

LIVING

MARTHA STEWART

FRIDAY-NIGHT
FISH FRY

60 DAYS OF
SUMMER

Amazing
things
to eat,
see
& do!

Easy
dinners,
delicious
sides,
next-level
desserts

DECORATING:
Wicker 2.0

How to keep
your home
cool & clean

July/August 2017
\$4.99 USA (CAN \$5.99)
marthastewart.com



THE SUMMER EFFECT

These loose, laid-back days have a quiet superpower: They naturally kick-start the healthy habits that will help you feel stronger, fitter, and sharper year-round. Go ahead and play like a kid, and be a regular at the farmers' market—it's the easiest time of year to become your best self.

TEXT BY LOUISA KAMPS

Light air, sunshine, long weekends, and much-anticipated vacation time are all invitations to slow way down this time of year. But as anyone who has taken a cool early-morning jog through slanted rays and a symphony of birdsong knows, summertime also makes staying healthy and active practically effortless. Here's how to experience the season to the fullest and reap its benefits for your well-being.

LEAN INTO LONGER DAYS

► Exposure to bright morning light has been linked to better mental health and more solid

sleep. Plus, exercising outside has benefits you just can't get thumping along, hamster-like, on your basement treadmill. Research has shown runners covering real hills and dales with wind resistance expend more energy and work more muscle groups than indoor runners do. Time outdoors also reboots our brains: We have two types of attention, experts say: "directed," the active kind we use when doing focused tasks in our desk-bound lives; and "involuntary," the effortless kind that flips on when our surroundings are inherently interesting or exciting. At a certain point, we deplete our capacity to actively direct our attention (which is why, after we've fielded 46 emails, figuring out dinner can feel impossible). But when we get outside and our involuntary, sensory-based system takes in the scent of fresh-mown grass or the sound of chirping crickets, the business part of our brain (aka the prefrontal cortex) appears to hit pause:

Studies consistently find that we feel revitalized, calmer, and more able to think clearly. So rise with the sun and take a walk, and stroll again after dinner. "You don't have to be in a perfectly scenic place," says Florence Williams, author of *The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative* (W.W. Norton, 2017). "Just enjoying some trees and birds is really good for your brain."

SCRAP YOUR SCHEDULE

► It's hard to pinpoint precisely when free time became a forbidden concept, but experts

agree the rise of internet access and smartphone use has steadily gobbled up time we humanoids used to spend doing things without a goal in mind. But it turns out that leaving a weekend wide open, or meeting up spontaneously with friends, actually invigorates our brains. Research shows that being constantly "on" can make us less productive and more irritable and error-prone; we need breaks to replenish our maxed-out mental and emotional energy. Additionally, unbound time allows us to reflect and daydream in an open-ended way that helps us live life more meaningfully, says Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at Temple University.

GET YOUR HANDS DIRTY

► Gardening is good, old-fashioned physical labor that gets you out of your head and

up close to the earth. All the tilling, weeding, and watering makes it as healthy as going on a fairly brisk walk, says Paul Davis, Ph.D., an associate professor of kinesiology at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro. Even better, these tasks build upper-body strength. But stronger hearts and shoulders are just two jolly green benefits. People who garden are less likely to be overweight: In 2013, University of Utah researchers observed that female gardeners weighed 11 pounds less on average than their nongardening peers. And they eat more fruits and vegetables than nongrowers, according to a Colorado study. In the same study, a group of gardening women also

reported feeling deeply rooted in their communities, a strong predictor of good overall health, according to Kristen Malecki, Ph.D., an assistant professor of population health sciences at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Consider your backyard or vegetable patch plain-air therapy, for the price of a few seed packs.

STOCK UP AT THE FARM STAND

► Buying local fruits and vegetables is second nature in summer, and it leads to nutrient-

packed meals—especially if you shop the rainbow. Aim to "maximize the number of colors that end up on your plate," suggests Mary Ann Lila, Ph.D., director of the Plants for Human Health Institute at North Carolina State University in Kannapolis. Along with colleagues, Lila has linked the pigments that make produce green, blue-black, white, orange-yellow, and red to myriad benefits, including reduced risk of developing



Health

GOOD LIVING

diabetes, heart disease, and certain cancers. Reach for deep-golden beets, dark-colored greens, eggplants, and heirloom tomatoes in all their lumpy, bumpy glory. Here's even more incentive: The more you eat, the fewer fast and processed foods you'll crave, says Ali Bouzari, Ph.D., a culinary scientist and author of *Ingredient: Unveiling the Essential Elements of Food* (Ecco, 2016). "When you have a belly full of vegetables, you've done yourself a double solid. You've taken in a lot of nutrition and enjoyed deliciousness from a wholesome source."

BEHOLD
BEAUTY

► Feeling a little self-involved? Witnessing vast, stunning scenes can snap you right out of it.

University of California, Berkeley, professor of psychology Dacher Keltner, Ph.D., and his labmates discovered that after people look at incredible sights—towering trees, purple-mountain majesties—they feel closer to others and are more likely to help people in need. The ego check unfolds like this, Keltner explains: By marveling at places or things that "transcend understanding, we become more open to our collective identities," which, in turn, increases empathy. In a 2015 study, Keltner and his partners also found that people who reported recently experiencing awe (versus other positive emotions, such as pride and joy) showed significantly lower levels of cytokines—markers of inflammation, which, at chronically high levels, have been associated with heart disease, dementia, and clinical depression. In other words, when you slow your breath while trying to understand whatever

spine-tingling thing you're gawking at (be it a jaw-dropping sunset or a shell in the sand), awe's anti-inflammatory effect is at work. And that's a lot better than popping a pill.

PLAY
LIKE A
KID

► Flicking a Frisbee, flying down a hill on your bike, practicing the *Dirty Danc-*

ing "lift" in the pool—there's a reason these moments leave you feeling looser, lighter, and more alive: You're *playing*, which can feel foreign to the average bill-paying adult. But it's actually what we (with our big, socially wired brains) were built to do. Neurologists and psychologists have found that laughing can strengthen bonds with partners, friends, and colleagues, and that goofing off helps us think more creatively and decompress when we're stressed. (Laughter also triggers the release of endorphins, which can increase our ability to withstand pain.) If your childlike instincts are out of practice, this time of year limbers them up again. "We go into summer thinking, *Beach*, and that's precisely the mental state you need to let yourself play," says Hirsh-Pasek, who recently celebrated her 64th birthday racing go-carts with friends. When we try new things in a safe environment, she adds, "it gives us confidence to take intellectual and physical risks elsewhere." All the more reason to live it up, starting right now.