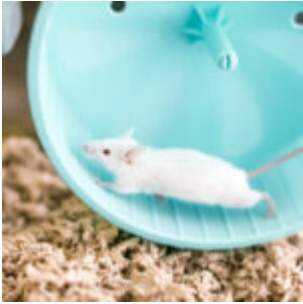


# Time to Start Digging Out



I don't know about you, but I've gotten into a rut since this whole COVID thing started. Really, I've gotten into a bunch of ruts. As things start to loosen, it's time to start brainstorming how to get out of the ruts without endangering our recovery.

The topics of what kind of ruts we've gotten into vary and can be really personal. I, for instance, dug a new pair of shoes out of my closet that I have yet to wear since I bought them about six months ago.

For the first six months of lockdown, I wore the same pair of sandals every day. I noticed I was doing it, but I really just didn't care. Who was going to notice? I was working at home. When I decided I needed a solid shoe for the cooler months I went out and bought two pairs. You guessed it, I wore the same pair of solid shoes for six months. It was not until today that I dug out the other new pair and put them on. The act made me feel sort of special. A little lighter. Maybe even a little cleaner. The psychological toll of this thing has hit us all. We just need to turn inward to find out how it has affected us and start to bring it to the surface so we can do things to heal.

Since so much of my writing focuses on food, I thought I'd point out a few ruts I have noticed and offer up ideas on how to get out of them. Some of these may apply to you.

### **Same Day Same Food**

When I was a kid in a large Irish family if it was Monday it was chicken. If it was Tuesday it was meatloaf and of course, if it was Friday it was fish. During this time, I've noticed that I can fall into making the same things too often. For some that's comfort. For me, that's a sign of boredom. To work on that I have been getting out cookbooks. Yep, my on-the-shelf, old-fashioned cookbooks. I found one with Southern dishes I drew from and one that's French written by one of my cooking heroes, Wolfgang Puck. Cooking something he invented gets you out of your grilled cheese sandwich rut. My husband has also been reading the food section of the paper for ideas. I appreciate the help.

### **Cutting Board Meals**

If you don't do this already this might be a perfect way to get out of a rut. The kids will even enjoy this.

What we do is take cured meats and put them on a big cutting board. Things like salami or any good deli items will do. Sometimes I cut up pre-cooked sausages and heat them in the oven. Then we add things like celery and carrots for crunch. You can also add things like olives, or those cherry peppers you find in the deli. My husband likes roasted red peppers in the jar. Add cheeses cut into cubes or slices. Add some crackers or breadsticks. You can also add some jams. Fancy ones like fig jam are nice.

You can stack things on a cracker or just eat them in little bites. A bit of jam spread on a piece of cheese makes me smile.

No one had to really cook to make the whole meal come together. Each person has their own little plate and can take things off the cutting board they like and make a meal out of it. You can do this and play a game or watch a movie. Sure beats popcorn!

### **Watch a Documentary**

This has been big for me. I figure if I'm going to be in the rut of watching TV I might as well learn something. Once you get on Netflix or Hulu and start picking documentaries, they suggest more you might like. You can find some fascinating subjects.

### **Teach**

For those of you with kids, I imagine homeschool has been grueling. This brings back memories for me. When I was a little girl my mother let me learn cooking and entertaining projects on weekends when I was not in school. I loved it and I have kept those lessons with me to this day. She taught me how to set the table. Not just a fork, spoon, and knife. She taught me what all the other little spoons were for, even demitasse. She did not stop what she was doing. I'd just bring her a little fork or knife and ask her where it went. She'd tell me and off I went. She'd let me set the table for a fancy meal even if we were not having one. She was quite proud in her later years when she came to our place for a visit and saw the dinner table properly set.

She let me experiment with arranging flowers. Now that you can buy assorted bouquets inexpensively at the grocery store you can cut loose. The idea is NOT to just cut off the plastic and plop the bouquet in a vase filled with water. What I do is cut pictures out of magazines with properly arranged flowers and work to duplicate them. The height of the flowers is so important. As is the arrangement of small and large flowers and where to put the greenery. The modern way to do this might be to copy what's on Pinterest.

## Drive

Most of the time I've been in a car I've been on the way to the grocery store or to Target. Big Yawn. My mileage is low. My gas bill is teeny, but you can get really bored and feel cooped up. My husband's idea was to drive one direction for an hour and check out a new town. It can be any little town. And you don't even need to get out of the car if you don't want to. Just drive around the town square and come back. That gets us out of the rut of hanging around the house on Saturday morning. The funniest one was the day we drove to Cleveland, Tennessee. They have an M&M's plant there. Here's a picture of my husband with the Peanut. I found out his name is Yellow. The Mars Company calls him "The Goofball."



We all need to bring out the little “goofball” in all of us so we can really get smiling again. I have been so inspired by people doing new projects during the lockdown. Things like sidewalk chalk projects have lifted neighborhoods and communities. Let’s keep it going.

Cheers,