

Compliments of Stacey Shanner

*Good to Be*

issue 19

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## Homeowners Insurance: *What's Covered and What's Not*

*Tips for finding the right plan*

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# Front of Tear Out Card 1



**PAN CON TOMATE**  
*spanish tapas*



**Stacey Shanner**

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# Back of Tear Out Card 1

MAKES  
12  
TAPAS

# PAN CON TOMATE

*spanish tapas*

■ **INGREDIENTS**

2 ripe, juicy tomatoes

About 12 small slices day-old bread (such as a baguette)

2 cloves garlic, peeled and halved

Extra-virgin olive oil

*Fleur de sel*

Freshly ground pepper

■ **INSTRUCTIONS**

**1/** Wash and dry the tomatoes and cut them in half crosswise. Lightly toast the slices of bread.

**2/** Rub the bread with the cut side of the garlic, then rub it with the tomato halves, cut-side down. Press down firmly to help release the juices and some of the pulp.

**3/** Drizzle generously with olive oil, sprinkle with *fleur de sel*, and add a few grinds of fresh pepper.

**4/** Serve right away.

Recipe excerpted from © *Upper Crust: Homemade Bread the French Way* by Marie-Laure Fréchet. Flammarion, 2021. Photography by Valérie Lhomme.





Dear Bill and Judy,

It's nearly time again to shake off winter and embrace a new season in your life and home. Whether you've spent the past few months doing indoor projects or dreaming about what improvements you want to make come spring, this issue of Good to Be Home will be a welcome gift for your creativity. It includes a guide to clearing your rooms of clutter, an interview with actress, director, and wallpaper designer Melora Hardin, and tips for sprucing up your backyard space.

Do you have stuff you don't know what to do with in every nook and cranny of your home? There are better alternatives than throwing your unwanted items into the trash, and the enclosed tips can help you make room for the new without being wasteful with the old.

You might be familiar with actress Melora Hardin from her work on famous TV shows like The Office and Monk, but, as it turns out, acting is just one of Hardin's many talents. Inside she shares all the facets of her creativity, including a look at her line of intricate wallpapers.

If you've been shut in by winter weather, the light at the end of the tunnel is near. Be sure to check out the guide for giving your backyard a beautiful upgrade just in time to enjoy it to the fullest.

What changes are you planning to embrace this spring? As always, it's a pleasure to send you this magazine.

Stacey Shanner



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# Pattern PLAY

written by: SHELLEY GOLDSTEIN



When it comes to interior design, the use of patterns can add depth, character, and interest, transforming a room from one solid note to a symphony of color and texture. To ensure the outcome is cohesive rather than chaotic, follow these principles on the best ways to choose and combine patterns.

## CHOOSING PATTERNS

The first step is to take stock of what patterns already exist in your space. For example, do you have a wood floor? Exposed brick? Wallpaper that you don't plan to remove? Then decide which patterns you want to add. Some to consider include:

**Toile:** Taken from the French term *toile de Jouy* (meaning "linen from the town of Jouy-en-Josas"), toile features a monochromatic pattern of pastoral illustrations printed on an unbleached cloth.

**Chevron:** This geometric pattern is sometimes confused for herringbone, but it's actually an inverted V pattern that creates a seamless, rather than broken, zigzag effect.

**Floral:** Elegant and storied, this motif hit prominence in the rococo and Victorian eras and pairs well with stripes, polka dots, and checks.

**Stripes:** Wide or skinny, horizontal or vertical, this pattern is one of the most versatile because it pairs well with so many others.

**Polka dots:** This playful and ubiquitous design makes for a perfect pillow or small-blanket accent.

**Checkerboard:** Exploding onto the scene during the pandemic, this self-describing pattern dates back to the Greek and Roman Empires and can be found on everything from area rugs to cutting boards.

## LAYERING PATTERNS

Generally, it's best to begin with a dominant pattern that will serve as the foundation of the room, whether in the form of wallpaper, a large area rug, or upholstered furniture. You can then weave in smaller patterns through throws or pillows to fill in the gaps and add interest without creating competing elements. Play with complementary colors as well as with different shades of one tone. Both minimalist and maximalist rooms can incorporate patterns; stick with neutral shades and subtle prints for the former and more vibrant colors and dynamic prints for the latter.



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issue 19



# Finding a Home for Your unwanted Stuff

written by: BONNIE JOFFE

Most people have items they no longer use and aren't sure what to do with. Whether it's clothing that no longer fits, dated furniture that needs replacing, or old sports equipment, books, toys, or household items, these belongings can take up valuable space in your home. However, you don't need to let them go to waste. Here are some tips to help you reduce the mess in a responsible and ethical way.



## cut clothing clutter

You can free up room in your closet by selling any gently used clothes. Consider taking them to a consignment shop or posting them on websites such as ThredUp and Facebook Marketplace for regular items, Poshmark for mid-to-high-end brands, and the RealReal for pricier luxury pieces. (Note that some of these sites charge a fee to sell on their platform.) Ensure your clothing is clean and in good condition, and always take good photos and provide accurate descriptions, including the brand, size, and condition. If selling feels like too much effort and hassle, you could always donate them to shelters, nonprofit organizations, or community centers.

## lighten your bookshelves

Do you have a library of books you no longer need or want? If so, you can sell them online for extra cash. Online book vendors like Decluttr will purchase hardback and paperback books, children's books, and even used textbooks from you directly. If you would rather donate, many libraries, schools, and day care centers welcome preowned books in good condition.





## *purge* your furniture

Many consignment shops will take furniture and other home goods if they're in decent condition. This can be a great way to unload your old pieces and make some money at the same time. If your goal is to donate them, you can contact an organization like Habitat for Humanity or GreenDrop, which will usually pick them up to ensure they go to people in need.



## *retire* older electronics

If you have usable outdated electronics, you could donate them or sell them for a profit at a yard sale or on sites like Craigslist or eBay. Even if they're no longer working, you can sell them for parts since many people use spare parts to repair other devices. You can also give them to a tech recycling program, which will dispose of them properly.



