

November 2021

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Keagan loves gymnastics, dancing and traveling with her family. Outfit provided by Terra Toys, KidOShoe and Dragonsnaps. Photo taken by Jordan Ashley Photography.



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## EDITOR'S NOTE

ANNETTE LUCKSINGER

*Lucksinger is a mom of two and author of the guidebook and app Exploring Austin With Kids.*

When I was in college, the one sure thing to bring on homesickness was eating alone in the cafeteria. I grew up eating rushed breakfasts before school with siblings. We ate big Sunday breakfasts as a family. At dinnertime, we passed around plates of food along with bits of family banter, pinches of manners, dollops of gratitude and heaps of stories from our day. It is the same today with my own family.

In my mind, food is inextricably tied to family and memory. As we head into the holiday season, we look forward to gathering around the table with

family and friends, especially after the disruptions of the past year.

This issue honors those connections and brings to mind all that we are grateful for. Our feature article offers ideas to make mealtime prep simpler and easier, so you can spend more time focused on family. We share recipes to make with the kids. During this time of giving thanks, our education column gives great tips for expressing gratitude to some very special people ... teachers! This month's health column provides advice on how to make the best decisions to keep your family happy and healthy this season. As always, like a fine dessert, we serve the humor column last – to top things off and leave you with food for thought.

Cheers to food, family and fellowship this November,

*Annette*

# austinfamily®

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# Play it product recalls **SAFE**

## Government Recalls Bike Helmets, Jogging Strollers and Newborn Loungers



SKE Outdoors is recalling about 860 toddler **bike helmets**. The helmets do not comply with the U.S. CPSC federal safety standard for bicycle helmets, posing a risk of head injury. The recall applies to model number FX010 size small kid helmets only. The helmets were sold in lime green, mint blue, black, magenta pink, purple and orange at amazon.com

and other websites from August 2020 through July 2021 for between \$14 and \$22. Consumers should immediately stop using these kids bike helmets and return them free of charge to SKE Outdoors for a full refund or a free replacement helmet.



Joovy has issued a recall for about 9,200 **jogging strollers**. The front wheel bearing can fail or detach, resulting in a potential fall or injury. The recall involves the Zoom 360 Ultralight Jogging Stroller with SKU 8060, 8061, 8067 and 8069 and a batch number between March 2020 (03-XX-20) and November 2020 (10-XX-20). The label

on the inside leg of the stroller contains the SKU and batch numbers. These jogging strollers were sold at independent specialty juvenile stores nationwide and online at joovy.com, amazon.com, buybuybaby.com and target.com from May 2020 through December 2020 for about \$250. Consumers should immediately stop using the affected strollers and contact the firm for a free repair kit to replace the front wheel fork bearing. Joovy is contacting all known purchasers directly.



Nearly 3.3 million **newborn loungers** have been recalled by The Boppy Company due to the risk of suffocation. Infants can suffocate if they roll, move or are

placed on the lounger in a position that obstructs breathing or causes them to roll off of the lounger onto an external surface. Eight infant deaths have been reported. This recall applies to Boppy Original Newborn Loungers, Boppy Preferred Newborn Loungers and Pottery Barn Kids Boppy Newborn Loungers. The recalled loungers were sold from January 2004 through September 2021 for between \$30 and \$44 at juvenile product stores and mass merchandisers nationwide and online. These stores include Pottery Barn Kids, Target, Walmart and Amazon. Consumers should immediately stop using the recalled loungers and contact The Boppy Company for a refund.

*The US Consumer Products Safety Commission works to protect the public from unreasonable risks of serious injury or death from more than 15,000 types of consumer products.*

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- Sarah F. (6yrs old)

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# AROUND

# Austin

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## Art Installation Honors Austinites

Austin Public Library and Library Foundation presented the permanent art installation "Legends Mosaics: Austin's Courageous Female Leaders of Color" outside the Austin Central Public Library. Six commemorative mosaic portraits honor important women in the city's history – Dr. Martha Cotera, Dr. Teresa Lozano Long, Dr. Bertha Sadler Means, Sylvia Orozco, Cathy Revilla Vasquez and Peggy Vasquez.



Latinitas founder and CEO Laura Donnelly (left) presents a mosaic of Dr. Teresa Lozano Long, one of six pieces depicting leading Austin women of color now on display at the Austin Central Public Library. Photo courtesy Latinitas.

The mosaics were produced in a collaboration between six Austin female artists of color and Latinitas, Austin's only bilingual STEM nonprofit for 20 years. The organization empowers all girls to innovate through media and technology by providing resources, training and esteem-boosting services not, only based in gender, but also culture. The art pieces were created in accordance with Latinitas 2021 Purple Party for Chica Power Rock the Block Party in June at Holly Commons, where the seventh mosaic of Ana Sisnett, Austin's "Technomama," is on display permanently.

Latinitas founder Laura Donnelly explains, "These women were fighting for equity in education, public leadership, the arts, technology and even public spaces long before the climate of listening we are experiencing now. They were the first of their communities to run for office, graduate with Ph.D.s and fight segregation in Austin's most popular spaces. The magnitude of what all these women have done for Austin's culture is immeasurable."

## Children's Album Release Party

Austin singer-songwriter Jenn Hartmann Luck will release her new album "Raise Your Voices" on November 12. The album is a collection of songs that celebrate kids who are changing the world. Luck's new record features eight children from the Austin area.

The official album release party will take place at the Thinkery on Sunday, November 14. Doors open at 1 p.m. and the concert begins at 3:30 p.m. The celebration will feature activations from the children who both inspired and performed on the record, followed by the live musical performance. Each track helps to support a related charity or organization.



Local singer, arts educator and Paramount Story Wrangler Jenn Hartmann Luck releases a new children's album inspired by children who are changing our world for the better.

## High School Career Planning

The Make It Movement has launched a campaign in response to the 40% of high school graduates who are opting to forego postsecondary enrollment and directly enter the workforce. Recent reports show that adults without any type of postsecondary credentials will often earn the same amount of money in their sixth year after completing high school as they did in their first year.

Founded by Roy Spence, co-founder and chairman of GSD&M and co-founder and CEO of the Purpose Institute, the Make It Movement seeks to introduce high schoolers to careers where higher learning equals higher earning. This purpose-based marketing initiative helps students identify careers that align with their interests and desires and guides them to pursue some form of further education in these areas.

The Make It Movement has partnered with leaders and staff at Austin Community College, Workforce Solutions Capital Area, E3 Alliance, Texas Association of Builders, United Way for Greater Austin, American Youthworks, Austin Regional Manufacturers Association and Skillpoint Alliance. To learn more, visit [makeitmovement.org](http://makeitmovement.org).

