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Volunteer Donna Cota distributing communion to resident Dorothy Patch at Stonehill Communities, Photo contributed by Stonehill.

COVER PHOTO: Volunteers participating in the Days of Caring event. Photo contributed by Sarah Candee.

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Volunteering has always been a big part of my life. Currently, I serve on the board for Days of Caring and volunteer around our community. Any time you can lend a helping hand is a win, win for everyone involved. When volunteering for opportunities you are able to lend a helping hand, and it feels good to be able to give back and make a difference. – Sarah Candee



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Why Volunteering is Good Community and You

Volunteers participating in the Days of Caring event.



Sarah Candee has been the Volunteer Coordinator for Stonehill Communities since November of 2023.

*by Sarah Candee,
Volunteer Coordinator*

A volunteer is more than just a person giving of their time. Volunteers are angels on earth sharing their compassion, empathy, hope, and love through their time and talents. Each day, volunteers are bringing their skills, spirit, and energy to benefit others in our community.

The reasons why individuals (and groups!) volunteer are as numerous as the talents they bring and the roles they

fill. For some, it is about connection. They can meet and form relationships with others through their volunteer service. For others, it can be a way to build skills or complete educational requirements. Others want to give back to an organization that has made a difference in their personal lives. Some see volunteerism to live their faith and support the less fortunate. Business groups also use volunteerism as a team-building experience or a way to gain exposure and community goodwill.



for Our

But did you know volunteering is good for your health? According to the Mayo Clinic, research suggests that engaging in volunteer work can have a positive impact on both physical and mental well-being, particularly for older adults. Activities such as assisting at a local shelter, mentoring young people, or participating in a community garden help individuals stay active, both physically and mentally. Volunteering is known to boost mood, reduce stress, and contribute to overall mental wellness.

Beyond these benefits, volunteering can also support heart health and may even help lower the risk of conditions such as heart disease and stroke. One of the most valuable aspects of volunteer work is its ability to foster social connections, helping to reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation—common concerns for older adults. Staying engaged with others not only enhances emotional well-being but may also help maintain cognitive function and lower the risk of dementia.

Volunteering can also provide a sense of purpose and fulfillment. For older adults who have retired, the ending of a career can leave an emptiness. Volunteering is a great way to add an element of routine and engage in meaningful activity.

Ultimately, no matter why or how they volunteer, ALL volunteers make an impact. They bring smiles to faces, ease workloads, stretch dollars, and enhance quality of life.

In 2024, volunteers contrib-

uted a total of 6,339 documented hours of service to Stonehill Communities. According to the “Value of Volunteer Time” report by Independent Sector and the Do Good Institute, the value of a volunteer hour is estimated to be \$29.95. At that rate, those hours are equivalent to a contribution worth more than \$189,000!

This month, during National Volunteer Month, we celebrate our volunteers and the incredible impact they make in our community. I encourage you to join me in recognizing them for the gifts of their time, energy, and expertise. Or, as an even better tribute to their service, join them! Opportunities are everywhere and fit every skill and interest area.

Sarah Candee loves her job and helping people make an impact. Sarah and her three children – Faith (22), Hunter (21), and Ashlyn (18) all enjoy volunteering at various Dubuque organizations. She can be reached at 563-690-9666 or scandee@stonehilldbq.com. ❖



Donna Shemmel cutting butterflies for a project.

START HERE! FIRST PROJECT WITH YOUR AI ASSISTANT, CLAUDE

neys: planning her upcoming adventure to St. Simons Island, and learning to work with her new AI assistant, Claude.

In this article, we'll join Margaret as she works with Claude to plan her customized trip, adjusted to her preferences, interests and physical abilities. She will accomplish this by conversing back and forth with Claude UNTIL she is delighted with the results.

Travel planning is an ideal first project for exploring AI's capabilities because it combines several skills we use in everyday life: research, decision-making, photography, writing, and creative design. By following this project from start to finish, you'll gain confidence using Claude and other AI tools to help you create something meaningful that you will want to share.

The Tools in Our Travel Planning Kit

Before we begin our journey, let's gather our AI tools:

Claude, your planning partner, will help research destinations and craft a detailed itinerary tailored to your interests and capabilities.

Luminar AI will help you to enhance your travel photos.

Canva, with its AI-powered design features, will help you create a beautiful cover for your trip book, like having a graphic designer at your side.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

by Dr. Carolee Duckworth

Margaret sat at her desk, surrounded by photo albums from decades of travel. Her fingers traced the faded images from a trip to Hawaii fifteen years ago, trying to remember the name of

that charming breakfast spot where the owner shared stories of old Maui. If only she had written down those details.

