

MAY/JUNE 2026

CONNECTION

Time-Honored Tradition

Macon County
Hillbilly Days



YEARS

TRILIGHT MOBILE

REDEMPTION
RECIPES

Get the Support You Need and Avoid Tech Support Schemes



Adobe Stock image by keppinon

These days, you don't have to be a technophobe to get fooled by scams. As criminals become more sophisticated, their messages and approaches have become convincing enough to fool anyone.

That's especially true if you think your computer might be at risk. Tech support scammers often tell elaborate stories to convince people they need to hand over their financial information or remote access to their digital devices.

The Federal Trade Commission offers advice for times you're unsure about someone claiming to offer technical support and provides steps you can take to protect yourself.

Real tech companies aren't in the habit of reaching out by phone, email or text message every time your computer might have a problem. If someone does, that's a red flag.

Legitimate security pop-ups and messages will never tell you to call a phone number for help. If your computer's security software detects a legitimate problem, it will likely recommend a virus scan and walk you through the process.

Look out for language telling you to move money to "protect it." Scammers may suggest depositing money in a "federal safety locker" or buying gold to give to someone. These protections are fake, and a real government employee will not demand payment in gold or cash. 📧

Plan a StayCation

Taking a break doesn't necessarily mean long drives or booking a flight and a pricey hotel. Often, there are a wealth of adventures close to home, which means there's an affordable summer staycation right outside your door.

Here are a few tips to consider:

BE A TOURIST

Pop online and check out travel sites like TripAdvisor for your area. Are you overlooking destinations closest to you? Make a short list of nearby stops and plan a visit. You may be surprised by what you find.

GEOCACHING

Check your preferred app store for a geocaching app and prepare to enjoy real-world puzzle solving. Often, you'll be guided to a nearby state or national park where clues will challenge you to find hidden caches.

VIRTUAL CONCERTS

Find a cozy spot and enjoy a virtual concert—as a bonus, there are no crowds. Options include YouTube Live Concerts or NPR's Tiny Desk Concerts. Both serve a range of musical tastes. And look for genre

specific options like K-Love OnDemand, which features Christian artists. All are typically free.

A FAMILY OLYMPICS

Do you need to keep the kids moving? Organize a family Olympics. Go to a local park and choose events to suit all ages and abilities. Then, post your results on your favorite social media and challenge family and friends to join the fun. 📧



Adobe Stock image by master1305

Hit the Books

Online troves await digital bookworms

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

There are few better ways to escape the heat and humidity than with a classic summer read. Finding your next great adventure has never been easier with the vast digital libraries available on the internet. Whether you're looking to relax with your favorite e-reader or find an audiobook for a long road trip, you can start reading and listening today.

PROJECT GUTENBERG

Since 1971, a veritable army of volunteer book nerds has been expanding and maintaining this digital archive of classic reads as they enter the public domain. Today, the Project Gutenberg library includes over 75,000 free e-books that you can download and read in a web browser or on most mobile devices. While you won't find the latest best-sellers on Project Gutenberg, it is an excellent place to return to classics like "Pride and Prejudice" or "Moby Dick" without paying a cent.

LIBBY AND HOOPLA

Your library card is already a passport to free reads, but did you know it may also hold the key to a treasure trove of digital books and audiobooks? Apps like Libby and Hoopla let you borrow books and audiobooks from participating libraries around the world simply by linking your card to an account. Check out popular reads on your phone, tablet or browser, but don't take too long. Just like with your local library, you can only borrow them for a limited time.

LIBRIVOX

If you prefer to sit back and let someone read to you, or if you just

don't have the time to sit down with a book, LibriVox is your friend. You can find audiobooks, in various languages, recorded by volunteers worldwide. Much like Project Gutenberg, all LibriVox audiobooks are in the public domain. Audio quality and reading styles can vary widely from one title to the next, but if you're looking for a free repository of classic audiobooks read by real people, LibriVox has you covered.

Whether you want to dig into a timeless classic, settle in with the latest thriller or listen to a new favorite while tidying up, there have never been more ways to find free books online. Happy reading! 📖

THE WIDE WORLD OF PODCASTS

It's easy to see why podcasts have become so popular in the last decade. Most are free, they're easy to find and the variety of topics means you're bound to find something that speaks to you.

