



#### THINGS TO DO

## 20 ways for you (and the kids!) to spend summer at home

Yes, summer is almost here, and you'll still be practicing social distancing throughout it. With that in mind, here are 20 fun ways to stay happy and entertained through the season.

By **Jennifer Zeleski** | May 21, 2020 at 9:03 am

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*Photos by (left to right) Markus Spiske, Rad Pozniakov, Sarah Gualtieri and Britt Geiser*

You've heard it just about everywhere—summer is going to be different this year.

There's going to be plenty of time to spend in the backyard, hanging out in the cul-de-sac (albeit via social distancing) and chasing your kids around—as always. But it doesn't have to be a drag because of the pandemic and its lingering effects. There are still going to be a number of gorgeous, sun-filled days ahead, all you need to do is know how to make them even brighter!

Here, we've listed 20 ways to find some extra joy in the summer days this year. Cheers to memories, even when they're made in our homes time and time again.





*Photo by Markus Spiske*

### 1. Start a garden with flowers, herbs or edible fruits and veggies

Whether you're looking to spend more time outside on your own, or give your kids a few lessons in what to actually do with dirt, starting a garden when the weather is just starting to warm up gives you a plethora of opportunities. From digging and planting the seeds ([which is cited as being good for our mental health](#)), teaching your children how to measure the plant's growth or reaping the benefits once the vegetable plants start to ripen, it's a joyous process. For

additional tips on how to start a garden, [check out our interview](#) with Nikki O'Rourke, owner of Modern Foliage Designs.

*Photo by Shelley Pauls*

## 2. Support your local farmers market or produce stand

There's a lot of fun to be had while growing your own fruits, vegetables and herbs in a garden, but don't forget about the local farmers who are cultivating and harvesting in large quantities in NoVA. Not only can you fill up your basket (while

social distancing or picking up curbside) with the freshest fruits and vegetables near you, you can also stock up on other locally made items, such as jams and jellies, local honey and dairy and meat products. Those grocery store shopping trips just got a little shorter, and your community impact got a little bigger! Check [here](#) for the farmers markets near you and their updated hours, rules and regulations. Be sure to check out specific farms for nearby stands and pickup options too.

*Photo by Max Delsid*

### 3. Try new recipes in the kitchen

After a few months of cooking regularly at home, your go-to meals might become stale. But there's good news! There is no shortage of must-try recipes on the internet, from the likes of [Bon Appetit](#) and [NYT Cooking](#), to local food blogs such as [Cooking on a Whim](#). Despite common misconceptions, no, you don't have to be using a sourdough starter or propagated spring onions to make something new during the pandemic. Scour your pantry for great ingredients and [add these items to your tool box](#) to get back to delectable, fun-to-prepare meals.



*Photo by Stefan Vladimirov*

#### 4. Have a takeout roundtable

Unless you plan on prepping more than two meals at a time, there's a good chance that everyone at the table is eating just about the same thing every night. With a high level of patience, and the opportunity for everyone to be a little selfish, create your own restaurant dinner at home by ordering each family member their own meal (even from different locations) for pickup or delivery. Set the table with napkins and utensils, and make sure everyone gets to eat at the

same time, enjoying their self-chosen favorite meal. It may not be quite the same as dining out, but at least everyone will get to enjoy their own “menu item” and connect over conversation.

*Photo by Britt Geiser*

## 5. Enjoy a backyard (or nearby) picnic

Staying close to home and preparing most of our meals gives us a little more freedom than we would like to admit. Without the draw of going to a weekend



brunch or dinner with friends, turn a weekly meal into a picnic. Make it anything from finger sandwiches and juice pouches to a charcuterie board with a nice bottle of wine. Pack up the basket with napkins and utensils (if you need them), grab a thick blanket and head out to a flat, grassy area. The picnic doesn't have to be fancy or Instagram-worthy, but it will be relaxing and delicious nonetheless.

*Photo by Johanna Dahlberg*

## 6. Reimagine your outdoor space

If you've recently updated your home's interior, you know just how refreshing it can be to add new life to a much-used space. But don't forget your patio! Whether you want to add rocking chairs to your front porch or an outdoor bar area for evening cocktails, check out [this list](#) for inspiration. If you're going to spend more time in your backyard, you might as well make it as enjoyable as you can.

*Photo by Michael Guite*

## 7. Craft an at-home campsite

If it's your family's annual tradition to go on a summer camping trip—just like in the summer movie classic *The Parent Trap*—you might be wondering how to keep up your streak of popping up a tent and building a fire. With the help of [Potomac Overlook Park](#) Manager Rachel Doody, you can make it just as enjoyable, even steps from your home. [Here](#), she offers safety tips on starting a fire, even if it's just for making s'mores, and making sure to check the weather beforehand. No tent? No problem there, either. Let the kids sleep on the backyard trampoline with extra blankets and pillows.

*Photo by Rad Pozriakov*

## 8. Create a star-gazing area

Maybe your kids at home are a little too old to appreciate a sibling sleepover, but something everyone can enjoy no matter their age is getting a glimpse at the stars. Spread out some blankets on the grass or set up your favorite beach chairs and start looking up. Depending on the direction, you can search for well-known constellations or faraway planets. To make it even more fun, add a [telescope](#) to get an even closer view. If it starts to rain or it's just too chilly, [check out the northern lights](#) from your laptop instead.

*Photo by Chris Benson*

## 9. Take a bike ride

Maybe your bike has been hanging in the garage for some time, or you're looking for a new way to explore beyond your neighborhood streets. Whether you're getting back into the swing of it, or looking to purchase a new bike to hit the road, make sure to keep these [local shops](#) in mind—especially if you end up with a flat tire. Feel the breeze, take a different turn and get moving in a new way.

