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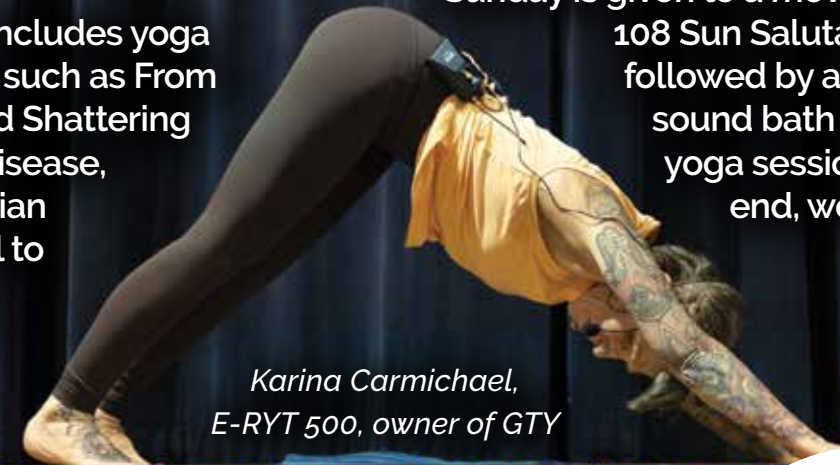
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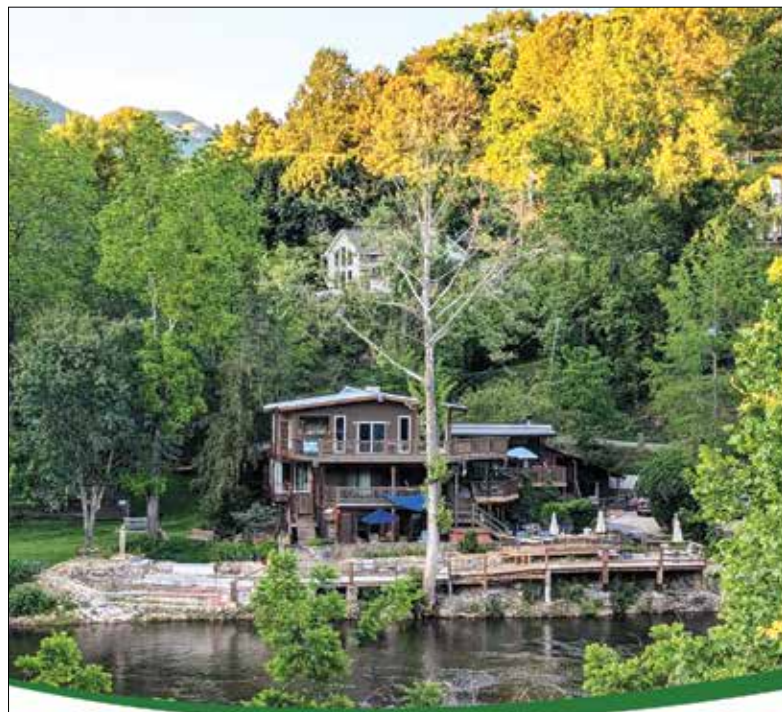
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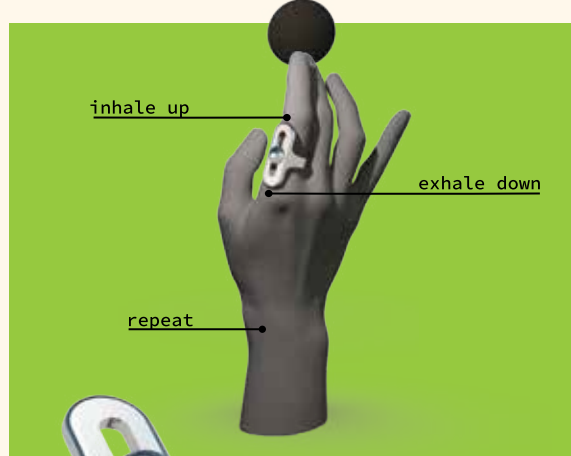
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September 2025

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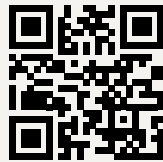
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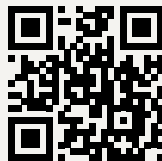
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**On the Cover**



The three yoga teachers on the cover are, from left to right, Ilona Moore, owner of Peachtree Yoga Center, Karina Carmichael, co-owner of Giving Tree Yoga, and Octavia Nasr.

Photo credit goes to Atlanta-based Jason Dennard, a photographer and live production specialist with over two decades of experience in photography, video production, post production and live event production. This is his ninth cover photo for us. [jasondennardphoto@gmail.com](mailto:jasondennardphoto@gmail.com)

Special thanks to Giorgi “Sava” Savaneli, owner of Mysore Yoga Atlanta for permitting us to shoot at his studio at 3575 Piedmont Rd NE, North Bldg 15, Suite T100. [MysoreYogaAtlanta.com](http://MysoreYogaAtlanta.com)

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— Lisa Bellini

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# Welcome to our 8th Annual Yoga Special Issue!

We did not plan for this issue to be yoga-dominant. Our staff wrote two articles: *Atlanta Enriched as Yoga Teachers Travel* and *The "One Human" Experience*. Historically, Corporate offers us one yoga-related article in September—and we only rarely run it.

This year, however, Corporate provided two yoga-related articles, and both speak to its effects on health: periodontal and gut! Since we're primarily about holistic health, we always publish the Healing Ways article, and the periodontal article was the Healing Ways piece.

Our lead yoga article is about the impact of yoga travel on teachers and their students. I've met a number of yoga teachers over the years who travel to India to deepen their study, and who inevitably bring back something to share with their students. When the idea for his article first appeared, the first teacher I thought to interview was Tracy Jennings-Hill, founder of LiveURYoga. Since I've known her, she's traveled to India frequently. Yoga editor Patty Schmidt contacted her, and we thought an interview was lined up, but it fell through. Tracy closed LiveURYoga within the last year and has now resurfaced as a program manager at Sattva Yoga Academy... in India! Clearly, her travels have impacted her greatly.

Giorgi ("Sava") Savaneli also came to mind since we featured him in September 2022. As a teacher of Ashtanga, he trained in India under the guidance of Sharath Jois. And, like the three teachers we feature in this issue, he and Tracy see the benefits of yoga extending far past the physical into the spiritual.

Which is the point of our lead article. For those who are open to it, asana practice is a gateway to deeper spiritual learning. It is,

after all, one of the eight limbs of yoga, which is one of the six philosophies of Hinduism. Indeed, our yoga department exists for the purpose of shining a light on the spiritual aspects of what we in the West call "yoga"; our intent has always been to help readers maximize their experience of yoga.

We've previously noted that spiritual practice and health are foundational to physical health, so these four articles, together, serve to reinforce that point like never before. So let's dig a little deeper.



*"Health is a state of complete harmony of the body, mind and spirit. When one is free from physical disabilities and mental distractions, the gates of the soul open."*  
— B.K.S. Iyengar

Image created with Chat GPT

Iyengar, an Indian yoga teacher who founded Iyengar Yoga, best known for its alignment approach to the practice, clearly says here that the spiritual dimension is one-third of the aspects of good health.

Vasant Dattatray Lad, the Indian-born Ayurvedic physician, author and educator who founded the Ayurvedic Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico, takes this one step further:

*"Ayurveda defines life as the conjunction of body, mind and spirit, found in Cosmic Consciousness, and embracing all of Creation."*

To me, this line seems to scream of non-dualism; all exists within Cosmic Consciousness, including whatever "us" is.

Bottom line, taking care of one's spiritual needs also takes care of one's physical needs.

Continued on page 20



## Atlanta Hispanic Yoga Festival Celebrates Wellness in Spanish

The Atlanta Hispanic Yoga Festival announces its inaugural event on September 28, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., at The Westside Warehouse in Atlanta. As the first Spanish-language yoga festival in the city, the event offers a full day of wellness, yoga and cultural connection all taught in Spanish and designed to be inclusive and accessible for all levels.

Attendees will have access to four sessions with 30-minute breaks in between, including an opening all-levels yoga class, a group Latin Soul Flow and a closing celebration with live music and dancing. Throughout the day, two breakout sessions offer a range of class options such as Deep Stretch, Cacao Ceremony, Power Yoga, Bilingual Flow and Self-Love Practices. Participants can also enjoy free chiropractic mini-sessions, glucose and cholesterol screenings, and a midday break with traditional Hispanic food available for purchase.

“What started as a one-day gathering has grown into something so much more, a true movement of wellness and connection,” says Adriana Guaderrama, marketing director for the festival. “We’re filled with deep joy and excitement as we bring together 15 incredible teachers from various Latin American countries, each one offering their unique voice, story and passion for yoga.”



Photo: Christian Rodriguez

10 of the 15 teachers at the AHY Festival

Early bird tickets start at \$25. Prices will increase closer to the event date.

For more information, call 770-235-6740, visit [AtlantaHispanicYogaFestival.com](http://AtlantaHispanicYogaFestival.com) or find it on Instagram and Facebook. The Atlanta Hispanic Yoga Festival will be held at The Westside Warehouse, 996 Huff Rd NW in Atlanta.

## Nuts 'n Berries Opens The Living Room Wellness Lounge

Nuts 'n Berries announces the opening of The Living Room, a wellness lounge inside its Brookhaven location, offering non-alcoholic beverages, organic smoothies, a bath soak blending bar and a variety of community events. The new space expands the store's 45-year mission of providing organic groceries, supplements and local wellness products by creating a gathering place for conscious consumers seeking education, connection and restorative experiences.



The Living Room will feature rotating menus of booze-free botanical cocktails, organic coffee and functional smoothies, plus a sensory-rich bath soak bar using clays and salts from around the world. Geier emphasizes the community aspect, noting, “It’s not just about what’s on the shelf anymore—it’s about who’s in the room. This is a space where everyone is welcome—whether you’re a raw milk drinker, a supplement junkie, a sober curious soul or just someone who’s tired and wants to feel good again.”

Co-owner and founder of The Living Room, Mari Geier, says the new concept is a natural extension of the store's values. “We’ve spent the last 10 years eliminating GMOs, cutting food dyes and vetting every single ingredient on our shelves—twice. This is just the next evolution of our mission: not just helping people shop differently, but helping them live differently.”

The Living Room will open in late September with a birthday party celebrating Nuts 'n Berries' 45 years of serving the community. Additional programming, tastings and pop-ups will roll out through the fall.

For more information, call 404-254-0330 or visit [NutsNBerries.com](http://NutsNBerries.com). Nuts 'n Berries is located at 4274 Peachtree Road in Brookhaven.

## Natural Mystic Fair Returns to Tassili's Raw Reality Café

The Natural Mystic Fair returns to the backyard of Tassili's Raw Reality Café September 5 through 7 after last year's one-off camping experiment. Produced by Tassili's Raw Reality Café and I Am Ascension Temple of Love, the festival resumes its in-town format. “We tried that last year, and the location, as beautiful as it was, was not conducive to what we wanted to do,” says Tassili Ma'at, founder and owner of the café.

