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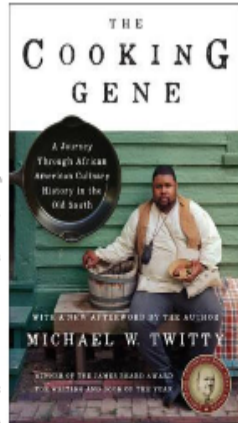
In the Community

By Sandra Pratt

This month I am sharing three of my passions with you - cooking, reading, and gardening. Each of these activities has an important place in my life, bring me joy, provide stress relief and are part of my self-care.

April is National Garden Month, and it is the time of year when those of us with a garden are clearing it up, prepping the soil and planning what to plant. Some have already planted some early spring crops - I have kale and broccoli in the ground. Last year when we went into lockdown many people decided to plant gardens whether it was out of a fear for possible food scarcity or just the desire to get back to our roots. I have friends who planned their own versions of a COVID- garden, and it was nice to see them excited about their bounty of tomatoes, cucumbers, and squash. Some even compared this gardening movement to the victory gardens of World War II when Americans grew food to feed their families and support the war effort. When I was growing up we always had a garden, and it was no small garden as we had everything from potatoes, corn, peas, tomatoes, and beans just to name some of the veggies. At the end of summer I had

in the kitchen helping my mom can and put everything "up for the winter". In these hot summer days when we were boiling potatoes and canning tomatoes I remember thinking to myself, "when I grow up I will NEVER have a garden!" get here I am. There is something so appealing about digging in the ground and connecting with the growing process from seed to harvest that is just so rewarding and satisfying. Of course, it can be easier and sometimes even cheaper to just go to the grocery store and buy a tomato, but no tomato will ever taste as delicious and juicy as the one you grow yourself.



Cooking is something I have had enjoyed for a long time, and cooking for others make me so happy! I am an avid watcher of the Food Network (the actual cooking shows not the competitions), a HGTV Rachel Ray fan (I know Heidi changed how I cooked) and during the pandemic I even started my own Instagram

account featuring my cooking (follow me on whatsuponcooking!). I love being in my kitchen fixing meals whether it be meal prepping or cooking Sunday brunch (LOVE brunch - I make a pretty great quiche). When you grow your own food there is nothing more rewarding than seeing it progress from the garden to your table. Fresh food is the best food!

If you do not have the luxury of space to have your own garden and it does not take much space - think container gardening - then you can visit the many local farmers markets in our area to enjoy locally grown produce. There is an organization in our area who is a leader in the regional food system and collaborates to create positive change in food, agriculture, and the environment. Local Environment Agriculture Project (LEAP) started in 2008 originally as a project of the Roanoke Natural Foods Co-op. Currently LEAP operates the Grandin Village Farmers Market, West End Farmers Market, and the LEAP Mobile Market. All the markets feature locally produced products with an emphasis on organic, sustainable,

and human produced, products and practices. The products sold at markets are produced within 100 miles of their market locations. All of the markets have Healthy Food Incentive Programs (Fresh Foods Rx, Farm Shares) and accept SNAP-EBT (food stamps), Medicaid, and WIC benefits. In addition to farmers markets LEAP also oversees community gardens in Roanoke City and with the assistance of many community partners and funders set up LEAP Kitchens, a shared commercial kitchen and food business incubator. Local food is all about the community: producers, consumers, business, community partners, and food advocates. It takes the support of all to sustain a local food system in our area, and LEAP has been a great connector for all. Check them out at <https://leapforlocalfood.org>

So you might be thinking where does the reading part come in? I have always had a passion for reading and it has been a big part of who I am since I was a little girl. Growing up getting books from the traveling bookmobile during the summer was one of the highlights of my week! These past

months I have read more than ever to escape into the pages of a "good book" during the lockdown. I joined national book clubs to connect with people across the country while my local book club (what else to the Van Burn Gang!) continued to meet virtually to stay connected. One of those groups, The Roanoke Change Academy had just started reading The Cooking Gene by Michael Twitty when we went to print. The Change Academy is a group of readers who are exploring topics around racism, inequality, inequalities, and learning and doing more together to make our community a better place for all. We are working on changing policies, minds, and hearts across the region, and we are becoming more informed to better do it. This discussion is being held in partnership with LEAP as we read about food, place, history, heritage, access, and get ready for another season of local food and connection with the season opening for the farmers' markets on April 17. The discussion of this book is bringing together so many things that are important to me - history, cooking, sharing food and community. Come join us in this journey!