"Never again," she promised herself, turning on her laptop. At 72, Margaret was about to embark on two exciting jour-

Make Friends with Claude

Let's begin by enlisting Claude to help plan your trip. Unlike traditional travel websites that overwhelm you with endless options, Claude will communicate back and forth with you, and base "his" assistance on your personal preferences and interests. The key to engaging with Claude will be to provide context by communicating who you are and what matters to you.

Here's how Margaret started her conversation:

"Hello Claude, I'm Margaret, a 72-year-old retired teacher planning a winter trip to St. Simons Island. I enjoy history and photography, prefer a relaxed pace and need to avoid too much walking at once. Could you help me plan an itinerary that would suit my interests and energy levels?"

Notice how Margaret provided context by sharing her age and physical considerations, specific interests and preferred travel style. Then she asked for personalized recommendations. This helps Claude provide suggestions that truly fit her needs, rather than just generic tourist information.

Learn the Art of AI Conversation: A Sample Planning Session

Let's peek over Margaret's shoulder as she continues to plan her trip with Claude. Pay attention to how she builds her

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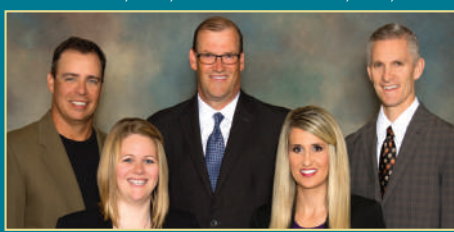
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requests step by step, using Claude's responses to shape her next questions.

First, Margaret asks for an overview:

"Claude, please tell me about St. Simons Island, focusing on what makes it special for seniors who enjoy history, nature, and a relaxed pace."

Claude responds with a thoughtful overview:

"St. Simons Island offers a perfect blend of Southern charm and coastal beauty. The island's flat terrain makes it easily accessible. Historic Christ Church, surrounded by ancient oak trees draped with Spanish moss, provides a peaceful spot for reflection and photography. The island's pace is unhurried, with plenty of benches and resting spots along the pier and in the charming village area."

Building on this foundation, she then asks for specific aspects that matter to her:

"What would you suggest for a five-day visit in February? I'd like a mix of activities but with plenty of downtime for relaxing and enjoying the scenery."

Claude responds with a balanced itinerary:

Day 1: Get oriented with a 90-minute narrated tour on the St. Simons Trolley for an excellent overview of the island's history and layout. In the afternoon, explore the Pier Village shops at your own pace, stopping at Palmer's Village

Café for their famous sweet potato pancakes.

Day 2: Visit Christ Church in the morning when the light is perfect for photos. For lunch, try Barbara Jean's Restaurant, known for their crab cakes and Southern sides. Later, visit the World War II Home Front Museum featuring fascinating tales of blimps above St. Simons spotting U-boats off this coastline.

Day 3: Take a morning beach walk during low tide, when the sand is firmest. Later, visit Redfern Village to explore art galleries and shops featuring local crafts. Then snag an outdoor table at Catch 228 for the Happy Hour "Buck a Shuck" oysters... (and so forth).

Your Turn: Plan Your Own Dream Destination with Claude

Think of this like learning from a master chef to prepare a phenomenal Lobster Bisque. Start with the basic ingredients (your travel preferences and needs). Follow a proven recipe (our planning framework). And end up with something delicious that is uniquely yours.

Step 1: Set Your Foundation. Share with Claude essential information about yourself.

Step 2: Understand Your Destination. Ask for an overview that addresses your specific needs.

Step 3: Build Your Framework. Ask for a basic itinerary that matches your pace. Request changes and additions

that suit you.

Step 4: Add the Details. Refine your plan, asking Claude for added details and specifics.

Looking Ahead: From Planning to Preserving

In our next article, we'll continue following Margaret's journey as she discovers how to:

Use Luminar AI to enhance her travel photos.

Work with Claude to write engaging stories of her experiences.

Create a captivating cover for her Trip Book using Canva's AI-powered design tools.

With help from AI, she (and you) will end up with a treasured keepsake that captures not just photos, but the stories, feelings, and discoveries that make travel so enriching. The key to accomplishing all this is knowing how to have productive conversations with your AI assistants—a skill you've already started to develop through this travel planning project.

