



The
HANDMADE
HABIT

A Year of Simple Projects
to Reconnect with
Craft, Time, and Touch

Tessa Conway

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“The desire to create is one of the deepest yearnings of the human soul.”

— *Dieter F. Uchtdorf*

For my mother, whose hands were always busy creating beauty,
and whose heart taught me why it mattered.

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Introduction

It always starts the same way: you reach the end of another day and realize you don't remember half of it. The hours were spent in front of screens, bouncing between emails, texts, streaming shows, and scrolling feeds. Your hands typed, swiped, and tapped, but they didn't really *do* anything.

And yet, underneath all that speed and convenience, there's a quiet craving. A longing to slow down. To touch something real. To make something that lasts longer than a notification.

I felt that same hunger years ago when my life became an endless loop of rushing, working, and multitasking. My mind was constantly overstimulated, but my soul felt undernourished. One night, on a whim, I melted wax in an old saucepan and poured my first candle into a chipped mug. It wasn't perfect. The wick leaned and the top cracked, but when I lit it, the room glowed in a way I hadn't felt in months. My hands had made something useful. Something beautiful. Something alive with intention.

That tiny flame was the beginning of a practice that changed me.

The concept of "The Handmade Habit" is simple yet profound. Each month, we focus on a different craft that allows us to engage with our hands and our hearts. These projects serve as gentle reminders to slow down, to savor the moment, and to find beauty in the act of making. Each craft aligns with the seasons, offering not just a skill, but a reflection of the time of year and an opportunity for personal growth.

These crafts aren't complicated or advanced. They're not meant to impress anyone on Instagram. They're small, doable, meaningful practices designed to help you slow down, breathe, and make something real. Maybe you've never touched a crochet needle. Maybe your last attempt at baking ended in smoke. That doesn't matter. This book isn't about perfection—it's about participation. Every chapter is written for beginners with clear instructions, minimal supplies, and encouragement to try, fail, and try again. The only expertise you need is curiosity.

Starting something new can often feel daunting. Trust me, I understand. The thought of mastering a skill can bring hesitation, yet the beauty lies in the beginning itself. I encourage you to adopt a beginner's mindset throughout these crafts. Don't be afraid to experiment and explore and allow yourself to make mistakes. These errors are not setbacks. They're lessons cloaked in experience.

And you might even find that the concept of a beginner's mindset is wonderfully liberating. It invites exploration without fear of failure. Our brains are wired to learn through trial and error, so why not apply this to crafting? Here's a little secret: some of the most beautiful crafts I've made were born from unintentional mishaps.

Crafting offers more than just a finished product. It provides emotional and psychological benefits. As your hands work, your mind finds calm. There is a mindfulness in each stitch, each brushstroke, each knead of dough. That rhythm - repetition, touch, creation - becomes its own meditation. Crafting can be a refuge, a space where worries fade and focus sharpens. Crafting offers what so much of modern life denies us: a pause, a presence, and a tangible sense of accomplishment.

I invite you to embrace your creativity, to welcome mistakes as learning opportunities, and to find happiness in the act of making. This book is a guide, but it is *your* journey. Let it inspire you to try new things, to find your rhythm, and to connect more deeply with your surroundings.

You may not connect with every craft that we'll do this year. Some crafts might seem ridiculous or pointless or too hard. You may engage with a craft that you absolutely love and want to learn more about. And you may try a skill that you absolutely have no intention of ever doing again. Whatever the case may be, I encourage you to simply *try*.

You don't have to become a master crafter. You don't have to follow every project perfectly. What matters is that you show up with your hands, your heart, and a willingness to try.

So let's begin. One project. One month. One habit at a time.

Together, we'll discover what our ancestors knew all along: when your hands make, your soul mends.

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January: Candle Making

A Light in the Darkness

January has always felt to me like a month of quiet. The noise of December fades and suddenly the days stretch long and pale, filled with stillness. The nights, however, seem endless — cold, dark, and waiting for something to soften them. It's a month when we instinctively reach for warmth: a blanket, a mug of tea, a fire. And, perhaps most simply, a candle.

Lighting a candle in January feels almost ceremonial. A flame catches, and suddenly the space around you glows. One small spark changes everything — shadows retreat, the room warms, and you feel a little steadier, a little less alone. In this way, candle-making is a perfect craft for the first month of the year. It reminds us that light can be handmade, and that small efforts create real, tangible comfort.

Candle-making is as old as civilization itself. Ancient Egyptians soaked reeds in animal fat to make the first primitive candles around 3000 BCE. The Romans dipped papyrus wicks in melted tallow or beeswax, producing steadier flames to mark festivals and light homes. In the Middle Ages, beeswax candles were prized for their clean, bright burn — though they were costly, often reserved for churches and the wealthy. For centuries, candles were not decoration but necessity; their steady flames lit homes, guided travelers, and marked sacred rituals.

It wasn't until the 19th century, with the advent of gas lamps and electricity, that candles became less about survival and more about atmosphere. Today, we don't need

candles — but we long for them all the same. They remind us of connection: to history, to home, to warmth. When you make your own, you join that long lineage of makers who shaped light with their hands.

The act of making candles is, at its core, an act of patience. You melt, you stir, you pour — and then you wait. The wax must cool slowly. The fragrance binds only with time. A handmade candle cannot be rushed; it insists that you let it become what it will in its own rhythm. This is a lesson January itself teaches us: beginnings rarely bloom overnight. They need rest, stillness, and quiet preparation before they shine.

Candle-making also invites you to pay attention. You notice how the wax changes from solid to liquid, from opaque to translucent. You learn the precise moment fragrance should be added. You see how a single wick can transform an ordinary jar into a vessel of light. It's a practice in care, in tending to small details, in believing that slow work leads to something beautiful.

There's something deeply soothing about this process. The repetition of measuring and melting has a rhythm that calms the mind. The scents you choose — lavender for peace, citrus for energy, vanilla for comfort — invite you to shape not just a candle, but the atmosphere you want to live in. Even the simple act of watching wax pool around a wick can quiet an anxious mind.

Making candles gives you more than a finished product. It offers you a chance to breathe, to focus, to step away from the speed of modern life. When you light the candle later — on a gray January afternoon, perhaps, or during a long evening when the house feels empty — you'll remember that your own hands made this light. That you can create something warm, steady, and beautiful, even in the darkest season.

Sourcing Your Materials

Choosing the right materials is like setting the foundation for a sturdy house. The quality of your wax and wicks will directly impact your candle's performance and your experience as a crafter.

Let's start with wax, the star of the show. You have options like soy, beeswax, and paraffin. Each has its own charm. Soy wax is a favorite for many because it's renewable and burns cleanly. It's derived from soybeans, making it a plant-based option that appeals to those who value sustainability. Beeswax, on the other hand, offers a natural honey

scent and golden hue, and it's prized for its slow burn time. It's a byproduct of honey production, so you're supporting beekeepers in the process. Paraffin, although not as eco-friendly, is widely used for its affordability and versatility in creating different candle types.

Your choice of wick is equally vital. Cotton wicks are traditional and versatile, suitable for most waxes. They provide a consistent burn and are easy to work with, especially for beginners. If you're feeling adventurous, wood wicks can add a delightful crackling sound reminiscent of a cozy fireplace. They work well with soy wax and add an aesthetic touch to container candles. When choosing wick sizes, consider the diameter of your candle. A thicker wick suits larger candles to ensure an even burn.

For those who are eco-conscious or budget-minded, there are sustainable and affordable alternatives. Soy wax and beeswax are both excellent choices for those who prefer natural materials that minimize environmental impact (Eco-friendly candle making: Sustainable supplies for the conscious candlepreneur). They both burn cleanly, with minimal soot, which is better for indoor air quality. If you're looking to save money or simply enjoy being resourceful, consider using household items as molds. Old jars, teacups, or even muffin tins can serve as charming candle holders.

Finding these materials doesn't have to be a scavenger hunt. Local craft stores often carry a range of waxes and wicks, and you might find beeswax at farmers markets where local producers sell their goods. Online marketplaces like Etsy and Amazon offer a treasure trove of specialty items, from unique fragrance oils to decorative molds. When shopping online, take time to read reviews and product descriptions to ensure quality.

Before diving into the actual candle-making process, preparing your materials is crucial. Melting wax safely is an art in itself. Use a double boiler to gently heat the wax without exposing it to direct flames, which can cause it to scorch or catch fire. A double boiler consists of a pot filled with water with another container placed on top to hold the wax. This method allows the wax to melt evenly and reduces the risk of overheating.

Priming your wicks is another step that can improve your candle's performance. By soaking the wicks in melted wax before placing them into your mold, you ensure they burn more consistently. This simple step helps the wick draw up wax more effectively when lit, leading to a more stable flame.

What You'll Need:

- Wax: Soy flakes, beeswax pellets—or a blend, depending on preference.
- Wick: Cotton or wooden wicks, with metal bases.
- Wick Adhesive: Wick stickers or a dab of melted wax to secure the wick.
- Containers: Heat-safe glass, ceramic, or repurposed jars. Avoid plastics or fragile ceramics.
- Double Boiler Setup: A heat-safe pouring vessel placed in a saucepan of gently simmering water.
- Thermometer (Optional): Candy or infrared thermometer for accurate temperature control.
- Fragrance or Essential Oils (Optional): Adds scent—use about 1 oz per pound of wax or 15-20 drops for smaller batches.
- Tools: Pencil, chopstick, or clothespin to center the wick; scissors or wick trimmer for trimming



Step-by-Step Guide

1. **Set Your Space:** Begin by clearing and protecting your workspace with parchment or a towel. Clean and dry your container well—it's your future home for light and warmth.
2. **Secure the Wick:** Attach your wick to the container's base using a wick sticker or a dab of melted wax. Center the wick and rest a pencil or chopstick across the top to keep it upright. A *Mindful note:* Take a moment to center that wick—it's your anchor through flow and solidity.
3. **Measure the Wax:** To estimate your wax amount, fill your container twice with flakes or pellets—the melted volume will be less. You can also weigh by using roughly 1 lb wax for a medium-sized jar.
4. **Melt the Wax:** Place your pouring vessel into simmering water (double boiler). Stir occasionally until fully melted—soy wax melts faster, beeswax may take longer.
5. **(Optional) Add Scent:** Remove wax from heat once melted. Let it cool slightly—aim for around 130–140 °F. Then, stir in fragrance or essential oils (approx. 1 oz per lb wax or 15–20 drops).
6. **Pour with Intention:** Carefully pour the wax into your container, holding the wick centered. Leave a small gap (½ inch or so) at the top.
7. **Slow the Cooling:** Wrap the container in a towel or let it rest uncovered—this helps prevent cracks or sinkholes by cooling evenly.
8. **Trim and Cure:** Once the wax has set (typically 30 minutes to several hours), remove your holding tool and trim the wick to about ¼ inch. Then, wait at least 24 hours before lighting. For best scent throw, some recommend curing at least seven days.



Understanding Scent Throw

One of the joys of candle-making is filling a space with a fragrance that suits your mood. The term “scent throw” describes how strongly a candle releases its fragrance. There are two types to know:

Cold Throw – The fragrance you smell when the candle is solid but unlit. This gives you a sense of how the candle will smell just sitting on a shelf or table.

Hot Throw – The fragrance released once the candle is lit and the wax begins to melt into a pool. This is the true test of your candle’s aroma power.

Tips for a Better Scent Throw:

Measure fragrance oil carefully. Most candle waxes hold between 6–10% fragrance load (that’s 1 oz of fragrance per pound of wax, up to about 1.6 oz per pound, depending on

the wax). Adding too little will weaken the scent, while adding too much can cause poor burning. Always check your wax manufacturer's recommendations.

Add fragrance at the right temperature. For most soy waxes, this is around 185°F (85°C). Adding fragrance oil when the wax is too hot can burn off the scent; adding it when too cool may cause the oil not to bind properly.