## *upcycle* old sporting goods

There are many ways to find a new home for the old sports equipment filling your garage or basement. Whether you choose to sell your wares to a secondhand sporting goods store like Play It Again Sports or SidelineSwap, donate them to your local athletic organization, or gift them to someone who will use them, it can be a win-win for everyone involved.

## *recycle* items in poor condition

For items that aren't in good enough condition to resell or donate, contact your town's recycling department to learn how to dispose of them sustainably or take them to a reputable and ethical recycling center—just inquire first about what items they will not accept. This will help ensure that your unwanted stuff doesn't end up in a landfill.





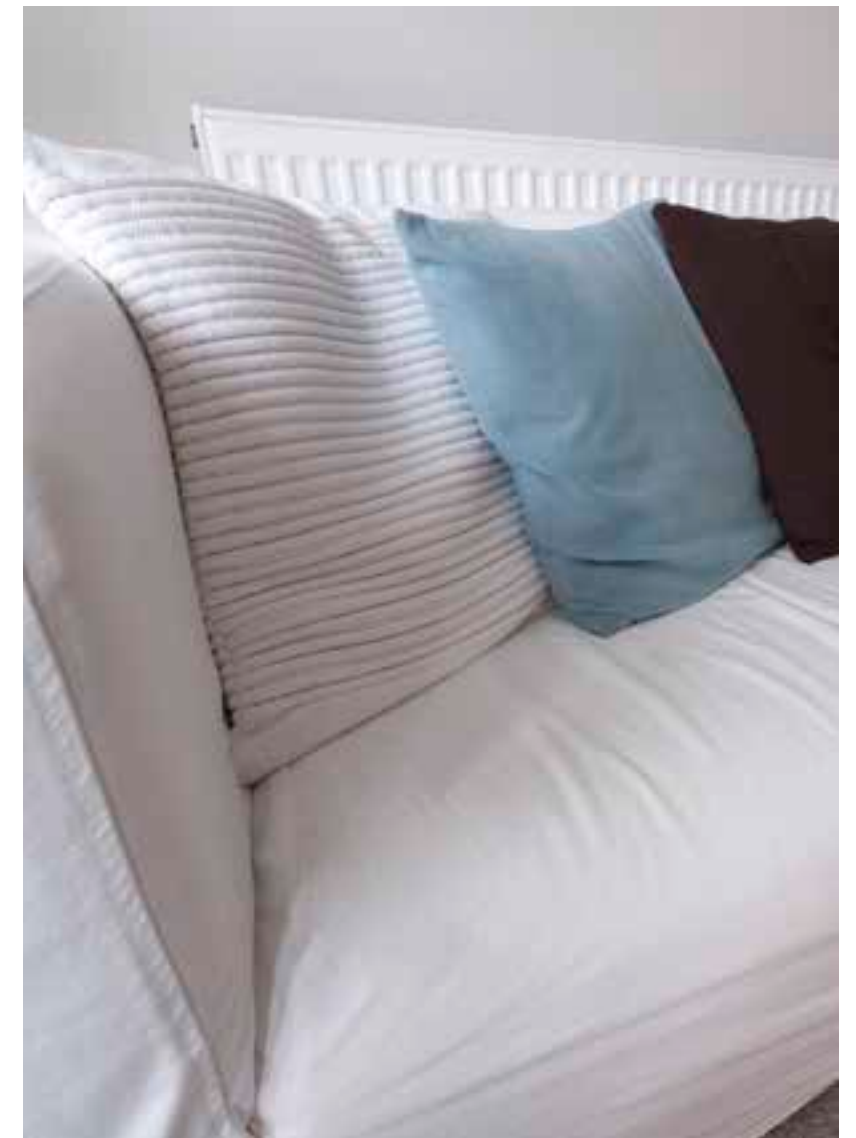
# HOW TO UPGRADE *Budget-Friendly* FURNITURE

written by:  
SHELLEY GOLDSTEIN

Are you one of those people who always manages to fall in love with the most expensive couch or chair without even seeing the price? Having champagne taste on a beer budget can be a frustrating experience, especially if no one is paying you for the impractical skill of guessing which love seat costs the most. That leaves you with only one choice: turning to creativity and ingenuity to upgrade affordable pieces into furniture that aligns with your style.

## ADD A SLIPCOVER

Part of the frustration of budget options for couches is the limited fabric choices. If you aren't happy with the colorways offered, there are companies that make affordable slipcovers in an assortment of shades and fabrics. Bemz, for instance, has made-to-order covers for a plethora of IKEA furniture models. But these aren't your grandma's slipcovers. They are made to fit each piece of the couch or chair just like the original. If you want to save even more money, order your IKEA furniture with the frame (which includes the back seat and cushions) only and purchase a slipcover separately.





## PLUMP IT UP

Comfort is another shortcoming in some budget sofa offerings. If you like the design of the frame, take a look at the cushions to see whether they have zippers on the covers. If they have a zippered opening, you can add hollow fiberfill and quilt batting or a piece of a cheap mattress topper to boost the plushness of the stuffing. For certain types of seat and back cushions, you can also use king-sized bed pillows as inserts to up the comfy quotient.

## REUPHOLSTER

If you have an old armchair with a beautiful shape and good bones, don't get rid of it because the fabric is outdated or worn. Reupholstering isn't cheap, but it's still less expensive than buying new, and starting with a solid frame will leave you with a quality piece that will last for years.

## BUY SECONDHAND AND RESTORE

Budget dressers and tables are often made from medium-density fiberboard, laminates, and melamine, which are lower-quality materials that tend to look cheap. If you can find a vintage piece at a yard sale or online marketplace, you will end up with higher-quality wood that can then be refurbished to fit your desired look.





## PAINT IT

If the wood finish is too far gone to be restored or you'd prefer a pop of color to a natural stain, use a satin or semigloss latex or oil-based paint to upcycle the piece. Make sure you sand and prime first to remove imperfections and reduce the likelihood of the paint chipping. If you have cheaper items, like flat-pack furniture, chalk paint will work even without priming or sanding.