Carolee Duckworth's unique blend of technology insight, travel expertise, and understanding of retirement life and living makes her a leading voice in helping retirees embrace new adventures, both in the real world and the digital realm. Her upcoming book, *"AI for Seniors: Embracing AI, Lifelong Learning & Discovery after 60"* will be available on Amazon Fall of 2025. ♦

HOW TO FIND A SUITABLE FUNERAL HOME

Planning a funeral can be a challenging and emotional process. Choosing the right funeral home is a crucial step in ensuring that your loved one's final arrangements are handled with care, respect, and professionalism. Here's a guide to help you find a funeral home that meets your needs.

UNDERSTAND YOUR NEEDS

Before beginning your search, outline your requirements. Consider:

Type of service: Will it be a traditional funeral, cremation, memorial, or celebration of life?

Cultural or religious preferences: Ensure the funeral home can accommodate specific traditions.

Budget: Determine what you can afford and look for a provider that offers transparent pricing.

SEEK RECOMMENDATIONS

Ask friends, family members, or clergy for recommendations. Personal experiences can provide valuable insight into the quality of service and care offered by a funeral home.

Research Local Options

Look for funeral homes in your area. Online directories, reviews, and official websites can give you a sense of their offerings and reputation. Pay attention to customer feedback about professionalism, compassion, and facility cleanliness.

Verify Credentials

Ensure the funeral home is licensed and



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



staffed by qualified professionals. Licensing requirements vary by state or country, so check with local regulatory bodies if you're unsure.

Visit the Facility

Schedule a visit to the funeral home to:

Assess cleanliness and ambiance.

Meet the staff and evaluate their professional-

ism and empathy.

Review available spaces, such as viewing rooms, chapels, and reception areas.

ASK QUESTIONS

Prepare a list of questions to better understand the services and costs, such as:

What packages do you offer?

Are there additional fees or hidden costs?

Can I customize the service?

How do you handle special requests or accommodations?

REVIEW PRICING

Funeral homes are required by law (in the U.S., under the Federal Trade Commission's Funeral Rule) to provide a general price list upon request. Compare pricing from multiple providers to ensure transparency and affordability.

CONSIDER LOCATION AND ACCESSIBILITY

Choose a funeral home that is conveniently located for family and friends who will attend the services. Ensure the facility is accessible to individuals with mobility challenges.

EVALUATE PERSONAL CONNECTION

The funeral director and staff should make you feel comfortable and supported. Their compassion and willingness to listen are essential during such a sensitive time.

TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS

After considering all factors, trust your instincts. If a particular funeral home feels right and aligns with your needs, it's likely a good choice.

CONCLUSION

Finding a suitable funeral home requires careful consideration of your needs, budget, and preferences. By taking the time to research and visit options, you can ensure that your loved one receives a dignified farewell and that your family feels supported throughout the process. ♦

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Medicare and Taxes: What You Need to Know during Tax Season

by Stefan Johnson

As we are busy with tax season, many Medicare beneficiaries may be wondering how their healthcare expenses impact their taxes. While Medicare itself is not taxable, certain medical expenses may be tax-deductible. Understanding these tax implications can help you maximize deductions and potentially reduce your tax bill. This article does not give the final word relating to taxes... I suggest every-

one have a tax advisor; this article will give you some things to discuss with him or her.

1. Is Medicare Taxable?

Medicare benefits are not taxable. However, some Medicare-related expenses can impact your taxes in other ways.

2. What Medicare-Related Tax Deductions are Available?

- Medicare Part B (Medical Insurance): The monthly premium for Part B is tax-deduct-

ible if you itemize deductions and meet IRS medical expense requirements.

- Medicare Part C (Medicare Advantage) and Part D (Prescription Drug Plans): Premiums for these plans may also be deductible as a medical expense.

- Medigap (Medicare Supplement plans): If you have a Medigap policy, these premiums are also deductible.

- In addition to Medicare premiums, you can deduct a vari-

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ety of medical costs, including:

- Doctor visits and hospital stays
- Dental and vision care
- Prescription drugs and insulin
- Medical equipment (wheel-chairs, hearing aids, CPAP machines, etc.)
- Home healthcare services
- Transportation costs to and from medical appointments (mileage, parking, or public transit fares)

Medical expenses which are not deductible include:

- Over-the-counter medications (unless prescribed by a doctor)
- General health items like vitamins or supplements

- Most cosmetic procedures

It is important to note that any amount which is paid or reimbursed under an HSA, FSA, Archer MSA, or HRA cannot be deducted as a medical expense on the taxpayer's federal income tax return.

