

*Carving
out a new
Thanksgiving
for 2020*





Sangria, decorative gourds and plates are set up on a table next to the fire pit for guests at a home in the Town of Montgomery. [KELLY MARSH/FOR 845 TODAY]



NOVEMBER TRIVIA QUIZ

1. What is the significance of Nov. 18?

- a. It's King Tut Day.*
- b. It's National Absurdity Day.*
- c. It's World Peace Day.*
- d. It's National Apple Cider Day.*

(ANSWER ON PAGE 48)



A Thanksgiving turkey and sides sit on an outdoor porch table at a Town of Montgomery home. This year at holiday get-togethers, remember to sit closely only with members of your own household; same thing if you host others, or go to someone else's home. And don't forget your masks!

STORY BY KATHY SWANWICK
PHOTOS BY KELLY MARSH
FOR 845 TODAY

As cases of COVID-19 continue to rise throughout the country, this year's Thanksgiving celebration is going to require flexibility, creativity and some sacrifice.

This is not the year for the quintessential, Norman Rockwell-style feast, with dozens of relatives sitting closely together around a food-laden table, says the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

We should come together in much smaller groups, preferably just with members of our own household, according to the agency's guidelines. But, if we're going to celebrate with other family members and friends, the festivi-

ties should be held outdoors – weather-permitting – where we can be socially distanced and the risk of transmission is lower.

With that in mind, a couple of local experts offered their visions of what a festive Thanksgiving might look like during the pandemic.

Keep it simple, suggested Susanne Meyer-Fitzsimmons, an author, blogger and inspirational speaker on living deeply and more sustainably.

Use any outdoor spaces you may have, she said, and consider holding any gatherings early in the afternoon when the weather may be warmer.

“The safest way to entertain, obviously, is outdoors. That becomes a little more complicated as we enter the colder season.”

“People have garages they could use and leave open,” she continued. “People have covered porches. People have patios and fire pits, right? People may even have

Making fire-roasted bread over the fire pit outside a home in the Town of Montgomery.



NOVEMBER TRIVIA QUIZ

2. Which event took place in November?

- a. Parker Brothers introduced the game Monopoly.
- b. The apartheid system in South Africa came to an end.
- c. Bell Telephone Company introduced the push-button phone.
- d. All of the above.

(ANSWER ON PAGE 48)

TRY THESE DELIGHTFUL FALL RECIPES

Classic German Glühwein (Hot Mulled Wine)

This wine, said Susanne Meyer-Fitzsimmons, is traditionally served in Germany in winter.

- 1 bottle dry red wine
- 1.5 cups water
- 8 whole cloves
- 1 untreated/organic orange
- A cinnamon stick
- ¼ cup sugar or to taste

Cut orange in slices and add to pot together with all other ingredients. Heat very slowly on stovetop without letting it come to a boil. Let sit for an hour so the flavors can deepen (optional). Reheat and serve if opting for the slow flavor melding.

Easy Pizza Dough for Quick Fire-Roasted Bread

- 1 cup warm water
- 1 TBSP sugar
- 1 TBSP active dry yeast
- 1 TBSB olive oil
- 2 to 2.5 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 chopped fat garlic clove
- Rosemary leaves, dried or fresh

Put warm water in mixing bowl and add sugar and yeast. Let sit for 5 minutes until frothy. Add olive oil and chopped garlic clove. Slowly incorporate the flour. Move to a bowl with a bit of flour in it, cover, and let sit for an hour on the countertop.

Divide into small handfuls, roll out into dough sausage, about a finger thick. Provide each guest with a clean branch, about 3' to 4' long, that is about a finger thick at the end. Wrap the dough sausage several times around the top of the branch. Hold over the fire until done, about 5 minutes.

Apple Cider Sangria, a great apéritif/cocktail to start off the festivities:

- 1 bottle Pinot Grigio
- 2 ½ cups apple cider
- 1 cup club soda
- ½ cup ginger brandy

Chopped apples and pears

– **Recipes submitted by Susanne Meyer-Fitzsimmons**



Dough infused with rosemary and garlic is freshly roasted over the fire pit outside a home in the Town of Montgomery.

barns. These are all spaces, when the weather is not too cold, you can plan at least a part of the event in there.”

Meyer-Fitzsimmons and her family have been entertaining very small groups of people outside around the firepit at their Warwick home since the middle of May, when they realized that the isolation of quarantining was making them “stir crazy.”