## SWAP OUT HARDWARE

You'd be surprised at how much this simple change can elevate the look of a piece. Check out secondhand shops or Etsy to find pulls or knobs in a style that suits you. Or if you like the structure of the hardware you already own, a few coats of spray paint can breathe new life into it. To refurbish rusted hardware, soak it in a vinegar bath overnight and then scrape it with steel wool.

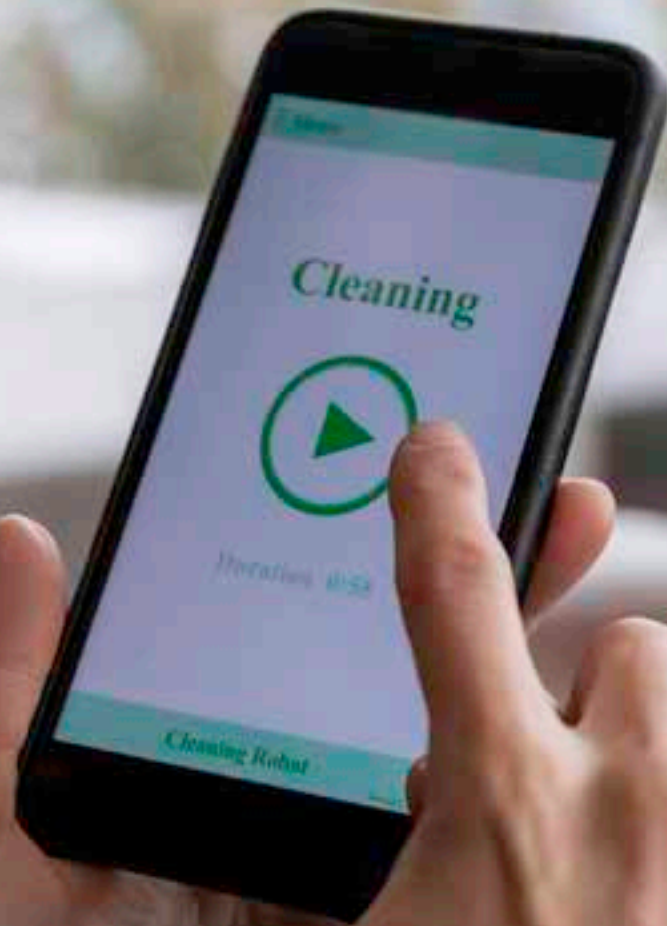
*You don't need to have unlimited funds to create a home that you are proud to show off. With a little resourcefulness and some elbow grease, you can transform your furniture in a way that reflects your individuality while also saving you some money.*





written by: ANDRE RIOS    photos courtesy of: GETTY IMAGES, UNLESS NOTED

# five innovative Home-Cleaning Products



This year, home cleaning gets a refresher with a roster of unique, fun, and even quirky gadgets—and they're more capable than ever of doing the heavy lifting for you. Check out these five items to help expedite your chores and make your most tedious tasks a breeze.



photo courtesy of:  
TREVOR GOMES

## Rubbermaid Reveal Power Scrubber

Electric toothbrushes are masterful at scrubbing away unwanted buildup, and this handy Rubbermaid device puts that oscillating brush power to work on your grimmest household surfaces, rotating sixty times per second to remove soap scum and other tricky muck. Its thin, toothbrush-like shape eases the cleaning of hard-to-reach spots such as faucets, drains, and showerheads. Even better, the Power Scrubber is water-resistant and comes with multiple heads and scrubbing pads for a variety of messy jobs.

## YUNYILAN Mini Desktop Vacuum Cleaner

Cleaning surfaces is made convenient and cute with this compact desktop pal, which suctions up dust, crumbs, paper scraps, and other messes into an easy-to-dispense tray. Thanks to the vacuum's powerful yet quiet motor, it's effective on many surfaces, including keyboards, electronics, and even sofa cushions. As a handy feature, its lithium battery charges via a USB so you can connect it directly to your computer and spot-clean while you work.





**ColorCoral Cleaning Gel**

Not all modern tech is electric—the innovators at ColorCoral have devised the perfect cleaning product with their flexible, sticky gel. This handy tool is perfect for sprucing up tricky surfaces such as vents, keyboards, and thermostats. Simply press and roll the gel across a surface, and it will naturally slip into fine grooves and gaps, grabbing messes like dust and oils without leaving behind any sticky residue. Reuse the gel until it’s permanently discolored, then discard it—despite its plasticky appearance, it’s nontoxic and 100 percent biodegradable.

**Bissell Steam Shot**

This handheld machine resembling a bulbous drill is actually a portable steam cleaner that can eliminate up to 99.9 percent of germs and bacteria on hard surfaces like kitchen floors and shower walls. The newest model heats up in just thirty seconds, includes a convenient kit of ten accessories for tasks like scrubbing and hard-to-reach spraying, and has an easy-to-refill, top-loading water tank. Best of all, the Bissell Steam Shot uses nothing but turbocharged hot steam to sterilize and clean, reducing your need to rely on harsh chemical cleaners like bleach that can potentially harm your children and pets.

**Smart assistants**

While virtual tech may not be able to scrub a bathtub, it nonetheless has some extremely helpful features that can make your chores routine a breeze. Instruct Google, Siri, Alexa, or another AI assistant to set reminders for occasional tasks you forget. For example: “On the first of the month, every three months, remind me to dust the ceiling fans and clean

the oven.” Did you run out of a vital supply? Have it add the product to your shopping delivery list so it’s always on hand. You can also set alerts to start dedicated chore sessions and automatically play energizing music. With a little help from AI, you can ease the never-ending burden of household chores.





# THE MANY LAYERS OF *Melora Hardin*

interview with: MELORA HARDIN

written by: LAUREN KIM

photos: AS NOTED

**A**ctress and director Melora Hardin, best known for her roles on *The Office*, *Monk*, and *The Bold Type* and her Emmy-nominated turn on *Transparent*, is also a passionate collage artist and wallpaper designer. She discusses her creative process and how it informs her work on, off, and behind the screen.