If you aren't sure where to start, platforms like Apple Podcasts, Spotify and iHeartRadio host thousands of podcasts that explore science, business, comedy, narrative fiction and so much more. Try top-ranked shows or go searching for deep dives on your favorite topics.

Leveling the Playing Field

Thanks to NCTC and Trilight Mobile, opportunities abound

When we talk about broadband, we often start with the hardware, including the cables, the trucks on the road and the servers humming away in a secure room. But while those pieces are important chapters, they are not the whole story.



**JOHNNY
MCCLANAHAN**
President/CEO

The bigger picture appears when you open your laptop, pick up your mobile phone or power up a tablet. It comes to life when you connect with someone, learn something new or share a piece of your day.

A recent report from the Pew Research Center shows just how connected our country has become. Today, about 96% of U.S. adults use the internet. That number may not surprise you. Most of us go online every day. Still, for rural communities like ours, that figure means something important. It shows we are closing the digital divide.

It means that whether you live on a back road, down a gravel driveway or right in the middle of town, you can participate in the same online world as someone living in a major city.

Pew's 2025 research also shows that 84% of adults use YouTube. Seventy-one percent use Facebook and about half use Instagram.


Those aren't just social media sites. They are modern gathering places where people learn, share and build connections.

At NCTC, our job is to make sure your connections are steady and ready when you need them. We handle the maintenance, the upgrades and the long-term planning, so your service is dependable.

Whether you use our broadband connection to learn a new skill, promote a local event, sell handmade goods or share family milestones with loved ones far from home, we're proud our cooperative helps make that possible. And you can count on us to keep moving forward with faster speeds, new services and always a focus on customer care.

In select areas, our fiber network is now available at a blazing-fast 8 Gig. With this speed your family can stream without buffering, game without lagging and reliably power all of the connected devices in your home.

Earlier this year, we launched Trilight Mobile, a cellular service that combines the power of nationwide coverage with NCTC's fiber network. With Trilight Mobile you get the reliable coverage you need with the same local customer care you know and trust.

Finally, recognizing your busy lifestyle, we have enhanced our website, nctc.com, to allow you to start your order online, any time, day or night. Of course, we're still here for you in person at our office locations, by email or phone. 

The North Central Connection is a bimonthly newsletter published by NCTC, © 2026. It is distributed without charge to all member/owners of the cooperative.



North Central is a member-owned corporation dedicated to delivering advanced telecommunications technology to the people of Northern Middle Tennessee and Southern Kentucky, including Macon County, Tennessee, and Allen County, Kentucky. NCTC also serves portions of Sumner, Trousdale, Smith and Clay counties in Tennessee. Through a partnership with Warren RECC, NCTC provides high speed internet to portions of Butler, Grayson, Edmonson and Warren counties in Kentucky.

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UTILITY RESOURCES

On the Cover:



Macon County Hillbilly Days celebrates 50 years of community and tradition June 18-20 in Lafayette, Tennessee.
See story Page 8.

Adobe Stock image by
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MEMORIAL DAY

Please join us in recognizing our fallen military heroes on Memorial Day. In observance of the holiday, our offices will be closed Monday, May 25.

NOTICE TO NORTH CENTRAL TELEPHONE CUSTOMERS

If you receive your home phone service through our state-of-the-art fiber optic network, it requires electric power to operate. To avoid a disruption of home voice service during a power outage—and to maintain the ability to connect to 911 emergency services—a standard corded phone is required.

Our battery backups are expected to last eight hours on standby power. That means the backup battery should give you about six hours of talk time. If you feel this is not enough time, you may extend your standby power by purchasing a 24-hour battery or additional eight-hour batteries. Our battery backup does not provide power to any services other than voice. Home security systems, medical monitoring devices, routers and other equipment will not run on a phone backup battery.

Unless you are otherwise notified in advance or in cases of abuse to our equipment, NCTC will maintain the power unit for three years from the date of installation.

CONGRATULATIONS, FELLISHA ADAMS

Fellisha Adams, NCTC's sales and marketing specialist, was recently named the Builders Association of South Central Kentucky 2025 Associate of the Year.

In addition to representing NCTC at the local association, Fellisha serves as chairperson of its strategic planning committee, and she is a director for the Home Builders Association of Kentucky. Additionally, she serves on the public relations committee with the Realtor Association of Southern Kentucky.

