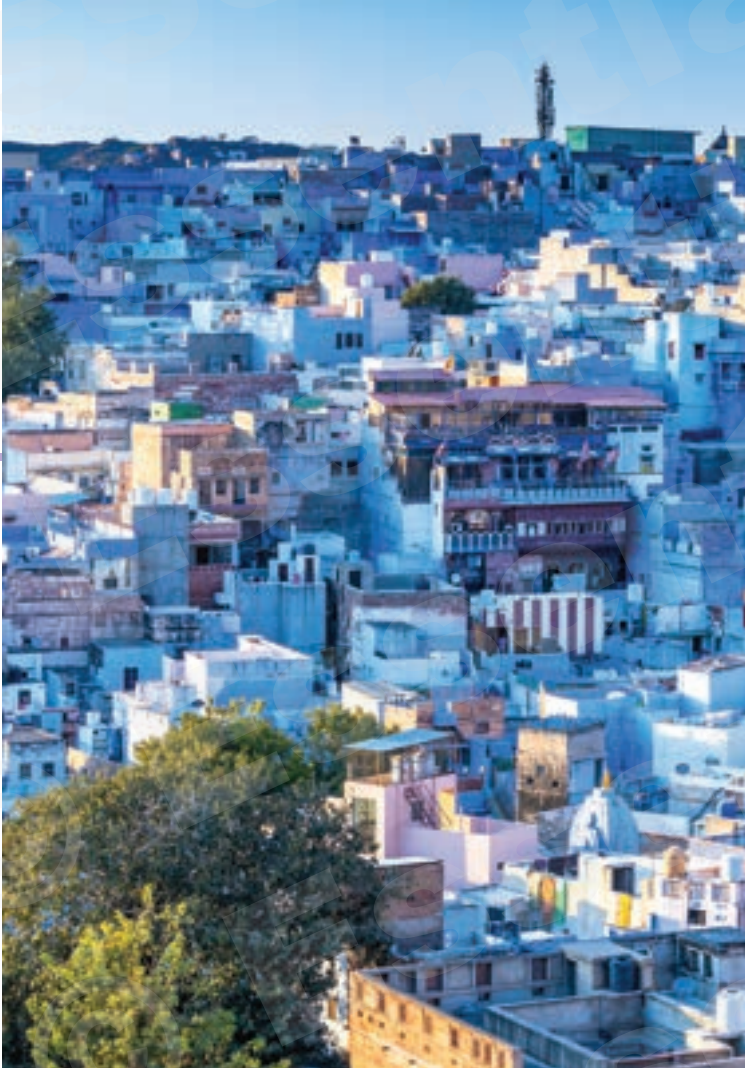
# CITYSCAPES IN TECHNICOLOR



## BURANO, ITALY

Burano is an idyllic island situated in the Venetian Lagoon, renowned for its striking and colorful houses. The streets of Burano offer a visual feast, as each house is painted in distinct hues, forming a surreal spectrum of vibrant blues, pinks, yellows and greens. The colorful facades cast their reflection in the canals, enhancing the allure of the place.

The tradition of adorning Burano's houses with bright colors originated with fishermen, who used them as distinctive markers for their homes while they were out at sea. Today, the island's colorful palette attracts tourists from around the world who come to admire the beauty of Burano.



## JODHPUR, RAJASTHAN, INDIA

Surrounding the Mehrangarh Fort, the old city area of Jodhpur enchants visitors with its narrow, winding streets flanked by houses adorned in various shades of blue. There are a number of theories behind the striking blues, with some attributing the pigment to its association with the Brahmins, India's priestly caste, while others suggest it comes from copper sulphate that was used on the buildings to deter termites. Some also believe the calming color was used to keep the houses cool, as the average high in Jodhpur is around 91° F, with temperatures reaching over 100° F during the hot season. As you navigate the labyrinthine alleys of Jodhpur, the vibrant blue exteriors create a captivating contrast against the arid desert landscape, evoking a serene ambiance that immerses you in a feeling of tranquility and awe.

