



# THE MINKA MONTHLY

Official Newsletter for the Minka Learning Lab for Living Well



## RX: FRESH SPRING AIR

By Joanne Artz, Assistant Director and Head of User Services Emerita, David L. Rice Library

Senior adults who have spent much of winter indoors, perhaps feeling blah and sluggish, may find inexpensive good medicine in the beckon of springtime air. A 2019 Scientific Reports study found that spending at least two hours a week in nature “is associated with good health and well-being.” What single pill offers all this: a healthier heart, reduction of stress, decreased anxiety and depression, cognitive improvement, strengthened balance/motor skills for fall reduction, better stamina, improved alertness and focus, lessened chronic pain and less isolation? Age and health status do not matter, nor how the two hours are apportioned. Just get outdoors, and let nature be the catalyst to restore a connection with yourself and others.

As spring brings a palette of cheerful color, we have varied choices for restorative activity at home or in the community.

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# EDITOR CORNER

## SPRING HAS SPRUNG

By Maggie McNeely, Intern

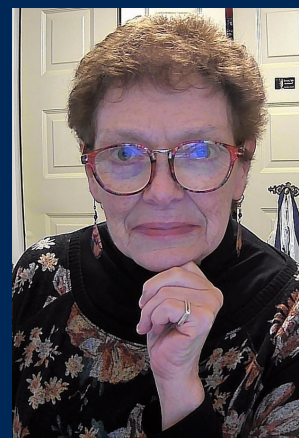


As the sun is starting to shine brightly in the sky again and is no longer glaring off the snow piles, people can confidently announce spring has sprung! Now, everyone breathes a sigh of relief because it was a trying winter for those of us living in the Midwest. Although allergies are making an appearance and bugs are resuming their pestering, I feel better knowing that I don't have to allot 15 minutes every morning to defrost my car. Now spring is here, I am looking forward to opening doors and windows to allow fresh air to permeate the dry air that has been circulating since I closed myself off from the harsh cold in November. I also plan on opening up the door to the Minka Learning Lab for Living Well, so if anyone sees the open door, please take that as an invitation to stop by and visit!

A couple of things I am looking forward to doing this season are bike rides, outdoor morning coffees and getting my plants out of my closet floor and onto my balcony. I don't dislike the gym, but there is just something about being outdoors that gives you an extra push to stay active. In this edition of the Minka Monthly, there are many articles about the benefits of gardening and getting outside. There are reflection pieces too on personal experiences, as well as an update on some new purchases for the Minka!

*If interested in contributing to this newsletter, please contact Maggie McNeely at [mrmcneely@eagles.usi.edu](mailto:mrmcneely@eagles.usi.edu).*

**Continuation from page 1:** Plant backyard flowers, and weed veggie seedlings for Seton Harvest help with spring cleanup along the Ohio or prepare for April's hummingbirds. One could also walk dogs, bike the Greenway, camp in Harmonie State Park or wander the Harmonist Labyrinth. From the comfort of a porch or patio, people can enjoy birdsong, read a book and just breathe. I've prescribed myself a healthy dose of "forest bathing," the Japanese custom of Shinrin Yoku. Mindful immersion in a forest landscape improves cardiovascular function, boosts immunity and reduces stress hormone activity. Check Wesselman Woods' [website](#) for more information. Do something familiar, try something new, hit the highway on a sunny day with the windows down, take a friend...make a friend. One minor caution: side effects may include Spring Fever!



"From the comfort of a porch or patio people can enjoy birdsong, read a book and just breathe." - Joanne Artz, Assistant Director and Head of User Services Emerita, David L. Rice Library

## MY DAYS OF GARDENING

By Paulette Colman, reader of the Minka Monthly

In all of my many years of gardening, I have found it provides me with joy and satisfaction, not to mention good tasting food to eat. I live out of town, so finding room for a garden has never been much of an issue. I have a 10 x 20 ft. backyard garden provides a gorgeous view from my back patio. Gardening is a rewarding hobby.

Come early May it is time to begin the work. The smell of fresh tilled soil while planting the seeds and plants gives you a drive to keep going. My first experiences in gardening were filled with trials and errors. However, I found this to be the best method because one learns by their mistakes. I like to keep a variety of crops in my garden for a more diverse selection when it comes to planning out meals later on in the season. Every year I plant corn, beets, tomatoes, cucumbers, radishes and zucchini.

Gardening has also become an excellent form of exercise. The next day I may have some sore muscles, but it is worth it to get out in the sunshine. When the plants start to grow and produce vegetables, those green worms seem to appear out of thin air, along with other insects. It is a project keeping those pests off of the plants.

Finally, it is time for my favorite part of the gardening process: canning! Preparing jars, cleaning vegetables and following recipes is a welcome challenge. It usually takes a couple of days to get everything preserved for the following months, but I have a full pantry of jars filled with my handiwork at the end of it all. Eating fresh vegetables in late summer and early autumn is rewarding in knowing it was your hands that started the process. The food is simply delicious and so healthy. Give it a try! You will be amazed and greatly rewarded.