Warren County Judge Executive Doug Gorman presented Fellisha with the award.



RV There Yet.

Step off the beaten path at a campground

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

With remote work becoming more mainstream, it has never been easier to hit the road in a recreational vehicle. As more Americans realize the appeal of making their office a national park one day and a beach the next, 16.9 million households are interested in buying an RV in the next five years, according to the RV Industry Association.

“There are so many great things happening this year, from America’s 250th birthday to the World Cup,” says Monika Geraci, a spokesperson for Go RVing. “People are discovering that RVing is one of the best and most affordable ways to be a part of the action and see incredible places across the country.”

GETTING STARTED

When it comes to choosing an RV, there are options. At its most basic, you can pack a car with gear and head out. If you’re ready for more, renting an RV is a possibility. Of course you can also buy your own. About 90% of all RVs produced are towable, which can be an affordable solution.

When planning your first trip, Monika recommends staying close to home. Pick a destination just 30 or 40 miles away so you can learn how to work the water and power hookups in a low-stakes environment. The one challenge new campers shouldn’t stress about is backing up the RV.

“Everyone is a beginner once,” she says. “Most people in the RV community are incredibly helpful. If you’re struggling, a neighbor will likely offer to spot you.”

MAKING CAMP

Once you’re on the road, you’ll have plenty of pit stops to choose from. Deciding where to pull over and stretch your legs will mostly depend on the camping experience you want.

RV parks and resorts: These are the best sites for beginners and families. With amenities like pools, Wi-Fi and full hookups for your utilities, you’ll have everything you need to keep everyone comfortable and happy.

State and national parks: The place to be for anyone looking to get away from it all and enjoy some incredible scenery. Just don’t expect the same amenities and ease of use you’ll find at an RV park.

Off the beaten path: There are plenty of apps and online platforms that can help you find low-cost or even free “boondocking” options, meaning a dry camp without utility hookups. These can range from sites on private and public land to secluded spots that provide truly one-of-a-kind experiences. 📱



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Adobe Stock image by Non

THE 2-2-2 RULE

Burnout on long drives is a real concern for beginners and veterans alike. A good rule of thumb to keep from overdoing it is to travel in twos:

- Drive no more than 200 miles at a time.
- Arrive at your destination by 2 p.m.
- Stay for at least two nights.

Following the 2-2-2 Rule can help drivers stay fresh and ensure everyone has time to enjoy the destination, rather than watching the world through a windshield.

CAN'T-MISS STOPOVERS

Anchor Down RV Resort sits on Douglas Lake in Tennessee with views of the Great Smoky Mountains. Full-service sites with access to boating, paddling, fishing and scenic drives make it a perfect base for exploring the area.

If you're longing for something more coastal, don't skip **Topsail Hill Preserve State Park** in the Florida Panhandle. With a combination of dune lakes, beach access and convenient RV hookups, it blends natural beauty with biking, bird-watching and swimming excursions.

Macon County Hillbilly Days

Celebrating 50 years of music, tradition and community

Story by ALETIA DuPREE

Macon County Hillbilly Days celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, keeping the rhythm of summer in Lafayette with bluegrass and gospel performances, lawn chairs in the shade and neighbors lingering to catch up with one another. The festival mirrors the community itself, rooted in tradition, shaped by service and always ready to welcome another generation.

Billy “B.J.” Blankenship has known Hillbilly Days since its humble beginnings. He won the bubblegum-chewing contest as a child, collecting memories long before he ever imagined helping guide the festival.

Today, through his work with the Lions and Lioness clubs, B.J. helps lead an event that draws thousands of visitors. Some families plan vacations around the weekend, and guests travel from as far away as Canada and even the Philippines, all drawn by the warmth and hospitality that define Hillbilly Days.

COMMUNITY ROOTS

The event’s roots stretch back to the late 1970s, when Hillbilly Days began as a modest community gathering centered on music and fellowship. Stewardship later passed through local groups, including the Quarterback Club, before the Lions and Lioness clubs assumed leadership in the

mid-1990s. Since then, the festival continued to grow while staying grounded in its original purpose. “We listen,” B.J. says. “Every year, we talk about what worked, what didn’t and what we can do better.”