## by the numbers



**1st** Thursday of November is National Men Make Dinner Day

Source: [nationaldayarchives.gov](http://nationaldayarchives.gov)



**21 million** U.S. military veterans are honored on Veterans Day

Source: [census.gov](http://census.gov)



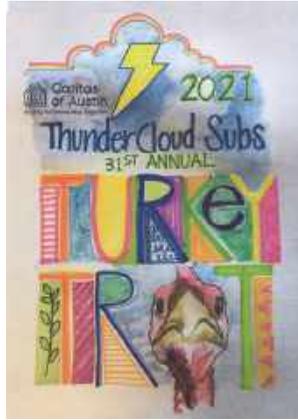
**1621** The year of the first Thanksgiving celebration

Source: [history.com](http://history.com)



## Turkey Trot

Registration is now open for the 31st Annual ThunderCloud Subs Turkey Trot, benefiting Caritas of Austin. The event features a five-mile run, one-mile walk and Stepping Stone School Kids K as well as a kids activity tent, live music, vendor booths, raffle prizes and lots of people in costume. The event takes place on Thanksgiving Day, November 25.



This year's event will take place both in person and virtually. Thanks to the success of last year's fully virtual Turkey Trot, it will continue as a tradition in 2021 and beyond.

All proceeds from the run will go to Caritas of Austin and its mission to end homelessness in Austin. The organization broke ground on its first-ever residential center this year, Espero Rutland, which will have 171 studio apartments and offer support services to residents. Caritas believes that providing people a stable place to call home helps them to reach their full potential and contribute to the community.

For more information or to register for this benefit run, visit [thundercloud.com](http://thundercloud.com).

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Austin-based band Grupo Fantasma will play the Breakthrough Central Texas Benefit Concert to ignite support for first-generation college students.

### Benefit Concert

The Grammy-winning, nine-piece Latin funk band Grupo Fantasma will headline this year's Breakthrough Benefit Concert. Breakthrough Central Texas is a nonprofit that creates a path to college for students from under-resourced communities. Starting in sixth grade, the organization offers out-of-school learning experiences, leadership skills and comprehensive advising to students to help them attend and succeed in college.

This private event will support the organization's mission to create paths to postsecondary success for Central Texas students who aspire to become the firsts in their families to earn a college degree.

The 2021 Breakthrough Benefit Concert will kick off at 6 p.m. on Thursday, November 4. Previously held as a public event at Stubb's BBQ, this year's reception and concert will be a hybrid event. An intimate 250-person event will be held at 3TEN ACL Live, and live streaming will be available to attendees who choose to watch from home. Tickets to the program and Grupo Fantasma concert are available via sponsorship at [breakthroughctx.org/benefit-concert](http://breakthroughctx.org/benefit-concert).

To learn more about Breakthrough Central Texas and its mission, vision and programs, visit [breakthroughctx.org](http://breakthroughctx.org).

# Must-Do This November

6

It's My Park Day!  
*Parks across the city*

7

Change Your Clock  
*Daylight Savings Time*

25

Turkey Trot  
*The Long Center*



### It's My Park Day

Volunteer registration is now open for the fall It's My Park Day. Join neighbors on Saturday, November 6, to clean up parks, mulch trees, spruce up the city's cherished green spaces or help with some specialty projects. Such projects this year include the groundbreaking of North Oaks Garden, flag placement for Veteran's Day at Austin Memorial Cemetery and support of the Pillars Project at Rosewood Park, among others.



It's My Park Day will take place at parks and greenspaces all over Austin. In accordance with the city's COVID-19 safety protocols, all in-person volunteer projects will be capped at 25 participants, so register early to ensure a spot at your preferred project. Virtual volunteer opportunities will also be available for those that prefer to keep our parks beautiful from a distance. Find more information and registration details at [austinparks.org/impd](http://austinparks.org/impd).

The Austin Parks Foundation also thanks Austinites for a record-breaking \$332,600 raised at this year's Party for the Parks event. Funds go to supporting Austin's parks, trails and green spaces, which continue to be underfunded and rely heavily for their upkeep on volunteers and community donations. This was the first year the annual fundraiser was held at the ACL Festival, and it proved to be the most successful one to date.



Recipients of the Kocurek Scholarship go on to pursue degrees in the health care profession. Applications for 2022 are currently being accepted. Photo courtesy St. David's Foundation.

### Scholarship Announced

St. David's Foundation honors the legacy of Dr. W. Neal Kocurek with a scholarship program in his name to support Central Texas students pursuing health-related studies at Texas colleges and universities.

A civic and corporate leader, Dr. Kocurek was known for bringing people together to achieve progress in areas such as healthcare, public education, social equity and regional stewardship. He was also deeply invested in the challenge of providing healthcare for the poor and addressing the root causes of health inequities in Austin.

Applications are now being accepted for the 2022 St. David's Neal Kocurek Scholarship. High school seniors from Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Travis and Williamson counties are highly encouraged to apply if they have a passion for a career in health care and will be attending a university or college within the state of Texas. To learn more, visit [scholarships.stdavidsfoundation.org](http://scholarships.stdavidsfoundation.org).



## GETTING OUTSIDE AND SLOWING DOWN

At last, the weather seems to be cooperating enough to allow us quality outdoor time. A perhaps surprising number of shows on PBS Kids – such as “Curious George,” “Nature Cat,” “Molly of Denali” and “Wild Kratts,” among others – encourage children to get outside.

This highlights a distinguishing feature of quality educational media: one measure



of success is whether it motivates off-screen activity. While we wish that a child would instinctively leap up and run outside after viewing an episode, in reality a parent or another adult usually needs to get involved to make outdoor action happen. Courtesy of pbsparents.org, here are some activities that don't require much preparation:

1. Walk slow with your heads down. See what forms of life you normally pass by without noticing, and take full advantage of little kids' close-up views of the ground!
2. Go on a scavenger hunt. Make a list of things you would like to see in the natural world, then go out and find them! Nature Cat includes the following items in his list: something that smells good, a flying insect, an acorn or other seed, something rough and something beautiful.

3. Read a book outside. Grab a blanket and a snack, then read a story out loud to all who wish to hear it.
4. Make a fort. Convert that reading blanket into a roof with some string. Add cardboard and other materials to create a magical outdoor space.

For more ideas, get the free Nature Cat Great Outdoors app for daily suggestions for outside adventures, or visit [pbsparents.org](http://pbsparents.org) for more tips.

Benjamin Kramer, Ph.D., is the director of education for Austin PBS.