This year's theme is “Afro Futurism: I n I and AI.” Sunday's keynote speaker, author Theo Chambers, visits from Jamaica to explore “ancestral intelligence” and ideas from his book *Digital Pandora's Box: Unleashing AI's Total Knowledge*. Other speakers include Aquarius Maximus, who integrates AI into divination through the I Ching and Ifa—two ancient systems of divination and wisdom—and presenters addressing the



future of food and AI together. Ma'at expects up to 20 speakers over the three days.

Friday's Libation ceremony, which takes place from 4 to 8 p.m., “honors the ancestors and Divine Intelligence” with the pouring of consecrated liquid. It features artist Raury and community African dance with Arata Ma'at. As is custom, the location is not revealed until the day of the event.

The Sankonscious Percussion Ensemble opens the festivities on Saturday and Sunday, followed by vegan food vendors, artisans and merchant booths. Festival hours are 2 to 11 p.m. on both days.

For more information, visit [TassilisRaw.com](http://TassilisRaw.com). Tassili's Raw Reality Café is located at 1059 Ralph David Abernathy Blvd SW in Atlanta.

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## Body Awareness Studio Adds Second Location

Body Awareness Studio, Atlanta's oldest Pilates studio with over 30 years in operation, has opened a seven-reformer second location at 1990 Delk Industrial Blvd SE, Suite 104, in Marietta. The first location is at 5549 Roswell Road, about 12 minutes away in no traffic.

The facility features brand-new Balanced Body equipment and increases access to Pilates teacher training and workshops in the metro Atlanta area. Only the Roswell Road location serves private clients.

Body Awareness Studio is Atlanta's only authorized training center for Balanced Body education. Balanced Body is the world's oldest and one of the world's two largest manufacturers of Pilates equipment. A relative latecomer to the certification business, it started offering teaching certifications in 2006. Leslie Clayton, the studio's founder and owner, is a Balanced Body Master Instructor. The studio offers Balanced Body courses, including Movement Principles, Pilates Reformer, Pilates Mat and Pilates Mat and Reformer. In addition to providing teacher training at its two locations, Body Awareness has offered training at third-party locations around the metro area.

"This new space reflects the growth we've experienced within ourselves and our community," says Clayton, whose professional



Leslie Clayton, owner of Body Awareness Studio

experience includes dance, somatic healing and energy-based healing modalities. "It's more than just an additional location—it's a physical expression of the inner transformation we guide our clients through every day. My hope is that people walk into this space and immediately feel supported, inspired and empowered to explore what's possible for their bodies and lives."

For more information, visit [BodyAwarenessStudio.com](http://BodyAwarenessStudio.com) or call 404-252-7550.

## BE Vitalized Celebrates Expansion with Grand Opening

BE Vitalized & Energized Wellness Center announces the grand opening and celebration of its expanded facility from noon to 3 p.m. on September 14 in Roswell. The event celebrates 10 years of service providing non-invasive technologies and services that facilitate physical and emotional detoxification. New offerings and new team members will be introduced along with a spacious 24-by-12-foot event room that is available for rent by clients and holistic practitioners.

Founder and owner Deborah Haynes, a registered nurse with more than 40 years of experience, opened the center to provide a "wellness playground" for those seeking noninvasive support for their body's innate healing ability. Haynes previously worked as an oncology nurse, where she witnessed firsthand how the im-



Deborah Haynes

mune system, stress relief and detoxification often influenced a patient's outcome.

"The human body is magnificently designed to heal itself," says Haynes. "I am honored to partner with those who want to take more responsibility for their well-being. We work together to increase our wellness and vitality."

The center's expanded space is intended to support community health by hosting wellness events, services and educational opportunities aligned with its mission. Haynes says her vision is to empower individuals with tools that promote healing and growth in a supportive environment.

For more information, call 770-676-6177 or visit [BEVitalizedAndEnergized.com](http://BEVitalizedAndEnergized.com). BE Vitalized & Energized Wellness Center is located at 700 Old Roswell Lakes Parkway, Suite 110, in Roswell.

# Local Vegan Festival in its 15th Year

by Paul B. Chen

“I wanted [to teach] people [that it’s a] myth that vegan food tastes nasty, that it’s a myth that it is expensive,” says Aya Nyemay, founder of Veggie Taste, an Atlanta vegan festival that takes place on the third Saturday in September. “I wanted to cater to people who were eating healthy and to educate other people.”

Nyemay was vegan when she and her then business partner, Jamila Crawford, a vegan chef, started what became Veggie Taste. They produced several events under the brand Bazaar Noir. In 2011, they introduced the Vegan/Vegetarian Taste of ATL festival. Nyemay changed the name to Veggie Taste two years later, after Crawford departed. After that year’s festival, a friend suggested the event lose the Bazaar Noir umbrella and gain a new name: Veggie Taste. Nyemay liked it and made the change.

The 2011 event was held indoors and attracted about 500 attendees, but since



Cynthia Steed

then, it has mostly been held outdoors, with the location changing every couple of years. This year it will be at the Shrine of the Black Madonna. Nyemay estimates that last year’s festival attracted 1,500 to 2,000 people and about 80 vendors, and expects about the same this year.

One long-time vendor, Cynthia Steed, owner of Masjesta, is a purveyor of all-natural, hand-crafted teas. What drew Steed to Veggie Taste was the large variety of foods and drinks that the festival made available. Plus, it was kid-friendly; “I have a bunch of children,” she says.

While that sounds more like a comment from an attendee than a vendor, Steed is quite happy with her tea sales at Veggie Taste. Nyemay and her team “almost feel like an extended family,” she says. “[They’ve] always been so helpful. I love how they put it together. I love how they plug it. So even if I wasn’t selling much of anything, I would be there every year.”

## What the Health Blows Up Veggie Taste

2017 saw a huge jump in attendance. *What the Health*, a documentary by Kip Anderson, appeared on Netflix earlier in the



Aya Nyemay

year, and the lines at Veggie Taste got “very long” come September.

Nyemay saw the effect in a personal way. Having long seen herself as the “different” family member, a relative of hers called in 2017 asking for vegan recipes. “Why?” she asked. “What’s wrong?” The relative had seen the film on Netflix. “After that documentary came out,” says Nyemay, “a lot of people were ready to change, ready to eat healthy. It was just a beautiful thing to see.”



Angel Drayton

Long-time attendee, Angel Drayton, didn’t need to see *What the Health* for motivation. She was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 2021, and veganism became a foundational component, along with deep inner work, in her seemingly miraculous healing. “The journey was not easy, and I endured great loss: home, job, car, support from others, etc.,” says Drayton. “I trusted in God and followed the process with consistency, resilience, grace, love and humility. Today, I am the healthiest I have ever been physically, mentally, and spiritually! I have no pain, no symptoms, and I can run, do

yoga, cartwheels, laugh and so much more.” She credits Veggie Taste as a “vital source of whole-food, plant-based information, and keeping me informed of community events of like-minded, beautiful people.”

Attendance at Veggie Taste used to be free, but it has begun charging for attendance. Today, the fee is \$10. A major reason for the change is to support the talks that are at the center of Veggie Taste. As education was a primary motivator behind producing Veggie Taste, the event has featured speakers and panels for many years. Last year’s speakers included chefs, a cancer survivor and a juicing panel. This year’s lineup has not been finalized yet.

## A Surge of Interest in Plant-Based Foods

While Nyemay senses much more interest in veganism, surveys show little change in the percentage of self-described vegans in the U.S. today as compared to 2011; it’s somewhere between one and two percent. However, interest in plant-based eating has increased dramatically. A 2025 survey by *VegOut Magazine / EAT Forum* shows that 68 percent of Americans want more plant-based meals, but only 20 percent do anything about it.

Regardless, American businesses have taken note, and Nyemay finds that problematic, as she sees a flood of processed vegan food come on the market. “Some of [those trying to transition to veganism] don’t understand that you use [processed food] as a transition food—but you don’t stay on it,” she says. “Or, you can just go right into plant-based whole foods.”

She also bemoans the fact that large corporations, to the detriment of vegan pioneers, are taking advantage of the trend toward plant-based eating. She gives the example of Hellmann’s offering a vegan mayonnaise. “Why not buy Veganise, a product from plant-based pioneer, Follow Your Heart?” she asks. 🌱

For more information, visit [TheVeggieTaste.com](http://TheVeggieTaste.com).

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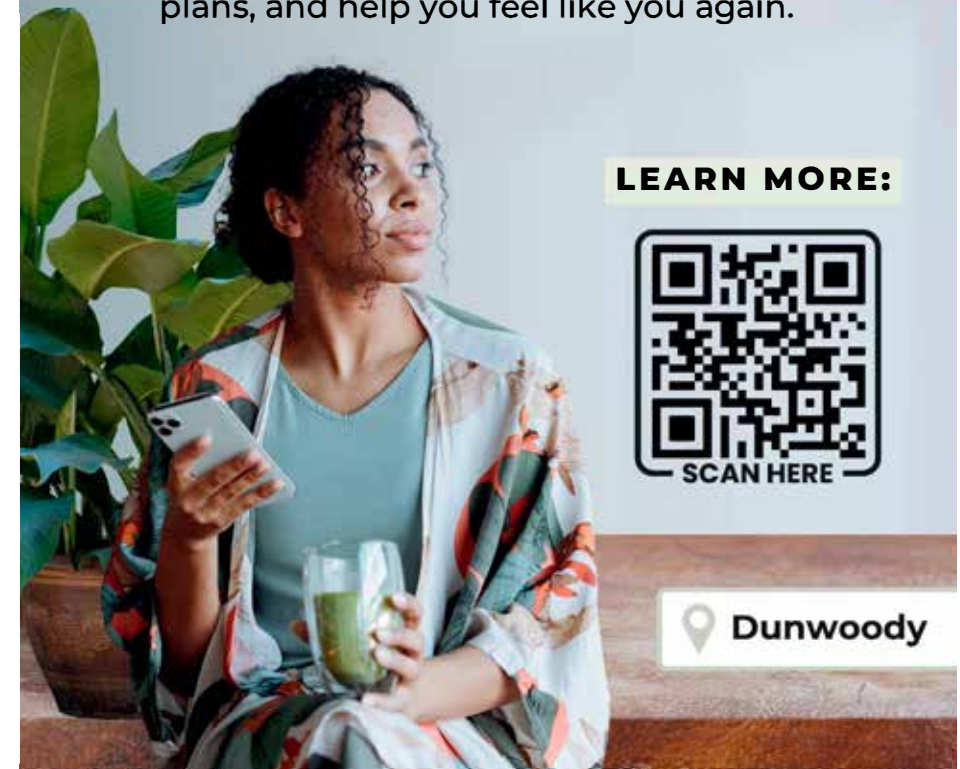
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# Sweet and Tart

## The Joys of Homemade Fruit Shrubs

by Chloe Karydes Krecun



photology2000/CanvaPro

A fruit shrub is a sweet and tart syrup made by combining fruit, sugar and vinegar. Used for centuries as a way to keep nutrients alive, these tangy, fermented syrups are becoming popular again as irresistible additions to cocktails and mocktails, while also contributing to gut health.