That commitment to listening and improving contributes to the festival’s longevity. To mark its 50th anniversary celebration, organizers are planning additional electrical access for vendors, pavilion upgrades, expanded activity space and more bands and special guests, including television personalities from Nashville.

Behind the music and fun is an important mission. Proceeds support the Lions Club’s charitable work throughout the year, which includes providing eyeglasses, eye exams, eye surgeries, hearing assistance, school backpacks and the Shop with a Cop program during the Christmas season.

One moment stands out to B.J. when, during a past festival, a visitor stopped simply to say thank you for the eyeglasses the Lions Club provided the year before. “That’s when you know it matters,” he says. “That’s what makes it all worthwhile.”

TATERS TO TUNES

Food is a central part of the Hillbilly Days experience, especially the Lions Club fish fry. Volunteers serve plates of fried fish while gospel music carries across



Lions Club member Angie Sullivan is all smiles in her overalls and sunflower hat.

the park. Hush puppies, made using Ericie Sisco’s recipe, are a perennial favorite. Although Ms. Ericie, as she was most often called, died in 2017, the beloved community member’s hush puppies are a tradition all their own. Slightly sweet, filled with chopped onions and fried until golden, they have a devoted following.

Festival favorites also include classic Southern comfort foods like kettle corn, blooming onions, pinto beans with cornbread and the festival’s famous taters, thick-cut potatoes sliced into quarters, dipped in pancake batter and deep-fried until golden. Guests are encouraged to save room for the hot fudge cake topped with ice cream. For many longtime attendees, the food alone is enough reason to mark their calendars each year.

Music anchors the weekend event, with bluegrass and gospel setting the tone.

Gary Reese, a former member of the Osborne Brothers band, returns each year to play bluegrass, connecting the festival's past and present through music. Throughout the weekend, fiddles, banjos and harmonicas fill the park as crowds gather under shade trees and along the pavilion to listen.

Once the music begins, it rarely stays on the stage. Buck dancers step forward, and before long, others are tapping, clapping and swaying right along, just as they have for decades. It is an unplanned moment that captures the heart of Hillbilly Days—tradition is lived, not staged.

FRIENDLY COMPETITIONS

That spirit carries into the festival's contests and activities. Popular events include junior and senior fiddle and banjo competitions, harmonica contests, buck dancing, an old-fashioned cakewalk,

cornhole tournaments, bounce houses and the beloved Itty Bitty Hillbilly pageant. The Hillbilly Hurl disc golf challenge continues to grow in popularity.

The Mister and Misses Hillbilly Contest remains a longtime crowd favorite, ending with a good-natured pie-in-the-face finale. Another cherished tradition is the annual search for the "hillbilliest" attendee. For years, this prize was claimed by Hobart Hauskins, who arrived each year in his trademark overalls and straw hat. Hobart passed away several years ago.

Admission is free, and festivalgoers are encouraged to bring lawn chairs, settle in and enjoy the food, music and fellowship. Easy parking and accessible paths help ensure the event remains welcoming to all.

As Macon County Hillbilly Days marks its 50th anniversary, it stands as a testament to neighbors helping neighbors,

FESTIVAL DETAILS

Macon County Hillbilly Days

June 18-20

Key Park, Lafayette



Bring a lawn chair and plan to stay a while. A full schedule of events will be posted to the Macon County Hillbilly Days Facebook page. For more information, contact Billy "B.J." Blankenship at bjblank1322@yahoo.com.

traditions honored and a community strengthened through service. What begins with music, food and laughter grows into something deeper: a shared legacy that continues to shape Lafayette for generations to come. 📱



ABOVE: The Luggnutts are Lafayette's self-proclaimed banjo-pickin', overall-wearin', bad-joke-tellin', crowd-pleasin' bluegrass bunch.

INSET: Rob Percy, left, is joined by a festivalgoer.

Wiener take all!

Dash to a dachshund race for a howling good time

Story by SARA DIAMOND PATTERSON

Can you see a wiener dog and not smile? Most people can't. With their extra-long bodies, wide smiles and constantly wagging tails, dachshunds just look silly. And they know it.

"Dachshunds make people smile because they're tiny dogs with huge personalities," says Debbie Kiker, dachshund enthusiast and director of Alabama's Hueytown Chamber of Commerce. "Watching them waddle and wiggle, it's impossible not to laugh—it's pure happiness on four short legs."