3. Should I Use my Medicare and Medical Expense Deductions on My Taxes?

To claim the medical expense deduction, you must itemize your deductions; but you cannot itemize if you make use of the Standard Deduction. Normally, you should only claim the medical expenses deduction if your itemized deductions are greater than your Standard Deduction. With

current tax laws, most people do NOT at this time itemize deductions, but, again... it is wise to consult with your tax advisor.

Here are some important rules to keep in mind:

- The 7.5% Threshold: You can deduct medical expenses only if they exceed 7.5% of your Adjusted Gross Income (AGI). For example: If your AGI is \$50,000, you can only deduct medical expenses that exceed \$3,750 (7.5% of \$50,000).
- Itemizing vs. Standard Deduction: To claim medical deductions, you must itemize your deductions on Schedule A of Form 1040 instead of taking the standard deduction.

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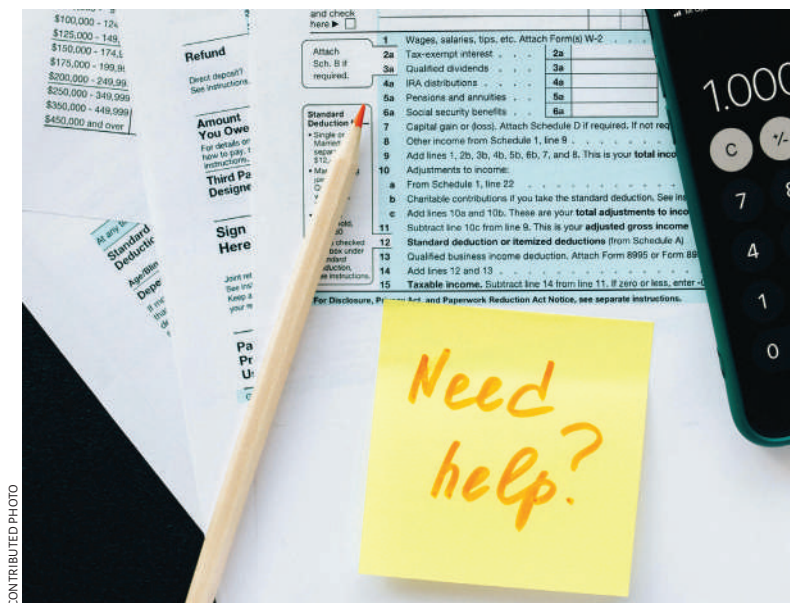
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4. Medicare Premium Surcharges and Tax Considerations

Some high-income Medicare beneficiaries pay higher premiums for Part B and Part D under Income-Related Monthly Adjustment Amounts (IRMAA). If your modified adjusted gross income (MAGI) exceeds certain thresholds, you'll pay more for Medicare.

For 2024, these income brackets are based on your 2022 tax return. If your income was above: \$103,000 (single) or \$206,000 (married filing jointly), you'll pay higher premiums.

If you had a life-changing event that reduced your income—such as retirement or the loss of a spouse—you can appeal IRMAA adjustments by filing Form SSA-44 with the Social Security Administration.

There are ways to legally and ethically keep your IRMAA “score” down. And the earlier in the planning process, the more

you can do to lower your IRMAA. With several years of planning, a good financial adviser can oftentimes lower the IRMAA hit that a client pays. That is too big of a topic for this article; (at the risk of sounding like a broken record) see a high-quality financial advisor. Be sure to ask him or her what can be done to keep your IRMAA rating as low as possible.

5. Medicare and Tax-Free Health Savings Accounts (HSAs)

If you're enrolled in Medicare, you can no longer contribute to a Health Savings Account (HSA). However, you can still use funds from an existing HSA to pay for Medicare Part B premiums, deductibles, copayments, prescription drugs, and other qualified medical expenses tax-free. You cannot use an HSA to pay Medigap premiums.

If you're approaching Medicare eligibility and have an HSA, consider maxing out contributions

before enrolling to continue enjoying tax-free withdrawals for healthcare expenses. To avoid a tax penalty, be sure to stop contributing at least six months before you start Medicare.

Conclusion

Medicare may not be taxable, but it can play an important role in your tax situation. Whether you're looking to deduct premiums, manage healthcare costs, or navigate Medicare surcharges, understanding these tax implications can help you save money.