"Eating fresh vegetables in late summer and early autumn is rewarding in knowing it was your hands that started the process." - Paulette Colman, reader of the Minka Monthly

# STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

## A Day in the Life

By Maggie McNeely, Intern

Working at the Minka has provided me with so many opportunities to grow in my professionalism. A normal day in the routine of the marketing intern for the Minka Learning Lab for Living Well is arriving at the smart house at 10 a.m. I turn on the house by asking Josh, our built-in smart home artificial intelligence system, to turn on all the lights and to play some music for background noise. Then, I turn on the rest of our gadgets such as the smartboard, aromatherapy and telehealth robot in case we have any visitors who want to have a look around.

One part of my job is to keep up with our Instagram and Facebook social media pages. I post four times a week minimum, so I dedicate a little time each day to taking pictures, creating captions and scheduling posts for our platforms. If we are having a dementia live session on a particular day, it is my job to set up the house with props when the participants arrive, they can put on the gear and begin the simulation.

Being editor of the Minka Monthly, it is my job to figure out what the theme is going to be, contact people to write articles, edit the articles and assemble everything together to match our format. Doing this every month means I must be at least a month ahead at all times. Finally, it is my job to be in constant contact with our advisory board members which usually is done through routine meetings about what is going on at the Minka. I love my job and feel that juggling all of these responsibilities along with being a full-time student helps me to practice the time management skills I will take with me into the workforce.



" I love my job and feel that juggling all of these responsibilities along with being a full time student helps me to practice the time management skills that I will take with me into the workforce. " - Maggie McNeely, Intern

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## GERO 101

### GARDENING: A HOLISTIC AND MEANINGFUL OCCUPATION

By Paul Arthur, PhD, OTR/L, Chair and Assistant Professor of Occupational Therapy Program

Gardening has been employed as a therapeutic modality since ancient Egyptian times when prescribed to address mental health challenges (Simson & Straus, 1998). A holistic activity, the benefits of gardening extend beyond mental health to include cognition through planning and sequencing, physical ability through endurance, balance and gross and fine motor performance. It also has many social benefits such as promoting engagement, responsibility and curiosity (Tse, 2010). Clinical benefits of gardening have attracted the research community with positive results in improving healing and recovery (Cimprich & Ronis, 2003), improving poststroke neural pathways (Jonasson, Marklund, & Hildingh, 2007), reducing the risk of cognitive decline in chronic illness (Hamer, Stamatakis, & Steptoe, 2009) and in improving the academic success of underperforming students (McArthur, Hill, Trammel, & Carlton, 2010).

"A holistic activity, the benefits of gardening extend beyond mental health to include cognition through planning and sequencing, physical ability through endurance, balance, gross & fine motor performance. " - Paul Arthur, PhD, OTR/L



The premise of occupational therapy (OT) is that engagement in meaningful occupation contributes to positive health and well-being. The meaning one derives from their experience with plants determines the efficacy of the experience (Fieldhouse, 2003). There are many aspects of gardening that may contribute to meaning to include watering, planting, weeding, pruning, harvesting, crafting, cooking, maintenance and even journaling about the experience (Wagenfeld & Atchison, 2014). To get started, one does not need acreage or money, just encouragement and motivation. Consider a window garden with recycled materials, and begin to experience the benefits for yourself or your loved ones.

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An example of a window garden is pictured below. Credit: Kevin Lee Jacobs ([agardenforthehouse.com](http://agardenforthehouse.com))



"The premise of occupational therapy (OT) is that engagement in meaningful occupation contributes to positive health and well-being." - Paul Arthur, PhD, OTR/L, Chair and Assistant Professor of Occupational Therapy Program

# TECH & U

## KEEPING UP WITH THE OUTSIDE FROM THE INSIDE

By Maggie McNeely, Intern

There was a time when the only way to learn about the weather was to tune into the news channels and wait for the weatherman to deliver the news. In today's world, most people check the weather in the span of a couple seconds looking at a weather app that comes pre-downloaded to their smartphones. However, the information is relevant to the whole city, and doesn't provide as accurate information about your specific current surroundings.

The Minka Learning Lab for Living Well has a smart system that gives round-the-clock precise information about the weather conditions in our exact location. The digital rain gauge comes with many helpful features such as a rain alarm, so that if you have any items outside that are not rain resistant, you have time to bring them indoors before a downpour. It is also self-emptying, so no more going outside to dump out the dirty rainwater. It also stores up to two years worth of rain data to an app.

One important reason to monitor the weather is for storms. Another one of the devices the Minka owns is the lightning detection sensor. This device detects lightning bolts and storms from up to 25 miles away. You can program the device to send notification alerts to your cell phone and computer. The Minka also has a two-in-one temperature and humidity sensor which updates an app with current information every 64 seconds. The weather will always be somewhat unpredictable, especially in the Midwest, but these devices make it easier for individuals to stay up to date on the conditions surrounding them.