Developed in Germany to hunt badgers, dachshunds' powerful, slinky build, strong jaws and distinctively loud voices were perfect for that calling. Some 300 years later, they're more adept at burrowing into the covers and hunting down snacks. Today they're seeing success in a different sort of sport.

SPEED DEMONS

When you think of dachshunds, speed likely doesn't come to mind, but they can run up to 15-20 mph for very short distances. Some folks in Australia noticed this, and in the 1970s began what evolved into today's dachshund racing.

More chaos than competition, there's no official standard, but most race-courses are 50-100 yards long. Each dog has a two-person entourage. One handler waits at the starting line with a pup to send flying to the other, who motivates the racer with a squeaky toy, snack or just love at the finish line.

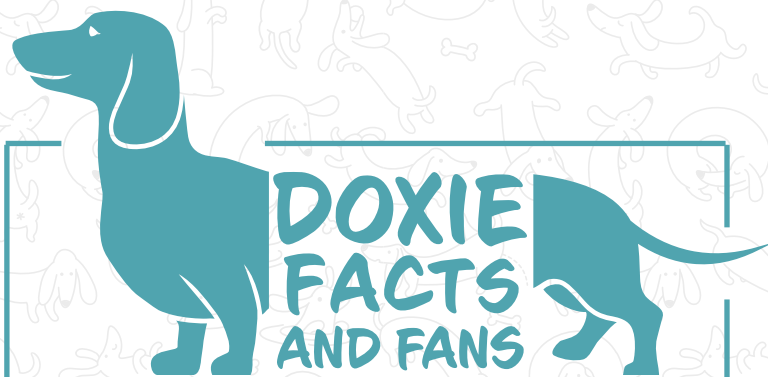
The Hueytown Chamber brings the doxies to town as part of PAW Palooza, a full day celebrating all things canine.

"What I love best about the weenie dog races is the smiles, and it brings the community together," Debbie says. "The dogs steal the show, and it's all just good, lighthearted fun. Just being involved is the fun of it all, seeing the dogs run, or wander, and the crowd cheering. Everyone is just enjoying the moment. Some dogs sprint, and some stop and sniff. Every run is a surprise."

The chamber is considering moving PAW Palooza to April, as September can be a little steamy for tiny-legged racers so close to the ground. For updates, find PAW Palooza & Wiener Dog Race on Facebook. [📱](#)



AI-generated image by Brandon Pomrenke/FreePik



DOXIE FACTS AND FANS

National Dachshund Day is June 21, the longest day of the year.

Napoleon Bonaparte was very fond of his dachshunds. The last four he owned are reportedly buried with him in the four pedestals holding his sarcophagus at Les Invalides in Paris.

John Wayne's dachshund, Blackie, alerted his family to a house fire in 1958 in Encino, California, while the actor was filming on location in Japan.

"Being the owner of dachshunds, to me a book on dog discipline becomes a volume of inspired humor. Every sentence is a riot."

—"Charlotte's Web" author E.B. White

"Nothing will turn a man's home into a castle more quickly and effectively than a dachshund."

—Queen Victoria

FAMOUS DACHSHUNDS

Crusoe

A miniature black and tan from Canada, Crusoe enjoys internet fame for his pet blog, New York Times' bestselling book and YouTube videos in homemade costumes. More than 3 million people follow him and his brother, Oakley, on Facebook.

Slinky Dog from 'Toy Story'

Part metal, part dog, all heart, Slinky Dog is quite possibly the most famous doxie of all, introducing generations of children to the breed.

Lump

Pablo Picasso was, by all accounts, smitten with his dachshund, Lump, and incorporated the pup into many of his later pieces.

Internet at the Speed of Life

Ensuring the connection to keep your home running smoothly

Today it is common for a household to have 20 or more devices connected to the internet. From laptops and smartphones to gaming consoles, security cameras and more, each connected device uses a portion of your home's bandwidth.

If used one at a time, the devices in your home may function at peak performance. But that's not how most households operate. While one member of the family is streaming a movie in the living room, the video doorbell is keeping an eye on the front porch, someone down the hall is listening to a playlist on a Bluetooth speaker and another member of the family is browsing the latest fashions online. If you really stop and think about how many devices your family uses simultaneously, you'll likely be surprised.