**How did you get started in collage art?** As a little girl, I was always creating and drawing, and I kept getting pulled into collage. I enjoyed being messy, adding layers, and making something. I also loved that I could cover a collage up with something else if I didn't like it. It was a fun way to express myself—it was kind of like doodling.

photographer: JOHAN JANSSON  
stylist: RANDY SMITH  
hair & makeup: STEEVE DAVIAULT



### How did you get back into collaging?

When I started making my documentary, *Hunter's Thunder*, collaging was something I could use to inform me as an editor. It's a little like directing because they are both about putting pieces together to tell a story. It's this ability to tell stories that attracts me most to collaging.

I also did a lot of collaging in Montreal while shooting *The Bold Type* since I hadn't been to that city before and was about 3,000 miles away from my family and friends. I felt compelled to collage since I knew there would be downtime. It gave me something relaxing to do to balance the intensity of the work I had done in Los Angeles with Hunter Austin, the subject of my documentary.

**What is your documentary about?** It's both an inside look at my friendship with Hunter and a story about a meaningful chance connection, real-life serendipity and healing, and women holding women up. It's 85 percent self-shot and is quite intimate. With a documentary, you follow real life, not a script, so I didn't know where the story was taking me. When I started editing my footage, I did a series of collages to help me figure out what I wanted to say. My collages resonated with Hunter; it was incredible to see my art have such an effect on somebody. They gave her an imaginative escape that helped her heal and create a new vision for her life.

**Does being a collage artist and an actor share any similarities?** Yes. In acting and directing, as with collaging, you sometimes need to release control and allow intuition and instinct to lead. The process requires a lot of skill because you have to know how to relax your brain to get the best results.

photographer: JOHAN JANSSON  
stylist: RANDY SMITH  
hair & makeup: STEEVE DAVIAULT





photo courtesy of: MELORA HARDIN



photographer: JOHAN JANSSON  
stylist: RANDY SMITH  
hair & makeup: STEVE DAVIAULT

### What is your creative process when collaging?

I begin by looking through magazines. I have piles of them—new ones, vintage *National Geographic* and *Life* magazines, and some from France. Anytime I see an interesting image on paper or cardboard, I save it. When I go to an airport, I find a newsstand and flip through each publication; if I find something intriguing, I buy it. Later, I'll cut out what I like—I have piles of clippings to pull from when collaging. I sometimes accent the images with gold, silver, or copper leaf and usually glue everything together with Mod Podge.

**Where do you create your collages?** I work on them wherever I go, but I really love to spend time on them in Montreal—that's where I have the most space to spread

out and make a mess. Rather than glue them together right away, I leave my collages out for a while. Then, when I'm happy with a collage, I take photos of it so I can take it apart, reassemble it, and glue it down. Putting my collages back together exactly as they were before is the tricky part.

I've filled a bedroom wall in my place in Los Angeles with my collages. When I wake up in the morning, I gaze at them and let them speak to me. On another wall in my bedroom, I've hung more collages using adhesive strips that allow me to easily move them around. My husband loves them; when I told him I was going to put them all over the wall, he was fine with it.





photos courtesy of: MELORA HARDIN



### Tell us about your wallpaper

**collection:** It's called Storyboards by Melora Hardin because everything in the collection tells a story—you can even infuse them with your own imaginings. My first experiment for the series was a collage I made for the bathroom wall in my Montreal condo. The collage makes the space, which has a big bathtub, feel incredibly restful. I can soak, relax, and gaze at its giant blooms, butterflies, and ancient-looking sculpture—it has an owl perched on it that appears to be looking at me. The scene in the collage can be almost anything, whether a lake or a garden—the possibilities are endless.

**Do the wall coverings you designed have a unifying theme?** Much of my collection is inspired by *Hunter's Thunder* and the idea of metamorphosis and healing. Some elements it features, such as butterflies and flowers, are about letting the light in since shame can only exist in the shadows. For example, my "Birds of a Feather" pattern has a bleak black-and-white background, but it also has a vibrant gold and pink foreground.

**Is your decorating style as colorful as your collages and wallpaper?** Yes—I want my spaces to be warm and welcoming. I'm what you'd call eclectic and "house proud." In my homes, I have lots of magic and whimsy and have collected many things. I love that my wallpaper can turn a room into a work of art.

*For more info, visit [melora.com](http://melora.com)*



photographer: JOHAN JANSSON  
stylist: RANDY SMITH  
hair & makeup: STEEVE DAVIAULT





# CRUSTS & crumbs

recipes by: MARIE-LAURE FRÉCHET

photography by: VALÉRIE LHOMME



Bread is enjoyed the world over for its versatility; it is delicious by itself or with a little butter or olive oil, forms the foundation of a sandwich, and can even be made into a dessert. These selections from the cookbook *Upper Crust* celebrate this legacy, featuring bread as an integral part of homemade dishes.

© *Upper Crust: Homemade Bread the French Way* by Marie-Laure Fréchet. Flammarion, 2021. Photographs © Valérie Lhomme.

## PAN CON TOMATE

*spanish tapas* | Makes 12 tapas

### INGREDIENTS:

- 2 ripe, juicy tomatoes
- About 12 small slices day-old bread (such as a baguette)
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and halved
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- *Fleur de sel*
- Freshly ground pepper

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Wash and dry the tomatoes and cut them in half crosswise. Lightly toast the slices of bread.
2. Rub the bread with the cut side of the garlic, then rub it with the tomato halves, cut-side down. Press down firmly to help release the juices and some of the pulp.
3. Drizzle generously with olive oil, sprinkle with fleur de sel, and add a few grinds of fresh pepper.
4. Serve right away.



