

# Ohio Outdoors

**By Taylor Macy**  
Miami Valley Newspapers Contributing Columnist

The sun is out, the temperature is rising, our clocks have sprung forward. What might this mean? Time to escape the self-quarantine boredom and prepare a garden! As you sit at home to protect vulnerable populations from coronavirus, look outside. Does your outdoor space have any areas that can be transformed? Tomatoes, green beans, bell peppers, and squash are a few options for beginners. If you don't have direct access to a green space, consider container gardening. Dig through your garage or alleyway to look for broken buckets or pots. We are supposed to avoid touching people, but they didn't say anything about touching trash! Cracks and holes provide the necessary drainage for plants. If your container is shallow, you can still plant lettuce, kale, or other shallow-rooted vegetables.

For those without space or those intimidated by the idea of sowing plants, community gardens provide an opportunity to learn from friends and neighbors. The Five Rivers MetroParks Community Gardening Program boasts over ninety gardens throughout the Dayton region. The southern-most option within the program is the Zion Community Garden off West Alex Bell Road, managed by lifelong farmer Ron Root. "During the season, I usually help by wandering around and talking to other gardeners. It becomes as much a social experience as a gardening experience," says Root. There are still ten plots left, so simply visit their website if interested. The cities of Moraine and Centerville also host community gardens for residents and non-residents, and their registration process begins this month – just call the cities for details. Miamisburg isn't far behind: Mayor Collins hopes to establish a community garden during her first term as well.

If the current panic in the supermarkets doesn't convince you of the utility in growing

your own food, maybe the mental health perks will. The hobby can reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, lower the stress hormone cortisol, and even activate brain cells that produce the mood regulating hormone serotonin. A general sense of optimism is evident at most community gardens, regardless of people's language or backgrounds. A few spaces within the Five Rivers MetroParks Program are managed by Dayton's immigrant populations. "The mental health benefits of gardening are something that [immigrant gardeners] are very familiar with because this is the type of the work that they specialized

in in their home countries," said Sister Mumbi Kigutha, CPPS, who manages a garden in Trotwood that is owned by the Sisters of the Precious Blood. Many of the gardeners at this space fled war and violence in their home countries. They have since found a new type of kinship in Dayton, not without the help of community gardens. The space provides food as well as a familiar sense of purpose. While your garden may never produce the toilet paper that your grocery store currently lacks, you can easily grow a wide variety of vegetables that will help your mind stay healthy and your belly stay full.

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