Long before fruit shrubs became a trendy addition to modern beverages, fermenting fruits in alcohol or vinegar was one of humanity's oldest preservation techniques. Resourceful cooks combined seasonal fruits with vinegar and sugar to create potent elixirs that captured the fleeting abundance of summer harvests in shelf-stable form.

When winter's grip tightened and fresh produce became scarce, these preserved fruits provided delicious flavors and vital nutrients. Today's food enthusiasts celebrate fruit shrubs for their complexity

and versatility in everything from sodas to salads and other inventive side dishes.

### Health Benefits

Each ingredient in a fruit shrub plays a distinct role in both preservation and nutrition. "The vinegar component in shrubs is what helps preserve the fruits and keep them from spoiling," explains Lea Ann Chen, M.D., assistant professor of gastroenterology at the Rutgers University Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. "However, the total amount of fruit in shrub recipes is relatively modest. Thus, the benefits of eating fresh fruits would be much higher. For example, fresh whole fruit contains fiber, which has many health benefits, but this is mostly missing in shrubs."

Chen notes that the fruit in shrubs is nevertheless a source of certain vitamins, such as vitamin C in citrus fruits, while berries are

also high in polyphenols, which offer anti-inflammatory properties. A 2021 Stanford University study published in the journal *Cell* found that consuming fermented foods may increase gut microbiome diversity and decrease inflammation, so the fermentation of fruit shrubs may be part of a gut-healthy diet.

According to Kirsten Shockey, the author of several books on fermentation, including *Fermented Vegetables*, fruit shrubs and mocktails serve as a practical steppingstone toward healthier drink choices. They offer a middle ground for those seeking to improve their habits by steering away from soda and alcoholic beverages without making dramatic changes.

### Fermenting Tips

Creating gut-friendly fruit shrubs at home requires nothing more than fresh fruit, sugar, vinegar and patience. Morgan Shortt, sales director at Pink House Alchemy, a maker of farm-to-table simple syrups, aromatic bitters and shrubs, explains that the sugar breaks down the fruit and naturally turns it into a thick, viscous syrup without having to smash the fruit. This natural maceration process allows the sugar to draw out fruit juices and flavors over the course of a couple of days.

Once macerated, the fruit is strained through cheesecloth or a coffee filter. The syrup can be used immediately as a topping on desserts or savory dishes. To make it last longer and add the tart taste, vinegar is incorporated. Almost any type can be used, depending on personal taste. White vinegar is intensely sharp; apple cider vinegar provides a mild, fruity flavor; and balsamic can add depth to berry shrubs with only a splash. The higher the quality of vinegar, the better the results, Shockey points out.

Although fruit shrubs are shelf stable, the shelf life varies depending on the ingredients. Shortt estimates that her shrubs have a shelf life of at least two years. Refrigeration can help maintain the quality and flavor for a longer period of time.

### Enjoying the Results

Shrubs offer a practical solution for reducing food waste. They are a good way to

use seasonal fruits that may be bruised or considered a farmer's seconds. "The key takeaway is that it's an easy and affordable way to consume a gut-healthy product, and it's delicious," says Shortt.

For those preferring convenience over homemade preparation, shrubs are increasingly available at farmers markets, health food stores and online. When purchasing, prioritize products containing raw, unpasteurized vinegar and minimal added sugar while checking for clean-ingredient labels. Premixed shrub drinks are also available in ready-to-consume cans or bottles for the ultimate in convenience.

Shrubs represent a delicious intersection of ancient preservation wisdom and modern wellness needs. Whether crafted at home or purchased ready-made, these tangy syrups offer a simple way to support gut health while adding flavor to drinks and recipes.

*Chloe Karydes Krecun is a sophomore at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Connect at [LinkedIn.com/in/chloe-karydes-krecun](https://www.linkedin.com/in/chloe-karydes-krecun).*



Gen AI/CanvaPro

Preheat the oven to 400° F.

Whisk all the vinaigrette ingredients together in a small bowl and set aside.

Toss the sweet potato cubes with a drizzle of olive oil and salt and pepper, to taste. Spread sweet potato cubes on a baking pan

## WILD RICE SIDE DISH

**YIELD: 6 TO 8 SERVINGS**

### FOR THE VINAIGRETTE

- 2 Tbsp pomegranate shrub
- 2 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 2 Tbsp shallots, finely chopped
- 1 tsp lemon zest
- 1 tsp honey or liquid sweetener
- ½ tsp fresh ginger, grated
- ½ tsp ground coriander
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Fresh ground black pepper, to taste

### FOR THE SALAD

- 1½ cup cooked wild rice
- 1 cup pomegranate arils (about one large pomegranate)
- 1 cup pistachios, coarsely chopped
- ½ cup parsley, coarsely chopped

In a small bowl, combine pomegranate shrub, olive oil, shallots, lemon zest, honey,



Gen AI/CanvaPro

ginger, coriander, salt and black pepper. Set aside.

Combine wild rice, pomegranate arils, pistachios and parsley in a serving bowl. Add dressing and toss to combine. Taste and season with additional salt and pepper, if desired. Serve immediately or refrigerate for up to three days.

*Recipe courtesy of Priscilla Koch, founder of The Urban Farmhouse Co., makers of organic shrub beverages.*

## FARRO SALAD WITH APPLE SPICE SHRUB

**YIELD: 4 TO 6 SERVINGS**

### FOR THE VINAIGRETTE

- 2 Tbsp apple spice shrub
- 2 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- ½ tsp raw honey or maple syrup
- 1 squeeze of orange, optional

- Sea salt, to taste
- Fresh black pepper, to taste

### FOR THE SALAD

- 1 cup cooked farro
- 1 sweet potato, cubed
- Extra virgin olive oil for roasting
- A few kale leaves, chopped

- 2-3 cups salad greens
- 1-2 carrots, peeled into ribbons
- 1 apple, diced
- A few radishes, sliced thin
- Small handful parsley, chopped
- ½ cup almonds, chopped and toasted
- Salt, to taste
- Fresh black pepper, to taste

lined with parchment paper and roast until golden brown, about 35 minutes. Once roasted, let the sweet potato cubes cool.

In a large bowl, lightly massage the kale with a bit of the vinaigrette until the kale wilts down. Mix in the farro and sweet potato cubes. Add the salad greens, carrots,

apple, radishes, parsley and almonds to the bowl and toss with vinaigrette. Add additional salt and pepper, to taste.

*Recipe courtesy of Priscilla Koch, founder of The Urban Farmhouse Co., makers of organic shrub beverages.*

When managing editor Diane Eaton related her experience of One Human Experience to me, the subject of our staff's second yoga article, it was clear that founder Veronica Clark also leans into Patanjali's perspective on yoga. Indeed, Clark is direct about this on her website: "At the heart of the One Human Experience are the *yamas* and *niyamas*, the ethical and personal principles of yoga." Furthermore, she uses asana practice as a way to glide into her program of building human connections. Diane writes: "Our unconscious thought processes, says Clark, 'are playing out over and over and over again. They're what's getting in the way of our love and our connection... Once we bring awareness to those patterns, we can begin to choose differently. We can stop participating in what separates us.'"



Two of our featured yoga teachers travel to India to be reminded, refreshed and reinforced by "the source" of yoga. So let me end at the beginning of the source, the first words of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras:

*And now the teaching of yoga begins.*

*Yoga is the settling of the mind into silence.*

*When the mind has settled, we are established in our essential nature, which is unbounded consciousness.*

*Our essential nature is usually overshadowed by the activity of the mind.*

Please enjoy this eighth offering of our yoga special section. Good reading! 🌱



*Publisher of Natural Awakenings Atlanta since 2017, Paul Chen's professional background includes strategic planning, marketing management and qualitative research. He practices Mahayana Buddhism and kriya yoga.*

# Balancing the Gut

## Investing in Our Inner Ecosystem

by Hannah Tytus



Cerna Ibarra/CanvaPro

"The gut is the first to encounter the universe, and it is the first line of defense between you and the universe," says Dr. Madiha Saeed, a holistic, functional and integrative doctor in Naperville, Illinois, and director of education for Documenting Hope and KnoWEwell. Home to trillions of bacteria, fungi and other microbes, the digestive tract forms a complex ecosystem known as the gut microbiome, which influences many aspects of health.

Microbes perform numerous functions. They help break down food, produce essential

nutrients, support the immune system and influence mood, cognition and overall well-being. Diet, stress, sleep, medications and environmental exposures shape the makeup of our gut microbiota, which, in turn, impact the body's propensity for health or disease. Efforts to restore and nurture gut health offer opportunities for us to enhance our well-being through simple lifestyle changes.

### Gut Microbiome Basics

The intestinal environment is constantly changing, with new microbes entering and others disappearing daily, creating a dynamic community of tiny organisms

that is unique to every individual. Different species have specialized roles. For instance, *Faecalibacterium prausnitzii* lowers inflammation by nourishing gut cells, while *Akkermansia muciniphila* maintains the gut lining by breaking down mucus and supporting helpful bacteria. Each person hosts approximately 1,000 distinct microbial species, while humanity collectively harbors more than 10,000 species.

Like a garden, the gut microbiome contains a mix of helpful and harmful organisms. Beneficial microbes behave like healthy plants, supporting digestion, nutrient absorption and immune function. When cared for, these helpful organisms thrive, while also helping to keep harmful microbes (weeds) under control.

Our intestinal garden is shaped by how it is tended. Fiber-rich foods, fermented products and exposure to natural environments help nourish the good microbes, much like water, sunlight and compost nourish plants. By contrast, processed foods, excessive sugar and unnecessary antibiotics can disrupt the balance and allow harmful microbes to take over.

Many people experience gut imbalance, or dysbiosis, without realizing it. The gut is highly sensitive to its environment, and everyday choices like processed foods, medications and chronic stress can quietly disrupt the inner balance, making it harder for beneficial microbes to thrive.

**Medications.** "Though some medications can save your life, they do come with a side disadvantage, so you need to weigh your risks versus the benefits when it comes to taking any medications," Saeed advises, noting that antibiotics, for example, reduce microbial diversity and richness, causing short-term changes in the microbiome. While most people recover within two months, their microbiota diversity and

productivity may remain low, and some people may experience longer-lasting disruptions.

Common painkillers called nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as aspirin and ibuprofen can also interact with the composition and function of the gut microbiome. They inhibit microbial growth, induce microbial cell death and increase gut permeability. NSAIDs can also interact with gut microbes, thereby impacting how well the drug is absorbed.

**Foods.** The food we eat significantly impacts the microbiome's composition and metabolism. "Real foods nourish the good bugs, while processed foods fuel the bad," says Saeed. Diets high in processed foods, sugars



nataliagolubnychaphotos/CanvaPro

and additives create a toxic load that disrupts bacterial balance and triggers inflammation, leading to chronic disease. Eating these kinds of ingredients on a consistent basis can slowly damage the gut, as harmful microbes crowd out beneficial species, weakening the intestinal ecosystem over time without immediate signs of distress.