# MEATLOAF

| Serves 8

## INGREDIENTS:

### *Meatloaf*

- Vegetable oil
- 1 onion, peeled and finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 5.25 ounces dry bread
- Scant ½ cup whole milk
- Scant ½ cup beef or chicken stock
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1¾ pounds ground beef
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- Salt and freshly ground pepper

### *Glaze*

- Scant ⅔ cup ketchup
- 1 tablespoon mustard
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar

## INSTRUCTIONS:

1. *Prepare the meatloaf:* Preheat the oven to 350°F and line the loaf pan with parchment paper.
2. Drizzle a little vegetable oil into a large skillet and add the onion and thyme. Sauté over medium heat until the onion is softened and lightly golden, stirring often. Remove from the heat and let cool.
3. Break up the bread into small pieces and place in a large mixing bowl. Add the milk and stock. Soak for about 10 minutes to soften the bread.
4. Add the onion and eggs and stir to combine.
5. Place the ground beef in a separate large mixing bowl and gradually incorporate the bread mixture with your hands until well combined and moist. Add the Worcestershire sauce and season with salt and pepper. Transfer to the prepared loaf pan and pat down into an even layer.
6. *Prepare the glaze:* Whisk together the ketchup, mustard, and brown sugar in a bowl. Brush some of the glaze over the meatloaf in an even layer, reserving the rest.
7. *Bake the meatloaf:* Bake for 30 minutes, then remove from the oven and brush with the remaining glaze. Return to the oven for 15–20 minutes, until nicely browned.
8. Let cool for 10–15 minutes before slicing and serving.

## LA BONNE IDÉE

- Serve thickly sliced with barbecue sauce on the side.
- You can swap out the ground beef for ground chicken and serve the meatloaf chilled with an herb mayonnaise.







# BREAD PUDDING

| Serves 6

## INGREDIENTS:

- 1 pound, 2 ounces stale bread, broken into pieces
- 4 cups whole milk + more if necessary
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup + 1 tablespoon amber rum
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup raisins
- Butter, for the pan
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup sugar
- 3 eggs, beaten
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1–2 teaspoons all-purpose flour, if necessary
- Confectioners' sugar, for dusting

## INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place the bread in a large bowl and pour in the milk—the bread should be completely covered. Let soak until the bread is fully saturated and soft (about 1 hour).
2. Meanwhile, warm the rum and pour it over the raisins in a bowl. Let soak until the raisins are softened and plump.
3. Preheat the oven to 350°F and generously grease a Pyrex bowl or loaf pan with butter.
4. Roughly mash the bread in the milk using a fork, then add the sugar, eggs, and cinnamon. Drain the rum-soaked raisins and add them to the bowl. Stir until well combined. The batter should be semi-thick—neither runny nor dense. If necessary, add 1–2 teaspoons flour or a little more milk.
5. Pour the batter into the prepared dish and bake for 40 minutes, or until a knife inserted into the center comes out clean.
6. As soon as you remove the pudding from the oven, run a spatula or knife around the edge to release the pudding from the bowl. Let the pudding cool slightly or completely in the dish before turning it out onto a serving plate.
7. Dust with confectioners' sugar and serve warm, at room temperature, or chilled.

## LA BONNE IDÉE

- You can swap out raisins for pitted prunes or very thinly sliced apples.





# Homeowners Insurance:

*What's Covered and What's Not* **written by:**  
BONNIE JOFFE



If you own a home, regardless of its type, you need homeowners insurance. It may cover your dwelling's structure and your personal belongings from various risks, such as fire, theft, and vandalism, and can potentially help pay for legal fees and damages if someone is injured on your property. However, not all policies are created equal; coverage will vary depending on your policy and insurance company along with your home's age, location, and value. Check out this handy guide to better understand what may or may not be included in your homeowners insurance.

## What's covered

A standard homeowners insurance policy usually provides basic protection, but verify with your insurer what exactly falls under your policy so you know what you can expect if you need to submit a claim.

### A home's structures

If your home suffers damage due to fire, smoke, theft, or vandalism, a standard homeowners policy normally covers the repair or replacement of the dwelling's main components—the foundation, walls, and roof—and may pay







for alternate lodging if your home needs to be rebuilt. Other common structures, such as a garage, deck, or fence, may also fall under the standard coverage umbrella.

***Personal belongings***

Homeowners insurance often includes coverage for personal property inside your home that has been damaged by fire, stolen, or vandalized. Your policy may help pay for repairs or replace your belongings. If you have any high-value items, such as jewelry or artwork, you may need to purchase extended coverage to protect against their potential loss or damage.

***Water damage***

Water damage is typically covered, as long as it’s from sudden and accidental events such as a burst pipe, failed water heater, or broken washing machine hose. In addition, if your roof leaks due to a covered event like hail or a severe storm, your policy will often cover the cost of repairing it.

***HVAC system***

If your HVAC unit gets damaged from an unforeseen event such as a severe storm or fire, your policy will likely replace

or repair it. However, this would not be the case if a unit breaks due to age or negligence.

***Liability***

A standard policy will typically help pay for legal fees and medical expenses if someone is injured on your property. You may even be covered if you have a dog that bites someone, though some companies won’t insure specific breeds.

**What’s not covered**

Understanding what’s not included in your homeowners insurance policy can help you be better prepared in the event of a loss. Consider purchasing additional coverage for specific risks depending on your location and situation.

***Flood and earthquake damage***

If you live in a flood or earthquake zone, you may want to seek separate insurance as a standard homeowners insurance policy will not cover this type of damage.

***Plumbing***

While the resulting water damage may be covered, homeowners insurance usually won’t pay to repair or replace



a burst pipe or broken water heater. The exception to this would be if they are damaged due to a fire or storm; in these cases, they would fall under your dwelling coverage.

***Termite damage***

Termite damage is viewed as preventable, so treatment and repair are not covered under your homeowners policy. The only caveat is that if the termites chew through wires and cause a fire, some insurers may cover the repair of the fire damage.

***Certain roof damage***

Though your roof is covered under your standard policy, the insurer will not pay for a roof leak or other issues if it determines such damage is due to lack of maintenance, age, neglect, or abuse.