Cure your candles. After pouring, let candles rest (cure) for at least 1–2 weeks before burning. This waiting period allows the fragrance to fully bind with the wax, which dramatically improves both hot and cold throw.

Choose the right wick size. An undersized wick won't melt the wax fully, which can lead to weak fragrance release. A properly sized wick ensures a full melt pool, maximizing scent throw.

Pro Tip: Test burn one candle from your batch after curing. Take notes on the scent throw, burn time, and wick performance. Candle-making is a craft of small tweaks, and each test brings you closer to the perfect result.

Troubleshooting & Tips

Sinkholes or Cracks? Reheat and pour a little wax to top it off.

Wick Leans? Use a clip or secure better; submerged wicks sink easily.

Weak Scent? Ensure proper fragrance-to-wax ratio and allow curing time.

Jars Cracking? Use heat-safe containers. Avoid sudden temperature shifts; test with boiling water then cold.

Journaling Questions & Reflection Prompts

- What does “light” symbolize for you in this season of your life?
- When have you felt like you were “in the dark,” and what helped guide you through?
- How do you want to bring more light—literal or metaphorical—into your home or relationships this year?
- Candle-making requires patience and waiting. Where in your life do you struggle

with waiting? How might you reframe waiting as part of the process rather than a delay?

- If you were to make a candle as a gift, who would you give it to, and what would you want it to communicate?

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February: Handwritten Letters

Connection and Expression

February is a month often marked by tokens of love—roses, candy, greeting cards. But in a world where connection often arrives as a typed message on a glowing screen, there is something startlingly intimate about receiving a letter in another’s handwriting. The loops and slants, the pauses between words, even the occasional cross-outs all whisper: *I was here. I was thinking of you. I wanted you to hold this in your hands.*

Writing letters is an act of slowing down. It’s choosing ink and paper over quick texts, permanence over scrollable streams. A handwritten letter does more than convey words—it carries presence. And perhaps this month of love and remembrance is the perfect time to rediscover that presence, to sit in stillness and write.

For centuries, letters were the lifeline of connection. From Roman wax tablets to quill-penned correspondence in the 18th century, letters have always been more than information—they were touch across distance. Soldiers in wartime carried home-tied bundles of love letters; poets poured their art into epistolary form; families preserved handwriting like heirlooms.

The physicality of a letter was once the most direct way of reaching someone far away. Even today, when we could send a message instantly, a handwritten letter still carries weight. It has traveled. It has been touched. It holds the sender’s time and intention.

Writing a letter teaches patience and thoughtfulness. Unlike digital words, which can be edited endlessly, letters bear the marks of our humanity—an ink blot, a misstep, a doodle in the margin. This imperfection is part of their beauty.

It also teaches you to think of another person with depth. To write to them, you must pause and imagine their voice, their life, their response. You step outside your own head for a while and live in empathy.



Sourcing Your Materials

A good letter begins with simple tools:

- **Pens:** Fountain pens lend elegance, gel pens offer smooth flow, and calligraphy pens invite flourish. Each brings a different character to your handwriting.
- **Paper:** Seek out smooth, ink-friendly paper. Heavyweight or cotton-based paper not only looks refined but feels satisfying beneath your hand.
- **Envelopes and postage:** Find an envelope in a style and color that complements the paper you chose.

- **Optional:** stickers, sealing wax, pressed flowers, colored pens, monogram stamp

You may even want to consider some techniques to improve your handwriting this month. Handwriting is both utility and art. Think of handwriting not as perfection but as expression. Your quirks—the tilt of your letters, the press of your pen—are uniquely yours. A few mindful practices, such as learning cursive or basic calligraphy or spending a few minutes each day with practice sheets and pencil guidelines, can elevate your writing into something beautiful.

Step-By-Step Guide

1. **Set the Scene:** Build yourself a mini ritual for this process. Gather your tools, including your favorite pen, stationary and maybe a cup of tea. Warm up your hand by writing the recipient's name a few times or tracing a line of loops to loosen your wrist. Give yourself a set time of perhaps 20-30 minutes so you can be unhurried but focused.
2. **Choose Your Recipient:** This could be a loved one, a friend you've lost touch with, or even your future self. Consider whether there's an **occasion** calling for a handwritten note—birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, condolences, a recollection of a special event, or simply a letter to express love, friendship, and gratitude. **Name your intention.** Are you thanking, encouraging, apologizing, reminiscing, or re-connecting? One clear purpose makes the letter feel focused and sincere.
Match tone to relationship. Intimate, playful, reflective, formal—choose a voice that fits how you speak to this person in real life.
Choose a single theme. If you haven't written in a while, resist the urge to cram everything in. One story or feeling lands better than a catch-up novel.
If writing to your future self: pick an "open date," add three hopes, and include a gentle question you'll want to answer later.
Mindfulness cue: Before you begin, close your eyes and picture the recipient opening your envelope. What do you hope they feel in that moment?
3. **Begin with Presence:** Write the **date** at the top. Noting time gives the letter

a place in your shared story. You might also add the **location** or a tiny detail (“Snow falling outside the kitchen window”).

Easy openings (choose one):

I've been thinking about you ever since...

I wanted to put this in ink because...

Today reminded me of that time we...

I'm writing from [place], where...

Add a simple, sincere salutation that fits your relationship:

Dear Mia, / Hi Dad, / My friend, / To my future self.

4. Write Honestly. Share a story, express gratitude, or simply describe your day. Don't worry about perfection.

A simple structure that works:

Anchor: Why you're writing now (“*Your message last week meant a lot.*”).

Story or substance: A small scene, memory, or update with concrete detail (“*I walked past the café where we...*”).

Meaning: What it reminded you of, what you appreciate, what you hope (“*It made me grateful for the way you...*”).

Invitation: A question or gentle next step (“*Tell me what's blooming where you are.*”).

***Make it vivid:** favor specifics over generalities—sights, sounds, textures, smells. Instead of “*I miss summer,*” try “*I miss the citrus on your porch and the way the screen door sighed at dusk.*”

If you get stuck, write one sentence you know is true and let the next sentence answer it. And when you catch yourself editing mid-sentence, pause. Let the pen keep moving. Cross-outs are part of the charm. Here are some quick prompts to keep you going if you ever feel that you do get stuck:

I thought of you when...

The thing I never told you about that day is...

Three small joys from this week:

If this letter could carry a scent, it would be...

Something I'm learning (and how you're part of it):

A hope I'm holding for you:

5. Add a Personal Touch: A doodle, a pressed flower, or even just your unique handwriting makes the letter memorable. Here are some ideas to help you personalize your letter!
- A small sketch of something you mention (the mug you're using, the streetlight outside).
 - Pressed flower or leaf (fully dried; attach with a small washi tape hinge so it doesn't crumble).
 - A quote that fits the tone—credited in the margin.
 - A tiny playlist (three songs) or a short poem you love.
 - A photo tucked in (date it on the back).
 - Wax seal or stamp for a tactile finish.
 - A light scent: place the letter near your candle for a few minutes rather than spraying perfume (some recipients are scent-sensitive).
6. Close Intentionally: End with a word of affection, hope, or blessing. Try to echo your opening so the letter feels complete.

Closing moves that land:

Gratitude: *"Thank you for being the kind of person who..."*

Blessing: *"May this month bring you steadier mornings."*

Future thread: *"Next time we talk, remind me to tell you about..."*

Invitation: *"Write when you can; I'll keep a place for your reply on my desk."*

Sign-offs by tone:

Warm: *With love, Always, Yours,*

Friendly: *Warmly, Take good care, Until soon,*

Formal/gentle: *With gratitude, Respectfully,*

Playful: *From the desk with too many pens, Your co-conspirator in small joys,*

Add a **P.S.** if there's a delightful extra or a practical note; people love reading postscripts.

7. Send or Save: If mailing, address and stamp the envelope. If writing to yourself, tuck it away in a drawer to be opened later.

Mailing well: Make sure the address is legible and that you've written in dark ink. And don't forget to include a return address! Make sure you have the correct postage on the envelope. And if you've inclosed a photo or pressed flower, add a thin piece of card as a stiffener to protect it.

Ritualize the act of sending the letter. Make a point to walk it to a mailbox, notice the sky and the flowers and trees you pass by, and say a small wish for your letter's journey.

If saving for yourself: Seal and write "To be opened on [date]." Slip it into a book or box so you won't be tempted to open it early or open it by accident.

Mindfulness cue: As you seal the envelope, acknowledge the courage it takes to share yourself. As you drop it in the box, release expectations and keep the joy of having written.

A letter is more than paper and ink—it is presence, distilled. You may never know the exact impact of your words, but somewhere, in someone's hands, they will bring warmth, remembrance, and connection. In a digital world, your letter is a rare gift.

Journaling Questions & Reflection Prompts

- How did it feel to slow down and write by hand?
- Did your words surprise you once they were on paper?
- How do you think your recipient will feel holding this letter?
- If you wrote to yourself, what did you most need to hear?

March: Natural Dyeing

Transformation Through Color

March is a month of change. Winter lingers but spring pushes forward, sometimes boldly with crocuses and daffodils, sometimes subtly with longer days and softened light. It is a month that reminds us that transformation takes time, but it always comes.

Natural dyeing is a perfect practice for March. It's a craft born of patience, experimentation, and reverence for the ordinary. For centuries, people dyed cloth and thread using what was around them—plants, bark, roots, flowers, even insects. Color was coaxed from onion skins, turmeric, walnut hulls, and madder root. In many cultures, dyeing was a ritual tied to the seasons—harvests of berries and blossoms became pigments that clothed and decorated daily life.

To take something plain—like a piece of white cotton—and submerge it in a pot of golden turmeric or the dusky purples of black beans is to participate in a kind of everyday alchemy. The cloth emerges altered, radiant, and completely unique. It teaches us that transformation is often slow, often messy, but always worth it.

In our lives, too, March is a good month to reflect on change. What in you is ready for transformation? What might be “dyed through” with richer color if you give it time and patience? Natural dyeing is both a craft and a metaphor: the fibers we soak absorb more than just pigment—they absorb story, memory, and intention.



Sourcing Your Materials

- Natural fiber fabric or yarn (cotton, linen, hemp, silk, or wool). Stay away from any synthetic fabric
- Dye source (examples below)
- Large pot (not used for food) The bigger the better! Once you use this pot for dyeing, it's no longer safe for food, so maybe consider looking for one at a thrift store.
- Water
- White vinegar or alum (a common mordant to help color set)
- Tongs or a spoon for stirring
- Rubber gloves (optional, to protect your hands)
- Old towel or drying rack

Common Dye Sources:

Yellow/Gold: turmeric, onion skins, marigold petals

Pink/Red: avocado pits/skins, hibiscus, madder root

Blue/Purple: blueberries, red cabbage, black beans

Brown: walnut hulls, coffee, tea

Step-by-Step Guide

1. Choose Your Fabric and Prepare It

Pick something made of natural fiber—a cotton handkerchief, a linen napkin, a piece of silk, or even wool yarn. Synthetic fabrics won't absorb natural dye well. Wash it first to remove any finishes or oils, so the dye can penetrate evenly. You may even consider boiling the fabric. If choosing this option, bring the water to a simmer (not a full boil) and keep it there for at least 30-60 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Mindfulness cue: As you wash your fabric, think about what in your life could use a “rinsing out” to make room for something new.

2. Create a Mordant Bath

Mordants help color bond to the fiber, making it richer and longer-lasting. A simple mordant bath can be made with hot water and a splash of white vinegar for plant-based fibers. It should be noted that vinegar is not a true mordant though, and it will not work as well to keep your fabric from fading in the wash, but it does open up the fibers a bit and allows the dye to soak in more by removing natural oils. If choosing this method, combine 1 part white vinegar with 4 parts water.