**Stress.** Chronic stress is another gut health disruptor. Stress hormones can reduce beneficial bacteria such as *Akkermansia muciniphila*, which has been identified as a potential protector against obesity and Type 1 diabetes. Stress also encourages yeast overgrowth, leading to inflammation and intensifying the stress response in a vicious cycle. Studies also show that stress, whether physical or perceived, can alter overall microbial composition.

A 2018 narrative review published in *Frontiers in Microbiology* analyzed existing preclinical studies and found that various psychological, environmental and physical stressors can alter gut microbiota composition and function. Furthermore, a 2023 systematic review published in *Neuropsychobiology* found that higher perceived stress was associated with lower microbial diversity and decreased abundance of beneficial genera such as *Lachnospira*, *Veillonella* and *Phascolarctobacterium*. Harmful bacteria like *Methanobrevibacter* rose in relative abundance in stressed individuals.

### Signs of Imbalance

Indications of an unhealthy gut show up in various ways. Digestive issues such as bloating, gas and constipation often signal an imbalance. Fatigue, mood swings and skin conditions like acne or eczema may also be related to poor gut health. Unexplained weight changes, cognitive problems and food sensitivities may be caused by intestinal distress. A weakened immune system, trouble sleeping and bad breath can also indicate a need for gut support.

### Repairing the Gut

Environmental factors influence the microbiome more than genetics, but when the gut has been harmed, Saeed explains, restoration takes more than just a probiotic.

**Eat organic whole foods.** "Food is medicine. Every bite can either help or hurt," counsels Saeed, emphasizing the importance of daily food choices. Like humans, gut microbes need nourishment to thrive. When they eat well, human health flourishes. The typical Western diet is high in simple carbohydrates and fat, but low in fiber, offering little nourishment for beneficial microbes.

On the other hand, microbiota-accessible carbohydrates (MACs) such as legumes,

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root vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds are essential for a diverse and resilient microbial community. Because MACs are not broken down by digestive enzymes, they are fermented by gut microbes, feeding and promoting the growth and activity of beneficial bacteria.

Choosing organic produce helps avoid synthetic pesticides and herbicides sprayed on produce to eliminate pests and weeds. These chemicals have been shown to negatively affect the gut microbiome and human health. "It's best to eat local food that is not sprayed," advises Dr. Patrick Hanaway, a board-certified functional medicine family physician, educator and chief medical officer of KnoWEwell.

**Supplement wisely.** Probiotics and prebiotics are vital for healing the gut. Probiotics, whether found in foods like yogurt and other fermented products or taken as supplements, introduce live bacteria into the body. Prebiotics act like fertilizer, feeding good bacteria and helping restore overall balance. Fiber-rich foods such as asparagus, bananas, garlic, onions, oats, apples and legumes naturally support a thriving gut ecosystem.

As Hanaway explains, "A probiotic is a live bacteria that can be ingested and move into the stomach and populate the body. A prebiotic is a component that helps feed the commensal [beneficial] bacteria in the gut. Probiotics are highly specific. They have great benefits for specific strains for specific diseases in specific doses. Yet, the probiotic is a tourist; it doesn't stay in the body. It's great to have tourists in the economy, but if an economy becomes entirely dependent on tourism, it becomes a problem."

When choosing supplements, quality matters. Due to limited regulations, it is best to purchase from reputable brands. Supplements in fillable capsules tend to have fewer fillers and more active ingredients. Vitamins and minerals are best absorbed from whole foods, so supplements should complement, not replace, a balanced diet.

**Start a garden.** Gardening increases the availability of fresh, fiber-rich, seasonal fruits and vegetables in the diet, but the very act of putting our hands in the dirt may also help increase the diversity of our gut microbiome. A 2022 cohort study of 19 families over one growing season by scientists at the University of Illinois and published in the journal *Nature* found that when compared to non-gardeners, families that grew plants



Stefano Oppo from corelens/CanvaPro

and produce in their backyards had more gut bacteria linked to fiber fermentation, greater microbial diversity and even some microbes in their guts that appeared to come from the soil. Families that gardened also ate more fiber-rich foods.

**Commit to small actions.** Healthy microbiomes grow with consistent care—not perfection—and even small lifestyle changes can build a more resilient ecosystem for better overall health. There is no magic bullet for healing the gut. The key is to commit one hour a week to health education and to small actions focused on rebuilding the inner ecosystem one change at a time.

"A strictly-diet approach isn't the answer; a lifestyle approach is," says Dr. Tom O'Bryan, an expert on food sensitivities, environmental toxins and the development of autoimmune diseases, as well as the host of the *Regenerative Whole Health Show* at KnoWEwell.com. "Dietary regimens can go only so far if something else persists, like mold in the house, high glyphosate levels

or accumulated mercury in the body." Addressing the macrocosm around us helps fix the microcosm inside us.

Indoor air filtration and water purification measures might be necessary to counteract an unhealthy indoor environment. Small changes like storing leftover food in glass rather than plastic can help keep harmful compounds out of the gut. Herbs such as chamomile and holy basil in diffusers and teas may aid the chronically stressed. Even simply chewing our food slowly, with mindfulness and gratitude, can help aid the digestion process.

The gut microbiome is a complex ecosystem that plays an essential role in overall health. Understanding what it is, what harms it and how to recognize signs of imbalance empowers us to take practical steps to restore and maintain gut health. By nourishing the microbiome with whole foods, managing stress, using supplements wisely and embracing small lifestyle changes, individuals can cultivate a resilient inner garden that supports well-being for life. 🌱

*Hannah Tytus is a researcher and content creator for KnoWEwell, P.B.C. and former technical writer for the National Institutes of Health's National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health.*



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# 3 Atlanta Yoga Teachers Bring The World Home

by Patricia Schmidt



“Sava” Savaneli serves gong fu tea to Ilona Moore, Katrina Carmichael and Octavia Nasr.

Yoga and travel have always been linked; historical texts are replete with stories of yogic pilgrimages for study and worship. Contemporary yoga cultures draw on this tradition, and Atlanta is no exception. Many yoga studios in the city offer some kind of travel or retreat experience for their students—whether shorter immersions or much longer periods away—and Atlanta’s beloved yoga teachers act as travel guides. Before they can serve in that capacity, though, these teachers travel themselves. They nourish their own practices by returning regularly to areas related to yoga origins: India, Tibet, Nepal. They deepen their personal knowledge and bring experi-

ences of travel back to their communities, ranging from specific breath and movement practices to more subtle energy work. Whether they travel with students again or share their experiences as they teach in studio, they and the Atlanta community are deeply shaped and enriched by their excursions.

## Traveling for the Self

*“There is a kind of magicness about going far away and coming back all changed.”*  
Kate Douglas Wiggin, children’s author

Owner of Peachtree Yoga Studio in Sandy Springs, Ilona Moore is an experienced teacher who also runs yoga teacher train-

ings and workshops. While she identifies Atlanta as her home, Moore has roots in Russia and has traveled around the world, including Asia and South America. Her most recent travels took her to Tibet, but she has also spent a great deal of time in India. Moore feels her travels offer a personal experience relating to her own energy and deeper spiritual studies; this is her primary reason for travel. To her, yoga travel is first a personal experience—she immerses herself, rather than leading others on retreat.

Moore recognizes that travel can’t be for everyone. It’s not essential to having a well-developed practice or being an authentic yoga student, she feels. But she notes that for many, it feels meaningful to be immersed in cultures that have “deep spiritual roots—that have traditions that take us deeper within.” When asked about what she gets from her own ability to make so many trips abroad, Moore shares, “I guess I am changing. Travel changes my energy field.”

Octavia Nasr, another seasoned and influential teacher in Atlanta, also experiences her yoga-related travel as a personal journey first, which she feels she can then offer as something more collective when she returns home to Atlanta. She grew up in Lebanon and often imagined travelling. When she was able to, it became a lifeline to a larger world, and she became a news reporter for a major television network. Yoga was her travel companion. “It was

2003, the height of the ‘War on Terror,’ and yoga came to save me from the ugliness. It supported me; it was my medicine; it was my center; it was my North Star.” Nasr frequently travels to India and elsewhere around the world, and it feels “like renewal; like filling the cup.” Her most recent trip took her to Bosnia and Croatia, and she’s planning another trip to her ashram base in Rishikesh, India, this year.

A co-owner of Giving Tree Yoga in Smyrna, Karina Carmichael is a native of Scotland and a relatively recent transplant to Atlanta. Like Moore and Nasr, Carmichael makes personal pilgrimages to India, in particular, and then also leads students on retreat to areas in South America and the Caribbean. When she first started traveling to India, she went three years in a row with her guru, studying mantra and meditation in particular—more than just the physical postures of yoga. “I travel to remind myself where yoga came from, she says, “and when I’m at the Ganges

or in Nepal or the Himalayas—all these beautiful mountains—it’s raw. It’s about the source.”

## Traveling for Others

*“Traveling – it leaves you speechless, then turns you into a storyteller.” – Ibn Battuta, medieval explorer*

“Your practice is not complete until you give it [away],” Nasr’s teacher told her, and she, Carmichael and Moore all demonstrate that principle. As their yoga travels nourish them, they come back to Atlanta to pass on their knowledge and travel experiences and to be of service to others.

“You can’t just contain all this knowledge and experience within yourself,” says Moore. “As soon as I learn something, I feel the need to share it with people. When I come back home, I start sharing whatever I learned and experienced with my students.”

Carmichael’s commitment to traveling to India and to nourishing her practice is all about being a yoga student. Her initial travel was “mainly going to see all the spiritual places and really getting soaked into the roots of where yoga evolved from. It was a promise I made to my teachers,” she continues, “that the roots—the history of yoga—be kept alive.” Now, as a teacher herself, she asks the same thing of her own students—that they commit to the full breadth of yoga traditions and not just the postures, and that it be active, intentional work. “That’s our job as yoga teachers: to spread the mantras, the meditations, the pranayama.” In turn, she hopes her students will do the same.

Nasr sees herself as both storyteller and space-holder when she returns from time away. “When you travel, you’re collecting stories and experiences to share. For me, storytelling is natural, and traveling is oxygen for that. It gives you the fuel.” As she travels, she “receives” the teaching

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of the cultural immersion. It's "not just me meditating by a river, under a tree, at the top of a mountain," she says. It might take the form of postural yoga, "but more often, it's a conversation, a book, a meal, a gesture. That's what yoga is. Yoga is not just going to a studio and practicing—and I think that really informs my travel, which then informs my teaching. When I come back, I'm richer."

Carmichael emphasizes, too, that "escape is not the point. The point is to take what you see, what you feel, what you learn from places and then integrate that into your everyday life." Moore concurs. "It's all about the practical application. You have to experience it; you have to live it yourself." At the end of anything she teaches," she advises her students: "I want you to actually apply this in your life."

This past June, Moore taught a summer solstice event, and the energy work she experienced on her travels served as a starting point for the spiritual enrichment to her students. "I had a slideshow telling people about my travels to Peru, to India, to Tibet. And after that, I gave them a very simple but powerful practice to take home to help them start experiencing the energy within themselves."

