



Mountain Telephone

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2021

CONNECTION

FIT FOR LIFE

Inspiring stories about getting healthy

LIVE FROM VAL HOLLER

Local woman heals with natural remedies

KEEP THE RHYTHM

Broadband connects musical creators





By SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

To expand broadband access, we must protect our supply chains

We at NTCA are encouraged to see rural broadband take center stage as people talk about how to improve our nation’s infrastructure. While grappling with a pandemic, more people than ever — especially in Washington, D.C., and in the policy arena — are realizing that robust and reliable broadband is essential for people to work and learn from home and for our country to move forward. It has been encouraging to see federal and state resources being put toward addressing gaps in broadband coverage.

However, the job is only beginning when the funds start to flow. While NTCA member companies are eager to keep building broadband networks, lead times for fulfillment of orders of telecom supplies are approaching deeply concerning levels. One member recently received a quote that projected an eight-month delay for fiber, and another was told it would take one year for fulfillment of a fiber order. We’re hearing stories of delays of several weeks or months for routers and other gear.

These supply chain delays could have real implications on American consumers — and they could present real problems when it comes to provider compliance with things like buildout deadlines and performance testing obligations.

It’s terrific that resources are being made available to ensure every American has access to sufficient broadband. But it’s going to be equally important that policy-makers pay attention to whether the supply chain can keep up and consider what steps must be taken to ensure that happens.

BROADBAND: Connecting your life



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How did your broadband connection help you through 2020? How will it support you in the new year? Share your story with the hashtag **#MyBroadbandStory**.



Don't ZOOM into trouble

Do learn the secrets to a great virtual meeting

There are some gaffes co-workers never forget. And with the likes of Zoom, GoToMeeting and FaceTime bringing business gatherings into many homes, the potential for memorable pitfalls only increases.

“Don't take your phone with you to the bathroom during a video call” should most likely be the first rule to remember for any team shifting to virtual gatherings. A quick search on YouTube will show you the wisdom of that policy.

While there's potential for unintentional blunders during video calls, the tools also offer an indispensable resource for teams. In many cases, productivity would grind to a halt without the ability to connect virtually through broadband.

So, here are a few “Dos” and some “Don'ts” to consider before your next virtual meeting:

DO dress fully. A work shirt on top and running shorts or pajamas on the bottom can prove embarrassing if you forget to turn off the camera before standing up. It happens, often.

DO take a few minutes before the meeting to confirm you know how to turn the microphone and camera on and (likely more importantly) off in the software you're using. It's also a good policy to stay muted unless speaking.

DON'T leave your notifications turned on when screen sharing during a meeting. Otherwise, everyone attending might see the message from your hungry spouse regarding the takeout lunch you promised to deliver.

DO have a clear, detailed agenda and stick to it. The attention of participants can wander, and a well-paced plan can keep everyone focused.

DON'T ignore the background. People will judge you on the contents of your bookshelves. Also, if there's a forgotten not-safe-for-work bit of kitsch visible on a shelf or wall, don't expect your co-workers to spare you embarrassment. They may just enjoy the humor.

DO consider lighting. Everyone looks better with good lighting, and a great presentation can not only set the tone for how others perceive you but also boost your self-confidence.

DON'T forget to take the time before the meeting to get a glass of water or cup of coffee.



DO jot down any notes about points you wish to cover, and keep a pen and paper handy. Know the steps you need to take to help you be more present during the meeting, and repeat the formula every time.

DO remember to inform other household members you're joining a video call. More than one relative or friend has taken an unintended star turn during a serious discussion.

DON'T leave the cats and dogs free to wander. Disembodied voices may draw their attention, usually at the most inopportune time. While a stray tail or untimely howl might add levity to a meeting, know your audience and prepare accordingly.

DO remember that the most important thing of all is to laugh. Isolation and, often, stress can counterbalance the freedom of remote work. Every meeting, take a moment to appreciate your co-workers, share a joke, smile and laugh. Enjoy the virtual time together. 🗨️

That's a formula for a great, productive meeting.

Resolve to master streaming TV in 2021

Each year at this time, I usually find myself looking ahead at all of the promise of the new year. Many of us will consider resolutions we can make to improve ourselves as the calendar turns to 2021.