## CHEFCHAOUEN, MOROCCO

Chefchaouen, often referred to as the “Blue City,” is a stunning destination nestled in the Rif Mountains of Morocco. This city is renowned for its vibrant, blue-washed buildings that create a dreamlike atmosphere. The color is believed to have been introduced by Jewish

refugees who sought protection in Chefchaouen in the 1930s. Wandering through the alleys is a full immersion into a mesmerizing sea of blues, from pale pastels to deep indigos, leaving visitors in awe of the city’s unique and enchanting beauty.





## ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND, CANADA

St. John's, the capital city of Newfoundland and Labrador in Canada, is renowned for its picturesque row houses that adorn the hillsides encircling the harbor. These charming dwellings, affectionately referred to as "Jellybean Row" houses, exhibit a captivating array of vibrant colors, including shades of red, yellow, blue and green. The richly painted facades infuse St. John's with an undeniable charm and personality, particularly against the backdrop of the dramatic coastal landscapes.

## GUANAJUATO, MEXICO

Guanajuato, a historic city in central Mexico, bursts with a vibrant palette that adorns its colonial architecture. The city's colorful facades line the narrow, winding streets and showcase a lively mix of yellows, oranges, pinks and greens. The bold and vivid colors reflect the city's rich history and culture. Guanajuato's colonial buildings,

adorned with intricate balconies and ornate details, come alive with their eye-catching hues. As you explore the city, the vibrant colors create a cheerful and festive ambiance, complemented by the energetic atmosphere of music, art and traditional festivals that Guanajuato is famous for.



# Slow Cooker Dips

Not only are dips the perfect party appetizer, but they are also so easy to make — especially in the slow cooker. However, when we say there are thousands of slow cooker dip recipes out there, we're not exaggerating. Allow us to save you the time of scrolling through countless recipes. We've compiled a spread that has it all: 1) the classic, 2) the highly underrated one and 3) the vegan alternative. Each of these dips is sure to be a winner.



**Prep Time: 15 Minutes**  
**Cook Time: 4 Hours**  
**Yield: 10 Servings**

## Slow Cooker Beer Cheese Dip

The rich cheese sauce with subtle hints of ale beer makes for the perfect recipe when paired with pretzels.

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- 12 oz. cream cheese, softened to room temperature
- 2 c. freshly grated sharp cheddar cheese
- 1 c. smoked gouda
- $\frac{3}{4}$  c. ale beer
- $\frac{1}{4}$  c. sour cream
- 1 tbsp. Dijon mustard
- 2 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tsp. garlic powder
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. pepper
- 1 c. crumbled bacon, cooked
- 1 green onion, sliced
- Pretzels for serving

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Add the olive oil to the slow cooker to grease the bottom.
2. Allow the cream cheese to sit at room temperature until softened before adding to the slow cooker with the cheeses, beer and sour cream. Mix together until combined.
3. Add the Dijon mustard, Worcestershire sauce, garlic powder, salt and pepper with  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of the cooked bacon.
4. Cover and cook on HIGH for 4 hours, stirring every 30 minutes.
5. After the allotted time, top with the rest of the bacon and green onions. Serve with pretzels and enjoy!



# Slow Cooker Crab Dip

Prep Time: 5 Minutes | Cook Time: 4 Hours | Yield: 8 Servings

This creamy, savory crab dip is the appetizer you never knew you needed. This underrated recipe will quickly become a fan favorite!

## INGREDIENTS

- 12 oz. canned crab
- 8 oz. cream cheese
- ½ c. mayonnaise
- ½ c. green onions, sliced, plus more for serving
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tbsp. lemon juice
- 1 tsp. lemon zest
- 1 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tsp. horseradish
- 2 tsp. paprika
- 1 tsp. celery salt
- 1 tsp. pepper
- 1 tsp. dried parsley
- ¼ c. freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 French baguette, grilled for serving

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Grease the bottom of a slow cooker, and add the crab meat, cream cheese and mayonnaise.
2. Stir to combine, then add the green onions and minced garlic cloves.
3. Add the lemon juice, lemon zest, Worcestershire sauce and horseradish before stirring again.
4. Combine the seasonings in a small bowl and sprinkle over the dip. Stir in the cheese, then place the lid on top and cook on HIGH for 4 hours. Stir once every hour.
5. Spoon into oven-safe dish and place under broiler for 2-5 minutes (don't let it burn!).
6. Serve with grilled, sliced French baguette and enjoy!