A student's inner energy is key to their practice, she explains, and it can be encouraged through sharing her personal experience of inner energies. For example, when she comes into a ritual with Gane-

sha in an Indian ashram, she finds that tapping into her first chakra and her pelvic energy helps make it meaningful. "Just performing a ritual in a foreign place doesn't really give that. If I want that ritual to have some kind of impact, I need to tap into the energy of Ganesha within myself." This knowledge and deeper practice are what Moore hopes to impart to her students.

Carmichael's relationship to travel is linked in particular to service. Her initial experiences in India more than 20 years ago were filled with service to underprivileged school children. To bring that work home, she founded an annual fundraising festival, which she's transplanted from Scotland to Smyrna in the form of the Giving Tree Yoga Fundraiser, which runs September 20 and 21.

"The first time I went to India," she says, "I was introduced to a school that was in trouble—it was closing down. And that's



Octavia Nasr in Rishikesh, India. Photo: Jules Brunois.



Ilona Moore in Lhasa, Tibet.

where my yearly festival came in, because I started using my yoga: we raised money to buy new land, and we sponsored some of the children there." She asked her students traveling on retreat with her to make this service a part of their practice, too. "Yoga students who had travelled to India had a picture of themselves with their sponsor child, and they helped the child attend school, get fed and get the bus. Some of these students came two or three times with me to India and really felt connected." Through her annual festival, Carmichael can continue to raise resources and support for the school in India, where she served originally, as well as local communities

here in Atlanta.

### More Than Souvenirs

Like any tourists, yoga students traveling abroad can be tempted to purchase small objects as souvenirs of their experience—a dancing Shiva statue or a practice rug, for example. But Carmichael, Nasr and Moore call on yoga travelers to go beyond simply acquiring objects of travel in order to connect more meaningfully with aspects of their practice. For them, the artifacts of yoga travel can serve as powerful reminders of the embodied experience of yoga and help to enrich and widen their yoga practice and teaching.

In fact, during a regular cleaning of a portion of the Ganges river basin, Carmichael found an intact marble statue of a bull, *Nandi*, who is Shiva's animal mount and

integral to his iconography and worship. *Nandi* has many qualities, including devotion, youth, purity and justice, and he often stands in temples as a surrogate for Shiva, the first yogi, through shared iconography. With approval from her local contacts, the statue—and Carmichael's story about the experience of wading into the wide river basin to retrieve it—now serve as a reminder for service and devotion and help initiate conversations about the depth of yoga teachings right here in Atlanta. "Standing in the Ganges, it reminds you again that yoga is so much more than what a lot of us in the West perceive it to be."

Nasr's first travel mementos were sound recordings of her teacher's Vedic chanting. They were her first souvenirs from India, and for two years, she immersed herself in the sound. "Every single day on the way to work and on the way back from work, I would be chanting with those CDs in my car. So it was learning Vedic chanting that was *my* gateway to yoga." She now passes that mantra practice on to her students during regularly held *satsang*—sacred gatherings—and monthly workshops. "Every month, we start with loosening the joints, a lot of yin yoga, then a yoga nidra, and at the end, I chant the *shlokas* not just once, which is eight verses. I chant it 10 times. So that's 80 verses." From the richness of Nasr's own initial travels and her first mantra practices, her students now receive the opportunity to walk through the same gate to find their paths to deeper yoga practice.

Moore likes to take photographs of her travels and, while she's traveling, share them social media to engage her home community. "People always ask me about the travels, and when I travel, I usually make posts so they can observe and



Karina Carmichael in Nepal. Photo: John Carmichael.

see what's happening." When she returns to Atlanta, she shares her images of travel and yoga, which, like the marble *Nandi*, serve

to open conversations around the depth of one's practice and the non-postural aspects of yoga. They also function as invitations to local students to widen their own inquiry.

But beyond physical keepsakes, energy is the most potent of souvenirs. All three of these yoga teachers feel that the energy of the travelled space comes back with them to Atlanta, deep within their identity as teachers, storytellers, servants and space holders. "Sometimes you don't have to say anything—you can impart richness and expansion, love and compassion and humanity without opening your mouth," says Nasr. That expansion has depth as well. "There is an expansion in who I am. I come back a richer person, not in money, not in title, not in belongings. Just richer in humanity."

Moore elaborates on this idea. "When we have a practice together, be it a meditation, a breathing exercise or any kind of an energy practice, we get the full pie of that energy, as opposed to everybody having a little piece—carving it out, taking it home. We are exponentially becoming bigger." 🌱



Patricia Schmidt, C-IAYT, E-RYT 500, YACEP, is a certified yoga therapist specializing in pelvic health, accessible yoga and yoga for cancer support.

She is a Franklin Method trainer, Roll Model method teacher and somatic movement specialist. To learn more, visit [PLSYoga.com](http://PLSYoga.com).

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- A Focused Advertising Section -

## CALENDAR

### SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 6

**Free Yoga in the Park** - 9:30-10:30am. Relax and rejuvenate with an all-levels outdoor yoga session led by Teresa Robinson. Bring a mat and a friend. Hunter Memorial Park, Douglasville. <https://bit.ly/Yoga-in-the-Park-090625>.

**Breathe To Be | Yoga with Dorinda** - 10-10:45am. Hybrid faith-based yoga for all bodies, blending movement, hope, and community. Free. Austell Presbyterian Church, 5895 Love St, Austell, or online via Zoom. [bit.ly/Yoga-with-Dorinda-090625](http://bit.ly/Yoga-with-Dorinda-090625)

### SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

**Sol-Rise Sundays: FREE Yoga in the Park** - 11am-12pm. Beginner-friendly yin yoga with high-vibe R&B and deep relaxation. Free. Yellow River Park, 3232 Juhan Rd SW, Stone Mountain. [bit.ly/Sol-Rise-Sundays-090725](http://bit.ly/Sol-Rise-Sundays-090725)

**Silver Fit Standing Yoga** - 10-11am. Low-impact standing yoga flow focusing on breath, mobility, balance, and guided affirmations. Free parking. Free. Pittsburgh Yards, 352 University Ave SW, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Silver-Fit-Standing-Yoga-090725](http://bit.ly/Silver-Fit-Standing-Yoga-090725)

### WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

**Yoga + Wine Down Wednesdays** - 6:45-9pm. Relax with an all-levels yoga session, then unwind over wine or non-alcoholic drinks in a creative gallery setting. Free. Peters Street Station, 333 Peters St SW, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Yoga-Wine-Down-Wednesdays-091025](http://bit.ly/Yoga-Wine-Down-Wednesdays-091025)

**Restorative Yoga + Sound Bath** - 7:30-8:30pm. Gentle restorative yoga followed by a calming sound bath to promote deep peace and harmony. \$28 walk-in. Joiful Yoga, 205 Hilderbrand Dr, Sandy Springs. [bit.ly/Restorative-Yoga-Sound-Bath-091025](http://bit.ly/Restorative-Yoga-Sound-Bath-091025).

### THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 11

**Yoga in the Park** - 6-7pm. Outdoor community yoga with Dancing Dogs Yoga,

powered by lululemon. All levels welcome. Free. Active Oval, Piedmont Park, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Yoga-in-the-Park-with-Dancing-Dogs-091125](http://bit.ly/Yoga-in-the-Park-with-Dancing-Dogs-091125).

**Sunset Yoga with SOZO** - 7:30-8:30pm. Gentle all-levels yoga at golden hour with live orchestral music. Free. Bring a mat and water. Trilith Parkway, Fayetteville. [bit.ly/Sunset-Yoga-SOZO-091125](http://bit.ly/Sunset-Yoga-SOZO-091125).

### FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

**Find Your Wings** - 5-7pm. Build strength and awareness in this arm balance workshop with Will Boatwright. Learn practical drills and techniques to advance your practice. \$50. Vista Yoga, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Vista-Yoga-091225](http://bit.ly/Vista-Yoga-091225).

### SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

**Ignite the Inner Flame** - 3-5:30pm. Rebirthing breathwork and gongs with Ananda and Gretchen. Release emotional blocks and awaken inner healing. \$55 advance; \$65 at door. Vista Yoga, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Vista-Yoga-091325](http://bit.ly/Vista-Yoga-091325).

### SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 14

**Yoga in the Park & Reynoldstown Farmer's Market** - 10-11am. All-levels vinyasa flow followed by community connection and market visit. Donation-based. Lang Carson Park, 100 Flat Shoals Ave SE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Yoga-in-The-Park-091425](http://bit.ly/Yoga-in-The-Park-091425)

**Free Yoga at Pontoon Brewing** - 10-11am. Enjoy an all-levels Vinyasa Flow class and a complimentary first pour. Ages 21+. Bring your mat and towel. Pontoon Brewing, Sandy Springs. [bit.ly/Yoga-Class-Pontoon-Brewing-091425](http://bit.ly/Yoga-Class-Pontoon-Brewing-091425).

**Book Club: Alan Watts' Wisdom of Insecurity** - 11:45am-12:45pm. This philosophical gem explores how our chase for certainty creates suffering—and why embracing life's "dizziness" leads to true peace. Led by Holly Bonvissuto. Free. Lift Yoga Johns Creek. [bit.ly/lift-book-club](http://bit.ly/lift-book-club)

### MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

**Yoga presented by Kaiser Permanente** - 6:30-7:30pm. Free evening yoga on The Plaza Green at The Battery Atlanta. Bring water and a mat. Free parking. The Plaza, 775 Battery Ave SE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Yoga-by-Kaiser-091525](http://bit.ly/Yoga-by-Kaiser-091525).

### THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

**Now Begins the Yoga** - 6:30-8pm. Four-week beginner series with Tracy James. Learn foundational yoga postures and breathwork in a supportive setting. \$90. Vista Yoga, Atlanta. [/bit.ly/Vista-Yoga-091825](http://bit.ly/Vista-Yoga-091825).

### SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 20

**Soul Shine Yoga Jam with Cappy Franti & Ahoo Sarab** - 1-3pm. As part of Michael Franti & Spearhead's Tour, this special event is led by Cappy, DJ and meditation guide—with yoga co-led by Ahoo, studio owner and instructor. Korsi Hot Yoga. [bit.ly/korsi-soul-shine](http://bit.ly/korsi-soul-shine)

**Just Be & Flow Yoga in the Park** - 6-8pm. Light vinyasa flow in Grant Park to unwind, stretch, and connect with nature. Free. Grant Park, 840 Cherokee Ave SE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Just-Be-Flow-Yoga-092025](http://bit.ly/Just-Be-Flow-Yoga-092025)

### FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

**Mind-Body Connection** - 9:30-11:30am. Yoga and networking for mental health professionals. Connect, relax, and support peers in the field. Free. Lift Yoga, 501 S Main St, Alpharetta. [bit.ly/Yoga-Networking-Event-092625](http://bit.ly/Yoga-Networking-Event-092625).

### SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

**The Art of Flight: Eka Pada Koundinyasana II Workshop with Jenn Cook** - 1-2:30pm. This workshop will tap into the expansive energy of air and explore a powerful arm balance, the one-legged sage pose. Form Yoga, Decatur. \$30. [bit.ly/form-art-of-flight](http://bit.ly/form-art-of-flight)

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# The “One Human” Experience

by Diane Eaton

“Let’s feel into this together.”