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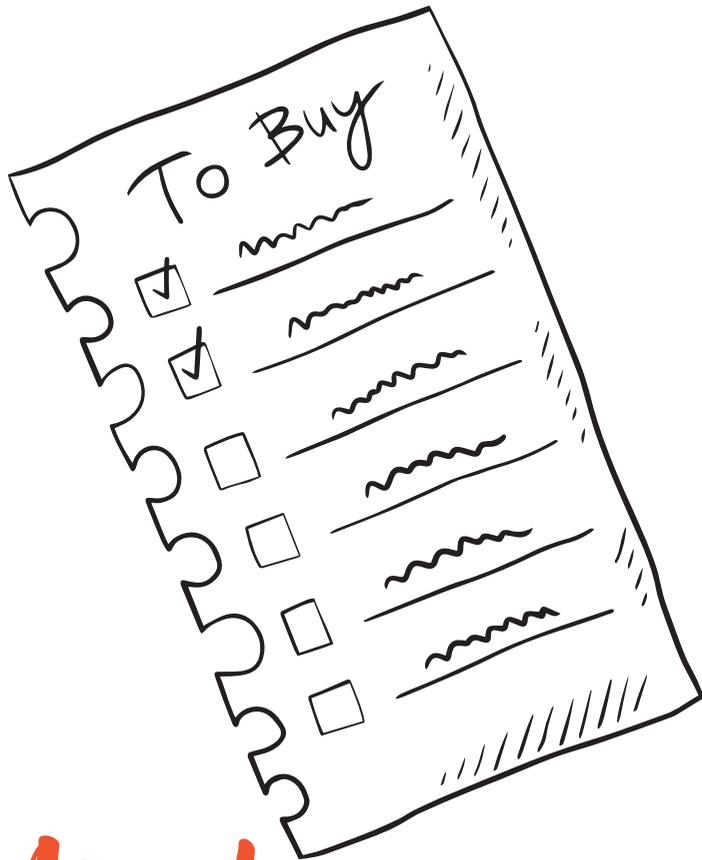
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# Mastering Mealtime

BY SARAH LYONS

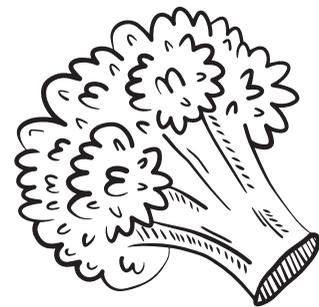


Rushing home from an exhausting day, the last thing on your mind is cooking a healthy dinner for your family. The kids are hungry, the baby is crying, it's already 5:30 p.m. and you have nothing planned for dinner. Desperate for a quick solution, you use the drive-thru for a less than delicious and not so nutritious meal. Sound familiar?

Many parents find themselves so busy with work, school, homework, sports, activities and errands that cooking weeknight meals may seem impossible. In reality, eating at home can be faster, easier and more affordable, even on those hectic school nights with these five steps.

## Step 1 - Create a "Go To List"

Start by making a list of meals your family already loves. Be realistic and keep it simple by adding quick and easy recipes that can be put together on a busy evening. Once you have your list, place it where you can refer to it again in the future. This list is your secret weapon to mastering mealtime.



## Step 2 - Plan the Week

With your "Go To List" of meals in hand, consult the family calendar. For the busiest and most stressful days, plan a Crock-Pot meal. On days when everyone is coming and going at different times, try sub sandwiches with fruit. Pull ideas from your "Go To List" of meals to fill in the rest of the week. Meal planning will reduce the stress of the evening rush and solve the daily dilemma of "What's for dinner?"



### Step 3 - Go Shopping

Look over your meal plan and make a grocery list. Don't forget to check the freezer and pantry for items you may already have on hand. When you have your list, head to your favorite store and pick up your items.

**"Meal planning will reduce the stress of the evening rush and solve the daily dilemma of 'What's for dinner?'"**

### Step 4 - Prep Ahead

Prepare as much food as possible in advance. Wash and chop vegetables and fruit, brown meat and put into one-pound batches, put together casseroles and thaw any items you will need in the next few days. Chicken breasts can be cooked in large batches in the Crock-Pot for later use in salads, casseroles, soups or skillet meals. The more you prepare now, the less you will need to do on those busy nights after work.

### Step 5 - stick To It

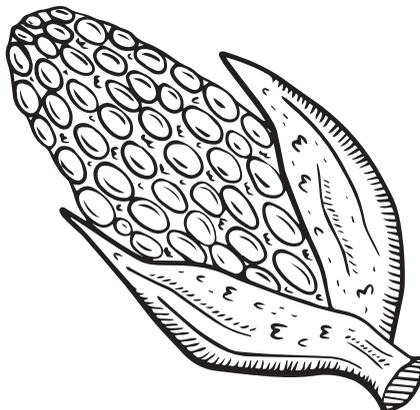
The hard work is done, and it's time to stick to your plan. Since everything is prepped and ready, you just have to finish your meals and enjoy.

Unexpected challenges may come up, but with an organized plan, you will be able to handle most surprises with ease and avoid getting stuck in the fast food rut once again.

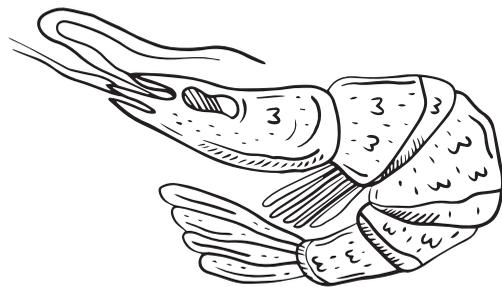
With these five easy steps, you can throw together a fast, healthy and budget-friendly meal, while reducing stress and gaining quality family time.

### Quick Tips To Master Mealtime

- **Make Two** - If you are making one casserole, why not make two? One can be eaten now while the other can be frozen and saved for dinner another night.
- **Stock the Freezer** - Fill your freezer with both pre-made and homemade items to have on hand for an eventful week.
- **Use the Slow Cooker** - Toss some things together in the morning and come home to a hot meal after a long day.
- **Buy Pre-Made Ingredients** - Precut vegetables, cooked rotisserie chicken and ready-to-grill marinated meat are perfect for the active family.
- **Have "Buffet" Nights** - Designate one night a week to eat leftovers from the fridge to save time and money.



- **Stock the Pantry** - Have meals on hand you can turn to in a bind, such as spaghetti, bean burritos or quesadillas.
- **Plan Theme Nights** - Monday - Pasta, Tuesday - Tacos, Wednesday - Stir Fry... To make it even easier, repeat the theme every week with slight variations in the menu. You will streamline your grocery list, steady your grocery budget and simplify meal planning.
- **Do Double Duty** - Use extra ingredients to make two meals. For example, leftover taco meat could become enchiladas, nachos or chili. Grilled chicken breast could be used for a salad, soup or casserole.



- **Take a Night Off** - Add a "Night Out" to your meal plan once in a while to treat yourself and your family. Even better, look for "Kids Eat Free" nights at your favorite restaurants.
- **Make It Fun** - Get the kids involved in meal planning and food prep. Most importantly, enjoy mealtime together.