SHAYNE ISON
General Manager

After the year we've all just been through, I think we could likely use that fresh sense of optimism. But just as admirable as it is that we will resolve to lose a little weight or get organized this year, it's also unfortunately predictable that many of us will drop those diets, exercise regimen or organizational systems by spring.

That's why I have a suggested resolution for many of our members that can be accomplished from the couch.

If you're one of the roughly 1 in 4 Americans who hasn't tried streaming video service through platforms like Netflix, Hulu or Amazon Prime, I'd urge you to consider resolving to give it a try in 2021.

According to the researchers at Nielsen, many older TV watchers did just that in 2020. Spurred on in a hunt for programming while staying home during the pandemic, older viewers now account for 26% of all streaming minutes viewed, up from 19% a year ago, according to the Nielsen data.

While there is a little bit of a learning curve on the new platforms, the amount of shows and movies to watch at your command is astounding in addition to our amazing MTTV channel lineup.

While Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Hulu are the dominant providers, new streaming services like Disney+, Peacock and HBOMax have debuted in the last 18 months. Paramount+, due out this year, promises to offer an immense catalog of shows from CBS and other Viacom networks, as well as decades' worth of hit movies produced in the Paramount Studios. The summer Olympics alone are expected to provide hundreds of hours of programming for NBC's Peacock. Don't forget — if you are a Mountain Telephone TV customer, our TV Everywhere gives you access to stream a number of your favorite programs.

And thanks to our work in building and maintaining the Mountain Telephone broadband network, this vast world of programming is available right in your living room.

Here are my suggestions for how to give it a try:

- 1. Start small.** Most streaming platforms offer a free trial of up to 30 days. Beyond that, basic plans for Disney+, Hulu and Netflix are priced at under \$10 per month so you can try the service without a huge financial commitment.
- 2. Pick the right box.** Your TV may already have some streaming capabilities built in to get you started. If not, you'll need a Roku device or Amazon's Fire TV Stick connected to your Wi-Fi to get you started.
- 3. Ask for help.** Whether it's a friend or family member, don't hesitate to reach out and ask for advice on navigating this exciting new world of streaming video. 🗨️

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Mountain Telephone

Mountain Rural Telephone Cooperative, Inc., is a member-owned cooperative dedicated to providing communications technology to the people of Elliott, Menifee, Morgan, Wolfe and a section of Bath counties. The company covers 1,048 square miles and supplies service to nearly 11,500 members.

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On the Cover:



Elliott County Middle School teacher Jennifer Turner took up running in her 30s. Now she hopes to run the Boston Marathon. See story Page 9.

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Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge

An avian sanctuary

Story by ANNE P. BRALY

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge in North Alabama is a rich, diverse wildlife habitat.

As winter's chill sets in across North Alabama, Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge undergoes a feathery transformation. Birds that normally call the northern reaches of the continent home fly south, finding the relative warmth of the 35,000-acre property along the banks of the Tennessee River far more to their liking.

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge came to be in 1938 as a protected area for migratory birds and other wildlife who call the refuge home year-round — snakes, deer, small mammals, amphibians and other animal species. It was the first-ever wildlife area to occupy a hydroelectric impoundment, which is part of a larger hydroelectric system that uses a dam to store river water in a reservoir — in this case, Wheeler Dam. It was an experiment that has become a tremendous success over ensuing decades.

Although designated as a waterfowl refuge, Wheeler provides for a wide spectrum of wildlife with its deep river channels, creeks, tupelo swamps and other areas. There is shelter and food for wintering birds, such as the critically endangered whooping crane, and year-round residents like the endangered gray bat.

The refuge is also home to 115 species of fish, 74 species of reptiles and amphibians, 47 species of mammals, 38 species of freshwater mussels and 26 species of freshwater snails.

Teresa Adams, supervisory park ranger at Wheeler, says the refuge's appeal to sandhill and whooping cranes is due to management practices in place since Wheeler's inception. Those practices reflect a partnership between the refuge and farmers in the region.

"Farmers plant food crops — corn, soybeans and winter wheat — and leave around 18% of the crop in the field for the wintering waterfowl, cranes, and migratory and native birds," Adams says.

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge, which serves as the gateway to the North Alabama Birding Trail, has a visitor center that hosts a series of interpretive exhibits. These displays have information about the refuge's numerous animals, as well as the early human residents of the Tennessee River Valley.

