ELIZABETH RAGO

Our April cover profile features MDW Founder, Elizabeth Rago, whose story reflects the same real-life challenges faced by many of the women she now supports through MDW Cares. Her work centers on bringing the community together, creating moments of beauty, connection, and support, even in the midst of stressful seasons.

APRIL 2026

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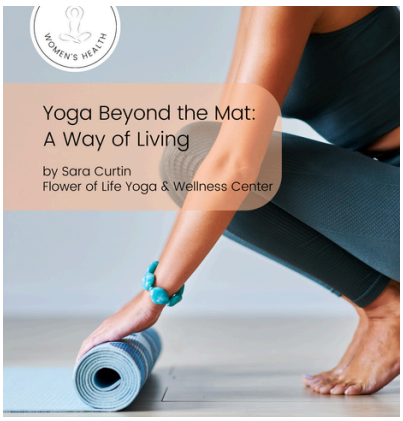

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MDW Magazine features individuals, businesses, products, and services that align with our mission of supporting women, community, and well-being.

While we make thoughtful efforts to highlight trusted resources and experiences, inclusion in MDW Magazine does not constitute an endorsement, guarantee, or certification of any product, service, or provider. Readers are encouraged to conduct their own research and use their own judgment when engaging with businesses, professionals, or products featured in our publication.

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April 2026

MDW MAG

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear MDW Community,

It's a weird feeling, seeing your face on the cover of a magazine. I'm much more of a behind-the-scenes worker bee rather than shining under the spotlight. I'm an ambivert, the combination of both an introvert and extrovert, and if I'm being honest, this issue challenged me in ways I didn't expect.

Because if you've been here for a while, you know this has never really been about me.
It's always been about you.

The stories. The small businesses. The women in our community who are building something meaningful in their own unique way. The women showing up, especially when it's hard.

So, putting myself on the cover? It felt… uncomfortable. And a bit like standing in a room where I'd much rather be introducing everyone else.

But here's what I'm learning. Sometimes the most honest thing we can do is let ourselves be seen, even when it goes against our nature. Not for attention, but for connection. MDW has never been separate from me; it's an extension of my life, my values, my experiences, and the seasons I've walked through - just like it reflects yours.

This issue is rooted in that energy. You'll find pieces that celebrate nature, remind you to look up, to wander, to notice the beautiful things happening around you. To be silly and embrace your inner child. And you'll also see the beginning of something new for us - the MDW Market!

This idea has been living in my head for a long time. A way to take everything we've created here, this magazine, this community, the resources, and bring it into real life. A place where you can feel and see the spirit of MDW. Where stories are shared hand-to-hand, small businesses are supported in tangible ways, and where connection has space to blossom.

It's not just a pop-up. It's a continuation of what we've been building all along.

MDW started with me, but it has never been just mine. It belongs to every woman I've met, the ones who attended an event, supported a small business, or read something here and felt a little less alone. You are the heartbeat of this.

So while this issue might have my face on the front, I hope what you feel when you move through these pages is what has always been at the core of MDW. Connection, care, and the reminder that you don't have to do life (or business, or healing, or growth) on your own.

Cheers to what we're building together!

Elizabeth Rago
MDW Founder & Editor

DOWNLOAD

Tap on the cute icons or QR codes to shop instantly or learn more about the product featured.

About the Photographer

Becky Burger of Bloom & Gather Photography captured our cover with an editorial shoot for this issue, and the experience was nothing short of incredible. She has a fabulous ability to truly see you, capturing not just how you look, but your spirit, and she made me feel completely at ease every step of the way.

The result is imagery that feels authentic, effortless, and honestly... just amazing.

You should book a session!

Becky Burger

BLOOM & GATHER
Photography

the modern domestic woman

APRIL SPONSOR

Subscriber Gift

With this month's subscriber gift, I'd like you to create a little ritual for yourself. I've included a stick of palo santo, a satchel of lavender mint tea from Rishi Tea (one of my personal favorites), and a cute evil eye charm.

Remember, rituals don't have to be complicated, and honestly, they shouldn't be.

First step, boil water and then add the tea bag to steep. Inhale the herb and floral notes of the tea and notice the way the lavender settles your shoulders while the mint gently wakes you up. Hold the warm cup in your hands and allow your senses to wake up a bit. (Side convo, don't burn your hand on the cup!)

Then, when you're ready, light the palo santo stick. Hold the stick downward at a 45-degree angle and let the stick burn for 30 seconds. Blow out the flame and place the stick in a heatproof dish.

Notice the warm, woodsy, and slightly citrusy scent.

Take a deep breath and think about something good that you want to happen in your life. This could be a fresh start, better health, joy, or a boost in wealth. Whatever feels right for you in this moment.

Now, slowly sip your tea and envision this goodness.

These types of rituals can be as short or long as you'd like; the goal is to spend time with yourself.

Enjoy!
- Elizabeth

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Profile

Meet Elizabeth Rago

I've always been a writer, even before I had the title to prove it.

As a kid, I lived in my own little world, reading, writing, and imagining, with a mother who encouraged my little world. I still remember writing a book about penguins in fourth grade and feeling this deep sense of satisfaction, like I had found something that fit my desire to create and share that magic with others.

I didn't know what my career would look like yet, but I knew one thing: I was going to keep writing.

Little Elizabeth,
the aspiring writer.

My professional journey has never been one job, one title, or one lane. It's been a collection of experiences like writing press releases for a federal bank, creating web copy for a Fortune 500 company, ghostwriting for executives, putting together PR strategies for an agricultural start-up, and editorial work for digital magazines. Even when "writer" wasn't in my official title, it was always the role I was ultimately called to fill.

I've written across industries that most people wouldn't connect at first glance. One day, I was writing about high-end kitchen design and the latest designer handbag release, and the next, I was deep in B2B content for transportation and cannabis. This wide range of clients helped me step into different voices and perspectives. And I built a strong portfolio doing it.

At the same time, I was building something else. A life that included my husband and kids in it. I always saw motherhood in my future, and from the first look at my son, I was ready to keep exploring with this tiny human being. I'm in awe when kids experience new firsts and couldn't wait to ignite the same spark of curiosity and learning with my own children.

As my next adventure of motherhood started, I realized I didn't want to wait to have a career. Putting my writing on hold until my kids were older or out of the house made me sad. I loved writing, and I wanted my kids to be a part of seeing how their mother built what she loved from the ground up and understand what it looks like to create a life in real time. But that desire came with a cost.

It looked like waking up at 4 a.m. to write before anyone else was up. Working late into the night after bedtime, trying to meet deadlines when my brain was already exhausted, and taking on part-time jobs between freelance projects to keep money flowing in.

My life was constantly moving and shifting between roles: Mom. Employee. Freelancer. Chef. Wife. Daughter. Housekeeper. And back again.

There were so many years when I felt like I was doing everything halfway. I was carrying so much guilt because, while I had chosen to stay home and be the primary caretaker, always honoring this crucial role, I felt this constant pull to contribute financially to our family.

My internal self-talk ping ponged between "You're not spending enough time with the kids" and "You're not bringing in enough money."

The guilt of "never enough" plagued my thought life, yet fueled my desire to provide for my family, both from a mothering perspective and a financial one.

That intense guilt took years to unwind with therapy. I started to realize that there was no perfect way to "be there" for your family. That everyone's home looks different. And if I stepped back and really looked at my kids, they were happy, healthy, and thriving. This ridiculous pressure I put on myself was only distracting me from enjoying my life with my family and appreciating the career I was building.

But the next part of my story doesn't really begin until my life fell apart.

Between 2010 and 2013, my family went through a season that cracked everything open, emotionally, physically, and financially.

By day, I was writing about all these lovely elements of life (fancy clothes, expensive kitchens), and at night, I was navigating something entirely different: hiding my car so it wouldn't be repossessed, facial paralysis because of stress, relationship struggles, anxiety that didn't shut up, and the very real fear of not having enough.

And to the outside world, no one knew.

I walked out of my house every day and put a smile on my face, made pleasant conversation while secretly living a life unraveling behind closed doors. The hardest part wasn't just what we were going through; it was the shame.

Me, taking selfies like nothing's wrong

When I finally went looking for help, I did what most people do: I searched online. And while there were endless results, none of them felt right. I didn't want a random list of strangers, and I didn't want to guess. I also didn't have the capacity to sort through options because I was already overwhelmed with my life.

What I needed was a trusted voice. A referral from someone who understood. And when I finally opened up to a few people in my life, that's what I received.

Women who helped me find the right support. And even though they didn't know exactly what I was going through, they sat with me in seasons when I didn't know how to help myself.

Somewhere in those years of back-to-back stress, a question started to form: If I feel like this… how many other women are quietly feeling the same way and saying nothing?"

At the time, The Modern Domestic Woman was a lifestyle platform with DIYs, beauty tips, and home inspiration. It was polished and pretty.

But it wasn't completely honest in a way that spoke to the experience of the whole woman. So I started to shift it.

I shared about my anxiety and overwhelm one day amid the Morning Pretty posts and an article about the latest William Sonoma products I was crushing over. And my DMs and phone started blowing up.

The fam.

Doing yoga with the kids helped, too.

The girls that helped me and held me.

You might be thinking, "Elizabeth, so you shared about your anxiety. People do that all the time."

Indeed, now we live in a world where people are actively talking about mental health, but back when I shared my story, most women would not share this information publicly.

And that's the response that showed up in my social inbox and text messages.

"I'm going through something similar and need help..."

"Thank you for sharing your story. I just started taking meds and feel so ashamed, like I've failed at life."

"I'm not struggling with anxiety, but I am having relationship problems. Can you help me find a therapist?"

How could I not try to help these women?

So I began collecting resources the way I used to collect shoes - carefully, thoughtfully, with intention for who was reaching out. Therapists. Lawyers. Support groups. Local organizations.

Practitioners and professionals doing meaningful work who weren't focused on being seen online. They were on the ground, focused on helping people in real life.

And I knew other women beyond the ones in my DMs needed to know about them, too.

Deep conversations started happening with each professional I reached out to. Relationships were built through the stories of the women who needed support but didn't know where to start. And I accepted that if I was created to be a voice for people who didn't have the capacity to take that first step, I would take that first step with them and help be their voice.

Because I knew all too well the exhaustion of chronic stress and the guilt and shame of going through a rough season.

Looking back now, I can see how everything connected. The years of writing across industries, crazy early mornings and late nights. The small bits of growth despite the exhaustion and the season that broke me open.

None of it was wasted and I was building something I didn't even fully understand yet.

Today, MDW is what I needed back then. A space where you don't have to pretend everything is fine. A place where support is about honoring every element of my life - the good, the bad, and the pretty. (Because we all like looking nice and having lovely homes, even when we're going through a rough time.)

If there's one thing I've learned, it's this: You don't have to wait for your life to be perfectly in place to begin. Sometimes, you build it while you're in the middle of it. And sometimes, the thing you're building... is exactly what you needed all along.

Elizabeth

MDW Cares

MDW Cares is a network for women navigating life's many transitions, from motherhood to career shifts to divorce and beyond. We connect you with trusted local resources and community support so you don't have to walk the journey alone.

The following pages highlight events, support groups and therapists with immediate openings to help you find care when you need it most.