You may also consider alum for a true mordant and especially for protein-based fibers like wool and silk. If choosing this method, a common range for alum is 10-20% of the fiber's weight. For example, if you have 100 grams of fabric, you'd use 10-20 grams of alum and combine with hot water.

Note: you can re-use an alum mordant bath. Just heat it up and add a little more alum.

Once you've created your mordant bath, submerge your fabric gently and completely in the mordant solution for at least an hour. Some might even recommend 12-24 hours, then rinse.

Reflection: Mordants are like commitments—they help colors hold fast. What helps you “hold fast” to changes you’re making in your life?

3. Prepare Your Dye Bath

Chop or tear your dye material into small pieces. Add it to a pot of water and bring it to a simmer. Let it cook for 30–60 minutes, until the water is richly colored. Stir every now and then, and be sure to not boil your dye source (plants, beans, flowers). Strain out the plant matter if desired.

Mindfulness cue: Notice the transformation of the water. Ordinary kitchen scraps become a pool of possibility!



4. Dye Your Fabric

Place your wet, mordanted fabric into the dye bath. Let it simmer gently, stirring occasionally for even color. The longer you leave it, the deeper the color will be. Check the shade every so often—it’s like watching change happen in real time.

Reflection: Transformation doesn't happen instantly. What in your life might deepen with time, patience, and presence?

5. Rinse and Dry

Remove your fabric with tongs and remove all excess moisture. Hang it to dry on an old towel or drying rack for a few days before you rinse or wash it.

To help set the dye, you can iron the fabric once it's dry or wash it separately in cold water for the first few washes. Your fabric will soften into its final shade with time.

Variations and Next Steps

If you feel inspired to go further, there are many directions you can take this practice:

Pattern Making – Experiment with folding, tying, or stitching your fabric before dyeing to create resist patterns similar to tie-dye or Japanese shibori.

Bundle Dyeing – Lay fresh or dried flowers directly on your fabric, then roll and steam it to transfer their pigments and create beautiful, organic prints.

Layering Colors – Dye your fabric in one bath, then overdye in another to create new, complex shades.

Different Fibers – Try dyeing wool, silk, or even paper, as each material takes up pigment in unique ways.

One of the quiet lessons of natural dyeing is that you can never fully predict the outcome. The fabric that seemed destined for a deep, earthy brown may emerge as a surprising shade of rose, or a soft yellow might appear richer than expected after drying. Rather than viewing this as a flaw, consider it a gift—an invitation to let go of control and welcome surprise. Just as nature resists being tamed, the colors she offers carry their own personality. Embracing these unexpected results can teach patience, openness, and even joy in imperfection. In time, you may find that your favorite pieces are not the ones that turned out “perfectly,” but the ones that surprised you most.

Natural dyeing teaches patience. You can't rush the simmering pot or the absorption of color—it takes the time it takes. It also teaches you resourcefulness. Onion skins, avocado pits, and black beans—things most of us throw away—become tools for beauty. And perhaps most importantly, natural dyeing teaches you to embrace imperfection.

No two dye baths are ever quite the same. Your fabric may emerge speckled, uneven, or surprisingly bold. That unpredictability is the heart of the craft.

Just remember that transformation is not tidy. Not in ourselves, and certainly not in this fabric dying process! It is vibrant, surprising, and never uniform.

Journaling Questions & Reflection Prompts

- What changes or transformations are stirring in your own life this month?
- How do you normally respond to slow processes—do you resist them, or lean in?
- When have you discovered unexpected beauty from something you once thought was waste?
- What “mordants” in your own life help you hold fast to growth or change? (e.g., supportive relationships, daily rituals, faith practices)
- If your life were a piece of fabric being dyed, what colors would it be absorbing right now?

April: Container Gardening

Growth in Small Places

Spring has a way of stirring something inside us—the urge to plant, to nurture, to see life unfold in green. The air softens, the soil warms, and nature shows off her flair for new beginnings. But what if you don't have a sprawling yard or raised beds to dig into? Container gardening reminds us that growth doesn't require vast spaces—sometimes the most vibrant blooms and nourishing harvests come from the smallest pots on a windowsill.

Humans have practiced container gardening for thousands of years. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, were essentially elaborate container gardens suspended in terraces. In ancient Egypt, potted plants decorated courtyards and temples, and in China, the art of bonsai reflected how growth could be shaped and sustained in miniature. Across time, cultures used vessels—whether clay, stone, or wood—to nurture plants close to home. Today, container gardening thrives as a modern solution for city balconies, patios, and even indoor spaces.

Caring for plants offers a profound sense of connection and calm. Studies show that tending to greenery reduces stress, lowers blood pressure, and boosts mood. Container gardening adds a unique layer of satisfaction: you don't need acres of land to nurture life. Watching a seedling break through soil or a tomato ripen on your balcony reinforces

the truth that growth is possible anywhere—physically and emotionally—even in small places. The tactile act of digging, planting, and watering anchors us in the present moment, reminding us of cycles larger than ourselves.

Container gardening is also incredibly adaptable, making it a perfect practice for beginners. It's forgiving, flexible, and endlessly rewarding. You don't need to know everything about soil acidity or watering schedules to get started. The key is choosing the right plant for your space, your lifestyle, and the time you're able to give. A single herb pot on a sunny kitchen counter can be just as rewarding as a balcony overflowing with tomatoes and strawberries. With containers, you control the soil type, the water, and even the mobility of your plants—moving them into the sun when needed or sheltering them during a storm. For renters, those with limited space, or anyone hesitant to take on a full garden, container growing offers flexibility and freedom without the overwhelm of large-scale gardening.

There's also a metaphor tucked into every pot. Plants teach us that thriving doesn't always mean spreading wide—it can also mean rooting deeply, even in small soil. A strawberry plant spilling fruit from a hanging basket, or basil thriving in a kitchen window, shows us how creativity and resilience flourish within limits. Container gardening is a daily reminder that new beginnings don't require perfect circumstances; they require only care, attention, and a willingness to grow where you are.

Part of the biggest reason I've come to love gardening in containers is because it reminds me that growth is possible even in limited spaces. No matter where you're at, what your circumstances may be, there's always room for growth.

Sourcing Your Materials

- Containers with drainage holes (pots, recycled cans, baskets, or even teacups)
- Potting mix (light and airy, not garden soil)
- Seeds or starter plants (herbs, vegetables, flowers—your choice)
- Small trowel or spoon
- Watering can or spray bottle

- Optional: gardening gloves (personally, I forego the gloves as I enjoy the feel of the soil between my fingers)
- Optional: compost, gravel for drainage, labels or popsicle sticks



Step-by-Step Guide

1. Scout Your Spot (light, wind, space)

Count hours of direct sun. Most veggies/fruit need 6–8 hours; greens/herbs often thrive with 4–6; many houseplants prefer bright indirect light.

Note wind & heat. Balconies can be gusty; south/west exposures get hottest. Choose sturdy pots and tuck them near walls/rails for shelter.

Mind the weight. Large containers get heavy—use lightweight plastic/resin and place big pots where they'll live before filling.

Quick rule:

6–8 hrs sun → tomatoes/peppers/strawberries/geraniums

4–6 hrs sun → herbs (mint, parsley), arugula, lettuces

Bright indirect/low sun → snake plant, ZZ plant, pothos (indoor)

2. Choose Plants That Match Your Conditions (and the season)

Cool-season (spring/fall): arugula, lettuces, peas, herbs like parsley/chives, pansies.

Warm-season (late spring/summer): basil, mint, peppers, tomatoes, strawberries, squash, geraniums.

Indoors, low care: snake plant, ZZ plant, succulents (bright spot).

Start with 2–3 plants you'll actually use (e.g., basil + mint + strawberries).

3. Pick the Right Container (size matters)

Drainage holes = non-negotiable. If your pot has none, drill a few ¼-inch holes.

Skip the gravel layer. It doesn't improve drainage; it can actually hinder it. Good holes + potting mix do the job.

Size guide:

Herbs/flowers: 6–10 in wide, 8–10 in deep

Strawberries/peppers: 10–12 in wide, 10–12 in deep (3–5 gal)

Bush squash/dwarf fruit: 12–18+ in wide (10–15+ gal)

Self-watering planters are great for beginners and hot balconies.

Place a saucer/tray under indoor pots to protect surfaces.

4. Use Potting Mix (not garden soil)

Fill with all-purpose potting mix; blend in a few handfuls of perlite/pumice for drainage and a cup or two of compost for nutrition (optional).

Pre-moisten: in a bucket, mix water into dry potting mix until it's like a wrung-out sponge. This prevents dry pockets.

5. Plant: Seeds vs. Starts

For starter plants (transplants):

Fill the pot to 1–2 in below the rim.

Gently loosen roots; set plant so the top of the root ball is level with the soil (tomatoes are a special case—you can bury the stem deeper).

Backfill, firm lightly (don't compact), and water thoroughly until some drains out.

For seeds:

Check packet for depth (many greens want just $\frac{1}{4}$ in).

Sow, cover lightly, mist, and keep evenly moist until sprouted.

Thin seedlings to spacing on the packet so they don't compete.

Label each pot (plant + date).

6. Position & Rotate

Move sun-lovers into the brightest spot; give shade-tolerant plants a gentler exposure.

Rotate pots $\frac{1}{4}$ turn every week so growth stays even.

Outdoors: protect tender plants from surprise frost and strong winds; hardening off (see Step 10) helps.



7. Water Well (but not constantly)

First watering should be slow and thorough until water runs from the holes.

Then follow the finger test: insert a finger 1–2 in into soil.

Dry? Water.

Cool/damp? Wait a day.

Aim for morning watering. In heat, expect more frequent watering (especially small pots).

Consider bottom watering (set pot in a tray of water for 15–30 minutes) to hydrate evenly without soggy tops.

Self-watering planters: keep the reservoir filled and the top soil lightly moist for seedlings.

8. Feed Lightly, Regularly

Mix a slow-release fertilizer into the top inch of soil at planting, *or* use a diluted liquid feed (every 2–4 weeks once plants are established).

Herbs/greens need modest feeding; fruiting crops (peppers, tomatoes, strawberries) appreciate steady, balanced nutrition.

Don't overdo it—too much nitrogen = lots of leaves, fewer fruits.

9. Support, Pinch, and Mulch

Add stakes/cages at planting for peppers/tomatoes to avoid root disturbance later.

Pinch basil tops to keep it bushy; deadhead geraniums to keep blooms coming.

Add a thin mulch layer (fine bark, straw, or pebbles) to reduce splash, slow evaporation, and keep soil cooler.

10. Ongoing Care (your weekly rhythm)

Mon/Wed/Fri: quick check—finger test, wilted leaves, pests.

Weekly: rotate pots, remove yellowing leaves/old blooms, top up mulch, check stakes.

Monthly: refresh slow-release fertilizer or give a liquid feed; wipe dusty indoor leaves with a damp cloth.

11. Harvest & Enjoy

Cut-and-come-again: harvest outer leaves of arugula/lettuce; the center keeps producing.

Pick strawberries when fully colored; harvest peppers when firm and glossy.

Frequent picking encourages more growth (especially herbs and beans/peas if you add them later).

12. Refresh, Repot, or Overwinter

Mid-season, if growth slows, scratch in compost or repot up one size.

End of season: pull annuals and reuse mix thoughtfully—discard roots, recharge with 30–50% fresh potting mix + compost, or use old mix for non-edible ornamentals.

Bring tender perennials/houseplants indoors before cold snaps.

And yes, I know that this can be a lot to keep track of as a beginner. So here's a little guide to help you get started with some of my favorite plants!