# Slow Cooker Vegan Queso

A queso so good, you'd never be able to tell it was vegan if you didn't make it yourself! This dairy-free dip is packed with rich flavor and is so easy to make.

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- 1 small yellow onion, thinly sliced
- 2 cloves of garlic, grated
- 1 c. raw cashews
- 1 c. water
- 20-oz. can of fire-roasted tomatoes with green chilis
- 2 tbsp. lime juice
- 2 tsp. lime zest
- 2 tsp. harissa, plus more for serving
- ⅓ c. nutritional yeast
- 1 tbsp. turmeric
- 2 tsp. chili powder
- 2 tsp. cumin
- ½ tsp. salt
- Freshly minced cilantro for serving
- Sliced jalapeño for serving
- Blue corn tortilla chips for serving

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Add the oil to the slow cooker. Use a mandolin to thinly slice the peeled onion into the slow cooker. Then, use a zester to grate the garlic in with the onions.
2. Add the cashews, water and tomatoes to the slow cooker.
3. Drizzle in the lime juice, harissa paste and lime zest. Stir to disperse.
4. In a small bowl, combine the nutritional yeast, chili powder, cumin, turmeric and salt.
5. Place the lid on top of the slow cooker and cook on LOW for 12 hours. Once cooked, add to a blender and pulse until smooth.
6. Garnish with cilantro, sliced jalapeños and more harissa paste, if desired. Serve with tortilla chips and enjoy!

**Prep Time: 30 Minutes**  
**Cook Time: 12 Hours**  
**Yield: 15 Servings**

# DIY OR BUY



When facing a project, you often choose between DIY or off-the-shelf solutions. Both have their advantages and disadvantages, so assessing your specific needs and abilities is crucial.

DIY projects can save money, cultivate new skills and result in unique, personal creations, but they require an honest evaluation of your skill level and time constraints.

Ready-made products are generally more convenient and cost-effective, especially for simple items. However, they may lack customization and might not match the quality of DIY craftsmanship.

So, which route suits you best? Consider your specific requirements, skills and time limitations.

## **Know What Skills You Have**

We all have different talents and experience, so it's important to consider whether a project aligns with your capabilities. Some projects may require specialized techniques or tools that you may not be familiar with, and that's absolutely okay! By being realistic about your abilities, you can determine if a particular project is a good fit for you.

## **Calculate the Time and Cost**

Consider the balance between your valuable time and potential cost savings when deciding to DIY or buy. While DIY projects can potentially save money, it's essential to factor in the expenses associated with acquiring materials, tools and equipment. Additionally, consider the value of your time and whether the cost of materials outweighs the convenience and quality of a ready-made item.

## **Do You Really Enjoy a DIY Project?**

DIY endeavors can be a lot of fun and provide a sense of fulfillment, but they also require your time and effort. If the thought of taking on the project excites you and makes you eager to dive in, then DIYing is definitely worth considering. However, if the idea of doing it yourself feels like a chore or doesn't align with your interests, it's perfectly fine to explore ready-made options instead. Remember, the journey should be enjoyable, so choose projects that make you genuinely excited and happy.

**BUY**



Sometimes a DIY project seems like a good idea, especially when the tutorial you found makes it look like a simple afternoon project. However, unless you really know what you are doing, there are some things that will save you time, money and possible injury just to buy.

### **1. Live Edge Table**

Live edge tables are a stunning addition to any home, but a lot more goes into making them than simply adding some legs to a slab of wood. Creating a piece that is functional and that will last for decades to come is a skilled craft that requires quite a bit of time.

While every live edge table is already one of a kind, if you're looking for an even more custom piece, work with an experienced craftsman to help find the perfect slab for you and create a piece that will last for generations.



BUY



## 2. Cement Planter

Minimalistic cement planters are all the rage right now. However, the price tag can make it tempting to just DIY one. After all, how hard can pouring cement into a mold be?

Even if you have all the supplies, pulling off the sleek look is time consuming and challenging. There's a lot that can go wrong, and getting it right depends on everything from the weather to the precise consistency of the cement. Plus, if it doesn't turn out the way you hoped, there's not much you can do besides starting over from scratch.

Save yourself time by ordering one off of Amazon. By the end of the weekend, you'll have an even better end result, and you won't have wasted your money or your weekend.