MDW April Support Groups & Events

FREE

COME AS YOU ARE COFFEE: SUPPORT GROUP FOR ALL WOMEN

Every Saturday, 8 AM - 9 AM

Storybook Cafe in Geneva, IL

Text 630-946-9102 to RSVP

FREE

MOMS SUPPORT GROUP

APRIL 8TH & 22ND, 7:15 PM - 8:30 PM

Batavia Library, Batavia, IL

Text 630-946-9102 to RSVP

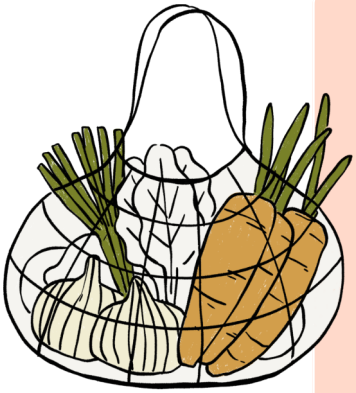
FREE

DIVORCED MOMS SUPPORT GROUP

SATURDAY MORNINGS

Virtual Bi-Weekly Meet Up

Text 630-474-5275 for more info



INTRO TO SUSTAINABLE LIVING: LEARNING HOW TO COOK FROM YOUR PANTRY

April 23, 6 PM - 8 PM

Chipko Market, St. Charles, IL

Cost: $25

SIGN UP →

MDW PROVIDERS

At MDW Cares, we don't recommend people willy-nilly. Every professional we refer you to is thoughtfully vetted. because when you're seeking support, quality, trust, and alignment matter. We want you to know that anyone you find here is someone we would confidently recommend to a friend, a sister, or ourselves.

That's why we're proud to feature three trusted professionals below, each of whom reflects these values in both their work and impact. If you need additional resources, visit mdwcares.com

Ages 10-35 & Bilingual

Jennyfer Garcia, LCSW

St. Charles, IL

As a proud Hispanic professional, Jennyfer brings deep cultural awareness to her work, creating a space where clients feel seen, respected, and safe to be themselves. Jennyfer uses an integrative, client-centered approach, blending CBT, mindfulness, and strengths-based techniques—to help clients build resilience and confidence.

Jennyfer is deeply passionate about empowering young people and fostering meaningful, trusting connections with both clients and their families.

nicole@bepresenttw.com

elliementalhealth.com (search St. Charles - Foxfield Rd)

@elliementalhealth_st.charlesil

Ages 10+ & Adults

Krupa Desai, LCPC

Lake-in-the-Hills and Telehealth in Illinois

Krupa Desai has spent more than 15 years supporting children, adolescents, and adults as they navigate anxiety, depression, grief, and life's many transitions. Drawn to the field from a young age, her work is rooted in creating a space where clients feel genuinely seen, heard, and accepted.

Known for her warm and steady presence, she is deeply committed to inclusive, culturally aware care that empowers clients to better understand themselves and build meaningful coping skills.

support@fostercounseling.org

fostercounseling.org

@fostercounseling

Adults & Couples

Lindsay Baish-Flynn, LPC

Wheaton, IL

Lindsay works with individuals and couples using an integrated, personalized approach that explores both inner emotional experiences and the broader social forces shaping their lives.

Lindsay creates a compassionate space using sincerity, humor, and a candid style, where clients can fully show up as themselves and move toward meaningful change. After transitioning from a career in corporate America, she brings a deep appreciation for growth, authenticity, and the courage it takes to start again.

hello@evergreencounseling.co

evergreencounseling.co

@evergreen_counseling_llc

A new chapter for MDW

Getting out into the community, sharing resources face-to-face, and creating spaces where you can experience what MDW is all about.

the mdw market

There are so many things that don't translate through a screen, and most of what we do and how we impact the women in our community happens face-to-face.

In addition to our workshops and events, we're so excited to launch the MDW Market, a living, breathing version of the magazine and the supportive community we've built together!

Our pop-up market is a place where free resources can be shared hand-to-hand, and you can see, feel, and touch the items we feature in our magazine.

We're proud to feature products created in our community, and some new, beautiful items made by women across the country.

Each pop-up will have its own personality. Guided by a rotating theme, the space will shift and evolve, sometimes centered around books and reflection, sometimes around plants and growth, sometimes around self-care, wellness, or small, whimsical objects that make you smile.

It gives us the freedom to follow what feels relevant, seasonal, and needed, while keeping each experience fresh, intentional, and a little unexpected.

No two visits will look exactly the same.

And that's part of the magic!

Elizabeth

MDW MARKET *calendar*

JULIETS SHOP · DINE · DISCOVER GENEVA, IL	JULIETS Weekend @ Inluro in Geneva	11 APRIL
16 MAY	Batavia Farmer's Market	
	House of 423 in Geneva	30 MAY
7 JUNE	St. Charles Pride Fest @ Mt. Saint Mary's Park	

More pop-ups will continue to find their way onto the calendar, each one a little different, each one shaped by the spaces and people who help bring it to life. Follow us on IG for updates!

If you have a space that could hold something like this, we'd love to explore it with you. And if you're a maker creating something thoughtful, useful, or a little bit lovely, we'd love to see what you're working on.

Interested in hosting the MDW Market pop-up or have a product you'd like us to consider? Email us at themoderndomesticwoman@gmail.com

Divorced Moms Support Circle

Single motherhood isn't about perfection, but about learning to trust the quiet strength you carry.

Join us virtually!

When: Saturdays 2x monthly
Date: Every other Saturday
Time: 8 AM- 9 AM
Where: Virtual Zoom (link provided after sign up)

Cost: FREE

A safe space for...

- Divorced moms rebuilding their lives.
- Moms feeling overwhelmed, isolated, or emotionally drained.
- Single moms seeking connection and support.
- Moms navigating co-parenting with a difficult or high-conflict ex.
- Moms currently going through a divorce.
- Moms wanting a community that gets what they're carrying.

Please pre-register here to receive your link:
Call/text: 630-474-5275 or E-mail: carrie@noreilahealing.com

To Elizabeth, A Thank You

There are women who build things loudly. And then there are women who change everything without needing the spotlight.

Elizabeth is the second kind.

The Modern Domestic Woman isn't just a brand or a platform. It's a space. A landing place. A reminder that women are allowed to be more than one thing at once, and that they don't have to figure it all out alone.

But what people don't always see is what it takes to build something like this. The emotional labor. The consistency. The belief in something before there's proof it will work. The choice to keep showing up, even when your own life is heavy.

Elizabeth has done that. Over and over again.

And for me, this isn't just something I've witnessed. It's something I've lived.

Six months postpartum, I was at my lowest. I was in an abusive marriage that was unraveling into what would become a high conflict divorce. I had just lost my job in a space that didn't support me or what I was going through. Everything felt uncertain. My identity, my stability, my future.

In one of the most out-of-character decisions I've ever made, I stepped out of my comfort zone and joined an MDW Moms Group.

She didn't try to fix everything. She didn't need to. She created space. She connected me to resources. She reminded me, in ways both direct and subtle, that I wasn't alone and that I wasn't done.

The resources within MDW weren't just helpful.

They were life-changing.
They gave me direction when I had none.
They gave me support when I felt isolated.
They helped me rebuild in a season where everything felt like it was falling apart.

And that's why I'm so passionate about this work as the MDW Mental Health Advisor now.

Because I know what it feels like to need it.

I know what it feels like to be on the receiving end of a community that actually shows up. Not performative. Not surface-level. But real, tangible support.

Elizabeth didn't just build something beautiful. She built something that saves people.

She built something that saved me.

And somewhere along the way, she became more than just the person behind it all. She became my best friend.

What stands out to me most isn't just what she's built. It's how she shows up within it.

She creates space for other women to use their voices.
She makes room at the table instead of guarding a seat.
She leads without making it about herself.

And that's rare.

We've been in rooms where collaboration should have been the goal, and instead it felt like competition. And every time, we've kind of looked at each other like… wait, what? That's just not how she operates. Elizabeth has always led with collaboration, stayed real in spaces that can feel performative, and when she grows, she brings other women with her.

Elizabeth, this isn't just about you being on the cover of the April magazine. It's about everything you are. Editor, mom, wife, daughter, nonprofit founder, and someone who changes lives every single day, including mine.

It's a thank you.

For seeing me when I couldn't see myself.
For building something that holds women up when life feels like too much.
For the way you lead, the way you include, and the way you keep showing up.

The impact is real. The community is stronger because of you.

And I am, too.

XO,
Carrie

Carrie Summers, LCSW, is MDW's Mental Health Advisor, known for creating warm, judgment-free spaces where you can exhale and be yourself. A therapist, certified divorce coach, and single mom, she brings both professional expertise and real-life understanding to her work, supporting clients through life transitions, relationships, perinatal mental health, and divorce. Carrie owns Noreila Healing & Wellness in Wheaton, Illinois.

MENTAL HEALTH

Nature as Medicine: What Watching Birds Taught Me About Coping With Stress

by Elizabeth Rago

There was a time when self-care wasn't something I could afford, but stepping outside always was. In this piece, I reflect on how a few quiet minutes in my small garden, watching and listening to birds, became an unexpected anchor during some of my hardest moments.

There was a stretch of time when life felt impossibly heavy.

Money was more than tight; it was a non-negotiable conversation - we just didn't have any. Self-care, at least the version sold to us in neat little packages, felt completely out of reach.

And yet, every morning, just outside my door, something lovely and generous was waiting for me anyway.

Nature didn't ask anything in return.
It didn't require a membership or a purchase. It simply existed. Open, available, and offering something I didn't yet have words for: relief.

Amid the craziness of life with three kids under the age of 6, I started small. A few minutes outside. A pause between tasks. A breath of fresh air when everything inside felt so loud I could scream.

And eventually, I really took to the birds.

At first, it was just their sounds. Layered choruses of tweets and chirps that I had heard my entire life but never truly listened to. The birdsong pecked through the fogginess of my stress while I sat and watched my kids play.

Then it became the sight of the birds and their silly little movements. The quick fluttering of their wings on our sad moss-filled birdbath, the tilt of their head as they inspected a bug on a tree branch.

Watching these little feathered beings, I could feel my chest loosen for the first time in a long while.

In those moments, my focus shifted from what I was lacking and worrying about to something immediate and alive.

The simple act of stepping into nature and taking in the sights and sounds of living things allowed me to breathe a little deeper, unclench my jaw, and let my thoughts slow down just enough to feel like I could get through the next 10 minutes.

It turns out, there's a reason for that.

Nature AS MEDICINE

Spending time in nature has been shown to significantly decrease stress and anxiety, even lowering cortisol levels, which is one of the body's key stress indicators. Exposure to green space and even bird watching has been associated with lower levels of anxiety and stress. And for those navigating attention challenges, time outdoors has also been linked to improved focus and reduced ADHD symptoms.

But beyond the data, there's something deeply human about it.

Nature invites us out of rumination and negative meditation, the endless loop of thoughts that keep us stuck, and into the present moment. Studies have shown that time in natural environments can reduce activity in the part of the brain associated with rumination, while also improving overall mood and sense of well-being.

And it's not that I didn't know any of this at the time. We all know getting out into the fresh air and grounding in nature is good for our health, but I was drowning so badly in chronic stress and the pressure of taking care of everyone around me that I couldn't press pause for 5 minutes to help myself.