Plant	Care Level	Watering Needs	Light Needs	Container Size	Best Placement	Notes
Succulents (aloe, jade)	Very Easy	Every 2-3 weeks	Bright, direct	Small (4-6 in)	Sunny windowsill, bright balcony	Great for forgetful waterers!
Snake Plant	Very Easy	Every 2-3 weeks	Low to bright, indirect	Medium (6-8 in)	Indoors, low light corners	Very forgiving; avoid overwatering
ZZ Plant	Very Easy	Every 2-3 weeks	Low to medium, indirect	Medium (6-8 in)	Indoors, desks/shelves	Handles neglect well
Basil or Mint	Moderate	Keep evenly moist (2-3x/week)	Basil: 6+ hours Mint: 4-6 hours	Small-Medium (6-10 in)	Kitchen window, balcony	Harvest often
Geraniums	Moderate	1-2x/week	Full Sun	Medium (10-12 in)	Balcony or sunny patio	Deadhead spent blooms for more flowers
Fruit Trees (dwarf)	Challenging	Weekly, deep watering	Full sun	Large (15-25 gallon)	Sunny patio/yard (outdoors)	Choose dwarf varieties; may need pollinator
Arugula	Easy	Keep soil consistently moist	Partial to full sun	Shallow/wide (6-8 in)	Window box, balcony	Cool-season; may bolt in heat
Strawberries	Easy/Moderate	2-5x/week	Full sun	Medium (10-12 in)	Balcony/patio, hanging baskets	Everbearing types fruit longer season
Peppers	Moderate	1-2x/week	Full sun	Medium-Large (3-5 gallon)	Warm balcony/patio	Likes heat; stake taller varieties
Squash	Moderate	1-2x/week; more when fruiting	Full sun	Large (10-15 gallon)	Patio/yard with space	Choose compact/bush types; heavy feeder

Quick Troubleshooting

Droopy leaves + wet soil: overwatered. Let dry; improve drainage/aeration.

Droopy leaves + dry soil: underwatered. Water deeply; consider a larger pot or mulch.

Pale leaves, slow growth: needs feeding or more light.

Brown/crispy edges: low humidity, salt buildup, or too much sun—flush pot with water and adjust position.

Aphids/spider mites: spray leaves (top & underside) with a strong stream of water; follow with a mild soapy water spray; repeat weekly until gone.

Variations and Ideas

Herb Garden: Basil, mint, parsley, and thyme thrive in small containers and bring joy to your cooking.

Flower Power: Petunias, pansies, or marigolds brighten a balcony or kitchen window.

Edible Treats: Tomatoes, strawberries, or peppers adapt well to pots.

Upcycled Containers: Try tin cans, mason jars, or wooden crates for a rustic touch.

Mini Zen Garden: Combine succulents with sand and pebbles for low-maintenance greenery.

As you press seeds into soil, notice the cool texture between your fingers. Feel the weight of the container in your hands. Breathe in the earthy scent of fresh soil—it's the smell of life waiting to begin. Each time you water, pause and reflect: *What in my own life am I nurturing right now? Where do I see growth, even in small or hidden ways?*

Container gardening reminds us that space doesn't limit possibility. Growth often begins in the humblest of vessels—with patience, attention, and care, something small becomes something sustaining. In May, as the world around you flourishes, may your little containers remind you of your own capacity to grow wherever you are planted.

Journaling Questions and Reflection Prompts

- What did I choose to grow, and why?
- How does tending a plant mirror tending to myself or my relationships?
- Where in my life do I feel “cramped,” and how can I invite growth anyway?
- What small, steady routines bring me joy and renewal?

May: Bath Bombs

Restoration and Nurturing

By now, I hope your container gardens are flourishing and you're watching for the first signs of life! Just as a garden needs nurturing, so do we. Growth isn't only about what happens in the earth—it's also about what happens within us. That's why May's theme is restoration and nurturing, and our handmade project reflects exactly that: bath bombs. After all the work April's showers brought us tending our flowers, May is our moment to pause and draw a restorative bath.

A bath bomb is more than a fizzy novelty—it's an invitation to pause, to soak, and to remind your body that playfulness belongs just as much to adults as it does to children. Watching one bubble and release its colors feels like a miniature firework show underwater—an everyday celebration just for you.

Bathing rituals have been part of human culture for centuries. The ancient Romans built elaborate bathhouses not only to cleanse the body but to nourish community and spirit. Japanese onsen and Turkish hammams, too, were designed as spaces of both healing and reflection. The modern bath bomb, however, has a much more recent origin: invented in 1989 by Mo Constantine, co-founder of Lush Cosmetics, who was inspired by the fizz of Alka-Seltzer tablets. Her idea transformed bathing into a multisensory experience of color, fragrance, and gentle effervescence—an accessible form of everyday luxury.

But bath bombs are more than indulgence. They're a meeting of science and self-care: a simple acid-base reaction (citric acid meeting baking soda) that becomes a little celebra-

tion in your tub. And on a deeper level, they remind us of the value of ritual. To draw a warm bath, light a candle, and drop in something you've made by hand is to reclaim a few sacred minutes of your day. It's a pause from rushing. It's giving yourself permission to restore.

Bathing itself has been shown to reduce stress, ease muscle tension, and improve circulation. Adding essential oils, salts, and botanicals can enhance relaxation, lift your mood, or even help with sleep. The act of making bath bombs compounds this therapy—kneading the mixture, choosing scents and colors, and watching your creation fizz to life later—each step brings tactile joy, mindfulness, and a sense of accomplishment.

Sourcing Your Materials

- 1 cup baking soda
- ½ cup citric acid
- ½ cup cornstarch
- ½ cup Epsom salt
- 2 ½ tbsp coconut oil (or another carrier oil)
- ¾ tbsp water or witch hazel in a spray bottle
- 10–15 drops essential oil of your choice (lavender, citrus, peppermint, etc.)
- A few drops of natural food coloring or mica powder (optional)
- Bath bomb molds or silicone molds



Step-By-Step Guide

1. In a large bowl, whisk together the dry ingredients: baking soda, citric acid, cornstarch, and Epsom salt.
2. In a small bowl, mix the coconut oil, essential oils, and coloring.
3. Slowly drizzle the wet mixture into the dry ingredients, whisking continuously to avoid fizzing too soon. The mixture should feel like damp sand—hold its shape when squeezed but not too wet.
4. If needed, spritz lightly with water or witch hazel until it holds together.
5. Pack the mixture tightly into molds, pressing firmly.
6. Let the bath bombs dry at least 24 hours before unmolding.

Tip: If your mixture starts fizzing while you're mixing, it's too wet—work more slowly and add liquid sparingly.

As you pack the mixture into molds, press with intention. Imagine you're sealing care and rest into each shape. Notice the scent rising from the oils and the grainy texture shifting in your hands. When you drop a finished bomb into water later, watch it fizz and let go—remind yourself that you, too, can dissolve tension and release what you've been holding.



Variations & Exploration

- Try adding dried flower petals, like lavender buds or rose petals, for a botanical touch.
- Experiment with different essential oil blends: lavender and chamomile for calming, citrus and peppermint for uplifting.
- Use different molds for fun shapes—hearts, stars, or even seasonal designs.

- For more advanced exploration, research techniques like creating layered colors or embedding a hidden surprise (a small charm or a flower) inside

Journaling Questions & Reflection Prompts

- When was the last time you truly allowed yourself to play without purpose? What did it feel like?
- How do you currently make space for rest, and what might shift if you treated it as a sacred, creative act?
- If you were to gift one of these bath bombs, who would you choose and why?
- As your bath bomb dissolves, imagine it carrying away one small worry. What would you release?

June: Bread Making

Nourishment for the Soul

June sits at the threshold of summer. The days lengthen, evenings stretch warm and golden, and life seems to hum with energy. It's a month that invites gatherings—picnics, backyard dinners, family tables filled with the easy generosity of the season. And nothing belongs at a table more than bread.

Breadmaking is one of the oldest human crafts, a skill that reaches back thousands of years to when early people first mixed ground grain with water and left it by the fire, only to discover it rose into something nourishing and new. Across centuries and continents, bread has been at the heart of culture and community: Egyptian flatbreads, French baguettes, Indian naan, Middle Eastern pita. It has carried people through feast and famine alike, a humble yet profound reminder of sustenance.

For me, the act of breadmaking is as meaningful as the loaf itself. There's something grounding about plunging your hands into a bowl of dough, feeling the transformation of simple flour and water into something alive. Kneading, stretching, folding—the process demands patience and presence. The dough resists at first, then yields, softening under your palms, springing back as if to say, "I'm becoming." Watching it rise, doubling in size beneath a clean cloth, feels like a quiet miracle every time.

June is the perfect month for breadmaking because it mirrors what the season itself is doing—rising, expanding, ripening. Just as gardens are pushing toward their fullest growth, so too does dough swell and rise, full of potential. Breadmaking becomes both

nourishment and metaphor: a reminder that we, too, need time, warmth, and care to grow into fullness.

The therapeutic benefits are as real as the nourishment. Studies have shown that kneading dough can reduce stress, acting almost like a moving meditation. The repetitive rhythm soothes the nervous system, while the yeasty smell of rising dough fills the home with comfort. Breadmaking encourages slowness in a culture that rushes: you cannot force yeast to hurry. You must wait, watch, trust. And in that waiting, something restorative happens—not just in the dough, but in us.

At its heart, breadmaking is an act of generosity. When you break bread, you rarely do so alone. It invites you to the table, to share, to nourish others as well as yourself. And in June, when days brim with light and life feels abundant, baking bread feels like an offering—to the season, to your family, to your own soul.



Understanding the Ingredients: Flour, Water, Yeast, and Salt

Bread is one of the oldest and simplest foods we know. At its core, it requires four elements—flour, water, yeast, and salt. Each plays a unique role in the science and artistry

of breadmaking, and understanding them deepens both your results and your connection to the craft.

Flour: The Structure

Flour provides the backbone of bread. Its proteins (mainly glutenin and gliadin) combine with water to form gluten, the elastic network that traps air bubbles during fermentation and gives bread its chew and rise.

Types of Flour:

- *All-Purpose*: Readily available, moderate protein (around 10–12%). Good for beginner loaves.
- *Bread Flour*: Higher protein content (12–14%), yielding stronger gluten and chewier texture. Ideal for rustic boules, sandwich bread, and bagels.
- *Whole Wheat*: Contains bran and germ along with the endosperm, giving more nutrients and flavor but also denser results. Often blended with white flour for balance.
- *Ancient Grains*: Rye, spelt, einkorn, or emmer lend unique flavors and textures. Rye, in particular, has less gluten, producing denser, earthier loaves.

Sourcing Tip: Whenever possible, look for unbleached, stone-ground, or freshly milled flours. Local mills or small-batch producers often offer flours with more depth of flavor and nutrition than mass-market brands. Store flour in airtight containers away from heat and light to preserve freshness.

Water: The Catalyst

Water may seem simple, but its role is profound. It hydrates the flour, allowing gluten to form, and dissolves sugars and starches that yeast feed on. It also regulates dough temperature, which directly affects fermentation.

Hard vs. Soft Water: Water with higher mineral content (hard water) can strengthen gluten, while very soft water can weaken it. Most home bakers will never need to fuss over this, but if your tap water has strong chlorine, it's best to use filtered water.

Temperature Matters: Cold water slows yeast activity, while warm water accelerates it. Many bakers aim for “lukewarm” (around 75–85°F / 24–29°C) to strike a balance.

Yeast: The Life Force

Yeast is the living engine of bread. These tiny fungi consume sugars in the flour and release carbon dioxide and ethanol. The gas creates bubbles that get trapped in gluten, while the ethanol contributes to flavor.

Commercial Yeast:

- *Active Dry:* Needs to be dissolved in warm water before use.
- *Instant:* Can be mixed directly into flour.

Wild Yeast (*Sourdough Starter*): Captures naturally occurring yeast and bacteria from the environment. Requires more care but rewards with deep flavor and complexity.

Sourcing Tip: Commercial yeast is inexpensive and widely available, but keep it stored in the freezer for longevity. If exploring sourdough, you can cultivate your own starter or source a bit of someone else's to begin your journey.