At any time, you might witness one of more than 300 species that have been recorded on the refuge. Year-round residents include great blue herons, great egrets, mourning doves, downy woodpeckers, Northern flickers and many more. It's not hard to recognize the brilliant hue of a blue jay or an Eastern bluebird or hear the caw of a crow or the screech of an owl.

Among the most common waterfowl that choose to winter at the refuge are wood and ring-necked ducks. Occasionally, you may spot a Ross's goose or greater white-fronted goose. 📷



Eastern screech owl.

Ready, set, shoot!

Tom Ress, a resident of Athens, Alabama, is an avid bird-watcher. His passion for photography has taken him far and wide with a camera in hand and a bird in the viewfinder. With his Canon 7D Mark II camera and Canon 100-400mm II zoom lens, he's zeroed in on the elusive blue-winged teal at Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge only once every two to three years, but he spots the tufted titmouse flitting from limb to limb more often.

Ress points out a number of important things to consider when photographing birds.

- For starters, you need to learn about their habitats and what foods and activities they enjoy. Do they hunt for rodents by soaring over open fields? Do they search through dead leaves for bugs, or do they prey on flying insects?
- Find a good vantage point and wait. Patience is one of the main things to bring with you when you plan on getting the perfect shot.
- Invest in a small, portable blind so that you're as well-hidden as possible. Such blinds are sold at big-box stores such as Dick's Sporting Goods, Walmart and Academy Sports + Outdoors.
- Tripods are a good idea, allowing you to capture a longer exposure by using a slower shutter speed. They're also useful if you don't have a steady hand. The use of a tripod is good for shooting baby birds in their nests or birds roosting in tree holes, on ledges and in other secure places. Tripods are not good, though, if you plan on shooting birds in action, Ress says. They are also rather cumbersome to carry if your hike is a long one.
- You will find more birds by learning their calls and songs. The Cornell University-funded website allaboutbirds.org is a good resource that includes more than 600 bird sounds and songs.
- Morning and evening are the best times for photography, offering the best lighting. Avoid midday when the sunlight is at its harshest.
- You don't need an expensive camera, but you don't want the cheapest, either. Make sure whatever camera you purchase has a good zoom lens.

Top-five birding apps:

1. **eBird** offers a paperless way to log your bird sightings (Android and iPhone).
2. **Merlin Bird ID** will assist you with identifying birds in seconds (Android and iPhone).
3. **Audubon Bird Guide** is a complete guide to more than 800 species of birds found in North America (Android and iPhone).
4. **BirdsEye** helps ID birds around you and find the birds you want to see (iPhones only).
5. **Larkwire** turns learning bird sounds into a game to help you and the kids identify birds by their calls (iPhones only).

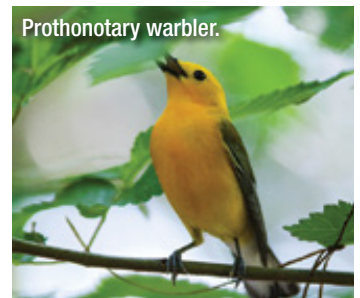
Bird-watching essentials

Whether it's in your own backyard or out in the wild, there are a few things to ensure your bird-watching experience is a success. Having spent countless hours in the field, Tom Ress is well-versed in the essentials, including:

- **BINOCULARS**
- **A FIELD GUIDE**, such as "A Field Guide to the Birds East of the Rockies" by Roger Tory Peterson and "The Sibley Guide to Birds" by David Sibley are good ones.
- **A BIRDING APP**, such as Audubon's Bird Guide: North America or eBird, to have bird-watching tips and other info at your fingertips.
- **RAIN GEAR** — Always be prepared.
- **PATIENCE** — You can never have enough.



Indigo bunting.



Prothonotary warbler.



Pectoral sandpiper.



A whooping crane, left, and a sandhill crane.

Peace of mind

Former coal worker seeks solace in cycling after cancer diagnosis

Story by JEN CALHOUN

Photography by WILLIAM LEMASTER

David Tate remembers the day in 2008 when his life changed. He was at work as a heavy equipment operator with a coal company when he felt a bad pain in his side. It was a strange pain, and it was bad enough for the then-52-year-old West Liberty man to call his doctor.

Tate would soon learn he had advanced colon cancer — Stage III, borderline Stage IV. The prognosis was disheartening. “It kind of devastated all of us,” Tate says.