But once I did step outside and took time to watch the birds, I felt lighter and a bit more capable. A little less alone inside my own thoughts, and hopeful that my situation would get better.

Nature became my much needed medicine.

"It was such a pleasure to sink one's hands into the warm earth, to feel at one's fingertips the possibilities of the new season."

Kate Morton,
The Forgotten Garden

A Messy-ish Garden

I used to think that yards needed to be perfectly trimmed, color-coordinated, or constantly “done.” Even the natural-looking yards. But as I sat deep in depression and anxiety, the idea that yet another thing would be added to my to-do list was exhausting.

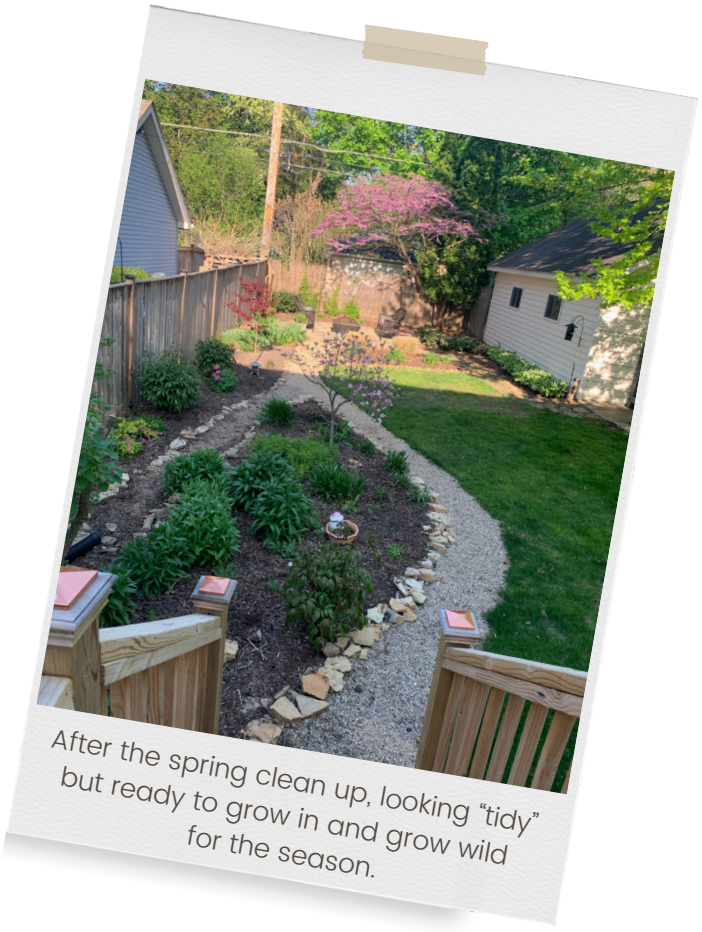
I couldn’t use my garden for all the mental health benefits if it looked beautiful from a distance but required constant control up close.

Instead, I leaned into a combination of a tidy yet naturally wild space. Because I do like planting new plants that tickle fancy and cleaning up as the seasons change.

Those tasks for me are deeply satisfying.

For example, rage weeding helps deeply when I’m frustrated and don’t know what to do next. Browsing through my favorite local garden center and discovering new plants is my own version of self-care and allows me time to slow down and breathe.

Because my garden is an evolving, literal living room where life ebbs and flows. And I wante to spend more time there.



After the spring clean up, looking “tidy” but ready to grow in and grow wild for the season.

Back to the birds

So, back to the bird watching....

In my mission to bring what my daughter calls “rotund bundles of whimsy” to our garden, I started to pay attention to what thrived in our space instead of what I thought should be there.

I did some research and chose plants that thrived in the Midwest and our specific hardiness zone. The native varieties that supported birds and pollinators. What happened was a unique ecosystem unfolding right in front of me. The space became less about presentation and more about participation.

And the birds seemed to notice.

They stayed longer. Came back more often. Moved through the garden like it was meant for them, not just arranged by me.

It also became more accessible and less cost-crushing than I expected.

I found local plant swaps and free gardening groups on social media where neighbors share cuttings, divide perennials, and pass along native plants that are already adapted to our environment.

Keeping in mind the “no pressure, no perfection” goal that I set for myself. I focused on learning and a willingness to let things grow a little differently.

If you’re craving something similar, it doesn’t have to be complicated:

- Start small. Choose one corner to let grow naturally
- Look for native plants that support birds and pollinators in your area
- Join a local “buy nothing” or gardening group to source plants affordably (or free!)
- Leave a little imperfection like fallen leaves, seed heads, and layered growth, which all create habitats for a variety of living things

All in all, the garden became a place I returned to not out of obligation, but because I needed it.

My outdoor space gave something back to me. Not just visually, but emotionally. It consistently invites me to rest, let out my emotions both good and sad (I’ve cried a lot in the garden, no shame!), and I love that the garden never judges.

In a world that tells us to do more, fix more, spend more, etc., nature doesn’t ask that of us. Healing and self-care for some of us look like stepping outside for a few minutes and noticing the silly birds hopping through the trees.

Time in nature isn't just calming, it's restorative. For me, it makes stress bearable. It quiets my anxious thoughts, pulls me out of meditating on everything I'm not doing "right", and back into the present. The very things I was reaching for back when my kiddos were small, like relief, clarity, and just a second to catch my breath amid the chaos of living, was already there, woven into something as simple as stepping outside and paying attention to the birds in my yard.

And that's the healing magic of nature. It doesn't demand you fix everything.

The birds, the flowers, the pollinators, they never ask you to have more, spend more, or be more.

They simply exist.

And for me, that's a fantastic reminder that I can have moments throughout the day where nothing is expected of me except existing.

About the Author

Elizabeth Rago is a writer, marketing strategist, and community builder with over 20 years of experience crafting meaningful stories across industries, from lifestyle and sustainability to commercial insurance and mental health advocacy. Elizabeth leads The Modern Domestic Woman (MDW) and MDW Cares, a grounded and supportive space offering real talk, trusted resources, and meaningful connection for women navigating life's harder seasons.

Inspired by her own rough season, she created MDW to reduce isolation and build community without the fluff. Equal parts strategy and soul, she believes in the power of storytelling, strong support systems, and a well-timed meme.

Art Speaks When Words Can't

by Elizabeth Rago

There's something about a mural that stops you mid-step.

Maybe it's the scale. Maybe it's the color. Or maybe it's the message. Bold enough to meet you exactly where you are, even on a day you didn't realize you needed it.

And that's exactly the heart of the Kayla's Hope mural, located downtown St. Charles, Illinois, on Rt. 31 & Main Street, and the mission of the entire organization.

Founded in honor of Kayla Brooke Lehmann, the organization carries forward her spirit. Creative, compassionate, and deeply attuned to others.
After Kayla's death in 2018 following her struggle with severe depression, her family chose to build something that could reach the people who need it most: those quietly carrying pain, those unsure how to ask for help, those who feel unseen.

Kayla's Hope exists for them.

Through awareness, education, and tangible resources, the foundation works to dismantle the stigma surrounding mental health and create space for honest conversation. But what makes their approach especially powerful is how they lead with connection. Through art installations, community events, and visible acts of kindness, they meet people where they are, without expectation, and without judgment.

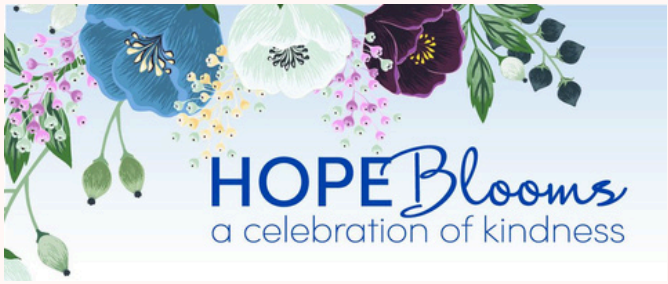
Because when facing something as isolating as mental illness, community matters.

And that's the intention behind Kayla's Hope Week, happening this month, April 5–11, 2026. It's an open invitation to remember that support doesn't have to be something you search for alone.

Like the mural itself, the message is simple but powerful:

You are not alone.
You matter.
And there is still hope.

Kayla's Hope
It's OKAY to not be OKAY

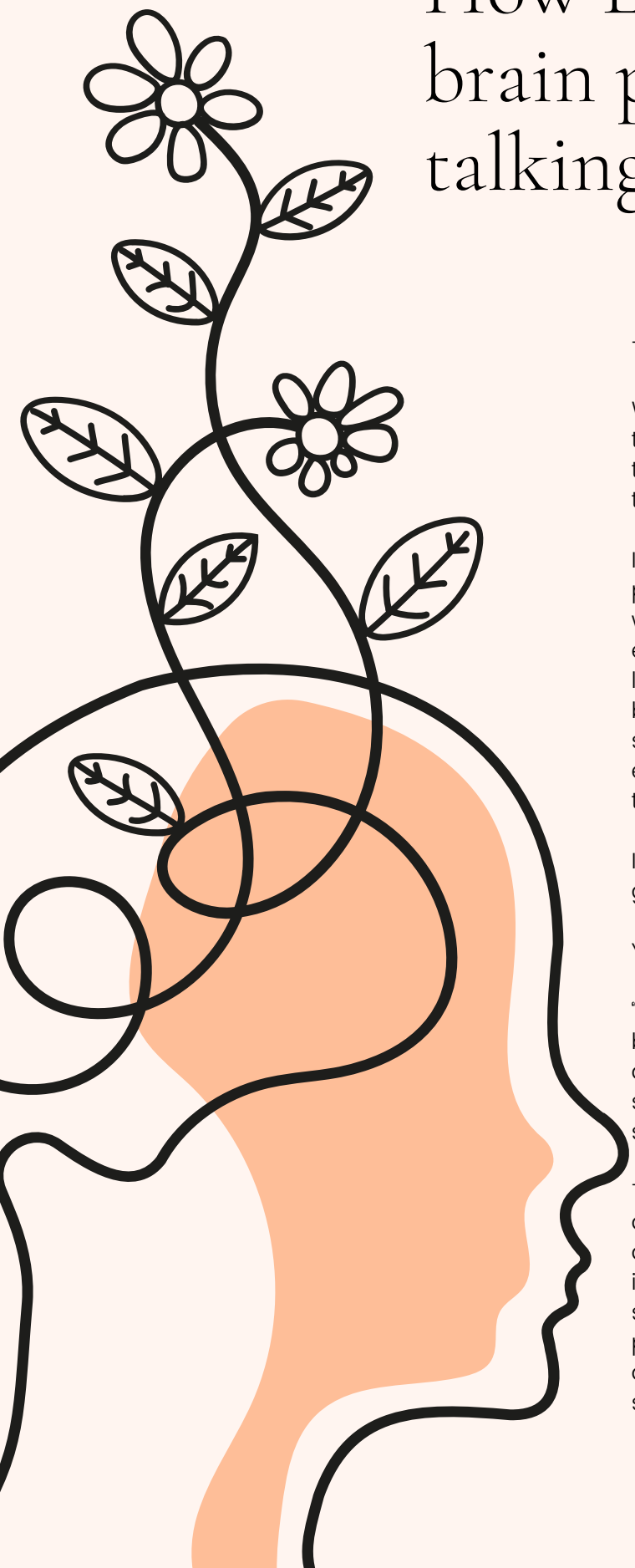


Learn more about
Kayla's Hope Blooms Gala 2026
April 11 at 6:00 PM
Eagle Brook Country Club, Geneva

EMDR Therapy: Say Less

by Danielle Slyder, LCPC, ATR
Clinical Supervisor
TriCity Family Services

MDW Contributing Partner



How EMDR helps the brain process when talking can't

Talk, talk, talk...is that all there is?