They sat around the fire at safe distances from their guests, and served drinks in paper cups that were tossed into the fire after being used for sipping wine or beer. Guests brought their own snacks and she put out a couple of different dishes to share.

Having several people using the same set of utensils for serving food poses a possible risk, she noted, but can be done safely.

“We always had little bottles of hand sanitizer out for everyone to use,” she said. “You can make the rules and tell people, ‘This is what you’ve got to do,’ or you can let people do whatever they’re comfortable with.”

It’s important to understand individuals’ risk tolerance as you think of people you’d like to invite.

“They have to assess their own and their guests’ risk level,” said Meyer-Fitzsimmons. “Are they in a high-risk group? Who is their immediate family? Is it children who come from all over the place who could bring the virus back? Is it then wise to bring elderly parents in? These are all assessments that everyone has to make on their own.”

She has grown comfortable as the months have

worn on letting their company use the guest bathroom as long as they sanitize their hands before using doorknobs to enter the house. She replaces terry cloth hand towels with paper towels for safety.

“There are certain basic precautions we take, but we’re not paranoid about it.”

You might even ask guests to put on a mask when they enter your house as an additional safety measure. Leaving out wipes with at least 60 percent alcohol allows guests to clean any areas they touch before leaving the room. And, of course, cleaning the room after the day is done helps eliminate your risk.

Meyer-Fitzsimmons’ immediate family will be together on Thanksgiving Day. They plan to entertain family and friends around the fire pit over the next three days, if it doesn’t rain. Leftover turkey will morph into turkey pot pies one day, turkey sandwiches the next. The menu this year, she said, will be improvisational, reflecting the less formal settings.

“All small gatherings,” she said. “Four people on one day, six people another day so that we see people all the time over the weekend and we don’t have this feeling that we’re lonely or there’s nothing going on and it’s not festive. It’s just a little different.”

Barbecuing is another great option for cooking outdoors – and another heat source.

However you decide to celebrate, focus on kindness, said Dr. Michele Winchester-Vega, a licensed clinical social worker with a private psychotherapy practice in New Windsor.

People who have been polarized and angry amidst



Sangria, cutlery and plates are set up on a table next to the fire pit for Thanksgiving guests at a home in the Town of Montgomery.

the current political climate and the “COVID fatigue” brought on by the sheer length of the pandemic need to appreciate each other and demonstrate tolerance.

“I think this Thanksgiving has to be different,” she said. “Let’s not forget the meaning of the holiday, that Thanksgiving is about thanks and giving. Maybe this year it’s about really giving to those who are really food-deprived right now or might just need one little extra of something that would make their day.”

Remember, she said, the huge numbers of Americans who have died from the virus that causes COVID-19. The entire world, she noted, is dealing with loss, grief and uncertainty about the future.

“It’s okay to feel sad and grieve about not having the same traditions this year,” said Winchester-Vega.



The hostess begins to slice a pumpkin pie on a table next to a renovated barn in the Town of Montgomery.



NOVEMBER TRIVIA QUIZ

3. True or false? November was the ninth month in the ancient Roman calendar.

(ANSWER ON PAGE 48)



An outdoor Thanksgiving table setting can incorporate many beautiful touches of fall.



NOVEMBER TRIVIA QUIZ

4. What gem is considered November's birthstone?

- a. Amber.*
- b. Yellow diamond.*
- c. Topaz.*
- d. Yellow jade.*

(ANSWER ON PAGE 48)

TIPS FROM THE CDC

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued the following guidelines for celebrating Thanksgiving more safely during the pandemic:

- Do not attend any gathering if you are ill or vulnerable.
- Know the community levels of COVID-19 where you plan to celebrate. Higher levels increase the risk of infection and spread among attendees.
- Location: Indoor locations generally pose more risk than those held outdoors. If hosting an outdoor event is not possible, and you choose to host an indoor event, avoid crowded, poorly ventilated, or fully enclosed indoor spaces. Increase ventilation by opening windows and doors if possible.
- Duration of gathering: Gatherings that last longer pose more risk than shorter ones. Note that the CDC recently updated their guidance of the definition of a close contact with an infected person (who may not know they're infected) as a total of 15 minutes within a 24-hour time period.

• Number of people attending: The more people that gather, the higher the risk. The CDC does not recommend a specific ideal number. However, they note that the size of a gathering should be determined based on the ability to reduce or limit contact between people, the risk of spread between attendees, and state and local health and safety laws, rules, and regulations.