*Sarah Lyons is a stay-at-home wife and mother of six children, including 18-month-old triplets. Her goal is to make time for family dinners on a regular basis because it helps develop feelings of connection.*



## Events and Destinations

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### JUNIOR LEAGUE 2021 CHRISTMAS AFFAIR DASHING THROUGH THE SNOW

**DOWNTOWN AUSTIN**

**Nov 17-21**

Join us for the event of the season. Market Days plus children's events including photos with Santa, petting zoo, meeting reindeer, Frosty the Snowman and Ice Princesses. Virtual parties available as well. Palmer Events Center. [jlaustin.org/events-a-christmas-affair](http://jlaustin.org/events-a-christmas-affair)

### PLAYLAND SKATE CENTER THANKSGIVING BREAK SKATE

**NORTH AUSTIN**

**Nov 22-26**

Extended skating sessions available. Great activity for all ages! Check out our website for more details. [playlandskatecenter.net](http://playlandskatecenter.net)

### CAMERON PARK ZOO

**WACO**

**Nov 26-Jan 9**

Visit Waco's Cameron Park Zoo's Wild Lights. A quarter of a million lights will brighten your walk through the zoo and Santa will be visiting until December 22. Tickets on sale now. 254-750-8415 [cameronparkzoo.com/specialevents/wild-lights](http://cameronparkzoo.com/specialevents/wild-lights)

### HOLIDAY BAZAAR AT TREASURES CHARITY

**ROUND ROCK**

**Nov 30, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.**

The store is open with all of the Christmas merchandise in the clothing and furniture stores ~ lots of decorations! It's very festive and fun for everyone, not just the thrift store shopper. This benefits Round Rock Serving Center. Volunteer opportunities available. 1099 E. Main St., Round Rock. 512-244-2431 [rrasc.org](http://rrasc.org)

### SANTA'S SKATE SHOP

**NORTH AUSTIN**

**Dec 11, 1-6 p.m., Dec 12, 12-5 p.m.**

Admission includes roller skate rental and take your own digital photo with Santa. We charge for all kids, whether they skate or not. Non-skating adults and children under 3 are no charge. [playlandskatecenter.net](http://playlandskatecenter.net)

### WINTER BREAK SKATE

**NORTH AUSTIN**

**Dec 20 - Jan 3**

Extended skating sessions available. Great activity for all ages. Check out our website for more details. [playlandskatecenter.net](http://playlandskatecenter.net)

### NEW YEAR'S EVE BALLOON DROP

**NORTH AUSTIN**

**Dec 31, 4 p.m.**

Come skate from 12-6 p.m. with a family-friendly balloon drop. Admission includes roller skate rental. [playlandskatecenter.net](http://playlandskatecenter.net)

## Holiday Camps

### CAMP DOUBLECREEK

**DAY CAMP**

**Dec 20, 21, 27, 28**

Camp Doublecreek is Austin's best day camp, featuring a variety of activities like swimming, archery, horseback riding, rockwall and more. We make sure every camper goes home knowing that someone believes in them. [campdoublecreek.com](http://campdoublecreek.com)

**CAMP JUMP!****DAY CAMP****Dec 20-22, Dec 28-30, Jan 3-4**

Winter break could be filled with gymnastics, arts and crafts, yoga, sports skills and so much more! Camp Jump! is an action packed, imaginative, four-time award-winning experience. Come see why. [jump-austin.com](http://jump-austin.com)

**COUNTRY HOME LEARNING CENTERS WINTER PROGRAM****DAY CAMP**

We invite our school-aged students to attend special activities planned at Country Home on public school holidays. Students enjoy active, fun-filled days that provide a variety of choices throughout our facility. When permitted, field trips are planned on these days to exciting and educational local attractions. North and South locations. Ages 5-13. [countryhomelearningcenter.com](http://countryhomelearningcenter.com)

**IDEA LAB****DAY CAMP****Nov 22-24, Dec 20-23, Dec 27-31, Jan 3-4**

Join us for our awesome STEM camps (voted Best STEM Camps in Austin by the readers of Austin Family magazine) while school is out of session. You can sign up for just one or two days or all of them! Each day will have unique activities for each age group (5-7 years old and 8-12 years old). [idealabkids.com/location/austin](http://idealabkids.com/location/austin)

**NEWK'S OUTBACK COLORADO SKI TRIP****OVERNIGHT CAMP****Dec 17-24, \$1350 all inclusive**

Join us for a week of fun, great food and new friends. Skiing, snowboarding, sledding and more. All ages welcome. [newktennis.com](http://newktennis.com)

**NEWK'S OUTBACK TENNIS CAMP, THANKSGIVING AND CHRISTMAS****DAY AND OVERNIGHT CAMP**

Established in 1968 by tennis legend John Newcombe, the Tennis Ranch has evolved into one of the premier tennis destinations in the world. All skill levels welcome. [newktennis.com](http://newktennis.com) or email [adventures@newktennis.com](mailto:adventures@newktennis.com)

**RIO VISTA FARM WINTER BREAK CAMP****DAY CAMP****Dec 20-23, First Session  
Dec 27-30, Second Session**

With instruction in English riding lessons and horse care, campers leave with a respect for the hard work, dedication and fun involved in working with horses. Rio Vista is located 10 miles from downtown Austin. Camps run from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Ages 7-16. 512-247-2303 [riovistafarm.net](http://riovistafarm.net)

**STEPPING STONE SCHOOL WINTER BREAK****DAY CAMP****Dec 23-Jan 4**

Winter Break is just around the corner...do you know what your child will be doing? This winter break, we will delve into the immersive world of Lego® where "Everything is Awesome." Students will use Lego® bricks to learn about the variety of science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics (S.T.E.A.M.) concepts and use daily "Challenge Builds" to expand their imaginations and problem-solving skills. In addition, campers will take part in our exceptional Joy and Mindfulness curriculum, as well as embarking on virtual field journeys over the course of the camp. Kindergarten-5th Grade. Locations throughout Austin metro area. 512-459-0258 [steppingstoneschool.com](http://steppingstoneschool.com)

**YMCA WINTER WONDERLAND!****DAY CAMP****Dec 20-23, Dec 27-30, Jan 3-4**

Windows will glisten with glittering snowflakes and sparkling ice crystal ornaments, as frosty snowmen and hot-chocolate-sipping students celebrate the magic of the winter season. Wintery science, fake snow and icy art curriculum will be accompanied by theme-related stories and books, including "When This World Was New" by Danilo Figueredo, "Sneezy the Snowman" by Maureen Wright, and the Hans Christian Anderson fairy tale "The Snow Queen." Multiple locations in Travis and Hays counties. More Winter Break information and online registration is available at [eacymca.org](http://eacymca.org).