Salt: The Flavor and Balance

Salt does more than season—it strengthens gluten, regulates yeast activity, and enhances the overall structure of the bread. Too little, and your dough may ferment too quickly or taste flat; too much, and yeast may struggle to rise.

Types of Salt:

Kosher Salt: Flaky and easy to pinch, dissolves quickly, popular in breadmaking.

Sea Salt: Offers subtle mineral notes; can be fine or coarse.

Table Salt: Works fine, but measure carefully as grains are denser than kosher or sea salt.

Sourcing Tip: Choose unrefined salts when possible—they provide richer flavor and trace minerals. Store in a dry container to prevent clumping.

No-Knead Bread: Simplifying the Process

Breadmaking can feel intimidating for beginners. The thought of kneading dough, timing rises, and shaping loaves can make even the most enthusiastic beginner hesitate. Enter **no-knead bread**—a simplified approach that delivers delicious, rustic loaves without the effort of traditional kneading.

Benefits of the No-Knead Method:

Ease for Beginners: No advanced technique or special tools are required. This method is forgiving, letting you focus on the joy of creating rather than mastering a skill.

Hands-Off Fermentation: The dough rises slowly over several hours, giving time for flavor to develop without constant supervision.

Rustic Results: You get a crusty, chewy loaf with an open crumb—qualities often associated with artisan bread—without professional experience.

Mindfulness and Relaxation: Because the method is simple, it allows you to enjoy the sensory aspects of breadmaking—measuring, stirring, and smelling—without stress.

How the No-Knead Method Works

No-knead bread relies on **long, slow fermentation** rather than vigorous kneading to develop gluten and flavor. A high hydration dough (more water relative to flour) allows gluten to form naturally over time, and the extended fermentation enhances taste, texture, and aroma.

Tips for Success

Use a heavy-duty bowl or container: A glass or ceramic bowl works best for slow fermentation.

Cover your dough: Prevent drying out with plastic wrap, a lid, or a damp cloth.

Be patient: The dough will rise slowly—typically 12–18 hours. This long wait is what develops flavor.

Use a Dutch oven or heavy pot: This creates steam during baking, giving a crisp, professional-looking crust.

Adjust hydration if needed: Some flours absorb more water than others. Dough should be sticky but manageable.

Ingredients

- 3 cups (360 g) all-purpose or bread flour
- 1/4 teaspoon instant yeast
- 1 1/4 teaspoons salt
- 1 1/2 cups (360 ml) water, lukewarm
- Optional: herbs, spices, or seeds for flavor

Step-by-Step Guide: No-Knead Bread

1. **Mix Ingredients:** In a large bowl, combine flour, yeast, and salt. Add water and stir until a sticky, shaggy dough forms. No kneading required!
2. **Cover and Rest:** Cover the bowl with plastic wrap or a clean kitchen towel. Let the dough sit at room temperature for 12–18 hours, until it has doubled in size and is bubbly.
3. **Preheat Your Oven:** Place a Dutch oven (with lid) in your oven and preheat to 450°F (230°C). This ensures the pot is hot for a perfect crust.
4. **Shape the Dough:** Lightly flour your hands and a surface. Turn the dough out and gently fold it over itself a few times to form a loose ball.
5. **Second Rise (Optional):** Let the shaped dough rest for 30 minutes while the oven heats. This gives it a slight puff before baking.
6. **Bake:** Carefully remove the hot Dutch oven from the oven. Place the dough inside, cover with the lid, and bake for 30 minutes. Remove the lid and bake an additional 15–20 minutes until the crust is golden brown.
7. **Cool:** Remove the loaf from the pot and place on a cooling rack for at least 30 minutes before slicing. This allows the crumb to set and flavors to deepen.

This approach makes breadmaking approachable, even for beginners, while still yielding the deep flavor, chewy texture, and crusty exterior of artisan bread. The tactile, patient process also encourages mindfulness—allowing you to slow down and nurture yourself, just as we nurtured our gardens in April.

Sourdough Bread: Tradition, Patience, and Flavor

Sourdough is more than bread—it's living history. While no-knead bread offers a simple and accessible introduction, sourdough connects us to thousands of years of human culinary tradition. This month's focus on nurturing ourselves through bread can take a deeper turn with sourdough: a slow, mindful process that rewards patience with complex flavor and texture.

The History of Sourdough

Sourdough is one of the oldest forms of leavened bread. Evidence suggests ancient Egyptians were cultivating wild yeast as early as 1500 BCE. Long before commercial yeast existed, humans relied on naturally occurring wild yeasts and lactic acid bacteria to make dough rise. Cultures across the globe developed unique sourdough traditions—San Francisco's famed tangy loaves, Russian rye breads, and French pain au levain, to name a few. Sourdough isn't just bread; it's a living connection to centuries of culinary heritage.

The Therapeutic Benefits

Sourdough is a lesson in patience. The slow fermentation process—sometimes 12–24 hours—requires observation and care, giving bakers time to pause and be present. Kneading and shaping the dough becomes a meditative act. Watching a starter bubble and come alive is both tactile and rewarding. Beyond mindfulness, sourdough's long fermentation improves digestibility and enhances flavor, making each slice a sensory delight.

How Sourdough Works

Sourdough uses **wild yeast and lactic acid bacteria** instead of commercial yeast. The starter is a living culture of flour and water that captures naturally occurring microbes from the environment. These microorganisms produce carbon dioxide, which leavens the dough, and acids, which contribute the characteristic tangy flavor. The process is slower than conventional breadmaking but requires less active work and more attentive observation.

Tips for Beginners

Patience is Key: Unlike quick breads, sourdough takes time. Watch your dough rather than rushing it.

Feed Your Starter: Keep your starter active with regular “feedings” of flour and water. A healthy starter is bubbly, aromatic, and slightly tangy.

Environment Matters: Sourdough thrives in warm, draft-free spaces. Adjust fermentation times based on temperature.

Hands-On Observation: Check the dough’s elasticity, bubbles, and aroma to know when it’s ready to bake rather than relying strictly on the clock.

Embrace Imperfection: Every loaf is unique. Cracks, bubbles, and rustic shapes are signs of character, not failure.



Ingredients for a Basic Sourdough Loaf

- 1 cup (240 g) active sourdough starter
- 3 cups (360 g) all-purpose or bread flour
- 1 1/4 teaspoons salt
- 1 cup (240 ml) water, lukewarm
- Optional: seeds, herbs, or whole grains for added flavor

Step-by-Step Guide: Sourdough Bread

1. **Feed Your Starter:** Make sure your starter is active and bubbly before beginning.
2. **Mix the Dough:** In a large bowl, combine the starter, flour, and water until a sticky dough forms. Let it rest for 30 minutes to 1 hour (autolyse stage).
3. **Add Salt:** Incorporate salt and gently fold the dough to distribute evenly.
4. **Bulk Fermentation:** Cover the bowl and let the dough ferment for 8–12 hours at room temperature, folding gently every 2–3 hours to strengthen gluten.
5. **Shape the Dough:** Lightly flour your work surface. Turn out the dough and form a round or oval loaf. Place it in a floured proofing basket or bowl.
6. **Final Proof:** Let the shaped dough rise for 1–3 hours, or refrigerate overnight for more flavor development.
7. **Preheat Oven:** Preheat a Dutch oven or heavy pot to 450°F (230°C).
8. **Score the Loaf:** Make shallow cuts on the dough's surface to allow controlled expansion during baking.

9. **Bake:** Carefully place the dough in the hot Dutch oven. Cover and bake for 30 minutes. Remove the lid and bake an additional 15–20 minutes until golden brown.

10. **Cool:** Let the loaf cool for at least 1 hour before slicing to allow the crumb to set and flavor to develop.

Sourdough is a practice in mindfulness, patience, and celebration of imperfection. Each loaf carries a story—the bubbles, cracks, and tangy aroma reflect your care and attention. In June, as life blooms and expands around us, tending to a sourdough starter reminds us that slow, consistent nurturing yields both beauty and sustenance.

Bread is more than nourishment—it's a thread that weaves through human history and culture. Across centuries and continents, communities have broken bread together to celebrate, mourn, and mark life's milestones. In Italy, a fresh loaf at the family table signals togetherness; in France, the daily baguette carries centuries of ritual; in many Middle Eastern and African cultures, bread is an offering of hospitality and respect. To bake bread is to touch a living tradition, to connect with countless hands that have worked, kneaded, and risen dough before you.

Sharing bread amplifies its meaning. When you offer a slice to a friend, neighbor, or family member, you extend not just sustenance, but care, presence, and connection. A loaf of bread carries the time, effort, and mindfulness you've invested—it's a tangible gift of love. Even small gestures, like bringing a warm roll to a colleague or sending a loaf to a friend far away, create ripples of generosity.

As you continue your breadmaking journey, remember: each loaf is a story. Celebrate its imperfections, honor the labor it took to create, and share it freely. In doing so, you participate in a timeless human practice, one that nourishes not only the body but the heart and community.

So, pause with your dough, savor the process, and then, when your loaf emerges golden and aromatic, share it. Let it carry your care, your patience, and your presence into the lives of others. In nurturing bread, you've nurtured yourself—and now you have the power to nurture the world around you.

Journaling Questions & Reflection Prompts

- How does watching dough rise remind you of the growth in your life or surroundings this month?
- What parallels do you see between nurturing a loaf and nurturing yourself or others?
- How does slowing down in the kitchen compare to your usual pace of life?
- If you were to experiment next time, what would you try—herbs, seeds, whole grains, or a different flour?
- How does it feel to eat something you created entirely by hand?
- How can the ritual of breadmaking teach you to nourish yourself beyond food?

July: Homemade Ice Cream

A Sweet Summer Indulgence

Summer is a season that invites abundance—longer days, warmer evenings, and the vibrancy of fresh fruit, flowers, and sunlight. July, in particular, carries a unique energy: a call to pause in the midst of activity, to savor moments of play, and to reconnect with simple pleasures. Making ice cream and frozen treats by hand embodies this spirit. Just as we tended to our gardens in April and nurtured our bodies with bath rituals in May, July asks us to nurture joy, curiosity, and creativity. The process of transforming simple ingredients—milk, cream, sugar, and fruit—into a creamy, cold delight is a tactile, sensory-rich craft that rewards patience and presence.

I remember my first homemade ice cream vividly. Standing over a hand-crank churn on a sunny afternoon, I was struck by the magic of transformation: liquid turning into thick, luscious cream under my hands. The aroma of vanilla, the sound of the churn, and the cool texture against my fingertips made the act of creating something from scratch feel meditative and restorative. Eating that first spoonful, I realized that homemade ice cream wasn't just a treat—it was an experience, a practice in slowing down and savoring life.

Frozen desserts have a long, fascinating history. Ancient civilizations, from Persia to China, mixed snow or crushed ice with fruit juices and honey to create early sorbets. In Italy, gelato evolved during the Renaissance, while in France, iced creams became a

delicacy for the elite. By the 19th century, the invention of hand-cranked ice cream makers brought this art into homes, making frozen treats accessible to everyday people. Today, crafting ice cream by hand allows us to connect to this centuries-old tradition, while also giving us the freedom to explore flavors, textures, and colors in ways that reflect our individual tastes and creativity.

The therapeutic benefits of making ice cream extend far beyond the palate. The act engages our senses, encourages focus, and requires a rhythm that can quiet a busy mind. Measuring, whisking, folding, and churning become meditative movements, while the anticipation of waiting for the mixture to transform into ice cream cultivates patience. Choosing flavors, colors, or mix-ins becomes an exercise in creativity and self-expression. When the finished treat is shared with friends, family, or even savored alone, it becomes a ritual of joy, connection, and mindful indulgence—a small, handmade celebration of the season.

Understanding Ingredients

Making ice cream is as much about understanding the ingredients as it is about enjoying the process. Each component contributes to texture, flavor, and the sensory experience of crafting something by hand.