• If you are hosting, provide or encourage people to bring supplies to help you and others stay healthy. For example, provide extra masks (do not share or swap with others), hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol, and tissues.

• If you are planning to celebrate with people outside of your household, consider asking all guests to strictly avoid contact with people outside of their households for 14 days before the gathering.

• If you plan to travel: Wear a mask to keep your nose and mouth covered while in public places. Maintain a distance of six feet from anyone outside



With many folks planning a Thanksgiving al fresco this year, it's important to keep guests warm as well as safe. At this Town of Montgomery home, chairs are gathered around an outdoor space heater and fire pit with plates and sangria on a table in the back.

your household. Wash your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds or disinfect with hand sanitizer containing at least 60 percent alcohol. Avoid anyone who is sick. Try not to touch your eyes, nose and mouth.

• Do not shake hands, bump elbows or give hugs. Wave and verbally greet others.

• Keep safe around food and drinks. Consider asking guests to bring their own food for their own household. Wash hands before and after preparing, serving and eating food. Wear a mask while preparing or serving food to people who do not live in your household. If serving food, consider having one person serving so that multiple people are not handling utensils; if not possible, have hand sanitizer available.

Lower risk activities:

- Have a small dinner with members

of your household only.

• Prepare traditional family recipes for family and neighbors, especially those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Deliver them in a way that doesn't involve contact with others.

• Hold a virtual dinner and share recipes with family and friends.

• Shop online rather than in person on Black Friday or the following Monday.

• Watch sports, parades and movies from home.

Moderate risk activities:

• Host a small outdoor dinner with family and friends who live in your community.

• Visit pumpkin patches or orchards where people use hand sanitizer before touching pumpkins or picking

apples, mask-wearing is enforced, and people are able to maintain social distancing.

• Attend a small outdoor sports event with safety precautions in place.

Higher risk activities that should be avoided to help prevent the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19:

• Shopping in crowded stores just before, on, or after Thanksgiving.

• Participating in or being a spectator at a crowded race.

• Attending crowded parties.

• Using alcohol or drugs, which can cloud judgment and increase risky behaviors.

• Attending large indoor gatherings with people from outside your household.

For more information, go to [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).

Consider holding any Thanksgiving gatherings early in the afternoon, when the weather may be warmer. Here, an outdoor space heater is set up next to a fire pit at a Town of Montgomery home.



NOVEMBER TRIVIA QUIZ

5. *What medical device was patented on Nov. 4, 1846?*

- a. Artificial leg.*
- b. Surgical suture.*
- c. Syringe.*
- d. Stethoscope.*

(ANSWER ON PAGE 48)

Find joy and be around other people when and where you safely can, she said. Winchester-Vega holds therapy groups on the bluff behind her office where clients wear masks and maintain social distance around a firepit.

“Connecting with others, however you do it, is so life-giving,” she said. “We’re not meant to be alone. We’re not meant to be in isolation. So, connect. Whatever your comfort level is.”

She plans to entertain a couple of people each day of the holiday weekend, and said that being tested for the virus prior to the holiday is always an option.

Be sure to decorate your home for the holiday, even if no one will be coming over. Do it for yourself, she urged.

“As it gets dark, it’s going to be important to bring light and to bring life into your home,” she said. “Like flowers, like lights, things that bring a smile to your face. Our environment affects our mood as much as other things.”

So be prepared to maybe skip the time-honored rules and recipes, just for this unique period in time.

Finalize your plans in the days before the holiday when you’ll know if the weather will allow for an outdoor celebration with more than just the members of your immediate household.

Throw on an extra sweater or jacket and enjoy new experiences, like cooking slices of sausage or baking bread wrapped around a stick over a firepit. Or fire up the space heater on the patio if you have one, and enjoy your time with your guests. Folks with two-burner camping stoves might want to use them to keep food warm outdoors.

Realize that this pandemic will end one day and we will be able to celebrate the holidays in style, with all the traditional flourishes and 20 people gathered at the indoor dining table.

In the meantime, “it’s all about togetherness,” Meyer-Fitzsimmons said. “It’s not so much about the fancy china and the fancy glasses. It’s about being together and going through this together. Just talking to people and emotional and psychological well-being and support.”

– Photos staged by Susanne Meyer-Fitzsimmons; susannemeyer-fitzsimmons.com



Dessert and fall decor make for a beautiful spread next to a Town of Montgomery barn.



The hostess of a small Thanksgiving gathering relaxes in an Adirondack chair in front of the fire in her family’s renovated Town of Montgomery barn.