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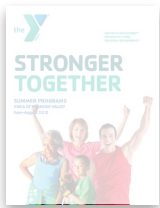
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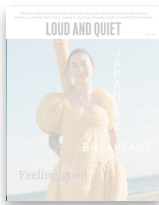
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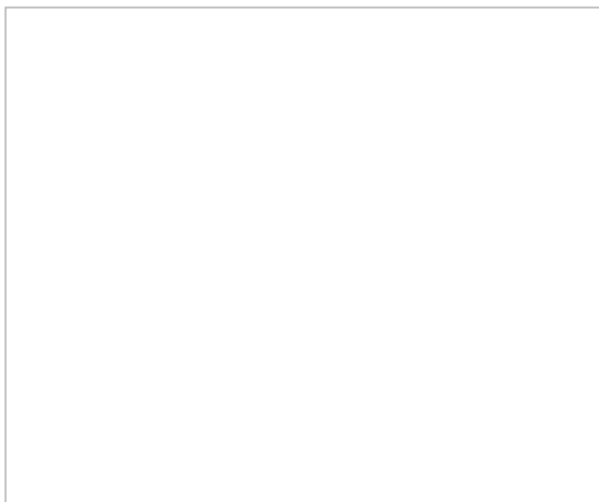
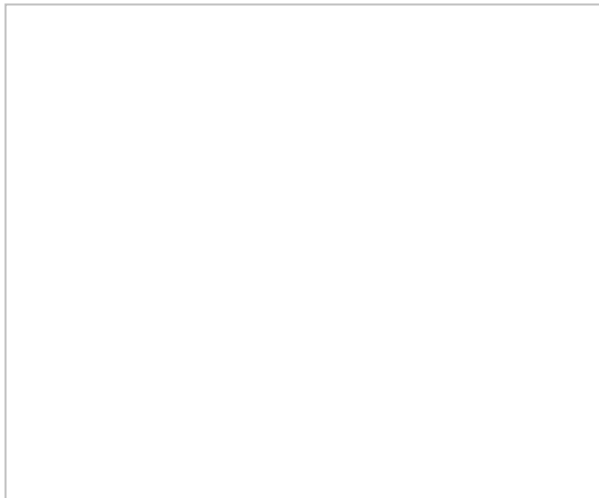
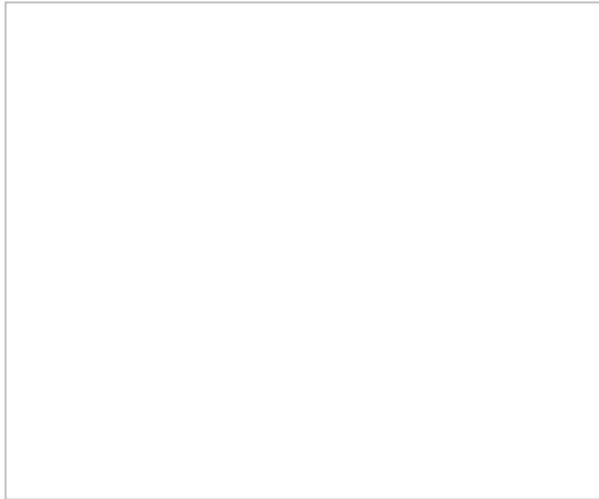
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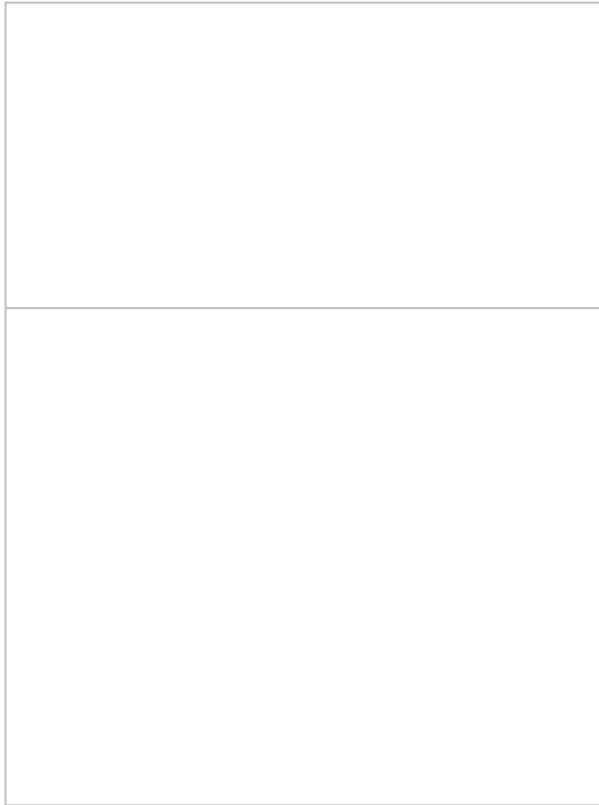


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