*The cost of homeowners insurance can vary, so make sure to compare quotes from different insurers before choosing a policy. And always review your policy annually to ensure it still meets your needs.*





# create a backyard paradise

By the time spring arrives, you may be itching to spend more time outside. Of course, if your backyard is a boring patch of grass or dirt and not much else, you likely won't want to log many hours there. However, with some imagination and planning, you can transform your yard into a beautiful and enjoyable oasis.

## get competitive

If your idea of a perfect afternoon is playing games with family and friends, you could turn your backyard into a fun recreation area. Lauren Shaver of the blog *Bless'er House* built a bocce court in her backyard in a weekend by clearing the ground, putting down weed-preventing fabric, adding a paver base topped with decomposed granite, and surrounding it all with two-by-fours treated with deck stain. If bocce isn't your game, you could set up a mini pickleball court, simple games like cornhole and horseshoes, or a tetherball pole—whatever will get everyone playing.



written by: LAUREN KIM  
photos courtesy of:  
GETTY IMAGES, UNLESS NOTED





**create a workout zone**

Fitness buffs can simply put down a sturdy gym mat in their backyard for jumping rope or doing calisthenics, of course. But influencer Cassie De Pecol wanted an airy yoga space, so she constructed a platform from weather-resistant cedar and surrounded it with string lights. Likewise, you could kick your backyard workout area up a notch by installing a shade sail or a pergola to protect yourself from the elements or adding a punching bag to perfect your boxing skills.

**bring in water features**

Julia Konya of the blog *Cuckoo 4 Design* initially had big

dreams for converting her Pennsylvania backyard into a fun place to enjoy with her family. She had hoped to put in a conventional above-ground pool but changed her mind after discovering how much it would cost. So instead, she and her husband fitted a stock tank with a pool liner and filter and installed it themselves by digging out a small hill in their backyard. For a tropical touch, they wrapped a bamboo fence around the tank’s exterior. As a result, they now have a relaxing place for the whole family to enjoy.

A pool isn’t the only way to incorporate water into your backyard, however. For instance, you could create a pond

by using a patio pond kit, a small stock tank, or even a large gardening pot (without drainage holes) and filling it with plants, fish, and other aquatic life. For a soothing touch, add an inexpensive solar fountain pump to circulate the water, cool the air, and provide the relaxing sound of bubbling water.

**make your own sanctuary**

If you like growing luscious vegetables or colorful flowers, why not convert a large part of your yard into a garden? Canadian blogger Melissa J. Will, who goes by the moniker the Empress of Dirt, had a large but unimaginative backyard. Gradually, she replaced the sod with bountiful rows of flowers and vegetables,

a homemade greenhouse, several water features, and her own handcrafted birdhouses and garden art. Now she happily tends to her plants and makes plans for new ways to modify her peaceful outdoor retreat.

What you decide to grow in your yard will depend on your climate and your preferences. Perhaps you’d like a serene Japanese garden with raked gravel, elegant bamboo, and a koi pond or an arid backyard with cacti and succulents. Don’t be afraid to get creative when designing the oasis of your dreams—the more unique the features you add, the lovelier your little paradise may be.







photo courtesy of:  
INSPIRATIONFORMOMS.COM

### sit back and relax

There are several ways to turn your yard into a comforting retreat. For instance, you could create a firepit area for roasting marshmallows complete with Adirondack chairs. Or follow the lead of Colorado blogger Laura Tusken of *Inspiration for Moms* and hang a hammock from a beautiful wooden stand while adorning the area with string lights, lanterns, and stepping stones. You could also build a family backyard theater area complete with a movie screen, Bluetooth speakers, and a firepit much like the one Sam Raimondi of the blog *DIY Huntress* made. Even just an inexpensive screened-in gazebo can provide the perfect setting for enjoying evenings outdoors.

*Using a little creativity and determination, you can put together a backyard that's perfectly suited for your enjoyment this season.*







# *a beginner's* **GUIDE TO LAWN CARE**

written by: ALLISON GOMES

A lush and healthy lawn can play a big part in making an outdoor space refreshing and visually appealing, but the task of caring for it can seem overwhelming, especially for newbies. With a few essential tips, though, you can easily transform your lawn into a verdant paradise.



## UNDERSTAND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SOIL

A successful lawn starts with healthy soil. Your soil's pH levels, texture, and organic matter, among other factors, will all impact the health of your grass. To get an idea of its current condition, such as if it's outside of the recommended pH of 5.5 to 7.5, conduct a soil test through a local lab or via a soil-testing kit like the one from MySoil. You can then use the results to develop a game plan for your soil's maintenance and determine what fertilizer and soil amendments (organic or inorganic materials that can improve the soil's physical or chemical properties) it might need in the future.

## PICK THE RIGHT SEED

If you have bare patches or need to grow a new lawn, you will likely need to seed it. Make sure you choose high-quality grass seed suitable for your region and climate. Cool-season grasses, including Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue, are ideal for northern regions, whereas warm-season grasses such as Bermuda grass grow well in southern regions. To seed, prepare the soil by raking it lightly, spread the seeds evenly, and cover it all with a thin layer of topsoil or straw. To promote germination and root growth, keep the soil moist until the grass becomes established, following the watering instructions on your seed packaging.

## CONSIDER YOUR LAWN'S WATER NEEDS

Water is essential for all living things, including your lawn. While the amount of water it requires depends on your local climate, type of grass, and season, the general rule is that most lawns need one to one and a half inches of water each week, either from watering or rain. If necessary, water deeply once or twice a week, ensuring the water penetrates at least six inches into the soil. Early-morning watering is ideal because the temperatures are typically cooler and the wind calmer, minimizing evaporation, and it allows the grass to dry before evening, reducing the risk of diseases. You'll also want to avoid overwatering since this can lead to shallow root development and increased susceptibility to pests and diseases. Just be sure to check your local guidelines regarding watering since it may be prohibited due to restrictions and droughts.



## MOW FREQUENTLY

Mowing is crucial for maintaining a well-kept lawn, so you'll need to get in the habit of doing so regularly. This could mean mowing every week or two, depending on how fast your grass grows. Always check that your mower's cutting height is at a suitable level; you generally want to cut no more than the top third of the grass blades since going too short can weaken the root system and increase the chances of weed growth.