To stream in 4K without buffering, the recommended speed is 100 Mbps. And that's just one screen. Online gaming requires a stable, low-latency connection, while videoconferencing relies on strong upload speeds.

Toss in online research for school, scrolling social media, software updates, all of your connected security features and your voice assistant, the demand on your connection keeps adding up. It may be time to upgrade your broadband service.

PREPARING FOR WHAT'S NEXT

Technology is advancing by leaps and bounds. The months and years ahead are certain to bring new connected devices to your home. Upgrading to a higher broadband speed now gives you the assurance that you'll be ready for the future.

With increasing work-from-home and learn-from-home opportunities comes the need for video meetings, cloud-based software and reliable uploads and downloads. Higher speeds ensure that multiple family members can have a premium experience without interruptions.

Broadband is an essential part of the infrastructure of your home. With higher speed, you have peace of mind knowing that your internet connection is working reliably in the background, powering everything you do. 📺

MULTI-GIG INTERNET IS HERE

Meet 8-Gig fiber internet—NCTC's fastest speed. Futuristically fast speeds allow you to stream without buffering, game without lagging and power every device in your home with 100% fiber reliability.

SPEED OPTIONS

8 Gig \$134.95/mo.*

5 Gig \$129.95/mo.

2 Gig \$119.95/mo.

1 Gig \$99.95/mo.

300 Mbps \$89.95/mo.

100 Mbps \$79.95/mo.

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Some restrictions may apply. Limited time offer.

Learn more at nctc.com/blast
or call 615-666-2151

*\$134.95 per month for 12 months. Once the promotional period expires, the regular price is \$149.95 per month. Not available in all areas. Prices may vary. Restrictions may apply.



Celebrating 75 Years

NCTC brings you a new way to connect

Welcome to Trilight Mobile, a new cellular service from NCTC. Now you can enjoy the power of nationwide coverage paired with the local NCTC customer service you know and trust.

Whether you are close to home or traveling many miles away, Trilight Mobile is wireless done the NCTC way.

- National coverage with local support
- Straightforward pricing and transparent billing
- No long-term contracts

ANSWERING YOUR QUESTIONS

Does Trilight Mobile really provide nationwide coverage?

Yes. Whether you are inside our local area or travel outside our area, you are seamlessly connected to a major nationwide network.

Will I have good coverage locally?

Yes. Trilight Mobile utilizes the power of NCTC fiber internet and hot spot technology to deliver outstanding local coverage.

Will I have to get a new mobile phone number?

No. Your existing phone number can be transferred to your new Trilight Mobile account.

Will I have to get a new phone?

Most newer smartphones are compatible with Trilight Mobile. Our customer support team can check for you. However, we will carry the latest models if you wish to have a new phone.

Will my bill increase later?

With Trilight Mobile from NCTC, there are no teaser prices. Our plans are straightforward and transparent.


I need help with my Trilight Mobile service, who do I call?

With Trilight Mobile from NCTC, your calls are answered by the same local NCTC customer support team you know and trust.

Are there any special offers?

Give NCTC a call to learn how to get your first line free!

A lot has changed since NCTC was founded in 1951. Technology has advanced by leaps and bounds, providing us with exciting new ways to connect. What will never change is our commitment to our local community through dedicated customer service.

To learn more about Trilight Mobile, follow us on Facebook @NorthCentralTel or give us a call at 615-688-2355. 



LAFAYETTE
615-666-2151

WESTMORELAND
615-644-6282

SCOTTSVILLE
270-622-7500

BOWLING GREEN
270-936-7444



Redemption Recipes

Childhood dinner villains return as comfort-food heroes

Brussels sprouts, kale and other greens, peas, mushrooms or pickled beets. There's a long list of foods that grossed us out as kids. Sprouts were squishy. Greens were bitter. Peas were pushed to the side. Pickled beets were vinegary, and mushrooms were just strangely mushy.

So why is it that as we age, some of us grow to love those foods?

"As infants and children, we are born preferring sweet tastes," says registered dietitian Danielle Townsend. "As we age, our other taste senses develop, which opens up our palette to foods that we didn't like before."

Here are some ideas using those once-hated ingredients in dishes that just might become part of your regular dinner rotation.