PUSHING FORWARD

Through surgeries and chemotherapy, Tate and his doctors managed to fight off the disease. Then, in doing some research online, Tate and his wife found studies that said exercise could cut the chance of recurrence by 50%.

He had long been a hiker even before the cancer diagnosis, but the chemotherapy left some problems. Along with reduced kidney function, Tate suffered from damaged nerve endings in his feet that caused him to lose his balance when he hiked.

“So, I tried various things, and none of them worked,” he says. “Somebody suggested a bicycle. I thought, ‘I’ll look kind of foolish with a bicycle at my age.’”

SIMPLE PLEASURES

But the cycling turned out to be a godsend for Tate, who can clip his feet into the pedals and not worry about the nerve damage dragging him down. “I go cycling on the rural roads with less traffic,” he says. “We live in an awesome area for that. Our local and state employees have done a wonderful job of putting up ‘share the road’ signs.”

Tate may ride 20 or 30 miles when he cycles. He often takes enough money for a drink and a sandwich at an old country store, and he leaves time to chat with his neighbors. Other times, he might pull over and take a nap or check out the deer, turkeys and rabbits that come along. For Tate, a ride on the road takes away the stress and replaces it with a love for life in all its forms.

“I never get bored,” he says. “People think I’m crazy, but I’ve never had a bad day at cycling.”

He hopes others decide to give cycling — or other kinds of exercise — a try. “Lots of times, when people wake up, they list what they want to accomplish,” he says. “They usually put exercise at the bottom. I say put it on top, and put everything else below that. Then do your chores. There’s nothing better than your personal health.” [📧](#)

David Tate started cycling after beating colon cancer.



TATE'S TIPS

David Tate started cycling later in life, but he's learned quite a few things along the way. Here are some of his tips for anyone interested in hopping on a bike for exercise and mental, physical and emotional well-being:

- ▶ Cycling might be a good alternative for joint problems. “I tell older people all the time, ‘If your joints hurt, try cycling.’ You don’t really put any stress on them as far as pounding concrete.”
- ▶ Invest in a good bike. “If you buy a bike from a big department store that sells everything, all you’re going to do is take that \$300 bike and throw it away. You can’t build a bike for \$300.”
- ▶ Stretch those lungs! Tate recovered from a bout with COVID-19 in the fall with minimal problems. He believes cycling helped keep his lungs healthy.

Chasing Boston

A runner takes off

Story by JEN CALHOUN
Photography by WILLIAM LEMASTER

When Jennifer Turner talks about her fitness journey, she starts by telling a story that begins on a fall day in 2004. Turner was in her mid-20s at the time and carrying nearly 200 pounds on her 5-foot-4-inch frame.

“We were taking family pictures with all my family — siblings, grandkids, everybody,” says Turner, now a math teacher at Elliott County Middle School. “I was overweight. My hair looked awful. I was wearing these same black pants and this horrible pastel shirt I always wore to special occasions, because shopping trips always ended with me crying in frustration.”

As she applied her makeup for the pictures that day, she cried. She was unhappy with the way she looked and felt. What’s more, she knew the disappointment she carried about herself had gotten in the way of living her life.

A few months later, in the spring of 2005, her younger brother died in a car accident. Those pictures were the last she had taken with him, and that realization changed everything. “After I made it through his funeral, I thought, ‘I’m not spending one more day feeling like this. He would hate this for me, and I hate it.’”

CHANGING COURSE

That year, Turner started exercising and walk-running. She also enlisted a friend to start a calorie-counting diet. Within a few months, she had lost nearly 45 pounds.

During a second pregnancy, she gained extra weight. She lost it again through diet and exercise. But it wasn’t until July 4, 2014, that Turner’s fitness journey would turn her into a full-on athlete at the age of 36.



Jennifer Turner ran her first 5K at the age of 36. She hopes to one day tackle the famed Boston Marathon.

GOING THE DISTANCE

It was Turner’s first 5K, and she was running it with her best friend. “I’d never really been in a race, but after I got going, I took off,” she says. “I loved the adrenaline. So when my friend said she planned to run a half-marathon in October, I was in. We ran every Saturday to build up to the 13.1 miles. We conquered the world those Saturdays.”