Veronica Clark spoke those inviting words—and countless others—to a room of yogis and non-yogis, me included, attending her One Human Experience, an immersive three-hour evening event at the Wellness Spot in College Park on the last Saturday in July.

The program sprang from a vision she had in December 2024 after she’d been teaching and developing many of its components at CIVANA Wellness Resort in Arizona for four years. It was a lofty vision. “It became clear to me that I was to go out into the world and share what it really means to live yoga,” says Clark. “One Human came as a reminder to humanity that we’re not alone, that we’re here for more and that we are here to experience peace.”

While key principles of yoga are woven deeply into the themes and practices in the class, the material is still well-suited even for those who have no idea what a down dog is. “The eight limbs of yoga provide a map on how to return to the Oneness, and One Human is an embodiment of that invitation,” says Clark. “If the heart of yoga is samadhi—a state of oneness, unity, and full absorption with all of life—then One Human is a way of remembering that truth in real time.”

The evening consisted of a few relaxed periods of teaching and inquiry, 30 minutes of accessible yoga *asanas*, and several



Veronica Clark



Michael Caserno



Vashti Dennis

experiential “laboratories,” or exercises done in pairs. Along the way, we participants got to notice some of what stirs within our oceans of unconscious beliefs, judgments, expectations and assumptions—the bricks and mortar of what keeps our sense of separation in place, she points out.

Our unconscious thought processes, says Clark, “are playing out over and over and over again. They’re what’s getting in the way of our love and our connection ... Once we bring awareness to those patterns, we can begin to choose differently. We can stop participating in what separates us.”

## Like Never Before

For Michael Caserno, a yoga teacher, podcaster and owner of a transportation business, the One Human Experience helped him “peel back some of those layers so you can see. And then if you find a blind spot—well, now it’s not a blind spot anymore. Now you can decide whether or not it’s something you want to work on.” Another takeaway

for Caserno, who took the program twice in Chicago where he lives, was his elevated sense of connection to people. “I gained the ability to really look deeper at people,” he says, “and to just let people live, let people have their story, let people have their defeats and their victories.” Says Clark, “People come out of these experiences feeling more connected to themselves. And they actually describe feeling love in a way that they had not felt love before.”



fizes/DepositPhotos.com

It’s important to Clark to create a safe space for people to relax into. Clark herself had been raised in an extremely abusive environment, and it galvanized her journey. “I felt so unsafe in my life for so long that I had to learn how to create my own safety and to feel safe in this world.” With the help of her yoga practice and some deep inner work, she says she’s created a “safe landing place in myself that allows people to feel safe, loved, seen, accepted, welcomed—so that [participants] can do this kind of deep work in a very short period of time.”

She also chose The Wellness Spot for its vibe. The studio is “the only boutique fitness studio and full-service wellness spa on the south side of Atlanta,” says certified yoga teacher Vashti Dennis, the wellness director of the studio, who co-hosted the event and led the yoga portion of the evening. A Black woman-owned small business with a membership business model, the Wellness Spot has flourished and grown beyond expectations since it opened four years ago. “Making sure that [the community] has access to try these wellness services has been just such a joy and a gift for me,” says Dennis.

## Aliveness Beckons

“Drop down into your body.”

By the time Clark spoke those words, we had formed two lines, each one of us facing the one in the line across from us. We had just completed a few exercises that helped us become more aware of what weakens our connection to each other. That’s when something clicked for me.

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Now, I've been a meditator for many years, and I have a deeply held intention to "be here now" as much as possible. But facing another person so nakedly in that moment? My mental chatter was at high volume. And as I dropped down into my body, thanks to her guidance, I knew in my bones that I had absolutely *no idea* who the person in front of me really was. That any thoughts I had would only be fiction, conjecture or projection. That knowing then created an openness that allowed me to discover her, hear her, be present to her and be enriched by her. Being in my body—rather than a subscriber to my mind's endless patter—made me profoundly aware of the aliveness in the room and the mystery of each soul walking around in a body there.

Clark is planning to develop a yoga teacher training program around One Human Experience so she can certify

others in the U.S. and around the world to lead events, too. "We need every single one of us to be fully alive," says Clark. "Yoga has always taught that separation is an illusion. That waking up means seeing clearly—what's real, what's not, what connects and what divides. That's the path from darkness to light, from forgetting to remembering."

*Veronica Clark will be bringing One Human Experience back to Atlanta in February 2026. For more information, visit [OneHumanExperiences.com](http://OneHumanExperiences.com).*



*Diane Eaton, MCIS, is managing editor of Natural Awakenings of Atlanta and a professional freelance ghostwriter and writing coach. For more information, visit [DianeTheWritingDoctor.com](http://DianeTheWritingDoctor.com) or call 404-585-7590.*

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# Gut Restorative Yoga

## Poses That Bridge the Gut-Brain Axis

by Jordan Peschek, RN-BSN



yacobchuk from Getty Images/CanvaPro

### Yoga for Digestion

Certain yoga poses specifically support digestive function. According to the Indian yoga teacher B.K.S. Iyengar in his seminal book, *Light on Yoga*, twists such as *ardha matsyendrasana* (half lord of the fishes) and *supta matsyendrasana* (supine spinal twist) gently compress and massage abdominal organs, stimulating the movement of food through the digestive tract and encouraging waste elimination. Forward folds like *pascchimottanasana* (seated forward bend) can soothe the nervous system while enhancing circulation to digestive organs.

Practicing *viparita karani* (legs up the wall) after meals may promote lymphatic drainage and calm inflammation, especially when paired with diaphragmatic breathing. *Virasana* (hero pose) after eating can also support digestion and, because the spine is upright in this posture, is ideal for those with acid reflux.

“When supporting clients with digestive concerns, I incorporate yoga postures and breathwork to encourage healthy, balanced digestion,” explains Katie Mullins Denk, a yoga instructor, Ayurvedic health counselor and owner of Moonflower Studio, in Brookfield, Wisconsin. “*Apanasana* (knees to chest) helps relieve gas and bloating; *supta matsyendrasana* (supine spinal twist), *malasana* (garland or yogi squat) and *surya bhedana* (right nostril breathing) help stimulate elimination. Lying on the left side after meals—a version of *savasana* (final rest or corpse pose)—supports digestion through rest and relaxation. These simple, intentional practices create space for healing from within.”

### Mind-Gut Connection

Yoga’s impact extends beyond posture. Mindfulness practices such as *pranayama* (breath control) and *dhyana* (meditation) cultivate interoception—the ability to sense internal bodily states. This deepened awareness can promote healthier eating habits, support mindful digestion and reduce over-eating. Mullins shares, “*Uttanasana* (standing forward fold), seated forward fold and *nadi shodhana* (alternate nostril breathing) help calm the nervous system.”

Chronic stress is a major disruptor of gut flora, and yoga has been shown to reduce cortisol levels, the primary stress hormone. A calm mind often translates into a calmer gut. Digestive health can be tied to the body’s natural circadian rhythm. By practicing sun salutations or flowing yoga postures in the morning, the metabolism is gently awakened, and by incorporating restorative yoga or stretches in the evening, we signal our body to wind down naturally.

### An Integrative Approach

As an integrative tool, yoga complements both conventional and alternative therapies for gut health. It works synergistically with dietary modifications, probiotics and functional medicine interventions. For individuals navigating gastrointestinal disorders—from bloating and constipation

to chronic conditions like Crohn’s disease—yoga offers a noninvasive, accessible practice with minimal side effects.

Yoga practice was found to improve constipation and sleep quality in a 2021 randomized, controlled trial with elderly adults published in the *Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies*. A 2019 systemic review and meta-analysis in the *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* found that mindfulness interventions including yoga reduced stress and improved depression and quality of life in participants with irritable bowel disease.

Gut vitality is foundational to overall well-being. Yoga, with its blend of movement, breath and mindfulness, offers a holistic path to digestive harmony. Whether practiced in a studio, on a living room floor or during a midday break, it invites each person to tune into their body’s wisdom and support the healing journey from the inside out. 🧘

*Jordan Peschek has a background in personal training, yoga instruction and mental health nursing. She publishes the Milwaukee and Twin Cities editions of Natural Awakenings.*

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Thus through you do I change the world.



Maitreya, the World Teacher

# Oral Health Benefits of Yoga

## Surprising Ways to Improve a Smile

by Marlaina Donato



Krakenimages.com/Shutterstock

An estimated 42 percent of adults aged 30 and above are affected by periodontitis, commonly known as gum disease. For some, the condition manifests as mild, reversible gingivitis, while others experience a more progressive form that can lead to bone loss.

Beyond its effects in the mouth, gum disease is strongly associated with chronic inflammatory conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and arthritis. A study conducted by the University of Toronto in 2020 found that the body's immune response to gum disease can trigger a hyper-inflammatory response that can negatively impact healthy tissues and organs.

Good oral hygiene and regular cleanings with a dental professional are the principle ways to prevent and treat gum disease. However, new findings suggest that stress

management techniques such as mindfulness and yogic practices, combined with conventional treatments, may be the future of whole-body periodontal care and another good reason to get on the yoga mat.

Research published this year in *BMC Oral Health* reported that elevated levels of the stress hormone cortisol may impact periodontal health by making the gums more susceptible to infection and inflammation. Stress may also lead to lapses in oral hygiene.

### Benefits of Yoga

"In itself, inflammation isn't a bad thing—it's how the body protects and heals itself after injury, illness or exposure to harmful substances. But when that inflammatory response doesn't turn off due to physical or emotional stress, the body stays in a constant state of defense, even when there's no real threat present," explains yoga teacher

Jamie LiCausi, owner of Empowered Alignment Holistic Healing Hub, in Hawley, Pennsylvania. "Many of us live in a constant state of low-grade stress without even realizing it. Yoga isn't just about finding your zen; it quite literally rewires your nervous system to help you handle stress differently."

A 2023 systemic review published in the *Journal of International Society of Preventive and Community Dentistry* found promising potential for yoga to improve periodontal health by reducing systemic stress reactions and periodontal disease risk factors such as diabetes and hypertension.

Dr. Amy Dayries, an integrative dentist in Roswell, Georgia, and host of KnoWEwell's monthly online show, *Healthcare From Your Dentist's Chair*, asserts that yoga can reduce stress-induced teeth grinding, mouth breathing and poor posture promoted by modern lifestyles. Relying on mouth breathing rather than nose breathing can lead to sleep apnea, dry mouth and a misaligned bite, which, if left untreated, may cause tooth decay and gum disease. "Dentally speaking, we see increases in gum inflammation and increased cavity risk because the oral microbiome changes as the body chemistry changes in a stressed state," she remarks, adding that stress chemicals can remain elevated for many years after the initial stressful event.

The tongue can also play a critical role. According to Dayries, we usually have a low tongue posture (resting on the floor of the mouth instead of the roof) when we slouch, and this bad habit can ramp up the sympathetic nervous system, thereby triggering

stress. She recommends a variety of yoga exercises, including hatha yoga tongue exercises, as part of a patient's dental treatment plan to ease muscle and emotional tension, support stronger posture and decrease mouth breathing. Such exercises may include placing the tip of the tongue against the roof of the mouth behind the top front teeth, suctioning the rest of the tongue flat against the roof of the mouth, closing the mouth and breathing through the nose.