As you prepare your taxes, take the time to review your medical expenses, determine whether you qualify for deductions, and explore strategies for reducing taxable income in future years. If you're unsure about your specific situation, consult a Medicare professional, financial advisor, and tax professional.

By staying informed and organized, you can ensure that you're making the most of your Medicare benefits while minimizing your tax burden.

Stefan Johnson helps people choose Medicare Advantage, Supplement, Cost, and Prescription Drug plans. He is licensed in Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Minnesota and represents several companies providing Medicare-related products. He can be reached at 563-581-9341 or sj@retiringease.com. Stefan is not affiliated with Medicare, nor with the government. ♦

HOW TO OPTIMIZE THE CLOUD STORAGE ON YOUR PHONE



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

by Alison Vanderpool

Our phones are our lifelines: our cameras, computers, communication devices, and navigation tools. They help us capture precious memories, keep track of important documents, and connect us to the world. But all that data takes up space, both on our devices and in the “cloud.” Cloud storage offers a convenient backup and sharing solution, but it can quickly become confusing and even expensive. Whether you’re an iPhone or an Android user, these tips will help you maximize your cloud storage.

Storage Units

How much is enough? How do

I know how much I need? Data stored both on your phone and in the cloud is measured in gigabytes (GB). Phones today are typically sold with a built-in storage range from 16GB-512GB, with the option to utilize cloud storage as a way to keep backups or extra data. The typical culprit for data abduction is our camera roll. Photos, videos, accidental duplicates, and screenshots, often unknowingly take up storage space for smartphone users. On average, a photo utilizes about 5MB (0.005GB). A basic photographer may only need 1 GB for around 200 photos, while a social media mogul may require closer to 30GB

for 6,000 photos. It is certainly a place to check for overflow if you’re ever being warned of dwindling storage space.

Apple vs. Android

iPhones primarily use iCloud, offering a limited amount of free storage (usually 5GB to start). Android users often rely on Google Drive, which also provides a free tier and various subscription options. Other cloud services like Dropbox, OneDrive, and Amazon Photos are available for both platforms, each with its own pricing structure and features. Whether or not to invest is completely up to your individual needs. Some upgrades may only cost \$1/month adding 50GB of storage, which as discussed before can free up some space for some more pictures, if that’s what you’re collecting.

Clean up the Clutter

The first step to conserving cloud storage is a digital declutter. Regularly review your photos, videos, and files. Delete duplicates, blurry shots, and anything you no longer need. This simple act can free up significant space both on your device and in your cloud storage. Consider using your phone’s built-in tools for identifying and deleting similar photos. Both iPhones and Androids offer settings to optimize their storage. On iPhones, you can choose “Optimize iPhone Storage” in iCloud Photos settings. This keeps lower-resolution versions on your device

while the originals are stored in iCloud. Android users can explore similar options within Google Photos, such as “Storage Saver” (formerly “High quality”), which compresses photos and videos while maintaining reasonable quality.

Still Need More Space?

If you still find yourself run-

ning out of cloud storage, consider upgrading to a paid plan. Compare the pricing and features of different cloud providers to find the best fit for your needs. There are also ways to store things out of the cloud and keep them on Earth, like on your computer, on an external storage drive, or by printing

and storing them in a photo album or binder. ❖

Alison Vanderpool, M.S.Ed. is a Realtor with EPIQUE Realty. She can be contacted at 815-275-5114, AlisonVanderpool@epique.me. You can visit her Facebook page at [Facebook.com/yourkey2access](https://www.facebook.com/yourkey2access).



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Downsizing to a SMALLER HOME



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As retirement approaches, many older adults find themselves thinking about downsizing to a smaller home. Whether it's to reduce maintenance, lower expenses, or simply to simplify their lifestyle, this transition can be both exciting and daunting. However, before taking the plunge into a smaller living space, there are several important steps older adults should consider to ensure a smooth and successful downsizing process.

DECLUTTER AND ORGANIZE

Downsizing often means moving from a larger space to a more compact one, so it's crucial to declutter and organize belongings before making the move. Start by going through each room and sorting items into categories: keep, donate/sell, and discard. Consider the size and layout of your new home and be realistic about what items you'll have space for. Sentimental items can be the most difficult to part with,

but it's important to prioritize what truly adds value to your life and let go of the rest. If necessary, enlist the help of family members or professional organizers to make the process more manageable.