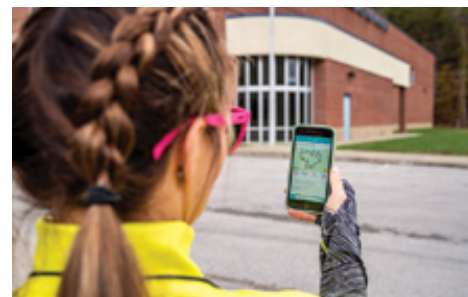
Since then, Turner has run several half-marathons and a few marathons. She uses apps like Runkeeper, and she measures time and distance on her watch. She uses the internet to research training plans, nutrition and shoes. She also takes a picture every day she runs and posts it to social media sites to keep herself accountable.

Now, her goal is to run the famed Boston Marathon. She needs to complete a qualifying marathon course within a certain timeframe before the Boston race. Her time needs to be at least 3 hours and 35 minutes, but even that doesn’t guarantee a spot. If she runs another marathon before the Boston Marathon and beats her time by 5 minutes, she’ll be guaranteed a spot. Many races have been canceled, which could push back her dream a year or more.

Still, Turner runs on. If she can’t run the Boston this year, she’ll try for 2022. In the meantime, she’ll keep training and pushing forward. “Like in life, training days can be good or bad,” she says. “On the hard days, I think, ‘I’m not going to let it beat me.’” 📱



Turner trains several days a week while listening to '80s music on her phone.



TURNER'S TIPS FOR GETTING FIT

1. Figure out why you want to get in shape.
2. Make a plan. Know what days you'll run or work out, and make sure they don't conflict with other priorities.
3. Find a friend with similar goals for support.
4. Set a goal.



Come together

Story by DREW WOOLLEY

Broadband brings together musicians across the world

As the pandemic stretched on last year, drummer Mike Kosacek and other members of the band Cosmic Singularity started kicking around the idea of recording a second album. With most music venues shut down and more time to write, it was a familiar story for bands and musicians across the world. But there was one key exception: Kosacek has never actually met any of his bandmates in person.

“Without high-speed internet, we just couldn’t do this,” he says. “I live in Round Rock, Texas. The keyboard player lives in Florida. The bass player is in Utah, and at the time, our singer and guitar player was living in Scotland.”

The globe-spanning collaboration would have been impossible just a decade ago. The songwriting process is a sort of musical relay. One member of the band will share a demo of a song he created, and the others will add their parts one by one.

“We’ll start stripping off the individual parts, and everyone will add in their own instruments to build up the song,” Kosacek says. “Once we’ve got all those parts, they’ll send it to me, and I’ll do the mixing in my studio.”

A NOD TO THE DRUMMER

Kosacek built his home studio, DoubleDog Recording, in 2009. He had been recording in his bedroom for several years, but the situation wasn’t ideal.

“In terms of sound, that wasn’t optimal. Plus, I have a family, so the noise wasn’t optimal for them, either,” he says. “When I decided I really wanted to make money off of my music, it had to be better.”

The stand-alone, 475-square-foot recording space gives him room to play without driving his family from the premises and provides Kosacek the option of recording bands live. Normally, he estimates, about a fifth of his business would come from mixing and mastering recordings for live bands. The rest is his Studio Drum Tracks business, where he records drum parts for Texas-based groups and artists like Black Dirt Tango, ThemThatKnow and Mike Hamilton, as well as others from across the globe.



Broadband technology underpins drummer Mike Kosacek’s business.

“At least half of it is mind reading,” Kosacek says. “But for me, I find that a lot of it is just experience playing and listening to a lot of music. So, when someone sends me a song that needs drums, I have some idea of where to go with it. A lot of times, it’s right the first time, and people are wowed at the difference, which is, of course, my goal.”

These days, with bands unable to record in person, all of Kosacek’s work comes from the drum tracks business. But internet connections have come a long way since he started, making the transition an easy one.

“I actually saw an uptick in business, because people were stuck at home writing songs that needed drums,” he says. “Ten years ago we would have to mail CDs, DVDs, even hard drives back and forth, because sometimes it was faster and more reliable than internet transfers. Being able to do this digitally and share files online — that’s what makes it happen.” 📧

Remote mastery

From his earliest memories, Serge Espitia was in love with music and how it comes together. He eventually moved to New York, where he had the chance to work as a producer with artists including James Iha of Smashing Pumpkins and Adam Schlesinger of Fountains of Wayne, as well as producers for artists like David Bowie, Beyonce and John Legend.