**Food Editor
Anne P. Braly
is a native of
Chattanooga,
Tennessee.**

Photography by *Mark Gilliland*
Food Styling by *Rhonda Gilliland*

TUSCAN SPINACH CHICKEN

- | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|-----|-----------------------------|
| 1 | tablespoon olive oil | 1 | cup cherry tomatoes, halved |
| 4 | boneless skinless chicken breasts | 1 | teaspoon garlic powder |
| | Sea salt, to taste | 3 | cups baby spinach |
| | Ground black pepper, to taste | 1/2 | cup heavy cream |
| 1 | teaspoon oregano | 1/4 | cup Parmesan cheese, grated |
| 3 | tablespoons butter | | Lemon wedges, for serving |

Heat oil in a skillet over medium heat. Add chicken and season with salt, pepper and oregano. Cook until browned on both sides, about 8 minutes per side. Remove from the skillet and set aside.

In the same skillet over medium heat, melt butter. Add cherry tomatoes and season with salt, pepper and garlic powder. Cook until the tomatoes begin to soften, then add the spinach and cook until it starts to wilt.

Stir in heavy cream and Parmesan and bring mixture to a simmer. Reduce heat to low and simmer until sauce is slightly reduced, about 3 minutes. Return chicken to skillet and cook until heated through, 5 to 7 minutes. Serve with lemon wedges.





PEA SALAD WITH SMOKED ALMONDS

- 2 16-ounce packages frozen peas
- 6 ounces smoke-flavored almonds, finely chopped
- 1/2 sweet onion or more to taste, finely chopped
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise or reduced-fat mayonnaise
- 1/2 cup sour cream or light sour cream
- Ground black pepper, to taste
- 1/2-1 cup cheddar cheese, shredded

Place frozen peas in a colander and rinse under cold water until thawed. Drain and transfer to a large bowl. Add almonds and onions. Mix well. Fold mayonnaise, sour cream and black pepper into the pea mixture until evenly coated. Transfer to a serving container and top with shredded cheese. Cover and refrigerate until serving.

ROASTED BEET PANNA COTTA WITH CANDIED WALNUTS

- 1 pound beets, scrubbed with stems removed
- 1 teaspoon powdered gelatin
- 2 tablespoons water
- 2 cups heavy cream, divided
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice

CANDIED WALNUTS

- 1/2 cup walnuts
- 1/4 cup maple syrup

Preheat oven to 400 F.

Wrap each beet loosely in foil and roast on a baking sheet for 1 hour or until tender. Remove beets from the oven and set aside to cool.

Stir the gelatin and water together in a small bowl. Let soak for 5 minutes.

Peel and discard the beet skins and place flesh in a blender along with 1 cup heavy cream. Puree until smooth.

Combine the remaining cream with the sugar and lemon juice in a large pot over medium heat. Warm until the cream becomes hot to the touch, but not boiling. Add the softened gelatin, remove from heat and stir until dissolved. Add the pureed beet mixture to the pot and stir until combined. Pour into a desired vessel, such as a pie plate. Let chill completely before serving, at least 4 hours.

For the walnuts: Combine the walnuts and syrup in a saute pan over medium heat and cook the nuts, stirring constantly, until the sugar dries and crystallizes, about 5 minutes. Set the nuts aside to cool.

To serve, spoon the panna cotta into individual serving dishes and garnish with candied walnuts.



CHEESY BAKED BRUSSELS SPROUTS



- 5 slices bacon
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 2 small shallots, finely chopped
- 2 pounds Brussels sprouts, halved
- Kosher salt
- Cayenne pepper, to taste
- 3/4 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 cup Swiss or Gouda cheese, shredded
- 1/2 cup sharp cheddar cheese, shredded



Preheat oven to 375 F.

Cook bacon in a large ovenproof skillet over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until crispy, about 8 minutes. Using a slotted spoon,

transfer to a paper towel-lined plate and let cool slightly. Discard bacon fat.

Return the skillet to medium heat and melt butter. Add shallots and Brussels sprouts. Season with salt and cayenne. Cook, stirring occasionally, until tender, about 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, transfer bacon to a cutting board and finely chop.

Remove skillet from heat and drizzle with cream. Top with Swiss cheese, cheddar and bacon. Bake the casserole until the cheese is bubbly, 12 to 15 minutes.

NOTE: If the cheese isn't nicely browned, broil, watching closely, for about 1 minute.





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