ASSESS YOUR NEEDS AND LIFESTYLE

Before downsizing, take some time to reflect on your current and future needs and lifestyle preferences. Consider factors such as mobility, accessibility, and proximity to amenities and support services. Do you require a home with fewer stairs or wider doorways? Are you looking for a community with social activities and amenities tailored to older adults? By identifying your priorities and must-haves, you can narrow down your search for a smaller home that meets your specific needs and preferences. Ad-



ditionally, think about whether you plan to age in place or if you may need to factor in potential future care needs when choosing a new home.

CREATE A FINANCIAL PLAN

Downsizing can offer financial benefits, such as reduced mortgage or rent payments, lower utility bills, and decreased maintenance costs. However, it's essential to carefully consider the financial implications of downsizing before making any decisions. Create a comprehensive financial plan that considers your current assets, income, expenses, and long-term goals. Factor in one-time costs associated with moving, such as real estate commissions, closing costs, and moving expenses, as well as ongoing expenses in your new home. Consult with a financial advisor to ensure that downsizing aligns with your overall financial strategy and retirement goals.

PLAN FOR THE TRANSITION

Moving to a smaller home involves more than just packing up your belongings and relocating. It's a significant life transition that requires careful plan-

ning and preparation. Start by creating a timeline for the move and breaking down tasks into manageable steps. Research moving companies or consider enlisting the help of friends and family to assist with packing and transporting belongings. If you're selling your current home, work with a real estate agent who has experience

with senior clients and understands your unique needs and preferences. Additionally, take the time to familiarize yourself with your new neighborhood and community to ease the transition and help you feel at home.

In conclusion, downsizing to a smaller home can be a rewarding and liberating experience for seniors, but it requires careful planning and consideration. By decluttering and organizing belongings, assessing needs and lifestyle preferences, creating a financial plan, and planning for the transition, seniors can ensure a smooth and successful downsizing process. With the right preparation and support, downsizing can be the beginning of an exciting new chapter in life. ♦





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Even arthritic hands can use an ergonomic hand tool and keep the wrist straight to avoid injury.

Make sure your hand tools are the right size for your hands.

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED BY TRACEY RUSH

HOW ADAPTIVE GARDENING HELPS US GARDEN AS WE AGE

by Tracey Rush

As we age, we find ourselves giving up certain things like jumping out of trees, eating a tub of ice cream in one sitting and in some cases, driving at night. Even if you have downsized your living quarters, gardening does not have to be one of the things you sacrifice as you age. Science has proven that digging our hands into soil produces serotonin and dopamine, both of which make us happy. However, bending over to pull weeds for hours on end, resulting in back aches does not make us happy. Here are some tools and methods to help us

continue to enjoy gardening.

WORK SMARTER, NOT HARDER

First things first: take care how you move. Pamela Rear-don, owner of Annie's Heirloom Seeds in Madison, Wisconsin advises seniors to do a series of stretching exercises to warm up their muscles and joints before heading to the garden. Take frequent breaks, stay hydrated, and garden in the cool of the morning.

Dr. Neal Rolwes of Fullness of Life Chiropractic in Dubuque also advocates for resting. "Taking breaks is important to let the muscles regain their endurance since many injuries stem from overcompensating to

and stress or strain." He adds, "Avoid injuries by making sure you keep your spine and neck straight. When standing, use long-handled tools to maintain good posture and ensure even muscle workload by alternating between your right and left side while using them."

Long-handled tools are useful whether you are gardening in-ground or in raised beds or containers. Hoes, cultivators, and shovels now come with ergonomic handles so there is less bending as you work. For digging holes, use an auger that attaches to your drill to skip the shoveling all together. Use a padded kneeler that dou-

bles as a seat when you flip it over. Make sure it's sturdy and on level ground before you sit. Last year, I gave up my clumsy wheelbarrow and switched to a 4-wheeled yard cart with wide wheels and a light-weight lift.

USE THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB

Even if you are gardening in small spaces, choose hand tools that are safe and won't put your hands and wrists at a disadvantage. Look for ergonomic tools with a curved handle to keep your wrist straight and not cause injury. Dr. Rolwes says, "Comfortable hand tools when sitting or kneeling can help keep us from overworking the wrists and elbows which are most protected when used closer to the body and di-

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rectly in front of us rather than out to the side with the elbows up at a high angle.”