When most people think of therapy, they think of talk therapy, otherwise known as psychotherapy. While talking and verbally processing can be the best route of treatment for many people, it's not for everyone.

If we transport ourselves back to a park in 1987, a psychologist by the name of Francine Shapiro was walking and reflecting on some of her stressful experiences. As she was reflecting, her eyes moved from left to right as she looked at her surroundings. When she became aware of what her eyes were doing, she noticed she felt better, more relaxed. She then began using this eye movement with others and started to formally study the effects.

It might sound surprising, "Eye movements? That's really going to help me?"

Yes! And the science behind it is pretty amazing.

"Bilateral stimulation" means working both sides of the brain at the same time. You can try it now: pat your head and rub your stomach. Connecting our emotional right side of the brain with the logical left side helps make sense of overwhelming experiences.

The left side of your brain helps soothe the right side during and after a bad or traumatic experience. If that does not happen, the brain starts adapting the best way it knows how. Like a scratched CD or corrupted file, things start to change, and you can't fully move on from that point. Specific memories, smells, places, body sensations, and other triggers can constantly bring you back to that stressful experience or stuck point.

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) helps "fix the scratch" on the CD or the corrupted file by saving the memory in a new, more productive way. When you remember the stressful experience, you don't just talk about it - you feel it and notice it, without having to retell every detail out loud.

You might notice a lump in your throat, pain in your head, or your mind drifting to another memory. You simply go with it, while your therapist guides you through the process at a pace that feels safe and manageable.

The therapist will give you a few options for how to engage in bilateral stimulation. This could be tapping your knees or feet left and right repeatedly, or following the therapist's hand movements with your eyes. There are many methods, and your therapist will help find the right fit for your situation.

Once you begin thinking about the experience, your therapist will check in with you and provide prompts from time to time. You don't need to say more than a few words, sometimes nothing at all. It's not about talking; it's about feeling and re-experiencing in a safe way.

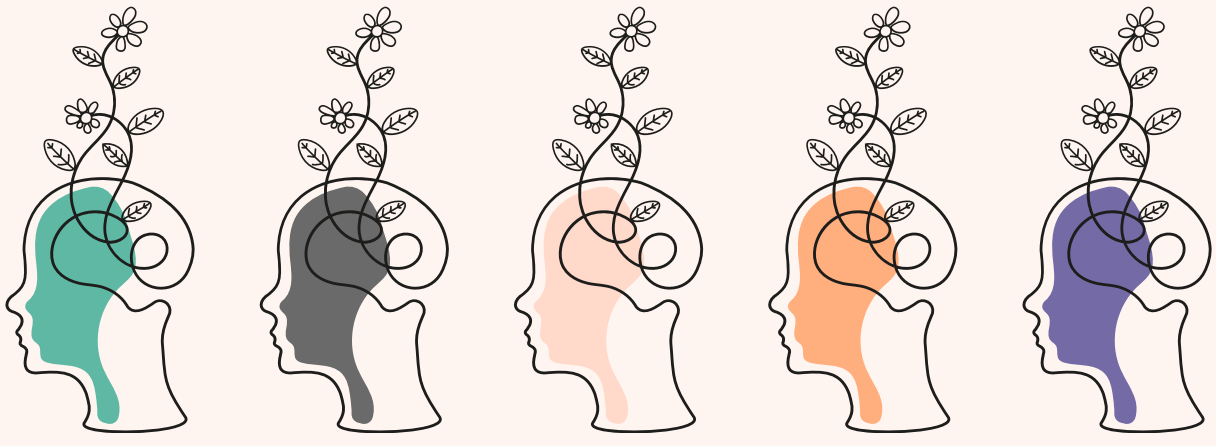
This allows you to feel or mentally say the things you weren't able to during the initial experience, and then rewrite what that experience made you believe about yourself, the world, or other people. It can also help with everyday stress that feels stu
ck, like constant overwhelm or reacting more strongly than you want to.

If you were in a car accident and broke your arm, you might start telling yourself things like, "I am dumb," "I can't do anything right," or "I don't deserve nice things."

With EMDR, we work on "installing," or rewriting, those thoughts into more helpful beliefs such as "I am capable," "I do things right all the time," and "I deserve nice things."

Whether you struggle with anxiety, depression, PTSD, eating disorders, or addiction, EMDR can be one of many therapeutic options to help you move forward.

Reach out to TriCity Family Services to explore our affordable therapy and treatment options: www.tricityfamilyservices.org or 630.232.1070.



About the Author

Danielle Slyder, LCPC, ATR
Clinical Supervisor
TriCity Family Services

Danielle Slyder is the Clinical Supervisor at TriCity Family Services (TCFS) and has been supporting the mental health needs of the community for over a decade. She currently provides clinical supervision, continuing education opportunities, and guidance to the providers and interns of TCFS.

Danielle has experience working with a wide range of individuals, families, and groups. In particular, Danielle has extensive experience with attachment and trauma-based issues, including adoption and foster care. She is an avid advocate for the LGBTQ+ community and individuals struggling with gender and sexual orientation. She believes in creating a supportive environment and an open mind to all. She utilizes therapies such as TF-CBT, DBT, EMDR, and Art Therapy.

Danielle seeks to support families and individuals who are experiencing anxiety, depression, trauma reactions, ADHD, behavioral issues, and many other struggles. She believes therapy provides an opportunity to unlock the change and strength we have within.

Danielle received her Master's in Counseling with a specialty in Art Therapy from Adler School of Professional Psychology. She is currently a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC), Art Therapist (ATR), and LENS neurofeedback provider.

On Danielle's time off, she can be found camping, traveling, watching comedy sketches, painting, and jamming out to music!

Learn more about therapy and other support initiatives at TriCity Family Services at tricityfamilyservices.org

WHIMSY

A LITTLE WOOL, A LITTLE WONDER

Inside the soft, intricate world of Whimsical Chaos

Needle felting is not fast work. It cannot be rushed, automated, or skipped ahead. And at its core, it's a process of transforming loose wool fibers into solid, sculptural forms using a barbed needle. Each tiny poke tangles the fibers together, slowly building structure and shape.

And when we say slowly, we mean it.

A single piece can take hours. Sometimes days. For custom work, weeks. This is art that asks for presence. And artist Jenn Kats leans into that pace.

In a world that often demands speed and output, her work insists on patience and the understanding that something meaningful takes time to become itself.

Jenn's wool sculptures carry big personalities. Each one feels like they have their own story. With tiny expressions built on subtle textures, each sculpture is carefully shaped, layer by layer, until it becomes something entirely its own.

Alongside her felting work, Jenn also creates macramé pieces using recycled cotton cord whenever possible.

Handcrafted in St. Charles, Illinois, Jenn's work can be found at Urban Apothecary in Batavia, and in her online shop at whimsicalchaosllc.square.site

Whimsical CHAOS

“Lighthouses don’t go running all over an island looking for boats to save; they just stand there shining.”
— Anne Lamott
Whimsical
CHAOS

FOLK ART

Folk art is rooted in storytelling and everyday beauty, often created by hand and passed down through generations. We love the simple, symbolic motifs like flowers, birds, and nature. This feathered friend has pretty stamped floral details and is ready to hang in any corner of your home.

Hanging Folk Bird

CLAY HIVE CO.

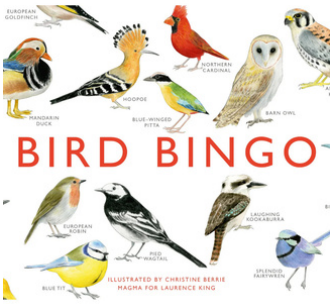
Finds for the Bird-Curious

It's Elizabeth again, talking about birds! In my earlier article I talked about the mental health benefits of observing birds in nature and how it helped me find calm in the midst of my day and most importantly, slow my brain down. Below are some of my favorite items that help me learn more about and joy the featheres friends in my life.

xo, Elizabeth

1

A fun way to learn about birds while having fun, this beautifully illustrated game turns casual curiosity into conversation and laughter. Buy it from The Peregrine Fund, where your purchase helps protect birds of prey and the ecosystems they call home.



2

I've had my Bird Buddy Smart Bird Feeder for two years now, and I'm still completely obsessed. It turns everyday bird visits into little moments of surprise and joy. I even added the hummingbird version, and between the stunning close-up photos and the app that helps you learn about the birds right in your own backyard, it somehow just keeps getting better.
Pro tip: get the solar version!

3

I love how this Acorn Hanging Roosting House from Duncraft blends so seamlessly into the trees. It feels like a natural extension of the branches rather than something added, while offering birds a safe, cozy place to rest through the winter. I always gravitate toward pieces from small businesses, knowing they're thoughtfully made and support conservation and families.

FAIRIES

"I love all things fairy-related and love setting up tiny magical settings and spaces throughout my garden. This charming acorn fairy house is made from hypertufa, a lightweight, durable, stone-like blend of cement, peat moss, and perlite, giving it that perfectly weathered, tucked-into-nature look that feels like it belongs right among the moss and leaves." - Elizabeth

Acorn Fairy House

DE JARDIN CREATIONS

SLOW LIVING

IN THE MARKET

The MDW Market is launching on April 11 at Inluro, and this first one is all about rituals and self-care.

Each MDW Market will carry its own theme, evolving with the seasons and the needs of our community.

For this debut, we wanted to start with something grounding and accessible: small, meaningful rituals you can weave into your everyday life. The kind that don't require a full lifestyle overhaul, just a moment of intention.

Inside the market, you'll find a thoughtfully curated mix of women-owned businesses, alongside a few MDW-exclusive pieces created just for this experience.

the mdw market

Come see us at
Inluro in Geneva
on April 11th
from 11 am - 5 pm.

We're introducing DIY bracelet kits, where you can create something personal and lasting, finished with a natural wood bead infused with a custom Inluro scent. It's a lovely, sensory ritual you can carry with you.

We'll also have self-care bundles featuring selenite, palo santo, and sage, designed to support moments of grounding, clearing, and calling something good in.

You'll find whimsical MDW totes, charm bookmarks perfect for gifting (or keeping), and a selection of free resources, because support should always be within reach.

Everything is chosen with intention, rooted in our belief in slow, peaceful living.

BOOK CLUB

Reading Between the Lines of Midlife

Through the Soul Sisters Book Club, DeeDee invites women into deeper conversations about their bodies, their health, and what it means to age well.

Soul Sisters

DeeDee Mehren has built her wellness community Feed Mind Body Soul as a grounding and expansive space, where women are invited to tune in to their bodies and ask challenging questions about their health and lives.

Over the years, DeeDee has become known for creating environments where conversations flow easily and meaningfully. And the introduction of the Soul Sisters Book Club feels like a natural extension of that ethos.

The inaugural read, The New Perimenopause by Mary Claire Haver, offers a grounded and approachable entry point into understanding perimenopause and menopause. Covering everything from hormonal shifts to sleep and strength, the book serves as both a resource and a conversation starter. And importantly, it meets women wherever they are, whether just beginning to notice changes or well into the journey.