**Summer Camp Only****CAMP HEART O' HILLS (girls only)****OVERNIGHT CAMP**

Located on the Guadalupe River near Kerrville, our friendly staff teaches over 40 fun, character-building activities to kids from around the world. Family-owned and operated, our camps have separate locations for boys and girls with the same dates and rates. Enjoy family-style dining and great food. We grow kids better! [hohcamp.com](http://hohcamp.com)

**CAMP STEWART (boys only)****OVERNIGHT CAMP**

Located on the Guadalupe River near Kerrville, our friendly staff teaches over 40 fun, character-building activities to kids from around the world. Family-owned and operated, our camps have separate locations for boys and girls with the same dates and rates. Enjoy family-style dining and great food. We grow kids better! [campstewart.com](http://campstewart.com)



**LIFELINES**

BRENDA SCHOOLFIELD

*Schoolfield is a freelance medical writer based in Austin.*

## Basic Facts To Help You Navigate the COVID-19 Information Maze

Although fewer children are affected by COVID-19 compared to adults, children can get sick from the virus, and some develop severe illness. Hospitalization rates of children due to COVID-19 have increased since the beginning of school. As parents, we want to make the right decisions to safeguard our child's health. But there is so much information out there, it is difficult to sort out who to listen to and what to believe. Here is some basic information to help you understand the concepts that you need to consider as you make important decisions that affect your child's current and future health.

### How Does the Drug Development Process Work?

Some people falsely think that one day a drug is in a test tube and a few days later, the drug is being tested on humans by researchers. Before a drug is available to be prescribed by your doctor or given as a vaccine, the drug

is evaluated for efficacy and safety throughout multiple phases.

After a drug is identified during the research and discovery process, it is investigated in an artificial environment such as a test tube. Toxicology studies are conducted to see whether the drug is safe. For example, household bleach would kill the virus that causes COVID-19 if tested in the lab; however, bleach is toxic to humans if injected or ingested. If a drug has a therapeutic benefit and is safe, research continues onto Phase I clinical trials in humans.

**Phase I.** In Phase I trials, the drug is tested in a small number of healthy volunteers. Researchers look at side effects in a range of doses. They look at what the body does to the drug – how the drug is absorbed, distributed, metabolized and excreted. These parameters show how fast the drug starts working, how long it stays in the

body and the pathway the body uses to eliminate the drug.

**Phase II.** Phase II trials are controlled trials conducted in a targeted patient population. A controlled trial means that one group of patients receives the study drug, and the other group gets an inactive substance (i.e., a placebo) or a different drug. The targeted patient population consists of patients who will benefit from the drug. For example, if the therapeutic benefit of the drug is to make it easier to breathe during an asthma attack, the drug is tested in patients who have asthma. Researchers evaluate safety and efficacy. Phase II trials can have up to 300 patients.

**Phase III.** Phase III trials involve a larger number of patients, from several hundred to several thousand. Researchers evaluate the drug's benefit-to-risk ratio, testing the effectiveness of the drug at treating

or preventing a disease versus the side effects. Researchers set up these trials to get the best possible data. Some patients are given an inactive substance and become the placebo control group. In randomized studies, patients are randomly assigned either the study drug or the placebo. Patient groups may be recruited in multiple geographic areas. If the outcome from Phase III trials is successful, then the drug is submitted to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for approval to bring the drug to market.

**Phase IV.** Phase IV trials are done after FDA approval. These trials build on the findings of the Phase III trials. They sometimes study use of the drug for a different target population, such as children, or they can expand a drug's indications. A drug's indication is what condition the drug is used to treat. For example, hydroxychloroquine is indicated as effective treatment for malaria and some autoimmune diseases. Recent studies were conducted by the World Health Organization to test the therapeutic effect of this drug as a treatment for COVID-19, but none was found.

#### **Where Can I Get Factual Vaccine Information?**

The currently available COVID-19 vaccines followed the required FDA drug development process. As with any newly approved (or authorized) drug, researchers continue to study and evaluate for safety and efficacy. Assessments are ongoing to see how the vaccine performs against changes in the virus (new variants), how long protection lasts and how well it protects against serious illness. Go to [cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/effectiveness-research/protocols.html](https://cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/effectiveness-research/protocols.html) for the latest information in COVID-19 vaccine effectiveness research.

#### **Bust Common Myths and Learn the Facts**

Rumors and disinformation about vaccines are rampant. The CDC is a trusted resource that provides credible and updated information. Go to [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/facts.html](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/facts.html) to learn more.

#### **Whose Advice Should I Trust About Vaccine Safety in Children?**

When making decisions that will

impact your child's health both now and in the future, don't hesitate to get expert advice. Talk to your child's pediatrician. Pediatricians are trained to evaluate risks and benefits of therapies for pediatric patients. They can offer expert advice tailored to your child's specific needs.

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# 6 Ways To Make a Teacher's Day



## THE Learning Curve

ALISON BOGLE

*Alison Bogle is a writer living in Austin with her husband and three children. A former fourth grade teacher, she now enjoys writing about children and education.*

To kids, Thanksgiving can seem like a second-rate holiday. It doesn't offer the wild costumes, delayed bedtimes and candy-fueled dreams of Halloween, nor does it come with the present overload, cookies and parties of Christmas or Hanukkah. What Thanksgiving does offer, however, is the antidote to the holidays of excess. It provides us with an opportunity to slow down, to center ourselves during this season of craziness and to remember to count our blessings, of which we often find many when we stop to notice.

After a year and a half of uncertainty, during which parents oversaw remote learning, virtual homework and the

back-and-forth of quarantining, all while juggling work and family responsibilities, many parents experienced a renewed sense of gratitude for educators. We were deeply thankful for the work our teachers were doing on a daily basis to help our children learn and thrive, both academically and emotionally.

After months of lessons over Zoom, my own children experienced a renewed sense of appreciation for school and the ability to gather in person. They still don't love homework, but they no longer grumble about getting up to go to school. My daughter even burst into tears when she had to stay home sick, such is the appreciation for the simple freedom of being at school.

**"This Thanksgiving, my family will be count our blessings... specifically for our teachers and school staff."**

As a marketing professional turned fourth-grade teacher, I know firsthand how hard educational professionals work. They're always "on." Lunch is eaten on the fly (if at all), and when they're sick, they make detailed plans for their substitutes to follow before they can rest. Once the pandemic hit, they also ran Zoom classes and in-person school, sometimes at the same time. The beautiful thing about teachers is that, for most, they do it because they truly love children. They care about our children and want to help them grow, both as students and as humans.