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN SHOPPING TOOL:

Lightweight but sturdy

Rubberized handles for easy gripping. You can also put grip tape on your existing tools (the same kind of tape you would put on your pickleball racquet, so it does not go flying across the court with an energetic swing). Or wrap some pipe insulation around the handle

GARDEN GLOVES WITH RUBBER GRIPS

Pruners or trimmers that are spring-loaded

Guards that protect your

hand from slipping onto the sharp part (like for knives)

Tools that fit YOUR hand. It is very important to try out a tool before purchasing it to make sure it will fit you and that you can easily work it. Just yesterday I was shopping for a ratchet pruner and trying (without success) to open the display model. The brawny young whippersnapper behind the counter kept saying, “Just squeeze it and it will pop right open.” I was and it wasn’t. I tried another brand that worked much easier for me and my apparently limited hand strength.

Look for tools with nuts and bolts and not rivets. Keep them clean, sharp, and in good

repair.

CONTAINERS AND RAISED BEDS

Where we plant is as important as how we plant. Raised beds are a wonderful alternative to in-ground gardening. They come in all shapes and sizes but gardening in taller beds and containers is better for your back. Choose a bed that is high enough and narrow enough for you to plant, weed, water, and harvest without undo strain. If you are building your own beds, consider adding a horizontal board along the top to serve as a seat.

Planter beds on legs that make them waist height are ideal for patios and decks. You can pack a lot of plants into even the small ones. Make sure there are drainage holes in the bottom, and either move it to where you want before you fill it with soil or add wheels so it can be easily moved.

Make good use of your patio or deck by planting in pots. In addition to a wide range of flowers, there are a lot of vegetables and herbs that can be grown in containers. Leafy greens like spinach, lettuce, arugula, kale, and collards do well in containers, as do bush beans, eggplant, radishes, peppers, garlic, and determinant tomatoes. You can also grow peas if you provide some trellising.

I can personally attest to the fact that most herbs do great in containers. I’ve grown sage, oregano, several kinds of basil, chamomile, parsley, dill,

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PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED BY TRACEY RUSH



Portable planters like this Vigoroot Self-watering planter make growing a kitchen garden easy.

and many others with success. I love being able to step outside and pick some fresh herbs for dinner!



This retractable pendant light has a grow light bulb for starting seeds indoors.

TV/radio host, author, and columnist Melinda Myers has been growing fruit, vegetables, and herbs in containers for

years. Myers advises making sure your pots are the right size for root growth of your plants. Pots for radishes need to be only 4"-6" deep, beets need a minimum of 8", and carrots at least 10", depending on the variety. Indeterminant tomatoes need a 5-gallon pot, determinant only 2-gallons. For potatoes, 5-gallon pots or grow bags work well in small spaces; Myers recommends three potatoes per bag. For other vegetables, "one plant per 5-gallon pot is more productive, but combinations of plants in the same pot will give you more variety and beauty," says Myers. Whether you are planting fruit, vegetables, herbs, or flowers,

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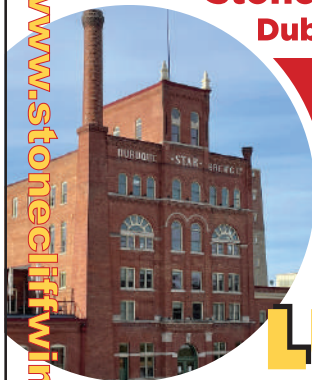
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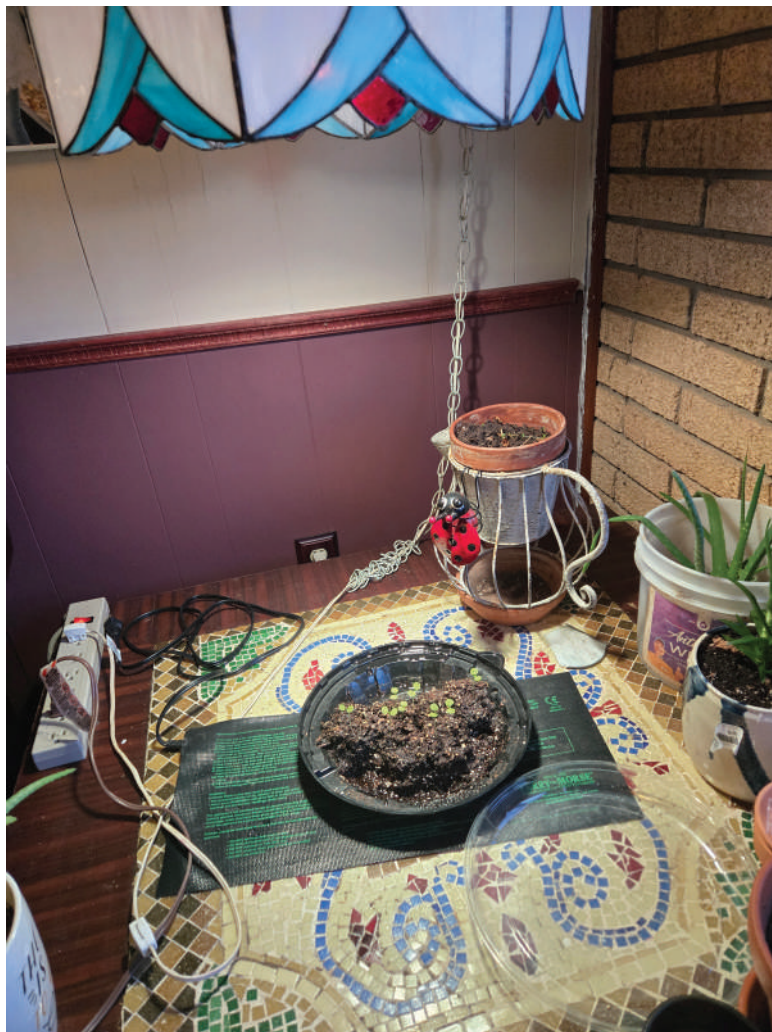