For many women, this season can feel isolating. There's often a gap between what's happening in the body and what's being openly discussed. The Soul Sisters Book Club will close the gap and offer a place to process information in real time with a community of women.

Future reads will focus on health and wellness to create a shared language and a starting point for conversations that might otherwise feel difficult to begin.

feed mind body soul book club

Sign up

Date: Tuesday, May 12, 2026, at 6:30 PM
Place: Geneva Public Library + Zoom

Cost: $20 (100% of the proceeds will be donated to the Geneva Community Chest)

What's your sign?

CAPRICORN (DEC. 22 – JAN. 19)

April is asking you to loosen the structure just enough to let something unexpected in. Not everything needs to be productive to be worthwhile. **Embrace your whimsy:** Have you been yearning to get creative? What about diving into a project that provides just enough stability but ends in a joyful result - perhaps embroidery, needlepoint, cross-stitch, or needle felting?

AQUARIUS (JAN. 20 – FEB. 18)

Your ideas are evolving, and you're seeing things from a new angle. Let yourself think differently without needing immediate validation. Your perspective is the point. **Embrace your whimsy:** Experiment! Start a passion project, redesign something in your life, or explore a quirky interest that feels uniquely you.

PISCES (FEB. 19 – MAR. 20)

You're moving through a dreamy but clarifying space, where intuition is guiding you more than logic. Trust what you feel, even if you can't fully explain it yet. **Embrace your whimsy:** Lean into creativity this month. Paint, write, daydream, or spend time near water, letting your mind wander freely. Having a hard time pulling away from your schedule? Block out time for yourself, even if it's a 15-minute lap around the block to listen to the sounds of your neighbordhood.

ARIES (MAR. 21 – APR. 19)

You're feeling the spark again, and this time it's less about rushing forward and more about choosing where your energy matters. April invites you to lead with intention instead of impulse. Not everything needs to be a sprint. **Embrace your whimsy:** Try something playful and physical like roller skating, a spontaneous day trip, or starting a bold new hobby just because it excites you.

TAURUS (APR. 20 – MAY 20)

There's a lovely comfort returning to your routines, but you're also being nudged to soften your grip on what's familiar. Growth doesn't have to disrupt your peace; it can deepen it. **Embrace your whimsy**: Indulge your senses! Fresh flowers on your table, a new cozy throw, or a slow morning ritual that combines your favorite tea and music.

GEMINI (MAY 21 – JUNE 20)

Your mind is a flurry with creative ideas again, but clarity comes when you give yourself space to follow curiosity without overcommitting. Let things be light before they become serious. **Embrace your whimsy:** Start a "just for fun" list. Think new podcasts, books, or random skills to try. Let yourself explore without needing to master anything.

CANCER (JUNE 21 – JULY 22)

You're coming out of a more introspective season, and while your sensitivity is still heightened, there's strength in how deeply you feel. Let connection find you again. **Embrace your whimsy:** Create a cozy corner or plan a low-key gathering. Something that feels safe, warm, and maybe a little nostalgic?

LEO (JULY 23 – AUG. 22)

You're ready to be seen again, but this time it feels more aligned and less about performance, more about authentic expression. Let yourself take up space without overthinking it. **Embrace your whimsy**: Say yes to something creative. How about painting, dance lessons, dressing up for no reason, or planning a moment where you get to indulge in something just for you?

VIRGO (AUG. 23 – SEPT. 22)

You've been doing the work behind the scenes, and now you're starting to see how those small, consistent efforts are shaping something meaningful. Progress doesn't need to be perfect to count. **Embrace your whimsy:** Add a touch of beauty to your routines. A new silly notebook, fresh pens, or a small ritual that makes your day feel a little more magical. Perhaps lighting a candle or getting that sage out...

LIBRA (SEPT. 23 – OCT. 22)

You're craving balance again, but it's less about keeping everyone happy and more about honoring what feels aligned for you. Your voice matters in the equation. **Embrace your whimsy:** Lean into aesthetics. Rearrange a space, curate a playlist with tunes from your childhood, or wear something that makes you feel fancy even if you're just going to the grocery store. (Don't forget to strut while you're out!)

SCORPIO (OCT. 23 – NOV. 21)

Things feel a little less heavy this month, and that might surprise you. Not everything needs to be analyzed or figured out. Some things can just be enjoyed as they are. This month, let yourself experience life without always looking for what's underneath. **Embrace your whimsy:** Explore something a little mysterious... How about journaling, tarot, or re-reading a book or podcast that pulled you in and changed your perspective?

SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22 – DEC. 21)

You're craving movement again this month. Stagnation doesn't suit you, and April opens the door to new perspectives. But only if you're willing to follow the pull. **Embrace your whimsy:** Let curiosity be your compass. Follow the urge, even if it makes no sense on paper. What about exploring how to create a teeny, tiny fairy garden in a small glass jar?

Intro to Sustainable Living: Learning How to Cook From Your Pantry

On April 23, MDW will host Intro to Sustainable Living: Learning How to Cook From Your Pantry, a workshop led by chef and sustainable living guide Katie McCall.

Designed to meet people exactly where they are, this event takes the overwhelm out of "going green" and replaces it with something far more approachable: small, meaningful shifts rooted in everyday life.

Katie's approach centers on progress over perfection. Rather than asking you to overhaul your kitchen overnight, she walks you through the first steps of building a pantry that supports both your household and your values. Attendees will learn how to cook with what they already have, reduce food waste, and slowly transition to more sustainable staples, all while honoring the realities of busy families, budgets, and evolving routines.

At the heart of the experience is Chipko Market's refill model, thoughtfully curated by owner Vandana Singh-Planis. At Chipko Market, sustainability becomes tangible. Customers are invited to bring their own clean jars to fill with pantry essentials, from grains to spices, or select from reusable containers and packaging available in-store. The concept is simple but powerful: take only what you need, waste less, and reconnect with the act of shopping as something intentional.

The workshop will also highlight a range of products available at Chipko, from artisanal coffee and golden honey to biodegradable household cleaners and natural personal care items, demonstrating how sustainability can extend beyond the kitchen into everyday living.

Vandana Singh-Planis

More than anything, this event is about removing the pressure that often comes with sustainable living. It's about learning, experimenting, and building habits that feel good and last.

SIGN UP →

Chipko Market
WHERE SUSTAINABILITY TAKES ROOT

The Return of Juliets Weekend in Downtown Geneva

JULIETS
SHOP · DINE · DISCOVER
GENEVA, IL

Returning April 10–12, 2026, Juliets Weekend (Just Us Ladies Into Eating Together and Shopping) invites you into the heart of downtown Geneva for a thoughtfully curated experience that blends shopping, connection, and discovery.

Because if there's anything we believe in at MDW, it's this: community, supporting local, and spending time in person with people who get you go hand in hand.

The experience begins Friday evening at the Geneva History Museum with the Juliets Kickoff Party. A warm, welcoming start designed to set the tone for the weekend ahead.

Think: hors d'oeuvres, a glass in hand, and that first exhale of "I'm so glad I came." It's where you'll meet the business owners behind the storefronts, gather your thoughtfully curated swag bag, and begin mapping out a weekend that's equal parts planned and serendipitous.

Shop — Browse Geneva's boutiques and uncover thoughtful pieces, exclusive offers, and in-store experiences created just for the weekend.

Indulge — Settle in at local restaurants offering feature menus, cocktails, tastings, and sweet little moments worth savoring.

Relax — Turn the weekend into a true reset by staying at a nearby hotel or Airbnb and allowing yourself to slow down.

Connect — Step into workshops, gatherings, and creative experiences designed to bring women together to learn, laugh, and feel a little less alone.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

Your ticket unlocks the full Juliets experience, including:

- Kickoff Reception at the Geneva History Museum
- A tote bag filled with giveaways from participating businesses
- Exclusive sales and promotions throughout the weekend
- Special restaurant menus and beverage offerings just for attendees
- Curated pop-ups and in-store activations
- Access to VIP Juliets events (some may require additional tickets)

THE MDW MARKET AT INLURO

Saturday, April 11 from 11 AM – 5 PM

On Saturday, we're bringing the MDW Market at Inluro on State Street in Geneva, our new signature pop-up experience designed to feel like stepping into the pages of our magazine.

We're also introducing a special hands-on element for the day: guests can purchase our DIY bracelet kits, finished with a wood bead infused with a custom Inluro scent.

This DIY kit is a small but meaningful ritual for self-care, blending scent, touch, and intention into something you can carry with you long after the weekend ends.

the mdw market

INLURO®

The Magic Happens Between the Stops

At its core, Juliets Weekend is about more than what you take home; it's about how you feel while you're walking through the streets of Geneva, the conversations with friends, and the shops you didn't expect to fall in love with.

It's community and lasting memories, thoughtfully woven into every detail of the weekend.

JULIETS
SHOP · DINE · DISCOVER
GENEVA, IL

How to Join In

JULIETS Weekend tickets are $50 and include access to a thoughtfully curated lineup of events, experiences, and exclusive perks throughout April 10–12.

Secure your spot at julietsgeneva.com and start planning your weekend, whether that means mapping out every stop or leaving space to wander.

Aries and the Season of Becoming

by Blakely Kresl

grow into it

As the Year of the Horse emerges, so does the beautiful season of Aries.

The first of the zodiac calendar, Aries, invites a gallop of fresh energy, a spark in the air, and a whole season of defrosting and getting excited again for the fruitful seasons ahead. Although we may not see all the blossoms yet, there's something so special about this time, right here, right now, as we move into Aries season during the Year of the Horse. It is a season of transformation, of growth, of planting, and of taking steps for our future selves.

The season of planting

Aries season always reminds me of the power of planting seeds. It is, after all, a direct reflection of Mother Earth's natural rhythm. She, too, is planting seeds, just like your aunt tending to her backyard garden or your neighbor planting new seeds for her front stoop pots. This is a season of immense care for the small sparks, the happenings that are just starting to bear fruit around us. It's a season of hope, of faith, of excitement, and of just doing (starting) the dang thing!

The results aren't going to happen overnight. You cannot expect your tulips to bloom the day after tending to their seeds and burying them in the earth. But what you can do is plant your seeds little by little, every day, and enjoy the process. This is where patience begins to matter.