But in 2016, Espitia and his wife were tired of the city, so they moved to New Jersey. There, he set up his own home studio for mastering — the art of touching up songs to achieve professional sound quality.

“There’s a lot of fear of the mastering process, but it’s really about your personal taste and appreciation for music,” Espitia says.

His mastering business is completely online, and that’s the way Espitia likes it. Operating remotely allows him to work faster compared to in-person sessions with artists that can take hours longer. The key, he says, is making a human connection with artists to better understand what they want.

“A lot of people I work with are very sensitive, so they have a good understanding of their musical influences and what they want to draw from,” Espitia says. “So, that part of the business really hasn’t changed.”



Home schooling

- ▶ **Education** — Books, magazines, online tutorials and more are available to help developing artists learn their trade. Online collaboration groups can also provide a supportive community and opportunities to hone your craft.
- ▶ **Know what you want** — Understand what kinds of sounds you want to create for yourself or others. These preferences will guide the type of recording environment you need and the equipment you use.
- ▶ **Learn your tools** — Having the best gear isn’t the be-all and end-all. Whether you’re using GarageBand or Pro Tools, knowing how to use what is at your disposal effectively and efficiently is crucial.
- ▶ **Listen** — Spend a lot of time listening to music. The more you can develop a critical ear, the better you’ll be at identifying the sounds you want to create and others want to achieve.

Thinking of building your own home studio? Take some advice from the pros.

gear list 🎙️

- **Microphone** — Beginners can get by recording on a smartphone, but serious musicians will want to invest in a quality mic.
- **Headphones** — Always opt for wired over wireless to prevent delays and unexpected interruptions to your connection.
- **Studio monitors** — These speakers play back unenhanced sound so you can be confident how your mix will sound on different systems.
- **Audio interface** — This converts the sound from your mic to digital sound on your computer.
- **Software** — There are many programs available to mix and export your music. GarageBand is free and a good starting place for beginners.
- **Soundproofing** — Keeping your sound in will make the neighbors happy. Keeping their noises out will make you happy.

The holistic holler

Local woman finds health and healing in natural ingredients

Story by JEN CALHOUN | Photography by WILLIAM LEMASTER

Valerie Daniels Williams comes from a long line of mountain people who knew the worth of the land on which they lived. She remembers the summer days she spent at her maternal grandmother's house picking beans and canning them to eat during the winter months. Her other grandmother would press a blackberry root tea into a child's hands to help heal a stomachache.

Those early lessons gave Williams a foundation for a life that uses nature as a source for healthy eating and healing remedies. "I enjoy learning from the past and what they did, then building on it to use more of what's around us," says Williams, who helps her husband run Air Repair Heating and Cooling from their home in Bolin Branch. "I like knowing what's on the plate and what's in the jar and what the ingredients are. It's just part of who I am."

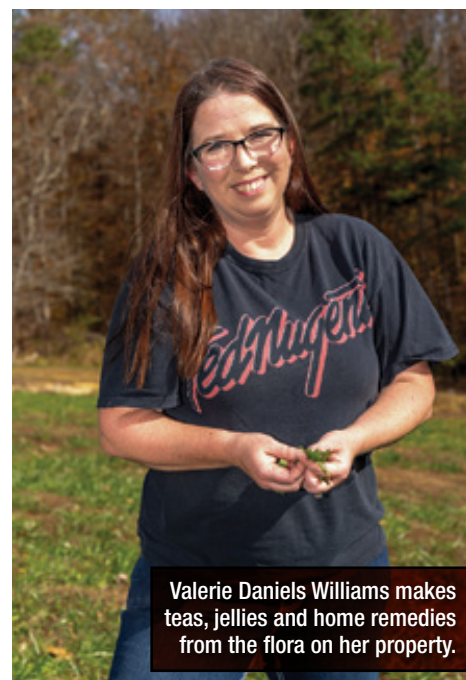
FORAGING ONLINE AND OFF

Nearly 20 years ago, Williams started a garden and began canning on her own, continuing a tradition her mother and grandmother taught her. She liked the idea of self-sufficiency so much that she also learned to hunt deer and process the meat herself. "I learned the hard way some of the time," she says with a laugh. "My poor husband ate a lot of really tough deer meat for a few years."

As the years went on, Williams also decided to stop watching regular television programs and start educating herself. She planted more gardens and canned different kinds of foods.