### 3. Floral Wreaths

Floral wreaths are simply beautiful, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere right at your front door. It's no wonder they're so popular! With a plethora of DIY tutorials available online, finding instructions on how to make your own wreath isn't a problem. However, DIYing your own wreath requires a considerable amount of time and money, with a high chance of ending up dissatisfied with the final result.

Once you add the cost of buying all the faux flowers and greenery, plus the wreath frame, glue sticks and wire, you'll realize the cost of buying a new one isn't too bad after all.

Check out home décor stores towards the end of the season to find one on clearance.

### 4. Upcycled Drinking Glasses

Some things are just better left to the pros, and upcycled drinking glasses definitely fall into that category. So, unless you are a professional glassblower, don't try these at home.

While the supply list may be simple, the skills to actually master this craft are not. Unlike some other projects on this list, a mishap with this one can land you in the ER or even start a dangerous fire, quickly adding to the cost of this DIY project.

Look on sites like Etsy or visit local artists to find ready-to-use upcycled bottles (no injuries required).

BUY



BUY





## 5. Basic Clothes Alterations

Learning how to do basic alterations like taking in a shirt or sewing on a button not only saves you from paying someone else to do it but also prevents you from discarding your clothes prematurely. With just a sewing kit and some online tutorials, you can easily tailor your garments to achieve the perfect fit or fix small issues like loose buttons or hems.



## 6. Throw Pillow Covers

There's no need to have a different set of throw pillows for every occasion when you can just swap the covers instead. If you're able to sew a straight line, you'll have no problem making your own pillow covers. Once you have a sewing machine, the only cost will be the fabric which can typically be found on sale. Pretty soon you'll have a cover for every season, mood and décor style.



## 7. Pantry Staples

Even if you're not a master chef or don't want to spend all day in the kitchen, there are still plenty of things you can make from scratch that can help cut your grocery list nearly in half. Here are a few items that require hardly any effort or time:

- Powdered sugar
- Seasoning mixes
- Honey mustard
- Self-rising flour
- Croutons

## 8. Pet Treats

While you're already at it in the kitchen, whip up some treats for your pup. While big brands will charge top dollar for limited ingredient treats, you can make your own for a fraction of the cost. From crunchy oatmeal peanut blueberry bones to frosty pupsicle bites, you may even find yourself tempted to try one!

### Frosty Pumpkin Bites

#### Ingredients:

- 1 c. pumpkin puree
- 1 c. plain Greek yogurt

#### Directions:

1. Place all ingredients in a blender or food processor and blend until smooth.
2. Pour mixture into ice cube trays or silicone molds and place in freezer until completely frozen.

## 9. Simple Home Repairs

While there are some home repairs best left for the experts, there are quite a few you can tackle yourself. If you're not sure where to start or whether you have the skills, try watching an online video tutorial to get a better idea of what the project requires. Some common DIY home projects include:

- Re-caulking your tub or shower
- Patching a hole in the wall
- Clearing a clogged drain



# GARDEN



# CARNIVORES

Welcome to the fascinating world of carnivorous plants, where botanical beauty meets predatory prowess! These captivating plants have mastered the art of capturing unsuspecting prey, turning the tables on the insect world with their leafy traps and crafty tactics.

Carnivorous plants have evolved to catch and digest small animals to supplement their nutrient intake due to nutrient-poor soil conditions in their habitats.



## RAREST CARNIVOROUS PLANT:

One of the rarest carnivorous plants is the **Aldrovanda vesiculosa**, also known as the waterwheel plant. It is a free-floating aquatic plant that captures small aquatic invertebrates using a **snap-trap** mechanism similar to the Venus flytrap. Due to habitat loss and degradation, the waterwheel plant is **critically endangered** and has disappeared from many of its historical locations.

## FASTEST TRAPPING:

Some carnivorous plants, like the **bladderworts**, have highly specialized traps that can capture prey in as little as **1/10th of a second**.

## MOST UNIQUE TRAPPING MECHANISM:

The **corkscrew plant** grows **underwater** and possesses specialized leaves with spiral-shaped traps. When tiny aquatic organisms touch the trigger hairs inside the trap, it **rapidly collapses like a corkscrew**, trapping its prey.