Cream and Milk – The foundation of richness. Heavy cream provides smoothness and body, while whole milk balances fat content for a creamy texture. For a lighter or plant-based option, try coconut, oat, or almond milk.

Sugar – Sweetness enhances flavor and improves texture, keeping ice cream soft and scoopable. You can experiment with white sugar, brown sugar, honey, or alternative sweeteners.

Egg Yolks (optional, for custard-style ice cream) – Yolks add richness, stability, and a luxurious mouthfeel. For a simpler “Philadelphia-style” ice cream, you can omit them.

Flavorings and Mix-ins – Vanilla, chocolate, fruit purées, herbs, nuts, and swirls of jam or caramel let you personalize your creation. Choosing ingredients you love makes the process joyful and expressive.

Ice and Salt (if using a traditional hand-crank method) – Lower the freezing point and create a smooth, firm texture during churning.

Step-by-Step Guide: Basic Hand-Crank Ice Cream

Ingredients (for Vanilla Custard-Style Ice Cream):

- 2 cups heavy cream
- 1 cup whole milk
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
- 4 large egg yolks
- Optional Mix-ins: Fresh fruit, chocolate chips, nuts, or caramel swirls

Instructions

1. In a medium saucepan, heat cream, milk, and half the sugar until warm (do not boil).
2. In a separate bowl, whisk the egg yolks with the remaining sugar.
3. Temper the yolks by slowly adding a small amount of the warm cream mixture while whisking constantly.
4. Return the mixture to the saucepan and cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until it thickens slightly and coats the back of a spoon.
5. Remove from heat and stir in vanilla extract.
6. Let the custard cool at room temperature for 15–20 minutes.
7. Chill in the refrigerator for at least 2 hours (or overnight) to allow flavors to meld.
8. For a hand-crank or electric ice cream maker, follow the manufacturer’s instruc-

tions.

9. If using a traditional hand-crank, fill the outer container with ice and salt.
10. Pour the chilled custard into the ice cream maker.
11. Churn according to the manufacturer's instructions until thickened and creamy.
12. Add mix-ins (chocolate, fruit, or nuts) during the last few minutes of churning.
13. Transfer the ice cream to an airtight container and freeze for 2–4 hours for firmer texture.
14. Scoop into bowls, cones, or cups. Pause, take a breath, and notice the texture, aroma, and flavors.



Ice cream is more than just a treat—it's a celebration of patience, creativity, and sensory delight. From the first whisk of sugar and cream to the final scoop in a bowl, each step invites presence and mindfulness. In crafting frozen desserts by hand, we slow down, engage our senses, and give ourselves permission to savor life's simple pleasures.

Historically, ice cream and sorbets have been shared across cultures as gestures of hospitality, celebration, and connection. By making your own, you participate in this centuries-long tradition while adding your personal touch—your choice of flavors, colors, and textures. Sharing your ice cream amplifies its meaning: giving a scoop to a friend, neighbor, or family member is an act of care, connection, and generosity. Even enjoying a bowl alone can be a ritual of self-nurturing and celebration.

The joy of handmade ice cream is not just in the final product—it's in the tactile rhythm of measuring, stirring, and churning, and in the anticipation of tasting something you've created with your own hands. Every batch carries a story: your choices, your care, your presence.

Journaling Questions & Reflection Prompts

- What did you notice about textures, aromas, and sounds while creating your ice cream?
- Did you find yourself fully absorbed in the process? Where did your mind wander, and where did it settle?
- Which flavors, colors, or mix-ins did you choose? Why? How might you experiment with new ingredients or combinations next time?
- How did waiting for the ice cream to set feel? Did it change your sense of time or presence?
- Can you identify other areas in your life where patience can be a form of self-care?
- Did you share your ice cream with someone? How did it feel to give a handmade treat?

- If you kept it for yourself, how did savoring it alone affect your experience?
- What did this process teach you about valuing small, hands-on creations?
- How can you carry this sense of celebration and mindfulness into other aspects of your life?

Optional Exercise:

- Keep an “Ice Cream Journal” for the summer: note flavors, mix-ins, textures, and reflections on how making and eating them made you feel.
- Consider hosting a small “ice cream tasting” with friends or family, experimenting with flavor combinations, and noting the reactions and joy it brings.

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August: Handmade Jewelry

Crafting Beauty and Mindful Expression

August is a month of vibrancy—the sun lingers in the sky, gardens are at their fullest, and the warmth invites creativity and self-expression. Summer encourages us to embrace color, movement, and play, making it the perfect season to turn our hands to jewelry making. Crafting jewelry is more than producing adornments; it's a tactile, creative practice that allows us to express individuality, patience, and attention to detail.

I remember the first time I sat at a small worktable with beads, wire, and clasps spread before me. The act of threading tiny beads, twisting wire, and assembling a finished piece demanded focus and presence. Each moment was meditative—the gentle resistance of wire between my fingers, the rhythm of picking and placing beads, and the quiet satisfaction of seeing a design take shape. By the time I clasped that first necklace around my neck, it was more than decoration: it was proof of creativity, care, and time devoted to making something by hand.

The history of jewelry making stretches back thousands of years. Ancient civilizations adorned themselves with natural materials—shells, bones, stones, and metals—to signify status, identity, and personal meaning. Egyptians used gold and gemstones not only for beauty but also for protection and spiritual symbolism. In cultures worldwide, jewelry

has been a form of storytelling, a way to preserve memory, mark important life events, or convey connection to community and ancestry. Modern handmade jewelry continues this tradition, allowing the maker to imbue each piece with intention, personality, and love.

The therapeutic benefits of jewelry making are subtle but profound. Just as with so many of the crafts we've created so far this year, working with your hands in a focused, detailed way encourages mindfulness and calm. The repetition of stringing beads or shaping wire has a meditative rhythm, allowing mental clutter to fall away.

Creative problem-solving, color selection, and design planning engage the mind, while the tangible results provide a satisfying sense of accomplishment. Whether making a gift for a loved one or a piece to wear yourself, jewelry making nurtures patience, self-expression, and joy.

Understanding Materials and Tools

Before you begin creating jewelry, it helps to become familiar with the materials and tools that will allow your designs to take shape. Understanding their qualities and possibilities not only makes the craft more approachable but also deepens your appreciation for the process.

Beads

Types: Glass, wooden, ceramic, metal, resin, gemstone, and seed beads.

Considerations: Size, shape, color, and texture affect the overall design and ease of handling. Larger beads are easier for beginners, while smaller beads can create intricate, delicate patterns.

Wire

Types: Craft wire, sterling silver, gold-filled, copper, and aluminum.

Gauges: Lower gauge numbers indicate thicker, sturdier wire (better for structural elements), while higher gauge numbers are thinner and more flexible (ideal for wrapping, coiling, and threading beads).

Tips: Choose a wire that complements your beads in both color and strength. Soft wire is easier to bend and manipulate, while harder wire holds shape better.

Stringing Materials

Types: Options include nylon thread, elastic cord, silk cord, and fishing line. Each offers different flexibility, durability, and feel. Elastic is great for bracelets, while silk and nylon are ideal for necklaces and more refined designs.

Findings and Fasteners

Clasps: Lobster, toggle, magnetic, or spring-ring clasps allow pieces to be secured and removed easily.

Jump Rings: Small rings that connect beads, charms, and clasps.

Crimps: Small metal tubes that secure wire or cord ends.

Decorative Additions

Charms, pendants, tassels, or pendants can personalize your design and add movement or symbolism.

Essential Tools

Pliers

- Round-nose pliers: For creating loops, curves, and decorative bends.
- Flat-nose pliers: For gripping, straightening, and holding wire.
- Chain-nose pliers: For opening and closing jump rings and precise adjustments.

Wire Cutters: Cleanly trim wire, cords, or beading thread. Quality cutters prevent fraying or crushing delicate wire.

Beading Needles: Thin, flexible needles allow threading of small beads, especially seed beads.

Measuring Tools: Rulers or tape measures ensure consistent lengths for necklaces, bracelets, or earrings.

Organizational Tools: Bead trays, small containers, or boxes keep beads and findings sorted, making the process less stressful and more enjoyable.

Tips for Sourcing Quality Materials

Local Craft Stores: Great for beginners to see and handle materials.

Online Suppliers: Wider selection of specialty beads, gemstones, and metals.

Repurposing Materials: Old jewelry, buttons, or charms can be incorporated into new creations.

Quality Over Quantity: Invest in a few high-quality beads or wire to elevate the final product and make handling easier.

Beginner Project: Simple Beaded Bracelet

This project introduces basic techniques like stringing beads, adding a clasp, and creating a balanced design. It's a perfect starting point for beginners to practice focus, creativity, and patience.



Materials Needed:

- Assorted beads (6–10mm beads recommended for beginners)
- Elastic cord or nylon thread
- Jump rings
- Lobster clasp or toggle clasp (optional for thread-based bracelets)
- Scissors
- Bead tray or small containers for organization

Step-by-Step Guide

1. Choose Your Beads and Design

- Lay out your beads in the order you want them to appear.
- Experiment with color, size, and texture for a visually pleasing pattern.
- Optional: add a focal bead or charm for emphasis.

2. Measure and Cut Your Cord

- For elastic: leave 2–3 inches extra to allow for tying knots.
- For thread: leave extra for knots and attaching a clasp.

3. String the Beads

- Thread beads onto the cord according to your layout.
- Pause to observe balance, color flow, and spacing.

4. Secure the Ends

- Elastic: tie a double knot and add a dab of jewelry glue for security. Trim excess.
- Thread: attach a clasp using jump rings and crimps. Ensure connections are tight.

5. Adjust and Finish

- Test the bracelet for fit and comfort.
- Make any final adjustments to bead placement or clasp security.

6. Wear or Gift

- Admire your creation or share it with someone special. Notice the joy in giving or wearing something you made by hand.



Jewelry has always been more than mere decoration. Across cultures and centuries, it has conveyed meaning, celebrated milestones, and expressed individuality. From the ornate gold and gemstone adornments of ancient Egypt to the delicate hand-beaded pieces of Native American traditions, jewelry has been a medium for storytelling, identity, and connection. When we make jewelry by hand today, we participate in this rich legacy while adding our personal touch, intention, and creativity to each piece.

Creating jewelry encourages mindfulness. The tactile movements—threading beads, twisting wire, and securing clasps—require focus, patience, and care. These deliberate actions allow our minds to settle, creating a quiet space for reflection and presence. Every handmade piece carries a story: of choices made, time devoted, and energy poured into the craft. By wearing, gifting, or displaying your creations, you share not just a physical object but a piece of yourself, a tangible expression of creativity and thoughtfulness.

Handmade jewelry also fosters connection. Gifting a bracelet, necklace, or pair of earrings transforms a simple object into a gesture of love, gratitude, or friendship. Even keeping a piece for yourself can serve as a reminder of patience, skill, and the satisfaction of creating something meaningful by hand. This practice encourages us to slow down, savor the process, and appreciate the layers of intention woven into every loop, bead, and clasp.

Ultimately, jewelry making is about more than beauty—it is a practice in care, creativity, and connection. Each piece is a small celebration of artistry, mindfulness, and human touch. As you continue your exploration, remember that mistakes are part of learning, experimentation is part of creativity, and every finished piece—perfect or imperfect—is worthy of pride and enjoyment.

Journaling Questions & Reflection Prompts

- How did the act of arranging beads and threading them onto cord make you feel?
- Were there moments when you felt completely absorbed in the process?
- Why did you choose the colors, sizes, and textures for your bracelet?
- How does the finished piece reflect your personality or current mood?

- How does the rhythm of this craft compare to your usual pace of life?
- If you gifted this bracelet, what emotions did it evoke in yourself and the recipient?
- If keeping it for yourself, how does wearing it serve as a reminder of your creativity and patience?
- What did making jewelry teach you about care, attention, and intention?