This Thanksgiving, my family will count our blessings, but we will take it a step further to express gratitude for those blessings, specifically for our teachers and school staff. How can you express just how much your child's teacher means to your family, without succumbing to the dreaded apple tchotchke? This year, consider one of these gifts instead that will truly make a difference to your child's teacher.

### 1. Thank you note

Most teachers keep a stash of notes from their students and students'

parents. On the hard days, it is a balm to pull out that folder and read through the kind and positive words of those for whom you've made a difference. Write your teacher a note telling her what an impact she's had – the more specific, the better. Have your child write a note from his perspective as well.

## 2. Gift card

Everyone loves a treat! If you know your child's teacher loves coffee, a gift card to a local coffee shop would be a welcome gift. Stores such as Target or Amazon are also always a hit, or a gift card to a local grocery store can help lighten the financial load of your hardworking teacher. If you know your child's teacher likes pampering, you could even consider a gift card for a massage or pedicure.

## 3. Meal

The days leading up to the holidays are a whirlwind of activity at school. Kids are bouncing off the walls with excitement, yet work still needs to be finished and grades entered before the long holiday. This time period is one of the most exhausting for educators. Gift your teacher with a homemade or restaurant-purchased meal to help relieve the burden of meal preparation. Check for preference and dietary requirements first.

## 4. Homemade gifts

Teachers truly love gifts that come from the hearts of their students. I still have a macaroni necklace given to me by one of my students on the first day of school ... 16 years ago. With a note of gratitude included, a homemade gift is certain to warm any educator's heart.

## 5. Treats (but not the kind you're thinking of)

Educators love anything given in appreciation, but they love something usable even more. As they head into the holidays, they receive chocolates and cookies galore. Though yummy, consider lower sugar alternatives for a person trying to stay healthy during a stressful time – such as trail mix, an assortment of sparkling waters or a fresh fruit basket.

## 6. Brag on them to their boss

Teaching can be an isolating profession. Although teachers are surrounded by many bodies during the school day, they don't have much opportunity to interact with other adults or with the principal. Send an email to the principal singing your teacher's praises. Copy the teacher so he knows he's been complimented. This simple gesture can provide your child's teacher a huge emotional boost.

By expressing gratitude to teachers this Thanksgiving season, you will not only make them feel appreciated, seen and valued, but you will also teach your child the gift of giving to others. Your child will learn that the beautiful thing about truly giving from the heart is that the gift doesn't have to be expensive or fancy. If your offering is heartfelt, to the recipient, it will mean the world.



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## FAMILY MATTERS

BETTY RICHARDSON

*Richardson, PhD, RN, CS, LPC, LMFT, is an Austin-based psychotherapist.*

# Should You Change Schools?

**Q** Our son Nate has started his freshman year at our local public school, but he comes home every day and asks to change schools. He says he doesn't fit in there. I don't know how to handle this request as I have no experience with this. My dad would have just told me to tough it out if I had told him that I wanted to go to a different school. What are good reasons to help a child change schools? If there are good reasons to make a change, how would I go about helping my son find a school that is a better fit?

**A** The most common reasons to switch schools that I found in my research include:

- the child is unhappy at the current school
- the current school doesn't seem a good fit for the child
- the child has stopped progressing or developing
- the child's safety is of concern
- COVID-19 procedures at the school don't seem adequate
- the school is not proving to be in the child's best interest.

When a child asks to change schools, it requires a good bit of research

to determine if this switching is a good idea or not. Start by taking the child's feelings into consideration. Ask questions about their relationships with their teachers and other staff, whether they think they are getting a good education, whether they feel safe at school, who they eat lunch with and who they like to hang out with. Ask your child to tell you what they would miss about their current school and what they would be glad to leave behind. List these things in one column.

In another column, add details based on your research of other possible schools. Take a look at their curriculum to determine what they might offer your child that will interest him and benefit him. Can your freshman take college courses or occupational courses? Look at the class size. Is the teacher in the classroom or are lessons virtual? What activities or clubs are available?

You should also meet with the current teachers, the school counselor and the principal of the school your son currently attends. These folks may be able to identify what is causing your son to want to change schools and whether these problems can be addressed at his current school.

Another factor to consider is timing. It is still fairly early in the school year, which does make it a better time to transfer now rather than later. If you are transferring out of your neighborhood school, however, you will need to check transfer dates and deadlines for the new school. These are often at the beginning of the calendar year.

In the meantime, do your research. If you have identified a possible school for your child to transfer to, ask the principal whether you and your son can visit and meet with one or more of the teachers. While on your visit, learn about the classes and extracurricular activities. A tour can also give prospective students a better idea of whether or not it is a good fit for them.

If your son transfers schools, realize that although it's a fresh start, it can be scary too. Enlist the help of faculty and offer lots of support at home. A good teacher can help a student find ways to connect as well as to understand what is expected of him to be successful in school. Likewise, if your son remains at his old school, you should also offer lots of support and work closely with the teachers and staff to help him find ways to develop a stronger sense of belonging.

# November 2021

## calendar

Please check [austinfamily.com](http://austinfamily.com) for daily updates to the calendar.

Any family-friendly events can be posted at [austinfamily.com](http://austinfamily.com) and will be made live once approved. Certain restrictions apply.

### Mon 1

**Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.** Fortlandia is a collection of custom forts designed and built for play in the Mollie Steves Zachry Texas Arboretum. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, 4801 La Crosse Ave. \$6 - \$12. [wildflower.org](http://wildflower.org).

### Tue 2

#### Día de los Muertos; Election Day

**Kindergarten Tour.** If you are considering a private Christian education for kindergarten, come explore our campus and see what Redeemer has to offer. 9 to 10 a.m. Redeemer Lutheran School, 1500 W. Anderson Ln. FREE. [redeemerschool.net](http://redeemerschool.net).

**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1.

### Wed 3

**Sprouts Storytime.** Bring your little ones to the Family Garden for nature-themed storytimes, especially for ages 5 and younger. Reservations recommended. 10 to 10:30 a.m. Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, 4801 La Crosse Ave. FREE with admission. [wildflower.org](http://wildflower.org).

**Monarch Sanctuary Celebration.** Learn about the importance of monarchs, their life cycle and how we can encourage and support pollinators on a local and personal level with engaging, hands-on activities through Families in Nature. 3 to 8 p.m. Tudor Cottage at Kingsbury Commons, 1100 Kingsbury St. FREE. [rootsandwingsfest.com](http://rootsandwingsfest.com).

**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1.

### Thu 4

**Starry Night at Girlstart.** Girlstart's STEM studio and mini-planetarium is a unique space for families to explore astronomy. 5 to 7 p.m. Girlstart, 1400 W. Anderson Ln. FREE. [girlstart.org](http://girlstart.org).