Instead of watching TV shows, she went down YouTube rabbit holes, searching for ideas and information. She learned from online homesteaders and preppers, even though she doesn't exactly consider herself either one of those things. "I tried to make a conscious effort to better myself with knowledge and not worry about the next trend or what's popular," she says.

For her, self-sufficiency became a fun and useful hobby. It was a way to get in touch with the land, work with it and find out what it was trying to offer. She wanted to learn more about her surroundings and how to best use the plants that grew around her. What could she forage, grow and make that might improve her family members' lives?



Valerie Daniels Williams makes teas, jellies and home remedies from the flora on her property.

"A couple of years ago in the spring, the whole yard was covered with dandelions," she says. "I knew they were edible because my grandmother would take me out and we'd cut wild greens before the first mow. So, I thought, 'What can we do with what we've got here?'"

Using her fiber internet connection from Mountain Telephone, Williams went online to learn about various uses and therapeutic properties of dandelions, the plant many people consider an annoying weed. As it turned out, there were plenty.

Dandelions are rich in Vitamin K, which helps bone mineralization and blood clotting, along with Vitamin A, which serves as an antioxidant. She started making a dandelion jelly that tastes like honey, then whipped up a dandelion tea, both of which went over well with her children, Luke, 15, and Donnalynn, 12.

After that experiment, she decided to keep learning. “I thought, ‘What else?’ I started looking around, and I saw the redbuds were in bloom. I’d heard of redbud jelly, so I tried that.”

In time, she picked white clover, red clover and goldenrod. She found that white clover makes a good jelly and a tea that many say helps the immune system. The red clover, she learned, could help balance female hormones. She found the goldenrod might just help her own allergies. She and her daughter also like to grab a pretty basket and hop on a four-wheeler to search for wild roses, usnea lichen and other wild plants for remedies and foods. “It’s edible, and God put it here, so we might as well try to use it,” she says.

AUNT VAL'S ITCH STICK AND OTHER WONDERS

One of Williams’ most-used home remedies is Aunt Val’s Itch Stick — a salve made from the plantain weed that grows naturally on her land. “It’s edible, and you can cook it like collard greens, but it also has drawing abilities,” she says. “I make a salve from it, and I put it in chapstick tubes so the kids can rub it on their bug bites and minor cuts.”

In recent years, friends have started calling Williams “a modern mountain woman.” It’s a title that feels to her like an honor.

She hopes to start broadcasting some of her own knowledge in the coming months through YouTube videos and on a video or two for MTTV’s local channel. Her plan is to name her YouTube channel From the Head of Val Holler, a nod to her name and her actual location. “I kind of walk to the beat of my own drum,” she says with a laugh. 📺

Valerie Daniels Williams — shown here with her son, Luke, 15, and her daughter, Donnalynn, 12 — raises three gardens.



Williams reads and watches YouTube videos to learn the properties of various plants.

From the Head of Val Holler

After watching dozens of YouTube videos for ideas and information, Valerie Daniels Williams hopes to take her own tips to the public soon. Williams says plans are in the works for an MTTV special and for her own YouTube channel, From the Head of Val Holler.



TUSCAN WHITE BEAN SKILLET

- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, divided
- 8 ounces brown mushrooms, sliced
- 1 1/2 cups diced yellow onion (about 1 large onion)
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2/3 cup drained and chopped oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes
- 2 (14.5-ounce) cans fire-roasted diced tomatoes
- 2 (14.5-ounce) cans drained and rinsed cannellini beans
- 2 (14.5-ounce) cans quartered artichoke hearts, drained
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- Parsley for garnish

Heat 1 tablespoon of the oil until shimmering in a 10-inch, cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Working in batches, add the mushrooms to the pan in a single layer. Brown for 1 to 2 minutes per side. Transfer to a bowl and repeat with remaining mushrooms.

Add the remaining tablespoon of oil to the pan. Add the onions and saute until lightly browned, about 3 minutes. Add the garlic and sun-dried tomatoes and cook until fragrant and softened, another 2 minutes.

Add the diced tomatoes to the pan, along with the beans, artichoke hearts, salt, pepper, oregano, thyme and sugar. Cover the pan and turn the heat down to medium. Let cook for about 10 minutes, until hot. Return the mushrooms to the pan and cook for another 1 to 2 minutes to warm them up.