*Photo by Robert Merhaut*

## 10. Take a drive to see NoVA's public art

There's nothing wrong with taking a Sunday drive, and you might as well look for some colorful, nearby art while you're at it. Create a general map to check out these [public murals around NoVA](#), such as the bright-pink Signature Theatre and the fibre space mascot, as well as the temporary, encouraging [art popping up on local storefronts](#). It's not quite the art gallery as we know it, but it's still fun.



*Photo by Christin Hume*

## 11. Join a virtual book club

Gathering around in the living room with the hottest bestsellers and your friends might not be on your calendar anymore, but book club doesn't have to end! Find a [local or faraway virtual book club](#) to get you back in the spirit of turning the pages. Plus, if you're still looking for that kitchen inspiration, [Old Town Books](#) has launched a [culinary book club](#) too. It's not novel reading, but it's still productive and offering a new sense of community, even while social distancing.

*Photo by Victoria Priessnitz*

## 12. For kids: Join a library reading challenge

The kids may be off for summer break, but there's still plenty of hours to fill in the day that could be spent reading, writing and gearing up their fine-tuned motor skills. Check out this [lengthy list of library recommendations](#), and then join the summer reading challenge at a library near you. Some offer [small rewards](#) for reading up to 25 books or more, from a free cup of local ice cream to a round of miniature golf at NoVA Parks. Need a few minutes off from narrating

stories yourself? From Dolly Parton to Michelle Obama, [these story times](#) are worth tuning into.

*Photo courtesy of the Smithsonian*

### 13. Sign up for virtual summer camp

Speaking of kids, summer camps are mostly transitioning online this year, and there's lots of great options coming your way for them to tune into. [George Mason University recently launched its registration](#) for summer programs, with

topics ranging from visual arts and film to computer programming and artificial intelligence. Wherever your kids might have been originally going for summer camp, check the website to see if virtual options are available, and get them signed up for even more fun.

*Photo by Wonderlane*

## 14. Declutter your most-used spaces

Spring cleaning came with a whole new meaning this year, but when it comes to cleansing your other spaces of hoarded items or piles of just “stuff,” it’s time to get down to business. With the help of [Lavender Menakaya of Alexandria-based Lavender Organizes](#), you can get started on purging those unwanted items in your free time. The first step? Tackle your paper-filled, work-from-home space. “Have binders, label them, categorize everything and commit to organizing papers at least twice a week,” says Menakaya. Once you get started decluttering the smaller spaces, it’s time to tackle that abandoned attic too.

*Photo by Sarah Brown*

## 15. Revamp your closet

Along with decluttering comes the closet, filled with going-out outfits and worn-out shoes. Whether you're reimagining your wardrobe to be more cozy for evenings spent in, or you're just looking to swap your summer shorts for new ones, we have some tips. Local stylists [Lauren Rothman](#) and [Lindsay Evans](#) have shared what they're still shopping for (even without local events), from fuzzy, bedazzled slippers to consignment designer pieces.

*Photo by Kreated Media*



## 16. Learn hand-lettering and calligraphy

You've tried reading, painting and even meditating, but some things just won't stick. Why not try to perfect your handwriting instead? An art form in its own right, hand-lettering and calligraphy will give you something to practice that can range in difficulty, but also let you see evolving results as you get the hang of it. With [a starter kit](#) and [a video tutorial](#) from Laura Hooper Calligraphy, you might just be making your own birthday cards and wedding invitations this year.

*Photo by Dan Meyers*

## 17. Write letters to your loved ones

Show off your calligraphy skills or simply pour your heart out on the page to a friend or family members, and send it off with a stamp. There's been quite a lot of emphasis put on the simple things these past few months, and getting an unexpected card in the mail may just be that much-needed moment of joy for the recipient. And even if you run out of friends, family members and loved ones to write to, you can [pen a letter to a local senior](#) and send some love their way.

*Photo by Sam Manns*

## 18. Foster (or adopt) a pet

Living alone, especially when you're limited to your own home, can get lonely. Even as a family, you might just be looking for a new, exciting member to come home and lighten up the mood. Whether you're riding solo or are a family of four, there's a pet who would love to bring some kisses and snuggles to your household. Cats, dogs, guinea pigs and more are waiting to meet you at your local shelter. Here's [how to go about fostering or adopting](#), and staying safe with a new friend this summer.

*Photo by Allen Taylor*

## 19. Host a family Olympics

Sibling versus sibling, pet versus pet, the matchups don't matter nearly as much as your creativity. The Summer Olympics have been canceled for 2020, but you can still host your very own competitive games at home. To make the competition fierce, be sure to keep tallies on who wins what, offer MVP awards and keep track of the activities that are the most fun. Need some inspiration to get started? Check out [this family](#) that started their very own quarantine Olympics back in April, with challenges ranging from chugging the refrigerator's water dispenser with a straw, to blind-folded toilet paper dodgeball.

*Photo by Sarah Gualtieri*

## 20. Go get ice cream

When all else fails, and you just need something to make you happy, [go get ice cream](#). The classic summer pastime is still just as sweet, even if you can't enjoy your scoops on the bench outside. Grab a takeout order of your family's (or your own) favorite flavors, and enjoy in the comfort of your home. To make it even more fun, create an ice cream sundae bar with toppings in the pantry, mix flavors

together for your own creations or just enjoy right out of the carton. Who's going to stop you?

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