**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1; Sprouts Storytime, see Wed 3.

### Fri 5

**Movie Night.** Mobile Loaves & Fishes invites you to the Community Cinema & Amphitheater to watch "Mulan" (PG-13). 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Community First! Village, 9301 Hog Eye Rd. \$5. [mlf.org/community-cinema](http://mlf.org/community-cinema).

**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1.

### Sat 6

**Bulldog Dash.** This annual race benefits Buda Elementary. For the love of go, get off the

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couch. Event starts in parking lot of the school. 7:30 to 9:30 a.m. Buda Elementary, 1060 Old San Antonio Rd., Buda. \$10. budabulldogdash.com.

**It's My Park Day.** The biggest city-wide volunteer event for Austin parks. 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Area wide parks. FREE. austinparks.givepulse.com.

**Stories of Our Elders: A Family Storytime Series.** Join the Asian American Resource Center for a multilingual storytime series for kids and adults of all ages. 10 to 11:30 a.m. Asian American Resource Center, 8401 Cameron Rd. FREE. aarcatx.eventbrite.com.

**Veterans Ceremony.** Come celebrate our veterans. Military vehicle display, booths, rock wall and inflatables. 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Veterans Memorial Park, 2525 W. New Hope Dr., Cedar Park. FREE. cedarparktexas.gov.

**Food Forest Fair.** Learn about the North Lamar International District's Food Forest while celebrating nature. This is a family-friendly event with seed ball-making, nature-themed arts and crafts, yard games, snacks and tree trivia. 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. North Lamar International District Food Forest, 1310 Kramer Ln. FREE. rootsandwingsfest.com.

**Blair Woods Bioblitz.** Join Travis Audubon for a day of exploring the biodiversity of Blair Woods, a 10-acre preserve in East Austin. Travis Audubon will host one-hour walks with a focus on specific groups of organisms, from birds

to fungi. Registration is required. Noon. Blair Woods Preserve, 5401 E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. FREE. rootsandwingsfest.com.

**Día de los Muertos Procession and Festival.** Celebrate this traditional Mesoamerican holiday dedicated to the ancestors with kid activities, art, crafts, food vendors, costumes and parade. Noon to 8 p.m. Centennial Plaza, 301 W. Bagdad Rd. FREE. roundrocktexas.gov.

**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1.

**Sun 7**  
**Daylight Saving Time**

**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1.

**Mon 8**  
**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1.

**Tue 9**  
**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1; Kindergarten Tour, see Tue 2.

**Wed 10**  
**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1; Sprouts Storytime, see Wed 3.

**Thu 11**  
**Veterans Day**

**Veterans Day Ceremony.** Please join us in honoring all current and former United States military service members. 10 a.m. Veterans Park, 1011 S. Bagdad Rd., Leander. leandertx.gov/parksrec/page/veterans-day-ceremony.

**Sleigh Bell Arts and Crafts Show.** Arts, crafts and gifts. This annual event hosts homemade items. Admission is free, with canned good donations accepted for Round Rock Serving Center. 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. St. Richard's Episcopal Church, 1420 E. Palm Valley Blvd., Round Rock. roundtherocktx.com/sleigh-bell-lane-arts-crafts-show.html.

**Silent Films Out Loud.** Silent Films Out Loud returns to the big screen for the fourth time, pairing local composers with a trio of films. 7 p.m. Violet Crown, 434 W. Second St. \$16. silentfilmsoutloud.com.

**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1; Sprouts Storytime, see Wed 3.

**Fri 12**  
**Movie Night.** Mobile Loaves & Fishes invites you to the Community Cinema & Amphitheater at Community First! Village to watch "Space Jam: A New Legacy" (PG). 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. 9301 Hog Eye Rd. \$5. mlf.org/community-cinema.

**Redeemer Middle School presents "Aladdin."** Come see Redeemer Middle School's production of "Aladdin." 7 p.m. Redeemer Lutheran School Cafetorium,

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**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1; Sleigh Bell Arts and Crafts Show, see Thu 11.

### Sat 13

**Pie Run.** This run benefits For the Love of Go, an organization that hosts family-friendly races in the area for schools and churches. Join in on a 1K fun run, 5K run/walk, 5K competitive run or a virtual 5K. 8 to 10 a.m. Gregg Clarke Park, 1231-1301 W. Center St., Kyle. \$10-20. [athletguild.com/running/kyle-tx/2021-pie-run](http://athletguild.com/running/kyle-tx/2021-pie-run).

**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1; Sleigh Bell Arts and Crafts Show (9 a.m. to 4 p.m.), see Thu 11; Redeemer Middle School presents "Aladdin" (1 and 7 p.m.), see Fri 12.

### Sun 14

**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1; Redeemer Middle School presents "Aladdin" (3 p.m.), see Fri 12.

### Mon 15

**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1.

### Tue 16

**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1; Kindergarten Tour, see Tue 2.

### Wed 17

**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1; Sprouts Storytime, see Wed 3.

### Thu 18

**A Christmas Affair 2021.** The Junior League of Austin presents A Christmas Affair 2021: Dashing Through The Snow. This Austin holiday tradition is back in person and featuring lots of vendors for your holiday shopping. Check out additional children's events that include gingerbread house decorating, photos with Santa and more. Noon to 6:30 p.m. Palmer Events Center, 900 Barton Springs Rd. \$20. [jlaustin.org](http://jlaustin.org).

**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1; Sprouts Storytime, see Wed 3.

### Fri 19

**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1; A Christmas Affair 2021, see Thu 18.

### Sat 20

**Stories from the South: A Family Archiving Workshop Series.** The Asian American Resource Center and the Austin History Center invite you to take a deep dive into your own family histories with this hands-on archiving workshop. 10 to 11:30 a.m. Asian American Resource Center, 8401 Cameron Rd. FREE. [aarcatx.eventbrite.com](http://aarcatx.eventbrite.com).

**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1; A Christmas Affair 2021, see Thu 18.

### Sun 21

**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1; A Christmas Affair 2021, see Thu 18.

### Mon 22

**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1.

### Tue 23

**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1.

### Wed 24

**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1.

### Thu 25

#### Thanksgiving

**Thankful Turkey Mermaid Virtual 5K.** This virtual 5K benefits Bluebonnet Lions Club that raises funds to give back to the community through grants and scholarships. \$15-25. [athletguild.com/running/san-marcos-tx/2021-thankful-turkey-mermaid-5k](http://athletguild.com/running/san-marcos-tx/2021-thankful-turkey-mermaid-5k).

**Thundercloud Subs Turkey Trot.** This annual event features a 5-mile run, 1-mile walk or Stepping Stone School Kids K, benefiting Caritas of Austin. 9:30 a.m. Long Center, 701 W. Riverside Dr. \$12 - \$32. [thundercloud.com](http://thundercloud.com).



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**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1.