### The Power of the Breath

Pranayama yoga and diaphragmatic breathing can reset the nervous system in a gentle way. "Many of us breathe shallowly into the chest, which means the lower parts of the lungs—the areas where air can become stagnant—don't get fully ventilated. Over time, that stagnant air holds onto carbon dioxide and other waste gases," says LiCausi. "When we breathe deeply using the

diaphragm, we help move that stale air out. Fresh oxygen circulates through the lungs, nourishing the body, while each exhale clears out toxins and waste."

Dayries advises that yoga helps us to counterbalance modern lifestyle activities that promote a forward posture. "This is because yoga is centered around one's breath and holding postural stances, wringing out the lymphatic system through stretching, strengthening and asanas [body postures]." Most of all, she points out, even when oral health problems are in motion, such as gum disease, there is hope to halt things where they are, even if some bone loss is evident. "It is never too late to implement healthy changes," she says. 🌱

Marlaina Donato is an author, musician and painter. Connect at [WildflowersAndWoodSmoke.com](http://WildflowersAndWoodSmoke.com).





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# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Publicize your event! This section hosts free and paid listings. Each month, we select a limited number of events — they must have broad appeal and cost no more than \$35 to attend — to list for free. Otherwise, basic listings are \$40 and enhanced listings are \$75. Submit free listings to [calendar@naAtlanta.com](mailto:calendar@naAtlanta.com) and paid listings to [ads@naAtlanta.com](mailto:ads@naAtlanta.com).

## Saturday, September 6

**Red Light Running Society** - 9am-12pm. Walk, jog, or run with all fitness levels welcome, followed by coffee, treats, and strength training. Free. Red Light Cafe, 553 Amsterdam Ave NE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Red-Light-Running-Society-090625](http://bit.ly/Red-Light-Running-Society-090625)

**Free Saturday HIIT Workout Class** - 10-11am. High-intensity interval training with cardio, strength, and endurance exercises for all fitness levels. Free. Jamie The Motivator, 3365 West Hospital Ave #Suite G, Chamblee. [bit.ly/HIIT-Workout-Class-090625](http://bit.ly/HIIT-Workout-Class-090625)

**Feel the Beat, Move Your Feet** - 10am-12pm. Dance-based fitness, health resources, and giveaways to boost community wellness. Free. 1839 Phillips Rd, Lithonia. [bit.ly/Feel-The-Beat-Move-Your-Feet-090625](http://bit.ly/Feel-The-Beat-Move-Your-Feet-090625)

**FREE Soundbath Serenity Meditation with Nature in the Park** - 10:30-11am. Relax to soothing sounds in a peaceful park setting. Free. Hunter Memorial Park, 8830 Gurley Rd, Douglasville. [bit.ly/SoundBath-Serenity-Meditation-090625](http://bit.ly/SoundBath-Serenity-Meditation-090625)

**FREE Reiki Infused Yoga & Meditation** - 3:30-5pm. Explore inner awareness through Vinyasa yoga, Reiki, and meditation to balance chakras and calm the mind. Free. Tiffany Monroe. Healing Hands Reiki, 27 Waddell St NE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Reiki-Yoga-090625](http://bit.ly/Reiki-Yoga-090625)

## Sunday, September 7

**Introduction to Transmission Meditation** - 7:30pm. Discover a powerful group meditation aiding both spiritual growth and global service. Open to all levels; enhances any practice. Free. Share International USA SE Region. [tinyurl.com/jtjckkr9](http://tinyurl.com/jtjckkr9)

## Monday, September 8

**EnerVibes Dance Fit with Tani** - 6-7pm. Zumba-inspired dance workout fusing Soca, Hip Hop, Latin Rhythms, and more. Free. The Home Depot Backyard, 1 Backyard Way, Atlanta. [bit.ly/EnerVibes-Dance-Fit-090825](http://bit.ly/EnerVibes-Dance-Fit-090825)

## Tuesday, September 9

The B.A.R. (Basic Abdominal Routine) with **Guru of Abs** - 7:15-8:15pm. Seated and standing abs workout using three planes of motion. Free. The Home Depot Backyard, 1 Backyard Way, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Basic-Abdominal-Routine-090925](http://bit.ly/Basic-Abdominal-Routine-090925)

## Wednesday, September 10

**Wellness Walks in Wildlife** - 9-11am. Guided

forest walk with nature observation, seasonal themes, and wildlife spotting. Free. Glen Emerald Park, 1479 Bouldercrest Rd, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Wellness-Walks-in-Wildlife-091025](http://bit.ly/Wellness-Walks-in-Wildlife-091025)

**Wellness Walk: Back to School Edition** - 6:30-8:30pm. Connect, move, and reset with a grounding session, cold brew tastings, full moon reflection, and Beauty Water. Free. Just Add Honey Tea Company, 684 John Wesley Dobbs Ave NE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Wellness-Walk-091025](http://bit.ly/Wellness-Walk-091025)

**Weekly Wed Meditation Class** - 7-8:30pm. Stretching, guided meditation, and wisdom talk led by certified coaches and Buddhist monks. Free; \$5 suggested donation. Georgia Meditation Center, 4522 Tilly Mill Rd, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Meditation-Class-091025](http://bit.ly/Meditation-Class-091025)

## Thursday, September 11

**Sacred Mantra Soundbath + Veg Dinner** - 6:30-8:30pm. Experience heart-opening chanting, chakra meditation, and a delicious vegan dinner. Free; \$5 donation suggested. Self Discovery Center, 1315 S Ponce De Leon Ave NE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Sacred-Mantra-SoundBath-Veg-Dinner-091125](http://bit.ly/Sacred-Mantra-SoundBath-Veg-Dinner-091125)

## Saturday, September 13

**Train for a 5K with Rhythm Walking!** - 7:45-10am. Boost endurance and mood through rhythmic walking to house music. Free. Park Tavern, 10th St & Monroe, Piedmont Park, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Train-for-5K-Rythm-Walking-091325](http://bit.ly/Train-for-5K-Rythm-Walking-091325)

**Healed & Whole Wellness Event** - 11am-5pm. A faith-centered day of movement, journaling, herbal healing, and sisterhood. Free; donations welcome. New Covenant Faith & Miracle Arena, 721 Morrow Rd, Forest Park. [bit.ly/Healed-and-Whole-Wellness-Event-091325](http://bit.ly/Healed-and-Whole-Wellness-Event-091325)

## Sunday, September 14

**Community River Float & Sound Bath** - 11:30am-2:30pm. Enjoy a gentle river float with a live sound bath on a riverside island. Free; NOC rentals available. Azalea Park, 203 Azalea Dr, Roswell. [bit.ly/River-Float-and-Sound-Bath-091425](http://bit.ly/River-Float-and-Sound-Bath-091425)

**Unity Atlanta Church "12 Powers Workshop"** 12:30-2:00 pm. You're invited to explore how you can use your God-given powers to improve your life. Each month, Licensed Unity Teacher, Freda Steward, will present one of the twelve spiritual powers available to all people. Feel free to bring a bag lunch. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Park-

way Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. [UnityAtl.org](http://UnityAtl.org)

## Tuesday, September 16

**S.A.F.E. Self Defense with Sule Welch** - 6-7pm. Learn awareness, reflexes, and escape tactics for real-life safety. Free. The Home Depot Backyard, 1 Backyard Way, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Self-Defense-with-Sue-Welch-091625](http://bit.ly/Self-Defense-with-Sue-Welch-091625)

**Full Body Bootcamp with Royal Physique** - 6-7pm. Complimentary full-body workout for all fitness levels. Bring water, towel, and mat. Free. The Home Depot Backyard, 1 Backyard Way, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Full-Body-Bootcamp-091625](http://bit.ly/Full-Body-Bootcamp-091625)

**Tranquil Tuesday: Yoga with Jaimee** - 7:15-8:15pm. A fusion of mindfulness, movement, and yoga for strength, balance, and calm. Free. The Home Depot Backyard, 1 Backyard Way, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Yoga-With-Jaimee-091625](http://bit.ly/Yoga-With-Jaimee-091625)

## Wednesday, September 17

**Wellness Wednesday: Bootcamp with Dex** - 6-7pm. Join master motivator Dex for a challenging outdoor bootcamp to boost fitness and energy. Free. Atlantic Green, Atlantic Station, 1380 Atlantic Dr, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Wellness-Wednesday-091725](http://bit.ly/Wellness-Wednesday-091725)

**Pilates on the Green by BODYBAR Vinings** - 6:30-7:30pm. High-energy Pilates workout led by certified instructors. Bring mat and water. Free. The Plaza at The Battery Atlanta, 775 Battery Ave SE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Pilates-on-the-Green-091725](http://bit.ly/Pilates-on-the-Green-091725)

## Thursday, September 18

**Healing Sound Bath with Raye Andrews** - 7-8 pm. Join Certified Vibrational Sound Therapist, Raye Andrews, for a beautiful symphony of sound. This immersive, full-body listening experience can bring relaxation to your mind, body and spirit. Suggested love offering \$20-\$40. Held in the Chapel. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. [UnityAtl.org](http://UnityAtl.org)

## Friday, September 19

**Alpaca Yoga & Networking with iaedp™** - 10am-12pm. Gentle outdoor yoga, networking, and self-care with alpacas and ED professionals. Free. Lost Mountain Alpaca Ranch, 1335 Bullard Rd, Powder Springs. [bit.ly/Alpaca-Yoga-Networking-091925](http://bit.ly/Alpaca-Yoga-Networking-091925)

## Saturday, September 20

**The Veggie Taste - 15th Annual** - 2-7pm. Atlanta's largest outdoor vegan festival with chef tastings, speakers, artisan market, music, and more. Kids free. Shrine of the Black Madonna, 946 Ralph David Abernathy Blvd SW, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Veggie-Taste-092025](http://bit.ly/Veggie-Taste-092025)

## Wednesday, September 24

**Wellness Wednesday: Self-Defense with Wadi** - 6-7pm. Learn empowering self-defense skills from Coach Wadi to boost confidence, protection, and fearlessness. Free. Atlantic Green, Atlantic Station, 1380

Atlantic Dr, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Self-Defence-With-Wadi-092425](http://bit.ly/Self-Defence-With-Wadi-092425)

**Walk & Talk Decatur** - 6-7pm. Enjoy a community stroll around Downtown Decatur Square starting at Clarity Fitness. All ages. Free. 1 West Court Sq, Ste 100, Decatur. [bit.ly/Walk-and-Talk-Decatur-092425](http://bit.ly/Walk-and-Talk-Decatur-092425)

## Saturday, September 27

**Faithful Flow: Graceful Movements with God's Guidance** - 10-11:30am. Gentle exercises, meditation, and scripture reflection to nurture body, mind, and spirit. Free. North Meadow, Piedmont Park, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Graceful-Movements-with-Gods-Guidance-092725](http://bit.ly/Graceful-Movements-with-Gods-Guidance-092725)