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## WHAT IS HAPPENING AT THE MINKA

### ORDERING PLANS

By Maggie McNeely, Intern

For those who have visited the Minka Learning Lab for Living Well, you may have noticed that the furniture is not elder friendly. Inside there are chairs with no armrests, heavy tables with jarring edges that sit low on the ground and a large glass dining room table. All of these things are safety hazards and have been avoided through the purchase of new furniture. The Minka Advisory Board members have been crucial in deciding what pieces of furniture will best suit the needs of older adults.

In addition to furniture, the Minka will be acquiring many new gadgets and various technologies throughout the smart house. There was special attention placed on the kitchen, and how we can incorporate more smart devices into morning coffee routines and fresh produce prep.

"The Minka Learning Lab for Living Well has an Ecowitt system that gives round-the-clock precise information about the weather conditions in our exact location." - Maggie McNeely, Intern



"If you have been inside the Minka before, we highly suggest paying another visit once these items start to trickle in and become part of our tours so that you can see all the new capabilities with our devices." - Maggie McNeely, Intern

For example, we are looking to order a Bluetooth teapot and a Bluetooth smart mug. The teapot can be started using Alexa, or the app that will be downloaded to the Minka tablets. This would be especially helpful for older adults who are hearing impaired, as they might not hear the tea kettle whistle when it is ready. It will be handy to have your devices buzz with notifications letting you know to tend to your teapot. The mug works similarly in that you turn it on and select what temperature you would like your drink to stay at. This feature is good for safety so that the user doesn't burn their mouth on hot drinks. It is also helpful for those who get distracted and forget their drinks for a while.

If you have been inside the Minka before, we highly suggest paying another visit once these items start to trickle in and become part of our tours so that you can see all the new capabilities with our devices. Also, we encourage everyone to come in during our open hours so that they can test and try out these gadgets for themselves. We are a learning lab, and the hands-on approach is the best way to learn!

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## LIVING WELL

### GARDENING FOR OLDER ADULTS

By Taylor Goffinet, Intern

Gardening can be an enjoyable hobby for all age groups, and older adults tend to account for most of the population who gardens. A garden can also benefit those with dementia because it provides multi-sensory stimulation and relaxation. According to the Alzheimer's Society, "a garden can help people living with dementia enjoy socializing and connect with others by creating a shared experience, to take part in physical activity and stimulate the senses and memories, all of which greatly improves their well-being." While there are many different types of gardens, flower gardening and vegetable gardening tend to be the vast majority here in southern Indiana.

Gardening takes planning and lots of hard work. If you want to have a successful vegetable garden, you must plant your seeds at certain times to make sure your crops are ready according to the grow season of each vegetable. Watering your plants and making sure to pick the weeds are other important aspects of gardening. Although gardening is hard work, it provides a level of independence and relaxation for those living with dementia. As the Alzheimer's Society states, "it has been proven exposure to gardens can improve sleep and increases energy, as well as reducing agitation, confusion and aggression."

"We are a learning lab, and the hands-on approach is the best way to learn!" - Maggie McNeely, Intern



"Although gardening is hard work, it provides a level of independence and relaxation for those living with dementia." - Taylor Goffinet, Intern



Flower gardening can be easier for some because if you make sure that your flowers are getting plenty of water and sunlight they should do just fine. The multisensory stimulation of a flower bed can promote calmness, reduce stress and lower blood pressure for people living with dementia and their care partners! A health and safety tip for older adults while gardening is to make sure to drink plenty of water. It can be hot while gardening and there is a risk of dehydration and getting sunburned. Make sure to wear sunscreen. A healthy garden equals a healthy body. Happy Spring and happy gardening!

"A health and safety tip for older adults while gardening is to make sure you drink plenty of water. "  
- Taylor Goffinet, Intern

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## PAST NEWSLETTERS

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## MINKA VISION STATEMENT

Aging well is personal. Each of us expects to live where we want and how we want as we go through life. Our homes are not always set-up for aging well. In addition, our communities may be stifled by issues with access to healthcare, crime and violence, food insecurity, inclusion, age discrimination and more. The Center for Healthy Aging and Wellness wants to transform southwest Indiana by creating a Learning Lab for Living Well housed in the Minka house at USI. The Learning Lab for Living Well offers an interdisciplinary focus to involve students, faculty and campus stakeholders in research, healthcare leadership development, and simulations that address challenges for living-in-place and open health profession career opportunities. In addition, the Learning Lab for Living Well provides everyone in the local community a place to learn about and to adapt home innovations for living-in-place. Home innovations designed to integrate smart home technology, health coaching and learning workshops for a personalized, adaptable approach to aging well. The Center for Healthy Aging and Wellness at USI looks to offer a blueprint for other rural communities to address social determinants of health.