## FERTILIZE TO PROMOTE GROWTH

To ensure healthy growth and discourage weeds, it's important to feed your lawn with fertilizer. Choose a slow-release, organic fertilizer that matches your grass type, and follow the recommended application rate. Regular fertilization can help your grass maintain its vigor and color. And when your grass is full and healthy, it can keep weeds from taking over—just be sure to manually pull any that pop up.

***With patience, consistency, and proper maintenance, you'll be rewarded with a beautiful lawn that's the envy of your neighborhood.***





# beautiful utility IN THE KITCHEN

**written by:** SHELLEY GOLDSTEIN   **photos:** AS NOTED

In this age of competitive consumption, where our desire to buy new things subconsciously stems from a “keeping up with the Joneses” mentality, it can be difficult to ascertain between what we need and what we want. This often results in excess clutter in our homes. But what if there was a better way to distill purchases into only what truly resonates as special and useful?

When it comes to the kitchen, it’s especially important to arrive at the intersection of form and function—where the kitchen items you buy look as good as they perform. Three companies weigh in on what it means to have products that are both aesthetic and practical.

## TEAKHAUS (wooden cutting and serving boards)

*Diana Sámano, marketing manager*

**Kitchen philosophy:** We believe that cooking is more than just preparing food—it’s also an art form that deserves to be elevated. With this in mind, we actively encourage our customers to make thoughtful choices that encompass both exceptional quality and affordability, enabling them to inspire their cooking creativity while having a well-equipped and efficient kitchen.

**Thoughts on aesthetics:** The true joy of cooking lies in the experience of using the finest tools. That’s why we’ve transformed

one of the most beautiful woods on earth, teak, into cutting and serving boards that go beyond mere functionality. We also recognize the importance of sustainability. In today’s world, we are mindful of what we cook and eat, but it is equally essential to consider what we use to prepare and serve our food.

**Kitchen pet peeve:** The excessive accumulation of utensils and gadgets. While it can be beneficial to have a range of tools for specific cases, having too many can make it challenging to find the exact tool required, leading to frustration and wasted time during meal preparation. When you prioritize the use of versatile tools that genuinely enhance the cooking experience, you can reduce clutter and create a more organized and functional kitchen environment.

**Advice:** Invest in a good cutting board. The cutting board holds a special place in the kitchen, serving as the starting point for every celebration and meal preparation. A high-quality cutting board also acts as a safeguard for your knives. It doesn’t necessarily need to be huge; rather, it should be the right size for your kitchen and your needs.

## TOWN CUTLER (knives)

*Galen Garretson, founder*

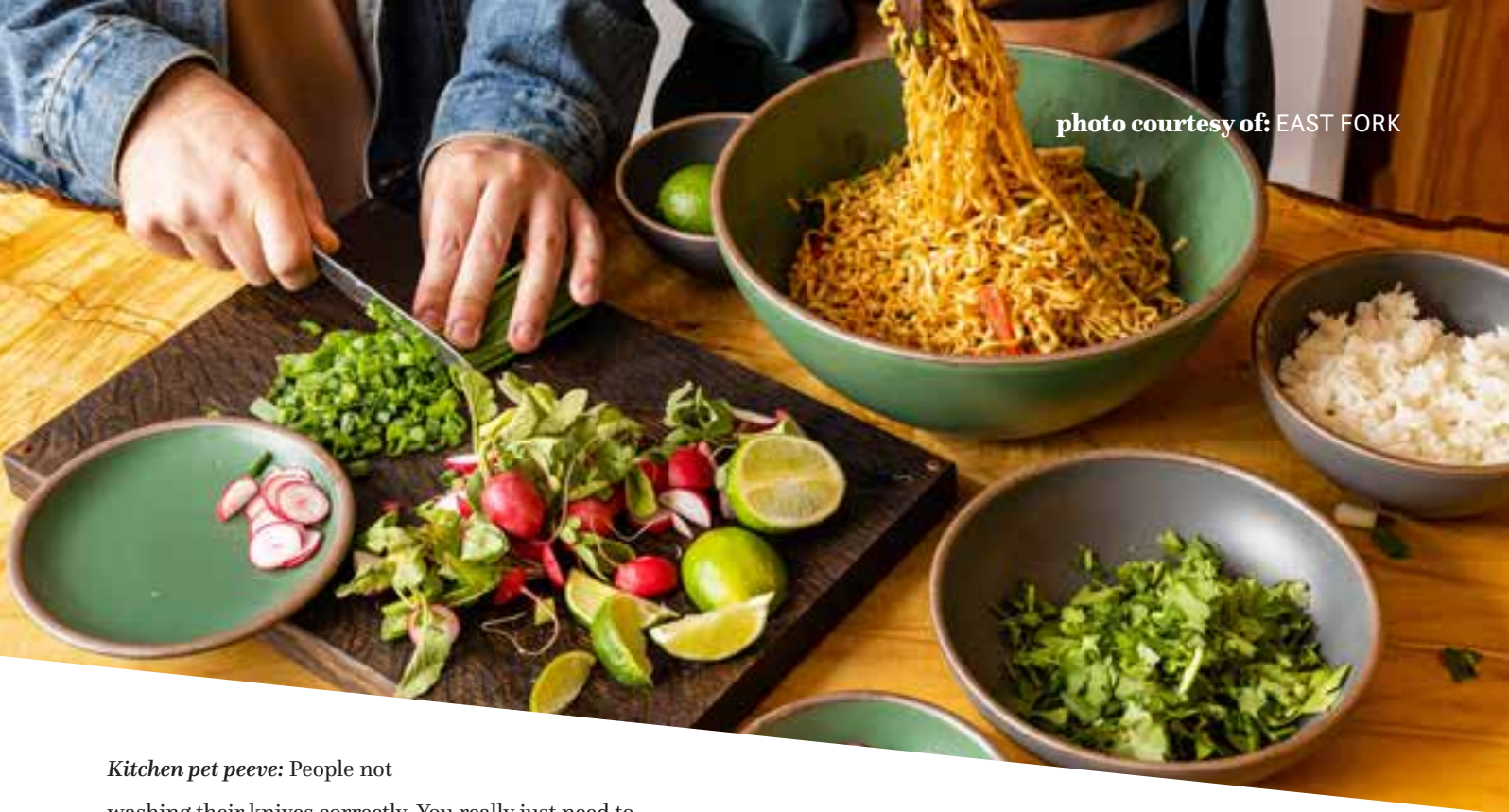
**On knife making:** When I started in 2011, there were maybe half a dozen knife makers in the United States. I am mostly self-taught, but I also worked with master bladesmith Aaron Wilburn on weekends to learn how to forge steel. Prior to making knives, I worked as a chef and had a knife-sharpening service in San Francisco. Making knives is a bit like cooking. You come up with a recipe, and then you have to figure out how to repeat it over and over.