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both Reardon and Myers highly recommend “compact” or “dwarf” varieties.

When those pots are filled with soil, they can get heavy. If you do not need a lot of depth for roots putting fillers like pool noodles in the bottom works well but Myers recommends putting landscape fabric between the noodles and the soil, so your roots are not growing among the noodles. Another option is to use planter inserts that are available in self-watering models. I cannot recommend wheeled dollies enough. A pot-lifter harness works well if you have two people to move your pots or just need handles if you are moving one by yourself. My birthday wish list includes a Plant Caddy Plant Dolly with an adjustable grabbing arm.

Consider a vertical planter if you want to grow a lot in very little space. Vertical planters come in a variety of sizes and models and some include built-in compost and top tray watering. Again, get the wheels that go underneath since you may need to rotate it every few days to expose all sides to the sun. Use a good quality soil mix in vertical planters. Luke from MIgardener suggests when using a planter with a watering reservoir on top: put the plants that need more water on the bottom layer and the ones that need less water near the top. It sounds counterintuitive but that is how those plant-



A clip-on grow light on a 42" high planter works well for year-round lettuce indoors.

ers work, thanks to gravity. Luke also recommends filling each tier with soil before stacking them as filled tiers click in to place much easier than empty ones.

INDOOR GARDENING

With the right lighting, all sorts of crops can be grown in a pot or planter inside. Kitchen herb gardens are popular if you have a sunny window or grow lights. I have used both portable grow lights and a grow bulb in an adjustable pendant lamp to grow pots of lettuce and even

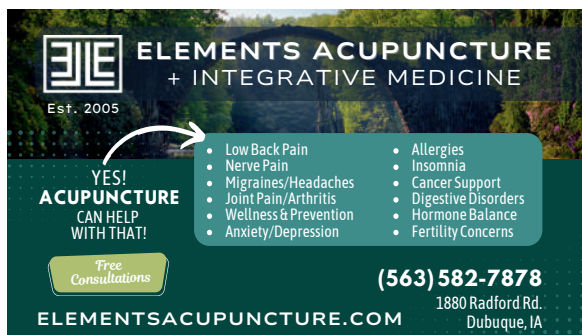
bush beans indoors during the winter. Vegetables that are self-pollinating or do not need pollinating can be grown indoors, like beans, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, corn, kohlrabi, onions, peppers, beets, onions, radishes, parsnips, and horseradish.

We have a lot of options to continue gardening as we adjust and adapt to our changing abilities and space. By being smart about what, where, and how we grow, it can be a life-long joy. ♦

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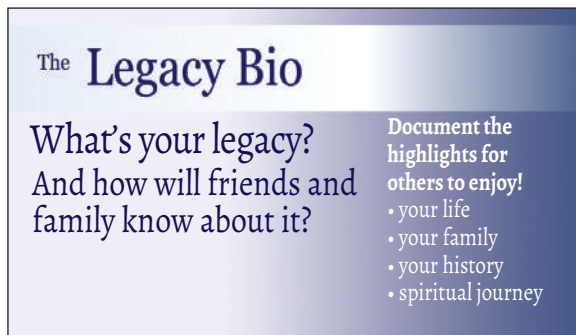
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