**Cardiovascular Health Exposition** - 11am-2pm. Expert talks, screenings, and interactive booths on heart health, nutrition, and exercise. Free. The Villages at Carver Family YMCA, 1600 Pryor Rd SW, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Cardiovascular-Health-Exposition-092725](http://bit.ly/Cardiovascular-Health-Exposition-092725)

**Reiki Share** - 3:30-5:30pm. Reiki practitioners gather for grounding, energy scanning, meditation, and healing in a supportive group setting. \$21 donation. Tiffany Monroe. Healing Hands Reiki, 27 Waddell St NE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Reiki-Share-092725](http://bit.ly/Reiki-Share-092725)

## Sunday, September 28

**"Spiritual Keys to Aging Well"** - 12:30-1:30pm. This monthly discussion group is based on the booklet, "Spiritual Keys to Aging Well," by Unity World Headquarters at Unity Village. Copies are available at the event. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. [UnityAtl.org](http://UnityAtl.org)

## Sunday, October 5

**Daniel Nahmod Live Concert**. 1:30-3:00 pm. Immerse yourself in the powerful and inspiring music of Daniel Nahmod. His Humanity Music recording label is influencing the world. Tickets on sale for \$35 on Eventbrite.com or at the door with cash or Venmo. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. [UnityAtl.org](http://UnityAtl.org)

## ONGOING

### Sundays

**Practicing the Presence -A Course in Miracles** - 8:45-10:30 am. This weekly Zoom study group aims at removing the blocks to the awareness of love's presence. Facilitator: Michael Wilkinson. An open and ongoing class. All are welcome. For more info and to receive the Zoom link, email: [MWilkinson@leadstrat.com](mailto:MWilkinson@leadstrat.com). Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. [UnityAtl.org](http://UnityAtl.org)

**Online & In-Person Sunday Experience** - 9-10:30 am Adult Study; 3pm, Music and Message; 4pm, Food and Fellowship; 5pm, New Thought Education Workshop. Spiritual Living Center of Atlanta, 3107 Clairmont Rd, Ste A, Atlanta. More info: [slc-atlanta.org](http://slc-atlanta.org)

**Red Clay Sangha Sunday Morning Service** - 9am, Sitting/Walking Meditation;

10:30, Morning Service; 10:45am, Dharma Discussion; 11:30am, Closes and Brunch. Via Zoom or in person. 3420 W Hospital Ave, Ste 102, Chamblee. More info: [RedClaySangha.org](http://RedClaySangha.org)

**Grant Park Farmers Market** - 9am-1pm. The Beacon ATL, 1030 Grant St SE, Atlanta. [cfmatl.org/markets](http://cfmatl.org/markets)

**SRF Atlanta Meditation Service** - 10-10:45am. An opportunity to meet with other truth-seekers to commune with God and share spiritual fellowship. 4000 King Springs Rd, Smyrna. 770-434-7200. [srfatlanta.org](http://srfatlanta.org)

### Meditation Healing & Wellness Course

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**Meditation Open House** - 10-11:30am. Discussion at 11:30am and tea at 12pm. Meditation instruction available from 10-11am for those new to the practice. Atlanta Shambhala Center, 1447 Church St, Decatur. More info: [Atlanta.Shambhala.org](http://Atlanta.Shambhala.org)

**Online: UUCA Service** - 11am. Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta. [uuca.org/live](http://uuca.org/live)

**Unity Atlanta Church Sunday Services** - 11am-12pm. "Shifting Seasons" - Message Series. All are invited to tap into your depth of faith and set new intentions for healing and transformation. Attend in-person or watch via livestream. Youth Sunday School is in-person at 11am for ages 5-18. Nursery service is available 10:30am-12:30pm. 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. [UnityAtl.org](http://UnityAtl.org)

**Twin Hearts Meditation** - 11:00 am - 12:30 pm. This meditation is an act of service. We use divine energy to bless the planet, our loved ones and every part of our life. With Atlanta Pranich Healing Center via Zoom. To watch: [AtlPranicHealing.com](http://AtlPranicHealing.com)

**Tarot and Mocktails** - 1-2.30 pm. 1st Sunday. Designed for experienced and beginner tarot readers. Bring a deck of cards or buy onsite. Enjoy mid-day snack and drink. Learn about tarot and oracle cards. With Holistic Health & Wellness - 3372 Canton Rd Suite 116, Marietta, GA, 30066. 678-471-6587. [HolisticHealthse.square.site/events](http://HolisticHealthse.square.site/events)

### Tuesdays

**The Art of Preserving Balance and Vitality Through Movement** - 6-7pm. Discover the ancient art of cultivating Chi to enhance well-being. Learn to manage stress, channel emotions, and deepen your connection with life. \$18/class; packages available. Zoom. Efraim Brady, 470-281-8645. [PathsToIntegration.com](http://PathsToIntegration.com)

**Online Meditation Open House** - 7-8pm meditation, 8-8:30pm discussion, followed by tea and cookies. To watch: [Atlanta.Shambhala.org](http://Atlanta.Shambhala.org)

**Twin Hearts Meditation** - 7-8:30pm. A short, guided meditation blessing the Earth with loving kindness, peace and good will. Donation. Spiritual Living Center of Atlanta, 3107 Clairmont Rd, Unit A, Atlanta. 404-417-0008. [Meetup.com/Twin-Hearts-Meditation](http://Meetup.com/Twin-Hearts-Meditation)

**"Divine Connection" (Conexión Divina)** - 8-9pm. Starting back on August 12, the Spanish-language weekly spiritual gathering will study the book, "The Sermon on the Mount," by Emmet Fox. Led by Rev. Xiomara Malagon via Zoom. For more info and to receive the Zoom link, email: [xioma735@gmail.com](mailto:xioma735@gmail.com). Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. [UnityAtl.org](http://UnityAtl.org)

### Wednesdays

**Meditation & Modern Buddhism** - 7:00-8:30pm. With Resident Teacher, Gen Kelsang Dechok. Talks, guided meditation, discussion and Q&A. All welcome. Kadampa Meditation Center Georgia, 741 Edgewood NE, Atlanta. 678-453-6753. [MeditationIn-Georgia.org](http://MeditationIn-Georgia.org)

**Weekly Wednesday Meditation Class** - 7-8:30pm. Open to all levels. Experience true inner peace. With the Venerable Nicholas Thannissaro of the Georgia Meditation Center via Zoom. To register: [Meditation Circle.org](http://MeditationCircle.org)

**Weekly Group Meditation Session** - 6:30-7:30pm. All levels of meditation experience are welcome. A simple, five-step meditation process will be presented before the 10-15 minute meditation session. Afterwards, conversation and questions are



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## Saturdays

**Morningside Farmers Market** - 8-11:30am. Year-round. Offers organic produce, bread, pastries, grains, meat, honey, along with chef pop-ups, prepared foods, coffee, in-season fruits, and locally produced crafts. Morningside Presbyterian, 1411 N Morningside Dr NE, Atlanta. MorningsideMarket.com.

**Oakhurst Farmers Market** - 9am-1pm. Year-round. Fresh produce, meat, baked treats, and more. Additional offerings include live music and chef demonstrations featuring seasonal recipes. Sceptre Brewing Arts, 630 E Lake Dr, Decatur. cfmatl.org/oakhurst.

**Tea & Tarot** - 11am-2pm. 1st Sat. A tea party and tarot mixer for people of all ages and experience levels. Hosted by Amy Cathryn. \$25. Forever And A Day, 7830 Hwy 92, Woodstock. 770-516-6969. ForeverAndADay.as.me/TeaandTarot.

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**Reiki Share Group** - 3:30-5:30pm. Last Sat. A gathering of like-minded reiki practitioners who participate in group healing treatments on each other. \$21. Healing Hands Reiki & Spiritual Development, Inc, 27 Waddell St, Ste A, Atlanta. Tinyurl.com/2rykarft.

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# Permission To Simply Play

by Tommy Housworth



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For better or worse, most of the things I've been halfway good at in my life have been things I've managed to—and I hate this term—"monetize." Not satisfied with the friendly confines of community theater, I sought out an acting and directing career. Too vain to keep my musings to myself, I looked for ways to get my writing into the public eye.

Yet, this way of thinking can offer a slippery slope. Over time, activities we have a hunger for can lose their magic when they become an obligatory treadmill instead of a leisurely stroll. After all, some things in life should be about delight, not deliverables.

So, when my wife Wendy and I signed up for acrylic painting classes last year, I was determined to focus on the simple joy of creating rather than an outcome. It was something I didn't need to be good at, so I could just enjoy the ride, right? It was time to roll up my sleeves and have some childlike fun.

But, alas, the artist's ego is a stubborn and fragile thing. After four classes covering technique, color mixing, layering and other basics, we were given the freedom to bring in images we wanted to paint, from pastoral landscapes to Dali-inspired surrealism.

As I struggled with simple imagery—symbols like an Enso, the Japanese Zen circle and a Sanskrit "Om"—my classmates painted richly detailed trees, textured rivers and expressive animals with personalities that seemed to leap off the canvas. While they brought out the limitless array of blended shades and hues, I was doing my best to salvage globs of monochromatic messes.

To her credit, our teacher kept an encouraging tone, but after many years of being on both sides of the audition table, I could spot a valiant attempt at a positive poker face when I saw one. While other students' works were promising, mine were weekly passengers on the struggle bus. Even worse, my overwhelming need to impress, coupled with my unwillingness to accept that I was a complete novice in a ridiculously challenging art form, made for classes that were painted in layers of discouragement accented with occasional flecks of fun.

I did my best to deflect. I kept small talk going and enjoyed the retro-fueled playlists that brought sonic energy to the studio. Still, there was no denying that I went home most nights feeling like a failure in an ungraded class. Wendy's pep talks were helpful, as were YouTube videos of Bob Ross wannabes teaching technique. But the bottom line was, I had no natural aptitude for painting. Rather than granting myself some grace, I resorted to beating myself up for not being Van Gogh from the get-go.

## No masterpieces. No mistakes.

Then, one night in class, as I looked around the room, I realized everyone—to a person—was so engaged with their own canvas, it was as if no one else existed. They were lost in their creations regardless of their level of progress and quality. There were no masterpieces. There were no mistakes. Just painters at play. An Alan Watts quote I'd read returned to mind: "This is the real secret of life—to be completely engaged with what you are doing in the here and now. And instead of calling it work, realize it is play."

I'd somehow managed to take a fledgling hobby—a chance to play—and turned it into work. I needed to be good instead of playful. I needed to be praised instead of merely present. From that night on, I remembered Mr. Watts' words as well as the sign that Quincy Jones posted outside the studio during the "We Are the World" recording sessions. It read "Leave Your Egos at the Door."

Slowly, painting became fun. Judgment gave way to joy, disapproval to something resembling delight. I've accepted that I'll never dazzle others with my visual artistry. Or, maybe someday, with the right amount of play, I will. But it will be play that gets me there. Because I finally gave myself permission to do just that. 🎨



Tommy Housworth is a professional writer and creative director for corporate projects. He's a certified mindfulness instructor, the author of two collections of short stories, and he publishes on Substack.

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