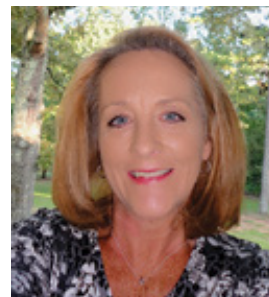
Healthy & hearty

Beans are perfect for cold days

With the holiday season behind us and winter in full swing, it's time for a bit of comfort. And there's perhaps no better way to create a feeling of warmth than with a steaming bowl of bean soup, or chili with beans, or, for that matter, any type of bean dish.

Beans can also pull double duty, offering wonderful taste and texture while being a delicious meat substitute.

Whether they are black, red, white or brown, beans are a great source of fiber, protein, iron, B vitamins, potassium, magnesium and many other beneficial nutrients. And if you choose dried beans over canned, you'll save money as well as reduce your sodium intake. If you do use canned beans, be sure to rinse them to reduce excess salt.



FOOD EDITOR
ANNE P. BRALY
IS A NATIVE OF
CHATTANOOGA,
TENNESSEE.

To serve: Spoon the bean mixture into bowls and garnish with chopped parsley, if desired. Be sure to serve with plenty of crusty bread for sopping up the tasty juices.

BLACK BEAN ENCHILADAS

- 2 large portobello mushroom caps
- 1/2 medium red onion
- 1 orange bell pepper
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 (15-ounce) can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 2 teaspoons cumin
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 1/2 cup vegetable broth or water
- 3 cups red enchilada sauce, store-bought or homemade
- 1 1/2 cups guacamole, store-bought or homemade
- 12 (8-inch) corn tortillas

For the garnish: 1 cup thinly sliced romaine lettuce; 1 to 2 radishes, julienned; 2 tablespoons minced red onion; and torn cilantro or parsley

Sour cream or Greek yogurt, optional

Preheat the oven to 400 F.

Remove the stems from the mushroom caps and thinly slice the caps. Thinly slice the red onion. Thinly slice the bell pepper.

In a large skillet, heat the olive oil over medium high heat. Saute the sliced veggies for 6 to 7 minutes until tender. Add the drained and rinsed black beans, garlic powder, cumin, onion powder, paprika, kosher salt, lime juice, and vegetable broth or water. Cook for 2 minutes until the liquid is thickened into a sauce.

Spread 1 cup of the enchilada sauce in the bottom of a large baking dish.

Brush both sides of each tortilla lightly with olive oil. Heat a large griddle to medium-high heat. Cook the tortillas in batches for 15 seconds per side until lightly browned.



Fill each tortilla with 1/4 cup of the vegetable filling and about 2 tablespoons guacamole, running in a line down the center. Roll it up and place it in the baking dish, seam side down. Once all of the tortillas are in the dish, pour the remaining 2 cups of enchilada sauce over the top.

Bake for 5 minutes until warmed through. Top with garnishes and serve.

NUTTY WHITE BEAN, WILD RICE SOUP

- 1/2 cup cashews
- 1 medium yellow onion
- 2 celery stalks
- 3 medium carrots
- 8 ounces baby bella mushrooms
- 6 cloves garlic
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon dried thyme
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- 8 cups vegetable broth
- 1 cup wild rice (not a wild rice blend)
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt, divided
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 2 (15-ounce) cans white beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup water
- 2 teaspoons dried sage
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce, tamari or liquid aminos

Place the cashews in a bowl and cover them with water. Leave them to soak while you make the recipe.

Dice the onion. Thinly slice the celery. Cut the carrot into rounds. Slice the mushrooms. Mince the garlic. In a Dutch oven, heat the olive oil and saute the onion, celery and carrots, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes or until lightly browned. Add the mushrooms and saute for 2 more minutes. Add the garlic, thyme and oregano and stir for another 2 minutes.

Add the broth, wild rice, 1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt and black pepper. Bring to a simmer and cook, uncovered, for 20 minutes. Add the drained and rinsed beans and continue to simmer, uncovered, for 30-35 minutes more, or until the rice breaks open.

Using a liquid measuring cup, carefully remove 2 cups of the hot soup, including broth, veggies and rice, and put it in a blender, along with 1 cup of water. Drain the cashews, then add them and the dried sage to the blender. Blend on high for about 1 minute, until creamy. Pour the creamy mixture back into the soup. Add the soy sauce. Taste and, if needed, add the remaining 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt. Adjust seasonings as desired. Garnish with freshly ground pepper. 📄



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