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September: Crochet

Patterns, Rhythm, and Mindful Creation

As summer fades and the air cools, September invites us to slow down and embrace a gentler rhythm. The golden light of early autumn, the scent of fallen leaves, and the return to cozy routines create the perfect backdrop for tactile, mindful crafts. Crochet is a quintessential autumn activity—it teaches patience, rhythm, and the joy of creating something tangible stitch by stitch.

I remember the first time I held a crochet hook in my hand. The simple motion of looping yarn, the soft tension between fingers, and the way a chain slowly grew into fabric drew me into a state of quiet focus. Time seemed to stretch, worries faded, and a deep sense of calm settled in. That first project—a simple scarf—was more than just an accessory; it was proof that small, deliberate actions could yield something lasting and beautiful. Crochet offers both meditative repetition and the delight of visible progress, stitch after stitch, row after row. Each loop is a moment of presence, each pattern a reminder of how patience transforms into something tangible.

Crochet also has a rich cultural history. While its exact origins are debated, crochet as we know it gained widespread popularity in 19th-century Europe, where it was used for lace-making, garments, and decorative pieces. Unlike knitting, which requires two needles, crochet relies on a single hook and a continuous motion, making it portable and versatile. Across centuries, crochet has been passed down through families, communities,

and cultural traditions—not only as a way to clothe and decorate, but also as an expression of creativity, care, and even economic support.

The therapeutic benefits of crochet are profound. The repetitive motions of stitching create a natural rhythm that calms the mind and reduces stress. Studies suggest that such repetitive, creative handwork can lower blood pressure, ease anxiety, and improve focus. Crochet promotes fine motor coordination, patience, and mindfulness, as each stitch requires both attention and care. Transforming yarn into something useful or beautiful mirrors the patience and nurturing required in daily life. And, like all handmade habits, crochet offers a tangible reward: a scarf, blanket, or motif that embodies your time, intention, and creativity.

This September, you are invited to explore crochet not just as a craft, but as a meditative practice—an opportunity to cultivate rhythm, presence, and joy with each stitch. Whether you're making a simple chain or experimenting with intricate motifs, every loop connects you to a centuries-old tradition of making, caring, and sharing.

Understanding Yarn and Hooks

Before beginning crochet, familiarizing yourself with the materials and tools is essential. Knowing your yarn and hooks allows you to select the right combination for your project and helps you feel confident as you work through patterns and stitches.

Yarn

- **Natural fibers:** Wool, cotton, alpaca, and silk offer softness, warmth, and breathability. Wool is excellent for scarves, hats, and cozy garments, while cotton is ideal for dishcloths, summer wear, and accessories.
- **Synthetic fibers:** Acrylic, nylon, and blends are affordable, durable, and easy to care for—great for beginners practicing tension or making colorful projects.
- **Blends:** Combining natural and synthetic fibers balances softness, strength, and ease of care.

Weight and Thickness

- Fingering / Sock: very thin, delicate
- DK / Light Worsted: medium, versatile
- Worsted / Aran: thicker, ideal for warmth
- Bulky / Chunky: fastest to work with, excellent for scarves and blankets
- Beginners often start with medium-weight yarn (worsted) as it's easy to handle and see stitches clearly.

Texture and Color

Smooth yarns are best for beginners, as textured or novelty yarns (like boucle or eyelash) can make stitches harder to see. Choose lighter or solid colors so stitches are easier to identify.

Crochet Hooks

Types: Inline (uniform width) or tapered (gentle slope). Both are excellent for beginners—choose whichever feels best in your hand.

Materials:

- Aluminum: Smooth and durable.
- Bamboo / Wood: Warm and comfortable, slightly grippy—helpful for beginners.
- Plastic: Lightweight and inexpensive, good for practice.

Sizes: Measured in millimeters. Larger hooks create looser, flexible fabric; smaller hooks create tighter, denser stitches. Yarn labels usually recommend a suitable hook size.

Always check yarn label recommendations for optimal hook size.

Other Useful Tools

- **Stitch markers:** Help track pattern repeats or rounds.
- **Tapestry needles:** For weaving in ends and sewing pieces together.
- **Measuring tape:** Ensures accurate dimensions of finished pieces.
- **Scissors:** For cutting yarn cleanly.
- **Row counter (optional):** Helps keep track of rows or rounds, especially in more complex patterns.

Sourcing Tips and Quality Guidance

- **Local yarn shops (LYS):** Great for hands-on learning, comparing textures, and getting expert advice.
- **Online suppliers:** Offer a wide selection of colors, weights, and specialty fibers.
- **Beginner-friendly choices:** Smooth, medium-weight yarn in a solid color paired with bamboo or wooden needles/hooks makes learning easier and more enjoyable.
- **Sustainable options:** Look for organic cotton, recycled yarns, or responsibly sourced wool.

Beginner Project: Simple Crocheted Scarf

This project introduces basic stitches and rhythm, perfect for beginners. It encourages mindfulness and creativity while producing a useful, wearable item.

Materials Needed:

- 1-2 skeins of Medium-weight yarn (worsted) in your choice of color (You can even use two different skeins of color for a more vibrant design!)

- Crochet hook (size recommended on yarn label)
- Scissors
- Tapestry needle for weaving in ends

How to hold things (comfort is the goal).

Hold the hook in your dominant hand. Two common grips:

- Pencil grip: like a pencil.
 - Knife grip: like holding a dinner knife.
- Hint: Try both; use what feels natural.

Hold the yarn in your other hand. Let the yarn run over your index finger and through your other fingers so you can lightly control tension. There is no single “right” wrap—aim for gentle, consistent tension.

Step-by-Step Guide

1. Find the yarn end and pull out slack

- Pull from the center of the skein if possible (called “center pull”) to avoid the ball rolling around. If you can’t find it, pull from the outside.
- Pull out 12–18 inches (30–45 cm) of yarn so you’re not fighting tightness while you begin.

2. Tie a slip knot on your hook (start of every crochet project)

- Hold the yarn so the tail end (short end) hangs to the left and the working yarn (the end attached to the skein) goes to the right.

- Make a small loop by crossing the working yarn over the tail to form a circle.
- Pinch where they cross with your non-dominant hand.
- With your hook, reach through the loop, grab the working yarn, and pull it partway through the loop to form a new loop.
- Pull the tail and the working yarn gently to snug the knot. Slide the knot so the loop on your hook fits the hook—not tight, not floppy—it should slide smoothly.
- Checkpoint: The loop on your hook should move if you tug the working yarn; the knot shouldn't cinch down onto the hook.



3. Make the foundation chain (this sets the scarf width)

- You'll make a series of chain stitches (ch). Each "chain" is one little loop that looks like a "V".

- Yarn over (yo): With the hook facing you, swing the hook under then over the working yarn so the yarn rests in the hook's groove.
- Pull through: Draw that yarn-over through the loop on your hook. You just made 1 chain.
- Repeat yo + pull through to make more chains.
- How many chains?
- For a beginner-friendly width (~7 in / 18 cm), make 21 chains.
- We'll not count the loop on the hook as a chain.
- Later, you'll work your first row into these chains to get ~20 stitches across.

Tips:

- Keep your chains relaxed. If they're too tight, it will be hard to work into them.
- If you're chaining tightly no matter what, try using a larger hook just for the chain (e.g., 6.0 mm), then switch back to 5.5 mm for Row 1.

4. Understand where to insert your hook

- Look closely at the chain. From the front, each chain looks like a "V." From the back, there's a little back bump. For your very first project, work under the top two loops of the "V." (Using the back bump gives a beautiful edge, but it's slightly trickier.)

5. Row 1 — Learn single crochet (sc)

- You'll work one sc stitch into each chain across.
- Skip the first chain from the hook (the one right under your hook). You'll start in the second chain from the hook—this keeps the row height correct.

- Insert hook under the top two loops of that second chain.
- Yarn over (scoop the yarn with your hook).
- Pull up a loop: draw the yarn back through the chain. You now have 2 loops on your hook.
- Yarn over again.
- Pull through both loops on the hook. You just made 1 single crochet (1 sc).
- Move to the next chain and repeat steps 2–6 until you reach the end of the chain.
- At the end of Row 1 you should have 20 sc (because you chained 21 and skipped one at the start).
Count them: Each sc looks like a “V” sitting on the top of your fabric—count those Vs across.
- Keeping edges straight (important!)
- You worked into each chain exactly once.
- Don’t add an extra stitch in the side “gap.”
- Count now; it saves headaches later.

6. Turn and begin Row 2 (and every row after)

- Chain 1 (ch 1). This little chain gives your next row its height. In this pattern, the ch 1 does not count as a stitch.
- Turn your work like you’re turning a page in a book, so your hook is on the right edge again and you’re ready to work back across.
- Insert your hook into the very first stitch (the first “V” under the hook—not the space at the base of your ch-1).
- Work 1 sc into that stitch (insert hook, yo, pull up a loop – 2 loops on hook; yo,

pull through both).

- Continue 1 sc in each stitch across the row.
- At the end of every row you should have 20 sc. Count them.
The last stitch can hide—look for the final “V” right next to the edge; don’t accidentally work into the side gap or skip it.
- Repeat this row until your scarf is the length you want (commonly 60–70 inches / 152–178 cm). Try 15–20 minutes a day; you’ll be amazed how it grows.

7. Fasten off (end neatly)

- When your scarf is long enough, finish the last row.
- Chain 1, then cut the yarn, leaving a 6–8 inch (15–20 cm) tail.
- Pull the cut end straight through the loop on your hook and tug gently to snug. The stitch locks closed.

8. Weave in the ends (make it tidy)

- Thread the starting tail onto your tapestry needle.
- Weave the needle through the backs of several stitches in one direction (about 2–3 inches / 5–7 cm).
- Turn and weave back a short way. This locks the tail so it doesn’t slip out.
- Trim the excess. Repeat with the ending tail.
- (Optional) Add fringe
- Cut multiple pieces of yarn, each 10–12 in (25–30 cm) long.
- Hold 2–3 strands together, fold in half.
- Insert your hook through the bottom edge of the scarf, grab the fold, pull it

partway through to form a loop.

- Pull the loose ends through the loop and tighten. Repeat across the edge at even intervals. Trim to even length.

Troubleshooting (everyone needs this at first)

- My fabric is stiff/curly: You're crocheting too tightly. Relax your hands; try a larger hook (6.0 mm).
- Holes at the edges: You may be inserting your hook into the gap beside the stitch instead of the actual top "V," or you're accidentally adding a stitch. Find the last true "V."
- My edges are slanted/wavy: Count every row to confirm 20 sc. If not, you're skipping or adding stitches.
- First row is hard to work into: Your chain was too tight. Use a larger hook for the chain next time, or loosen your tension.
- I lost my place: Use a stitch marker in the first stitch of the row and another in the last stitch until it feels natural.

Crochet invites us into a rhythm of loop and pull, of turning a single strand into something warm and tangible. It reminds us that creation is rarely hurried; it grows one stitch at a time. As you finish your first rows, you've not only begun a scarf but also joined a lineage of makers who have wrapped their families in warmth and comfort with their hands. Each piece is more than fabric—it's a story of patience, perseverance, and care. May the rhythm you discovered here continue to echo in your days, grounding you, soothing you, and reminding you that beauty can be built slowly, stitch by stitch.

Journaling Questions & Reflection Prompts

- What memories do I have of crocheted items in my life—blankets, scarves, or handmade gifts? How do those memories shape how I feel about making something now?
- How did it feel in my body to find a rhythm in the stitches? Did I notice any change in my breathing, stress level, or focus as I worked?
- Was there a moment of frustration while learning, and how did I respond? What might that reveal about how I approach challenges in other parts of life?
- Who might benefit from something I crochet—a friend, a family member, or perhaps even a stranger through donation?
- If this scarf (or project) could hold an intention or a blessing within its stitches, what would I want it to carry?