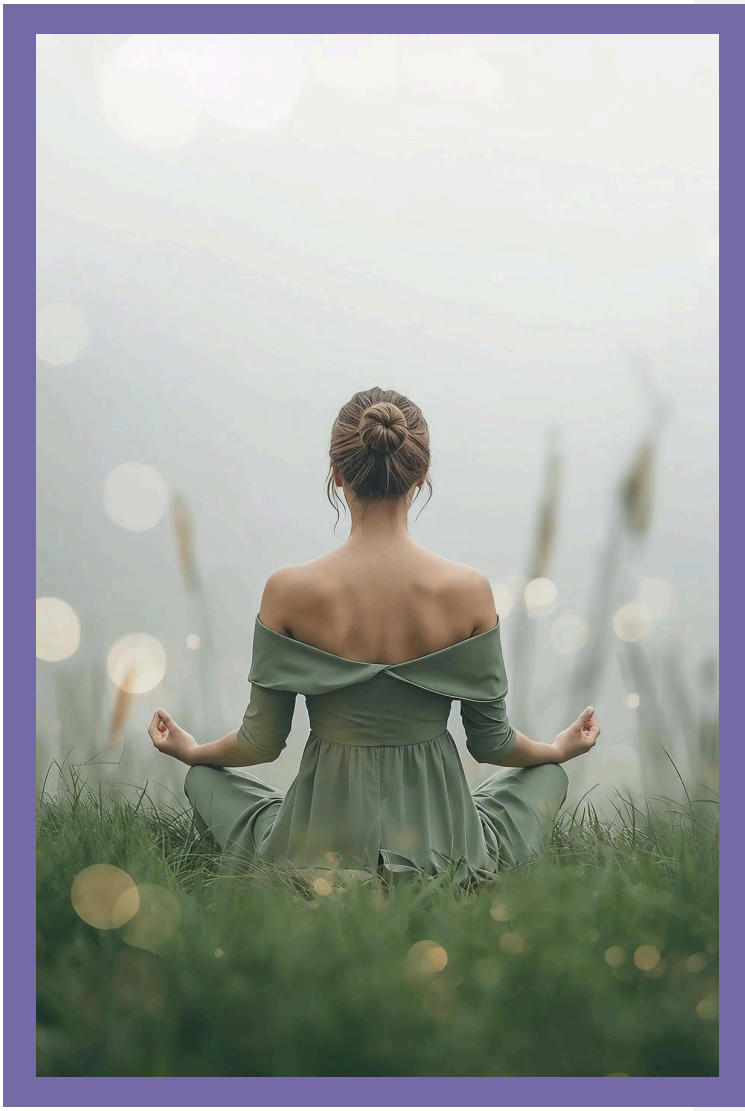
This season is about awareness, too, remembering to love your own rhythm more than others' rush. Seeds grow at different rates. One tomato seed may bloom faster than the strawberry, but the berry is what you want. It's sweeter and tends to your desires, your manifestations, and your personal goals.

Who you're becoming

And this is where your role in the process comes in. One of the best pieces of advice I've heard is to do things right now, in the present, for your future self. Your future self, the person you stretch to be every single day, deserves their bed made. They deserve to be taken care of and gently talked to. They deserve to feel sore after a workout, strong after a night's rest. They deserve to feel brave after taking that risk. They deserve to be this transformed person because you already took the steps to get there.

You are perfect just the way you are, there's no denying it. But don't we all have aspects of our lives that we want to grow into, to be more present with?

This is where Aries comes in



This is where Aries energy becomes clear. The power of Aries is telling us all to show up for ourselves today so that tomorrow we can thrive from the fruitful seeds we've planted.

So, do whatever it is you've been putting off, and your future self, the one who's already experienced that growth, will thank you.

This is manifestation in motion. It begins with belief; trusting in what you're working toward, and grows as you start to feel it as something real. With patience and awareness, what once felt distant begins to come into view.

In astrology, Aries is that initial ignition moving into action. Ruling the brain, head, and eyes, Aries is symbolic of the Crown Chakra (Sahasrara), connecting to awareness, consciousness, and the "spark" of life.

I imagine Aries as this bolt. Yes, the Harry Potter scar-shaped bolt. It is rigid and tough. Bold and ready. Aries is transparent, and this season shows you exactly how you're showing up for yourself. In this analogy, if you plant your seeds here, YOU WILL have a fruitful season, directly showing the effort you're putting in. If you don't, your seeds will not grow, and no fruit will be produced. It's that simple.

The power of your mind

This isn't a scary time. This time isn't all about action, action, action, and doing things on repeat. It's actually quite the opposite. The simplest and best thing you can do during this time, as we defrost from a tough winter, is to have hope for what's to come and stay excited. This hope goes a long way, and it plants seeds in you. Hope means anything you want it to be. It can be being gentle with yourself, or showing up for yourself and tending to things you've been putting off.

But one of the most important things to remember during this beautiful season is the power of your mind. It is such a gift that we have thoughts, and we can believe or not believe. We all experience the stress of racing thoughts, but you choose to believe in them or not.

"What you think, you become. What you feel, you attract. And what you imagine, you create."

What are you growing?

In this planning season of spring, what do you want to become? What do you want to attract, and what do you want to create? Write it down, make a mood board, speak it out loud to yourself. Whenever you find what that is, think it, feel it, and imagine it.

About the Author:

Blakely Kresl
Women's Wellness & Lifestyle Writer

Blakely is a contributing writer for The Modern Domestic Woman and a freelance writer, content creator, and social media strategist with a deep love for working alongside small businesses and community-driven organizations. With hands-on experience across marketing, PR, and brand strategy, she specializes in helping purpose-led brands tell their stories in ways that feel authentic, human, and connective.

She has supported mission-based companies like FemPAQ, a sustainable menstrual health brand focused on period equity and destigmatization, and Asami Naturals, an African tea company rooted in tradition and wellness. Whether she's developing content, coordinating events, managing farmers market outreach, or shaping digital campaigns, Blakely brings curiosity, empathy, and a community-first mindset to every project, believing that the most meaningful brands are built through shared stories and genuine connection.

Connect with Blakely on LinkedIn to reach out, collaborate, and learn more about working with her.

“FANCY” GRILLED CHEESE

By Katie McCall

THE EVERYDAY SANDWICH THAT FEELS LIKE A TREAT

When my son was just 4 years old (he's almost 8, pinch me!) and went to preschool half-days, he'd come home at lunchtime and request what we called "Fancy" Grilled Cheese. Since then, the recipe (and name) remains a constant in our kitchen, especially when we're feeling like something a bit elevated and bursting with tons of flavor.

If you're familiar with my style of cooking, you know it's simple and all about utilizing what's on-hand in the kitchen and pantry, incorporating unexpected flavor combinations – taking ordinary meals to the next level.

To that point, I've made a million regular grilled cheese sandwiches in my lifetime, but I never thought to include sun-dried tomato pesto until I saw an almost-gone jar in the refrigerator. Turns out, it's absolutely delicious when paired with fresh mozzarella, spinach, and avocado -- and I do feel rather fancy while eating it. I hope you enjoy it as much as we do!

- Katie

Pro Tip:
Get a good loaf of your favorite bread. I like the sourdough bread from Gather Bakery in Geneva, Illinois.

METHOD

Step 1 - Assemble the sandwich by spreading the pesto on both pieces of bread.

Step 2 - On one half of the bread, layer the mozzarella, sprinkle with the garlic powder, and then top with the spinach.

Step 3 - On the other half of the bread, mash the avocado. Place the pieces together and give it a nice press to hold everything in place.

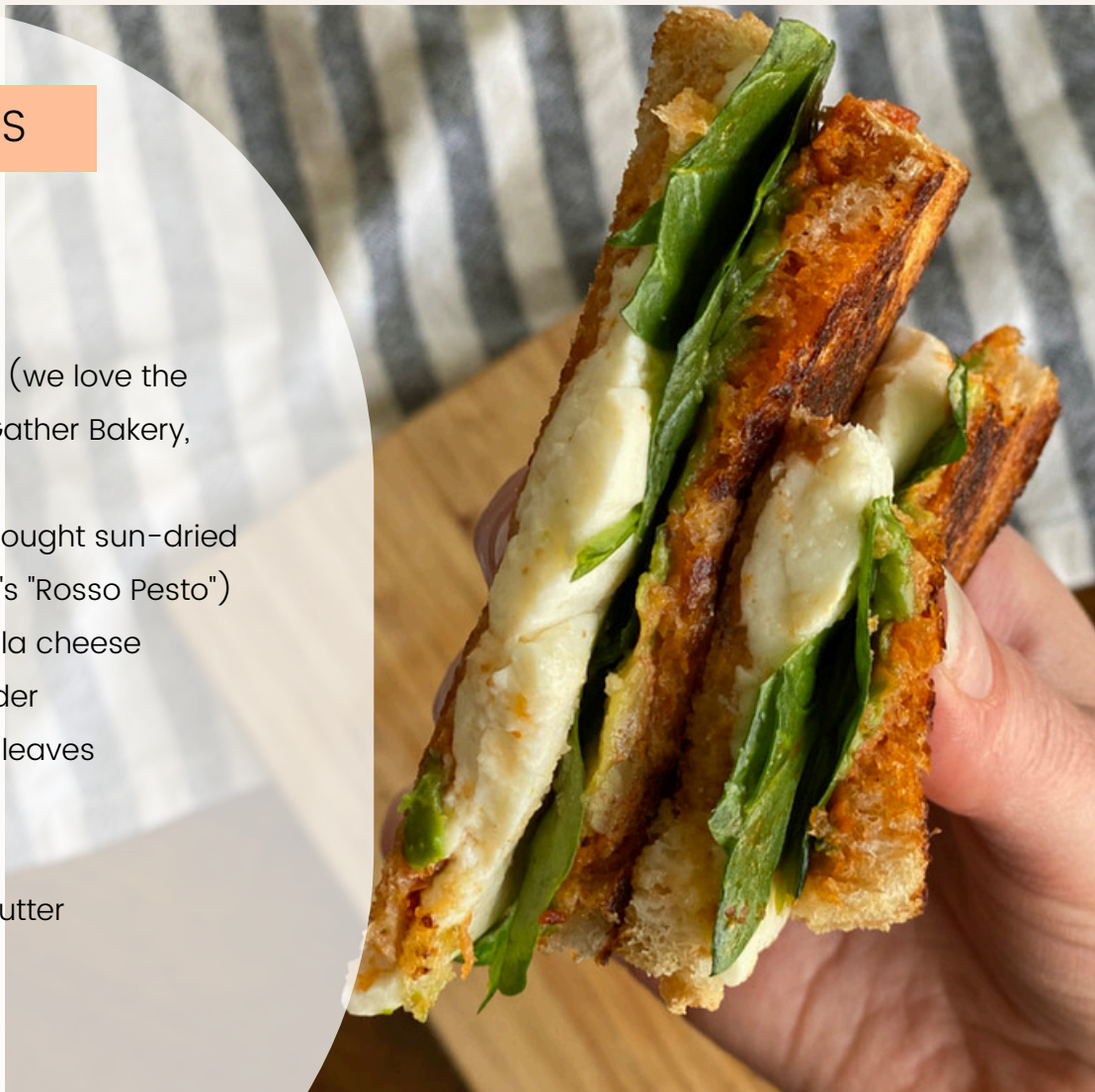
Step 4 - Instead of buttering the bread directly, I like to melt the olive oil and butter in a skillet over medium-high heat -- then place the sandwich directly in the pan, flipping to coat both sides generously. Add more butter or oil as needed.

Step 5 - Cook until both sides are crisp and golden, and the mozzarella is *just* melted -- but not too stringy.

INGREDIENTS

(Yields 1 Sandwich)

- 2 slices of favorite bread (we love the Sourdough bread from Gather Bakery, Geneva, IL)
- 2 tablespoons of store-bought sun-dried tomato pesto (I love Aldi's "Rosso Pesto")
- 3 slices of fresh mozzarella cheese
- 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
- Handful of fresh spinach leaves
- 1/2 ripe avocado
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1-2 tablespoons salted butter



About the Author:

Katie McCall is a Midwestern writer, cook, and community builder with a deep-rooted love for nature, food, and family. Raised in the rural suburbs of Chicago, she spent her childhood foraging for morel mushrooms, picking green beans, and learning early on that nourishment is about far more than what's on the plate.