**Fri 26**  
**Native American Heritage Day**

**Zilker Park Tree Lighting.** A holiday tradition for the entire family. Zilker Park, 2100 Barton Springs Rd. FREE.  
[austintexas.gov/department/zilker-holiday-tree](http://austintexas.gov/department/zilker-holiday-tree).

**Annual Lighting of the Square.** Come experience the magic as we kick off the holiday season with our annual Lighting of the Square. 5:30 p.m. Downtown Georgetown. FREE.  
[visit.georgetown.org/the-annual-lighting-of-the-square](http://visit.georgetown.org/the-annual-lighting-of-the-square).

**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1.

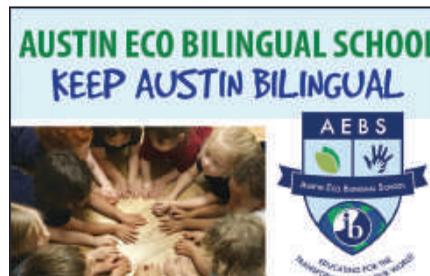
**Sat 27**  
**Austin Trail of Lights.** The Austin Trail of Lights is our city's most beloved and longest running holiday tradition. This year it is a drive-thru event with scheduled times and a fee charged per car. 5:30 to 10:30 p.m. Zilker Park, 2100 Barton Springs Rd. \$35 - \$95, depending on scheduled time and package.  
[austintrailoflights.org](http://austintrailoflights.org).

**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1.

**Sun 28**  
**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1; Austin Trail of Lights, see Sat 27.

**Mon 29**  
**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1; Austin Trail of Lights, see Sat 27.

**Tue 30**  
**CONTINUED:** Fortlandia at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, see Mon 1; Austin Trail of Lights, see Sat 27.



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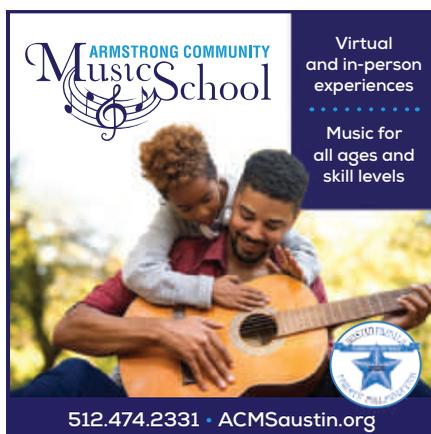
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# Baked Apple Recipe



Extend-A-Care YMCA Holiday Camps will offer a variety of locations and programming options December 27-31 for kids ages 4-12. Visit [eacymca.org](http://eacymca.org) for details.



If you want your kids to enjoy eating healthy, the first step is to show them that nutritious foods can be tasty too. Apples are a great choice, with their crisp texture and their combined sweet and tart flavor. Even better, with so many varieties in local markets, there's an apple to suit every taste.

To get your kids really excited about apples, try this simple baked apple recipe. As the aromas of apples and cinnamon fill your house, everyone will know that the holidays are just around the corner.

## INGREDIENTS:

- 4 apples, tart and sweet
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1/4 cup honey or brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1/8 teaspoon ground allspice
- 1/8 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons water

## DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat the oven to 350 F.
2. Start with a mix of tart and sweet apples – four total. Granny Smith is a great choice for the tart variety, while Fuji or Gala are firm and sweet. If you have to choose just one, you can't go wrong with Honeycrisp.
3. Core the apple and cut into 1/3- to 1/2-inch thick slices. Don't slice them too thin or they will cook too quickly and get mushy.

4. Place the apple slices in a large mixing bowl. Add 1/4 cup honey or brown sugar, 1 tablespoon cornstarch, 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon, 1/8 teaspoon ground allspice, 1/8 teaspoon kosher salt and 2 tablespoons of water. If you want to limit sugar, adjust the amount of honey or brown sugar used.
5. Melt two tablespoons of butter in the microwave, then add it to the ingredients in the mixing bowl. Stir to coat.
6. Pour the mixture into a deep 9-by-9-inch pan or similarly sized baking dish. Pour any excess liquid from the bottom of the bowl over the top.
7. Bake the apples for 25 minutes, until fork tender but not completely mushy. Do note that baking the apples won't turn them crispy in this recipe. The apples will be tender, like the filling of warm apple pie.
8. Serve hot, with vanilla ice cream or whipped cream as desired. You could also serve with vanilla yogurt or simply enjoy with a glass of milk.

Since the crust is typically the most indulgent aspect of an apple dessert, these baked apple slices have fewer calories than their traditional counterparts. If you're desiring some crispiness, try serving with graham crackers or granola. Either way, these apples taste incredible!

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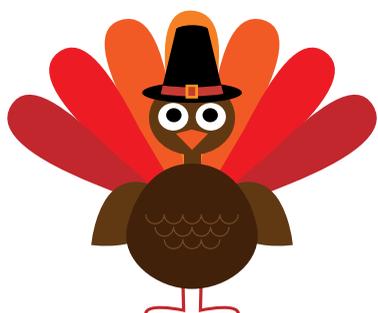
3214 Great Valley Drive, Cedar Park (off FM 620)  
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## JUST FOR GRINS

CATE BERRY

*Berry is an Austin-based children's book author and mother of two. She also teaches writing workshops for young people at cateberry.com.*



## Happy Turkeys

Every Thanksgiving we point our headlights west. Leaving chic espresso shops behind, we speed past deserted gas stations and miles of empty scrub brush, barreling down open highways to finally arrive at Turkey Roost Ranch. It's our family's land. My mother's people have ranched it for over a hundred years. It is rumored my great-grandmother was the first woman gifted a parcel for her very own, so it's pretty special.

It was named Turkey Roost because hundreds of wild turkeys roam the land. No one misses the irony of watching those majestic birds, sitting happily, swinging on the powerline under a powder blue sky as we dig into dark meat and sweet potatoes.

Those turkeys are enviable. They languish about, while I struggle remembering whether my distant aunt is divorced or not and who half my relatives are. As I sweat making small talk, the gobblers shoot the breeze, simply warbling in the wind.

I certainly would love to turkey-swap when politics or religion come up, or when my kale salad arrives and with it the subsequent commentary that follows. But it is great being human and enjoying a heaping helping of fluff salad (it's a West Texas thing), slyly showing off my kids and defending my long-standing reign of Spoon Player Champion-in-Charge.

As the day trots on, we dig into pecan pie. Then those turkeys really let loose. They flap down from the wire and strut just far enough away from our very large group to flaunt their lucky tail feathers. They sort of flip us the literal bird as they revel in their security for having made it through another Thanksgiving unscathed.

May we all get through our holiday gatherings, large or small, happy to simply hang under a powder blue sky and feel the gratitude of life.

In other words, at the end of the day, let's give thanks we are not turkeys.

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