## FASCINATING FRIENDSHIP:

The **purple pitcher plant**, native to North America, has a unique relationship with a mosquito species called *Wyeomyia smithii*. The **mosquitoes lay their eggs** in the water-filled pitchers, and the plant benefits from the nutrient-rich mosquito larvae while providing a safe environment for the mosquitoes to breed.

## LARGEST PITCHER PLANT:

Native to Borneo, the giant **montane pitcher plant** (*Nepenthes rajah*) has stems that grow nearly **five feet tall** and pitchers that grow to almost a foot in diameter. These plants are **capable of trapping lizards** and even small rodents.



- Although most **meat-eating plants** consume insects, larger plants are capable of digesting **reptiles and small mammals**.
- Over **800 carnivorous** plants have been identified around the world. They can be found on **every continent except Antarctica** and are most diverse in tropical regions, particularly in **Southeast Asia and South America**.
- There are estimated to be around **75 species of meat-eating plants native to North America** including the **Venus flytrap, pitcher plants** and **sundews**.
- **The Venus flytrap** can differentiate between **live prey and inanimate objects**. It only triggers its trap in **response to the movement** of potential prey.
- Carnivorous plants can be classified into **five groups** based on their trapping methods: **pitfall, adhesive, snap, snare and suction**.
- Native to swamps in mountainous regions in America, the **cobra lily has translucent windows** in the plant's leaves which make bugs think they're escaping, but they're really **flying deeper inside**.



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## Random Acts of Kindness

### FAMILY CHALLENGE!

**Turn kindness into a game with your loved ones.** Each week, take turns drawing from a jar filled with small, thoughtful acts of kindness. Perform your assigned act, like leaving an uplifting note for a family member or helping a neighbor, then share your experience at dinner. Celebrate each act with a 'Kindness Star' sticker on a chart and see who collects the most by the end of the month.



# Brie + Prosciutto + Fig Jam Crostini

This classic cheeseboard pairing is rolled into one tasty bite!

PREP TIME: 10 minutes | COOK TIME: 20 minutes | YIELDS: 8 servings

## INGREDIENTS

### For the Fig Jam

- ½ c. black figs
- 2 tsp. almond milk
- 2 tsp. coconut oil

- ¼ c. water
- 2 tbsp. cane sugar
- 2 tsp. lemon juice
- ½ tsp. vanilla extract

### For the Crostinis

- 1 French baguette
- 1 wheel Brie cheese
- 6-8 slices prosciutto

- Honey, for garnish
- Micro arugula, for garnish

## INSTRUCTIONS

### For the Fig Jam

1. Add the figs and almond milk to a food processor.
2. Pulse on high for one minute, then scrape the edges and pulse again on low for one minute.
3. Add the coconut oil to a small saucepan, then add the fig mixture.
4. Next, add the water, sugar, lemon juice and vanilla extract.
5. Cook over medium-low heat, stirring occasionally for five minutes.
6. Remove the fig jam from heat, then pour it into a bowl to cool for at least 10 minutes.

### For the Crostinis

1. Preheat the oven to 350° F and line one large baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Slice the baguette into eight pieces, then spread a spoonful of fig jam on each piece.
3. Next, slice the cheese into eight long pieces.
4. Place the Brie on top of the crostinis and bake for 5-7 minutes until the cheese has melted and the bread is slightly crunchy.
5. Wrap the crostinis in thin prosciutto pieces.
6. Drizzle honey over the crostinis and finish with micro arugula.



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# 7 ENERGY-SAVING TIPS



1. **DEFROST THE FREEZER** – Ice can interfere with the temperature sensors and cause the freezer to work harder.
2. **REPLACE FILTERS** – Check the guidelines for your HVAC system, water heater, refrigerator and dryer.
3. **SWAP OUT LIGHT BULBS** for energy-efficient LEDs.
4. **UNPLUG DEVICES** when not in use.
5. **FIND AND SEAL AIR LEAKS** – Check doors, windows and places where utilities enter your home.
6. **UPGRADE TO A SMART THERMOSTAT** to closely control the temperature.
7. **INSTALL ENERGY-SAVING SHOWERHEADS**, faucets or flow restrictors to reduce the amount of hot water being used.



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