She holds a B.S. in Journalism from the University of Illinois and later honed her culinary skills at Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts. Katie went on to co-found Two Wild Seeds, a gluten-free bakery she ran alongside her mother in St. Charles, Illinois. Though the bakery closed in 2021, her relationship with food—as storytelling, care, and connection—continues through her writing and creative work.

Katie currently serves as President of MDW Cares, where she helps guide the organization's mission to create accessible, supportive resources for women navigating life transitions. Her leadership is grounded in the belief that community care, honest conversation, and small daily acts of nourishment can change lives.

When she's not writing or cooking, Katie can be found tending her garden, restoring her 1905 farmhouse, wandering farmers' markets and antique shops, or experimenting with new ways to live thoughtfully and creatively. She is endlessly curious, deeply grounded, and always searching for what makes life feel both meaningful and delicious.

Gifts with Impact

This ivory gift set is a beautiful reminder that healing can take shape in tangible, meaningful ways. Each piece, from the Italian leather journal to the braided keychain and artisan earrings, is handcrafted by women rebuilding their lives after human trafficking through Refuge for Women. More than a gift, it's a way to directly support safe housing, restorative care, and a path toward independence. It carries both intention and impact, right here in our own communities.

Renewed & Rooted Journal Collection

SURVIVOR MADE @ REFUGE FOR WOMEN

Column: Asking for a Friend

by Katie McCall

Question:

Every year, I want to grow my own vegetables but quickly talk myself out of it. The different types of equipment, seeds, soil, general upkeep...

It all sounds so intimidating!

Where do I even begin? Thank you!

- R.S., Geneva, IL.

Hi R.S.! With planting season upon us, this question comes at the perfect time. While the thought of growing your own vegetables can feel daunting, I promise that with a little bit of forethought and elbow grease, you will be well on your way to homegrown goodness.

Growing up, I was fortunate enough to learn the art of gardening from my mother, Susan, who served as an invaluable source of education and inspiration. I spent countless hours at her knee, watching as she (also a professional artist) sketched our annual garden plot, poured over seed catalogs, babied the seedlings along, frequented the garden center, then prepped and planted the garden, watered, tended, weeded, and finally – harvested and prepared the seasonal bounty for our family meals. It was truly a labor of love.

As a young adult, I dreamt of having a garden like my mom's, but I was always limited to small spaces with city apartment living. During those early years, she encouraged me to try container gardening. It began with a few terracotta pots of herbs in the windowsill, and over time, expanded to larger pots of vegetables on my balcony. Now, as a homeowner of nearly 7 years, my garden naturally found its way into the ground, but I always make room for my tried-and-true containers around the patio – and my kitchen counter herbs are just a snip away.

So, let's do this!

I encourage you to grab a notebook and follow my "5 Ps" to start your first container garden with confidence:

- Plan
- Purchase
- Plant
- Patience
- Pick

Now let's dive into each element...

Have a question you'd like to ask Katie?

Life, relationships, style, home decor, food, feelings - we're talking about it!

Send your question to Katie at katie.mdwcares@gmail.com

And don't forget to follow her on IG @katielmccall

STEP #1: PLAN

First, scout out a nice, sunny spot in or around your home. This area needs to have at least 6 to 8 hours a day of full sunlight.

Next, ask yourself what you like to cook and eat. Perhaps you are looking to grow a few simple snacking vegetables like bell peppers, carrots, and snap peas, or possibly pickling piques your interest (think cucumbers, radishes).

Do you enjoy fresh salsa? Cilantro, tomatoes, and jalapeno peppers are a must-have. If you're a salad lover like me, consider growing a variety of leafy greens such as lettuces, chard, kale, and spinach.

Make a list and keep it handy for Step #3.

STEP #2: PURCHASE

Once you have settled on what to grow, it's time to get the equipment:

VESSELS - Make sure the containers are large and sturdy enough – typically no smaller than a 5-gallon vessel, unless housing herbs or shallower vegetables like lettuces. No matter the type – pots, hanging baskets, tubs – it's crucial to ensure proper drainage. To prevent waterlogged roots, which will eventually kill your plant, be sure the pots have holes in the bottom. Plant risers and/or pot feet also come in handy.

SOIL - Look for a lightweight, airy, organic potting mix (not top/garden soil); this is designed to promote drainage, aeration, and moisture retention. A simple, effective DIY recipe can also be made by combining ⅓ peat moss, ⅓ compost, and ⅓ potting mix.

FERTILIZER - While there are many natural, at-home fertilizer options (egg shells, coffee grounds, banana peels, ash, compost "tea"), for ease, I suggest starting out with a natural, organic, store-bought version.

BASIC TOOLS - It's easy to fall down the rabbit hole while visiting the garden center, but like most things, simplicity is best. A soil scoop, trowel, pruner, snips, garden gloves, and a watering can will do the trick.

ADD-ONS - For plants that require vertical support (cucumbers, beans, peas), be sure to pick up a small trellis, obelisk, or tomato cage. A plant caddy is also helpful for moving plants around with ease if needed.

STEP #3: PLANT

Now's the fun part! Grab your list (from Step #1) and head over to your local garden center. Look for healthy, bright, even-colored plants with plenty of new leaf growth. Avoid "stressed" plants with yellowing, sun spots, discoloration, or broken stems.

Once home, fill your vessels with the soil and begin planting. Each plant (or packet, if using seeds for lettuces, beans, etc.) comes with its own instructions, making it super simple for newbie gardeners. Be sure not to overcrowd and label each plant with markers to avoid confusion.

Be sure to water the plants well and monitor their moisture levels daily. A good rule of thumb – or finger in this case – is poking your finger straight into the soil, about a knuckle's worth. If your finger comes out clean, the soil is dry and needs immediate watering; if your finger emerges covered in a light coating of soil, you can temporarily hold off on watering.

STEP #4: PATIENCE

Perhaps the most difficult part... the waiting! But in my opinion, also the most therapeutic. Stepping outside to check on the garden with a cup of coffee in hand, listening to the birds chirp as the morning sunshine hits my face, is one of the most joyful parts of my day. The inspecting, the watering, the pruning ... these are the moments that will ensure a successful and bountiful outcome.

STEP #5: PICK

Congrats! Your planning, patience, and hard work has finally paid off. Once the veggies have reached maturity, it's time to harvest and enjoy your delicious, homegrown produce. Harvest time is unique to each plant and based entirely on its size, color, and texture. If you aren't certain, simply jump online or pull out a gardening book for detailed pictures and extra tips.

Above all else, the best piece of advice I can offer is to keep it small and simple to start. Pick a few plants, learn as you go, see what works and what doesn't. The internet is truly an incredible source of information. Don't be afraid to trust your gut, get your hands a little dirty, and most of all – have fun!

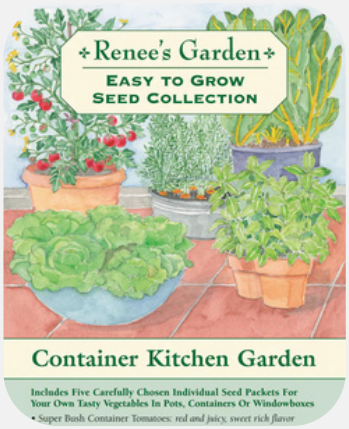
– Katie

Katie's Favorite Container Veggies

SUNGOLD CHERRY TOMATO

- Purple Beauty Bell Pepper
- Straight Eight Heirloom Slicing Cucumber
- Butterhead Lettuce (I love the speckled varieties)
- Curly Kale
- Blue Lake Bush Beans
- Round Baby Carrots
- Sunburst Patty Pan Squash (requires 7-10 gallon vessel)
- Herbs! Basil, cilantro, parsley, thyme, rosemary, and mint are my faves.

and some products you'll love too...



The Container Kitchen Garden

If you'd rather grow your own plants instead of buy, get this set of 5 seed packets!

reneesgarden.com

Organic Plant Food

Made from recycled supermarket food waste this can be used for indoor gardening and houseplants.

thefloralsociety.com

Woven Mini Garden Obelisk

Made from natural willow branches, your climbing plants will love this small trellis.

anthropologie.com

Terracotta Planter

Make sure your pots have a hole at the bottom for drainage. Terracotta is amazing for plant health.

lowes.com

STYLE

Photo by Becky Burger

SKINNY SCARF

A little woodsy, a little whimsical, this Fungi skinny scarf is perfect for adding personality to your everyday look, whether tied at your neck, in your hair, or onto your favorite bag. Inspired by vintage botanical texts, each mushroom illustration is thoughtfully sourced from rare books and antique archives, then reworked into a design that feels timeless and fresh.

Fungi Skinny Scarf

HEADING

spring vibes

Bold Floral Border Puff Sleeve Crop Top

Basket Weave Round Handbag

Grapefruit Raffia Drop Earrings

Floral Border Print Midi Skirt

THE PEP LINE

Shop at 201 Cedar Avenue
in St. Charles, or
thepepline.com

EARRINGS

Blue Tulip Earrings

DEAR JUNE

Spring Wardrobe Vision Board

Dip Dye Vintage Overalls

Keagan Mama Tee

Cable Knit Cropped Sweater

Stripe Kaftan Dress

Cut-Out Embroidery Midi Dress

Eyelet Lace Trim Joggers

Shop the full line at
201 Cedar Avenue in
St. Charles, or at
thepepline.com

HOME

ART

Bring a little edge and a lot of personality to your space with this Mezcal Fox print, where retro cocktail culture meets playful charm. Illustrated by Loni Carr, whose work draws from vintage Hollywood, classic posters and tattoo-inspired linework, this piece carries a timeless and moody aesthetic. Plus, we're crushing big time over the effortlessly cool fox in pink spectacles.

Mezcal Fox Poster Print

THE WHISKEY GINGER

MDW Contributing Partner

The Healthy Home Assessment: Clean Without Compromise

by Zoe Sherwin

When it comes to creating a healthier home, it's important to start here: we only know what we know, until we know better. And once we do, we don't have to change everything overnight. Knowledge is power, but it's also something we can move through slowly, one small swap at a time.

When I think of cleaning, the vision of bright, sunlit windows and fresh scents fills my mind. Shiny appliances, folded laundry, and not a single toy in sight or cup in the sink. The thought of exposing my family to pollutants that can cause asthma? That never crossed my mind until I began reading the ingredient labels on everything.

The truth is, over 53% of household cleaning products contain contaminants and irritants that can harm our lungs, including carcinogenic compounds like formaldehyde.

Step one? Give yourself grace. I was initially shocked at how many products looked great but were actually harmful (and already piled up in my pantry).

Start with a simple home assessment. Take a look at the ingredient labels on your cleaning products. Remove anything with warning labels like POISON, DANGER, or WARNING. That alone is a powerful first step.

If the idea of tossing everything out at once feels overwhelming or expensive, you're not alone. I felt the same way!

The good news? You don't have to overhaul your entire home to make a difference. I've found simple, low-cost ways to clean effectively without compromise. Many of the products I use come down to just a few base ingredients, mixed in different ways.

If DIY feels like too much right now, that's okay, too. There are also great ready-made options for when you're short on time or just need something easy. Let's talk about them!