**Town Cutler knives:** Japanese knives tend to be thin and precise, whereas European knives are a lot more durable. Our knives are somewhere in the middle—not as delicate as Japanese brands but sharper and more precise than some of the European ones.

**Thoughts on aesthetics:** Nowadays, many people want to buy things that look good, so aesthetics are an important factor in commerce. Sometimes our knives are referred to as pretty knives, but they are also very durable.

Our flagship line is our Classic line, which features a handle made from a solid piece of buckeye burl, a big knot of mixed sapwood and heartwood that can be found on certain buckeye trees in the Pacific Northwest. Burl wood is not only beautiful but also durable and comfortable to hold for long periods of time. Our most popular knives are made from the scrap pieces of burl, which we cast with either blue or black resin.





**Kitchen pet peeve:** People not

washing their knives correctly. You really just need to rinse them with water and dry them off. The only time I use soap is if I'm cutting meat or fish. Soap strips oils from the knives, especially the handle.

**Advice:** If you could only choose one knife, I recommend an 8.5-inch chef knife. It's an all-purpose workhorse that does everything.

**EAST FORK (pottery)**

*Devin Bambrick, director of creative*

**Kitchen philosophy:** Invest in fewer, better things. With a few exceptions, everything in your kitchen should be able to lead multiple lives. A really great knife will get you through most cooking tasks, and we think the same should be true of bowls and plates. Our Coupe, for instance, is a great vessel for plating dinner, but it's also an excellent small serving dish. Our Bitty Bowls are another example of flexibility: they're perfect both for mise en place and as tea bag holders, incense catchers, and teensy candy dishes.

**Thoughts on aesthetics:** Truly great design

needs to be both aesthetic and functional. Our company grew organically out of a tradition of Southern pottery that emphasized both sides of the coin: finding profound beauty in a functional vessel.

**Kitchen pet peeve:** Disposability. There's a tendency for kitchen items to feel flimsy, replaceable, or trendy, but that wasn't always the case; plenty of folks kept the same skillet going forever. That's a sensibility that informs our products. The first thing customers notice about our pots is that they have a real weight because, ultimately, they're meant to be lifelong companions.

**Advice:** Have fun and make your own rules. Buy things that make your heart flutter a little. Don't buy items you feel like you "should" have because cooking and dining isn't a performance for other people. It's about nourishing the deepest parts of yourself.

recommendations & referrals

are the core of my business and always greatly appreciated.

*Thank you for your continued support!*




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## Front of Tear Out Card 2



**BREAD  
PUDDING**




**Stacey Shanner**

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## Back of Tear Out Card 2

**SERVES 6**

# BREAD PUDDING

■ **INGREDIENTS**

1 lb., 2 oz. stale bread, broken into pieces

4 c. whole milk + more if necessary

¾ c. + 1 tbsp. amber rum

½ c. raisins

Butter, for the pan

½ c. sugar

3 eggs, beaten

½ tsp. ground cinnamon

1–2 tsp. all-purpose flour, if necessary

Confectioners' sugar, for dusting

■ **INSTRUCTIONS**

**1/** Place the bread in a large bowl and pour in the milk—the bread should be completely covered. Let soak until the bread is fully saturated and soft (about 1 hour).

**2/** Meanwhile, warm the rum and pour it over the raisins in a bowl. Let soak until the raisins are softened and plump.

**3/** Preheat the oven to 350°F and generously grease a Pyrex bowl or loaf pan with butter.

**4/** Roughly mash the bread in the milk using a fork, then add the sugar, eggs, and cinnamon. Drain the rum-soaked raisins and add them to the bowl. Stir until well combined. The batter should be semi-thick—neither runny nor dense. If necessary, add 1–2 teaspoons flour or a little more milk.

**5/** Pour the batter into the prepared dish and bake for 40 minutes, or until a knife inserted into the center comes out clean.

**6/** As soon as you remove the pudding from the oven, run a spatula or knife around the edge to release the pudding from the bowl. Let the pudding cool slightly or completely in the dish before turning it out onto a serving plate.

**7/** Dust with confectioners' sugar and serve warm, at room temperature, or chilled.

**LA BONNE IDÉE**

- You can swap out raisins for pitted prunes or very thinly sliced apples.

Recipe excerpted from © *Upper Crust: Homemade Bread the French Way* by Marie-Laure Fréchet. Flammarion, 2021. Photography by Valérie Lhomme.



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★★★★★  
*The Smith Family*  
Philadelphia

Stacey is the best of the best! Our family was very pleased with her services, especially Snowball, our little pup! She listened to all of our concerns, wants, needs, and dreams. Stacey is totally awesome! I will be sharing her information with everyone that I know.



★★★★★  
*The Miller Family*  
Manayunk

Stacey was very patient with us, even though we were very picky. She knew how important it was for us to have a great experience and great service. We would definitely refer Stacey to all of our friends and family.



★★★★★  
*The Austin Family*  
Manayunk

Stacey is truly a very impressive person. She works fast, efficiently, and effectively. Her services are top of the line and we were very satisfied with her work. We love Stacey!



*Stacey Shanner*

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