Zoe's DIY Favorites:

Dr. Bronner's Castile Soap

Say hello to one of the most versatile products out there. It cleans, smells great, and can be used for almost anything. Yes, really! The bottle includes dilution instructions, making it easy to create everything from foaming hand soap to an all-purpose cleaner. I like to add a bit of isopropyl alcohol and a few drops of essential oil for a multi-purpose spray. While it's generally safe for most sealed surfaces, always test on delicate stone like granite first.

Baking Soda

A true multitasker. From soothing heartburn (a teaspoon in water) to scrubbing sinks and tubs, baking soda does it all. Mix it with a little water for a gentle abrasive cleaner, or use it to deodorize drains (½ cup baking soda + 1 cup vinegar + hot water). It's also great for freshening carpets; you just sprinkle, let sit, and vacuum.
The best part? It's affordable and accessible everywhere!

Vinegar

Used for centuries, vinegar is a powerful natural cleaner. My go-to glass cleaner combines 2 cups of water, 2 tablespoons of vinegar, 2 tablespoons of rubbing alcohol, and a few drops of essential oil. It cuts grease, removes buildup, and leaves surfaces streak-free. I also love using it to steam clean my microwave. Just heat a bowl of vinegar and let it loosen everything inside.

Important note: Never mix vinegar with hydrogen peroxide or bleach, and avoid using it on natural stone like marble or granite.

If DIY isn't for you, try:

Magnolia Soap & Bath Co.

If DIY isn't your thing or time is tight, there are wonderful non-toxic options available. Supporting local is always a win! Try Magnolia Soap & Bath Co. in St. Charles, which offers a variety of safe, effective cleaners from laundry soap to multi-purpose sprays.

Other non-toxic brands to explore:

- Branch Basics
- Attitude
- Koala Eco

KOALA ECO

BRANCH BASICS

ATTITUDE

Small, intentional swaps can make a real difference in how you breathe, live, and care for yourself. While it's nearly impossible to eliminate all toxins from our environment, reducing exposure can support hormone balance, mood, and overall health.

Choosing non-toxic cleaning products isn't just about having a clean home; it's about creating a space that supports your well-being, your energy, and the people you love. When we become more mindful about what we bring into our homes, we shift how our spaces feel and function.
And it doesn't have to happen all at once.

A cleaner routine becomes a cleaner lifestyle. And over time, those small choices add up! The result is transforming your home into a place that feels just as good as it looks.

About the Author

Zoe Sherwin
Realtor with Keller Williams Inspire
Geneva, IL

Zoe is a Kane County-based realtor who supports both buyers and sellers through some of life's biggest transitions with empathy, clarity, and a calm, steady presence.

Known for her ability to balance strategy with heart, Zoe helps clients navigate not just the logistics of a move but the emotional weight that often comes with it. She believes a home is more than a property; it's a place layered with memories, meaning, and possibility, and she approaches every client relationship with that truth at the center.

Need support for buying or selling? Reach out to Zoe at
331-425-1181 or email her zoe.sherwin@kw.com

HARMONY
BLOOM ESTATES
CONNECTIONS. INTEGRITY. RESULTS.

CUPS

If you haven't stopped into The Pep Line lately, consider this your sign! It's the kind of shop you walk into for "just a quick look" and leave with pieces that instantly make your space (and your day) feel brighter. From cozy throw pillows and beautiful linens to statement lighting, furniture, garden accents, and even a thoughtfully curated clothing lineup, there's something in every corner that feels like a little refresh. Last time I popped in, I grabbed a hand-stamped stoneware mug, and now it's the one I reach for every single morning.

featured on the April cover!

Hand Stamped Stoneware Mug

THE PEP LINE in ST. CHARLES

CAFE VIBE

These floral café curtains are the easiest way to refresh your kitchen, no renovation required. With their soft, vintage-inspired print and delicate scalloped trim, they let in just the right amount of light while adding warmth and charm. A simple swap like this can instantly shift the feel of your space, proving that sometimes the smallest changes make the biggest difference.

Cotton Printed Embroidered Scalloped Cafe Curtain

ANTHROPOLOGIE

BUSINESS

Doing It All Is Slowing You Down

by Elizabeth Rago

The branding. The photos. The website. The copy. The backend systems. The strategy.

Somewhere along the way, we started believing that if we really cared about our business, we should be able to do all of it ourselves.

And while yes, you can learn how to do each of these things, the reality is that doing everything alone often becomes the very thing that keeps your business from growing.

Because when you're stretched across every role, you're not building, you're maintaining. You're keeping things afloat, not moving them forward. Real growth tends to begin the moment you step out of the mindset of "I have to do it all" and into "Who can help me do this well?"

Behind every sustainable, evolving business is not just a strong founder, but a circle of people she trusts.

This is where things start to feel different.

When you find the right people, women who understand your vision, who listen closely, and who respect your voice, you're no longer trying to force something into existence on your own. You're building something layered, supported, and far more expansive than you could create alone.

That doesn't mean losing control of your brand. It means strengthening it.

It looks like trusting a photographer to capture not just how you look, but how your business feels. Letting a designer take your scattered ideas and turn them into something cohesive and recognizable.

Working with a copywriter who can translate what's in your head into words that connect. It's not about handing things off. It's about building something together.

Of course, trusting someone with your business can feel vulnerable. This is something you've built from the ground up. It's your baby.

But trust doesn't have to be all or nothing. It can be built, intentionally, over time. In fact, you don't have to outsource everything at once; just pick one project and start there. Some tips when looking for contractors:

#1 - Be clear about your vision (even if it's still forming). You don't need a perfect brand guide, but you do need to communicate how you want people to feel when they interact with your business.

#2 - Share examples. Share language. Share what doesn't feel like you.

#3 - Choose alignment over convenience. The right person will understand what you're building, and treat it with care.

#4 - Allow for interpretation. You hired them for their expertise. Give them space to bring their perspective. That's often where the best work comes from.

#5 - Communicate like a human. Clear, kind, honest communication will take you further than perfection ever will.

At the end of the day, your business doesn't grow because you did everything yourself. It grows because you created something strong enough for other people to step into with you. And that's where the real magic is.

I'm so excited to introduce you to six women on the following pages who do exactly that. Women who bring both skill and intention to their work, helping you build a business that not only looks good, but feels aligned, supported, and sustainable.

- Elizabeth

Lindsay Bevers

The Green Loft Designs (Branding)

Lindsay Bevers of The Green Loft Designs brings over 15 years of experience in design, packaging, and marketing to help businesses build brands that feel as aligned as they are impactful. Her approach blends strategic design with intuitive insight, creating cohesive visuals that connect deeply with your audience while staying grounded and approachable.

- Branding that balances strategy + intuition
- Big-brand expertise with a personalized, collaborative experience
- Thoughtful, aligned design that reflects the heart of your business

Learn more at thegreenloftdesigns.com

Losser Consulting Solutions (Project Management)

Rachel Losser and her team at Losser Consulting Solutions help individuals and businesses move from overwhelm to action with practical, no-fluff project management support. Known as the "Get Shit Done" group, they simplify complex projects by focusing on what needs to happen and when, so nothing falls through the cracks. Whether you're managing a business initiative or just trying to bring order to everyday chaos, they bring clarity, structure, and real momentum.

- Streamline workflows and simplify complex projects
- Support across industries, from marketing to operations and beyond
- Clear systems that turn ideas into done, not just planned

Learn more at losserconsultingsolutions.com

Rachel Losser

LOSSER CONSULTING SOLUTIONS

Nancy McGushin

Good Karma by Nancy (Digital Ads)

Nancy, the heart behind Good Karma, helps business owners navigate the world of Meta ads with clarity, confidence, and a strategy that actually feels aligned. With a deep understanding of balancing real life and business, Nancy turns ads into a tool for sustainable growth. Rooted in intention and authenticity, her work goes beyond marketing to support the bigger vision you're building.

- Meta ads expertise (Facebook + Instagram) for every stage of business
- Flexible support from DIY courses to 1:1 strategy and done-for-you services
- A values-driven approach that blends strategy, encouragement, and real connection

Learn more at goodkarmabynancy.mykajabi.com

Blakely Kresl

Blakely Kresl Media (Social Media Management, Web Design & Copywriting)

Blakely Kresl brings a thoughtful, community-first approach to storytelling helping brands show up online in ways that feel genuine, connected, and deeply human. Blakely blends her experience in writing, design, and strategy to create cohesive digital presences that not only look good, but resonate with the people you're trying to reach. Whether you're building from the ground up or refining your voice, her work centers on clarity and meaningful connection.

- Content creation, copywriting, and brand storytelling that feels authentic
- Website design and social media strategy tailored to your audience
- A collaborative, community-driven approach rooted in research and connection

Learn more at blakelykreslmedia.com

Bloom & Gather Photography (Headshots, Events & Family Photos)

Becky Burger captures portraits, headshots, and events with a calm, joyful approach that puts people at ease from the very first click. As a mom herself, she understands that the best photos come from real moments, not forced ones, creating sessions that feel relaxed, natural, and even a little bit fun. Whether it's your family or your professional brand. Her goal is simple: to give you images that not only look beautiful, but bring you right back to how it felt in the moment.

- Family, newborn, and portrait sessions designed to feel easy and enjoyable
- Natural, personality-driven headshots for businesses and entrepreneurs
- Event photography that captures genuine, unscripted moments

Learn more at bloomandgatherphoto.com

Becky Burger

BLOOM & GATHER
Photography

Caitlin Slomski

True Knack Graphics (Printing & Design)

Caitlin Slomski brings over 15 years of experience in both design and high-quality printing, helping businesses turn their ideas into tangible, impactful materials. Her printing capabilities truly set her apart, offering everything from small-format pieces to large-scale marketing materials that elevate your brand in the real world. With a hands-on, collaborative approach, Caitlin ensures every project feels professional and uniquely yours.

- Large and small format printing for marketing, events, and promotions
- Custom design services, from branding to invitations and print materials
- Personalized wedding and event pieces designed to leave a lasting impression

Learn more at trueknackgraphics.com

about the modern domestic woman

Supporting women from all walks of life.

At The Modern Domestic Woman (MDW), we are committed to addressing the holistic needs of women and recognizing the challenges they face in various aspects of life. Our vision is to create a nurturing environment where every woman feels supported and encouraged to thrive, regardless of their circumstances. Through our workshops and resource-sharing initiatives, MDW equips women with the tools and knowledge they need to overcome challenges and pursue their goals with confidence. We believe in providing practical resources tailored to women's needs, ensuring that they have access to essential support services.

MDW focuses on 3 pillars of living:

MENTAL HEALTH - MDW Cares is our support community of women rooted in making mental health a priority instead of an afterthought. Because nobody can pour from an empty cup.

LIFESTYLE - MDW loves creating safe spaces; at home and in the body you call home. We encourage a healthy lifestyle that meets you where you're at. Not where someone else wants you to be. We also love pretty things at MDW and celebrate style and the artistry of creatives.

ADVOCACY - At MDW, we go out into our communities and support women in crisis. We actively partner with organizations that support the rights, recovery, and well-being of women.

Beyond referrals, MDW has free support groups and community education workshops, and an informative and fun blog with free downloadable resources.

For more information, visit mdwcares.com or follow MDW on your favorite social platform @themoderndomesticwoman

Have a question or need a referral? Email us at themoderndomesticwoman@gmail.com

mdw
media

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