October: Natural Cleaning Products

Simplicity in Sustenance

October has always carried with it a spirit of preparation. The long light of summer fades, and the crisp days invite us inward—to sweep out cobwebs, to ready the home for gatherings, to create a sense of warmth against the chill creeping in at the windows. There's something deeply fitting about turning to natural cleaning in this season. As leaves are shed outside, we too clear away what has gathered, making space for what will sustain us through winter.

For centuries, households relied on simple, natural ingredients to keep their homes fresh: vinegar to cut grease, lemon to brighten, soap made from lye and fat, herbs hung to dry for both scent and use. Before commercial sprays and artificial fragrances, these were the tools of care—passed down from mother to daughter, neighbor to neighbor. They were not only practical but also symbolic, a way of tending the hearth and protecting loved ones with what was readily at hand.

There is therapy in this simplicity. Mixing a scrub from baking soda and water, or wiping down a table with lemon and vinegar, asks little more than our presence. It's a rhythm that soothes: measure, stir, wipe, rinse. The scents are grounding, clean without being overwhelming. Unlike the harsh bite of chemicals, these natural cleaners feel gentle, safe—reminders that tending the home can also tend the spirit.

In October, as we slow down and notice the beauty of letting go, natural cleaning becomes more than a chore. It becomes a practice of mindfulness—an invitation to create a home that is not just tidy, but sustaining.

Sourcing Our Ingredients

One of the quiet beauties of natural cleaning is how little it asks of us. We don't need a specialty aisle or a complicated shopping list—most of what we need is already waiting in the pantry. Ordinary, familiar ingredients become extraordinary when we see them with fresh eyes.

Vinegar has been a household staple for centuries, valued for its ability to cut through grease, deodorize, and leave glass streak-free. **Baking soda**, humble and unassuming, scrubs away stains, freshens drains, and softens laundry. **Lemon juice** brings brightness, its natural acidity both cleansing and uplifting. Even **salt**, with its grainy texture, becomes a powerful abrasive for scouring pots or lifting stains. These ingredients are simple, affordable, and safe—gentle on our homes and gentle on us.

The benefits reach beyond practicality. By relying on pantry ingredients, we reduce our reliance on chemical-laden products, lighten our environmental footprint, and reconnect with a slower, more sustainable rhythm of care. There's comfort in knowing exactly what touches our counters, sinks, and linens—especially when little hands or beloved pets share our spaces.

To these foundations, we can add the subtle luxury of **essential oils**. A few drops of lavender, eucalyptus, or lemon not only enhance cleaning power but also transform the task into something sensory and restorative. The aroma of peppermint in a spray bottle or sweet orange in a mop bucket turns cleaning from a chore into an act of nurturing the home.

Once you begin mixing your own cleaners, you'll find that most of the work can be done with just a few base recipes. From there, you can adapt, customize, and tailor them to fit your home and your preferences. Think of these not as strict formulas, but as flexible starting points.



Recipes

All-Purpose Cleaner (Multi-Surface Spray)

- 1 cup distilled white vinegar
- 1 cup water
- 10–15 drops essential oil (lemon, lavender, or tea tree are excellent choices)

Combine in a spray bottle, shake gently before each use, and spray onto countertops, tables, and other hard surfaces. Wipe with a cloth. (Avoid marble or natural stone, as vinegar can etch surfaces.)

Glass & Mirror Cleaner

- 1 cup distilled water
- 1 cup rubbing alcohol

- 1 tablespoon white vinegar
- Optional: 3–5 drops peppermint or lemon essential oil

Combine in a spray bottle, shake gently before each use, Spray directly onto glass or mirrors and wipe with a lint-free cloth or newspaper for a streak-free shine.

Bathroom Freshening Spray

- 1 cup water
- 2 tablespoons vodka or rubbing alcohol
- 10 drops eucalyptus oil
- 5 drops lavender oil

Mist into the air or lightly onto shower curtains and bathroom surfaces to reduce mildew odors and bring freshness.

Grout Cleaner

- ½ cup baking soda
- 1 tsp dishwashing liquid
- ¼ cup hydrogen peroxide

Use a sponge to apply the mixture to the grout. Let it work for at least 10 minutes before scrubbing the grout lines. Wipe away the mixture with a damp sponge and rinse well with water or a clean cloth.

Toilet Bowl Cleaner

- Sprinkle ½ cup baking soda into the bowl
- Pour in ½ cup vinegar.

Let fizz for 10 minutes, then scrub with a toilet brush.□

Kitchen Degreaser

- 2 cups warm water
- 1 tablespoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon castile soap
- Optional: 5 drops orange essential oil (cuts grease beautifully)

Shake gently and use on stovetops, counters, and other greasy surfaces.

Sink Deodorizer

- Sprinkle ½ cup baking soda into the drain.
- Follow with ½ cup vinegar.

Let sit and fizz for 5–10 minutes, then flush with hot water.□

Customizing Your Recipes

Think of essential oils as both practical and personal. Tea tree, eucalyptus, and lavender bring antibacterial and antifungal benefits, while citrus oils like lemon, lime, or sweet orange brighten both mood and scent. If you dislike strong aromas, skip oils altogether—the basics will still clean beautifully.

Ratios can also be adjusted. If you prefer a stronger solution for deep cleaning, reduce the water slightly. For lighter, everyday cleaning, dilute more. Trust your senses: if it feels too strong or too faint, you can always adjust next time.

Storage & Usage Guidelines

- Containers: Glass spray bottles are ideal, especially for recipes with essential oils (which can break down plastic). Mason jars with shaker tops are perfect for powders.
- Labeling: Always label your bottles with contents and date mixed
- Shelf Life: Most recipes last 1–2 weeks, but those with vinegar, alcohol, or

essential oils often keep longer (up to a month). Fresh citrus-based mixes should be made in smaller batches and used quickly.

- **Shake Before Use:** Natural mixtures may separate—give bottles a gentle shake before each cleaning session.
- **Safety:** Even natural ingredients can irritate if overused. Use gloves when scrubbing with baking soda or vinegar if your skin is sensitive. Store all cleaning products—homemade or otherwise—out of reach of children and pets.

In many ways, cleaning with simple, natural ingredients is an act of care—not just for our surroundings, but for ourselves and those we love. Each time we wipe a surface or freshen a space, we are reminded that simplicity sustains us: lemon, vinegar, baking soda, and water are enough. The act of crafting your own cleaners becomes more than just a task—it is a ritual of mindfulness and self-sufficiency, a way of connecting to generations before us who relied on the same simple pantry staples. As the season turns inward, let your home reflect the calm, intentional spirit of autumn: warm, clean, and ready to shelter you through the coming winter.

Journaling Questions & Reflection Prompts

- How does your home feel different when you clean with natural products rather than store-bought solutions?
- What emotions surface when you connect your cleaning to the rhythms of the season?
- How might the act of creating and using your own cleaners shift the way you view household chores?
- If your home could “speak” after being cleaned with care and natural ingredients, what might it say?
- What other areas of your life could benefit from a similar simplification?

November: Gratitude Journal

Binding Thankfulness by Hand

November is a season of gathering—of harvest, of family, of reflection before the winter settles in. It's a month that naturally invites us to pause and take stock of the blessings woven into our days, large and small. Gratitude, at its heart, is a practice of noticing. It transforms the ordinary into abundance, turning a meal into a feast, a moment into a memory, and a day into something worth treasuring.

But gratitude is more than fleeting thoughts—it deepens when it's written, named, and preserved. To write what we're thankful for is to honor it, to give shape to our joy and resilience. And what better home for those words than a book we've stitched with our own hands? Just as gratitude binds together the scattered pieces of our lives, bookbinding gathers loose sheets into a whole, creating a vessel to hold what matters most.

The practice of gratitude has ancient roots. Philosophers as early as Cicero and Seneca wrote that gratitude was not only the greatest of virtues but the parent of all others. Across cultures and traditions, gratitude has been a cornerstone of spiritual and communal life. Indigenous peoples around the world have practiced gratitude through ritual, storytelling, and daily expressions of thanks for the earth's gifts. In modern psychology, gratitude has been shown to reduce stress, strengthen relationships, and improve overall

well-being. To practice gratitude is to tend the soil of our hearts, ensuring that joy can take root even in difficult seasons.

Journaling, too, has a long and storied history. Ancient Egyptians recorded dreams and daily life on papyrus. Roman statesmen kept *commentarii*—personal notebooks that mixed records, reflections, and speeches. In Japan, Heian-era court ladies filled diaries with both prose and poetry, blending the personal with the artistic. By the Renaissance, journals became tools of discovery: explorers charted new worlds, and scientists logged observations that would reshape our understanding of nature. Later, the practice shifted inward, with commonplace books, diaries, and spiritual journals becoming ways to explore the self. Through the centuries, journals have served as both mirrors and maps—reflecting the inner life while guiding the outer one.

Bookbinding gave permanence to these reflections. From the hand-stitched manuscripts of medieval monks to the pocket notebooks carried by poets and travelers, the act of binding words into a permanent form has long been both an art and a safeguard of memory. Each stitch in a spine was once a meditative gesture, a way of honoring the value of what was held within. Even in our digital age, the tactile pleasure of opening a handmade book—a cover that fits warmly in the hand, pages that hold the impression of ink or pencil—reminds us of the permanence of thought and the sacredness of recording a life.

Together, gratitude, journaling, and bookbinding offer a profound pairing. Gratitude softens us, reminding us to see abundance in simplicity. Journaling gives it shape and endurance. Bookbinding steadies us, teaching patience, rhythm, and care. All three require us to slow down, to give attention, and to trust in small, deliberate actions. And all three leave us with something lasting: a heart more attuned to joy, and a journal that physically holds the record of our noticing.

This November, as the days grow shorter and the year leans toward its close, we will practice gratitude not only in words but also in craft. With needle and thread, paper and glue, we'll shape a journal that becomes more than blank pages—it will be a companion, a record of thanks, and a handmade testament to the beauty of noticing.

Sourcing Your Materials

- 100 gsm paper for the inside pages (stronger than printer paper but still foldable)
- Coloured or printed paper for the cover, spine, and endpapers
- 2 mm thick cardboard (for the sturdy cover boards)
- Binder's needle (curved preferred, but a regular sharp needle works)
- Thick cotton thread or wax thread (wax thread is easier to pull through the paper)
- White PVA craft glue (such as Fevicol)
- Scissors
- Craft knife or blade
- Steel ruler
- Binding clips (or even large paper clips or clothespins)

Step-by-Step Guide

1. Prepare the Pages

Take your A4 sheets of 80–100 gsm paper and cut each one into four equal parts. This will give you A6-sized pages (about 148.5 mm by 105 mm).□

Fold each piece neatly in half. When folded, one page will measure 74.25 mm by 105 mm.□

Group 4–5 folded sheets together to form a small bundle called a **section** (also known as a “signature”). You'll be sewing section by section to build the book.□

2. Thread Your Needle

Cut a length of strong cotton or waxed thread about **60–70 cm long** (roughly twice the height of your page plus extra for knots).□

Thread your needle. A curved binder's needle makes sewing easier, but a straight one works fine.□

3. Bind the First Section (Saddle Stitch)

Mark the holes:

Take your first folded section of 4–5 pages.

Along the fold, use a pencil and ruler to mark **5 evenly spaced points**: start in the exact middle of the page, and then mark two additional points both above and below, approximately 2 cm apart from each other.

These will be your sewing stations

Pre-punch the holes

Using a thick needle, awl, or even a thumbtack, gently punch through the fold at each marked point.

Be sure the holes go through all layers of the section and come out neatly along the fold line.

Keep the holes straight so stitching later will be smooth.□

Thread and knot:

Thread your needle with about **60–70 cm** of cotton or wax thread.

Tie a knot at the end so it doesn't pull through.

Stitch the saddle stitch:

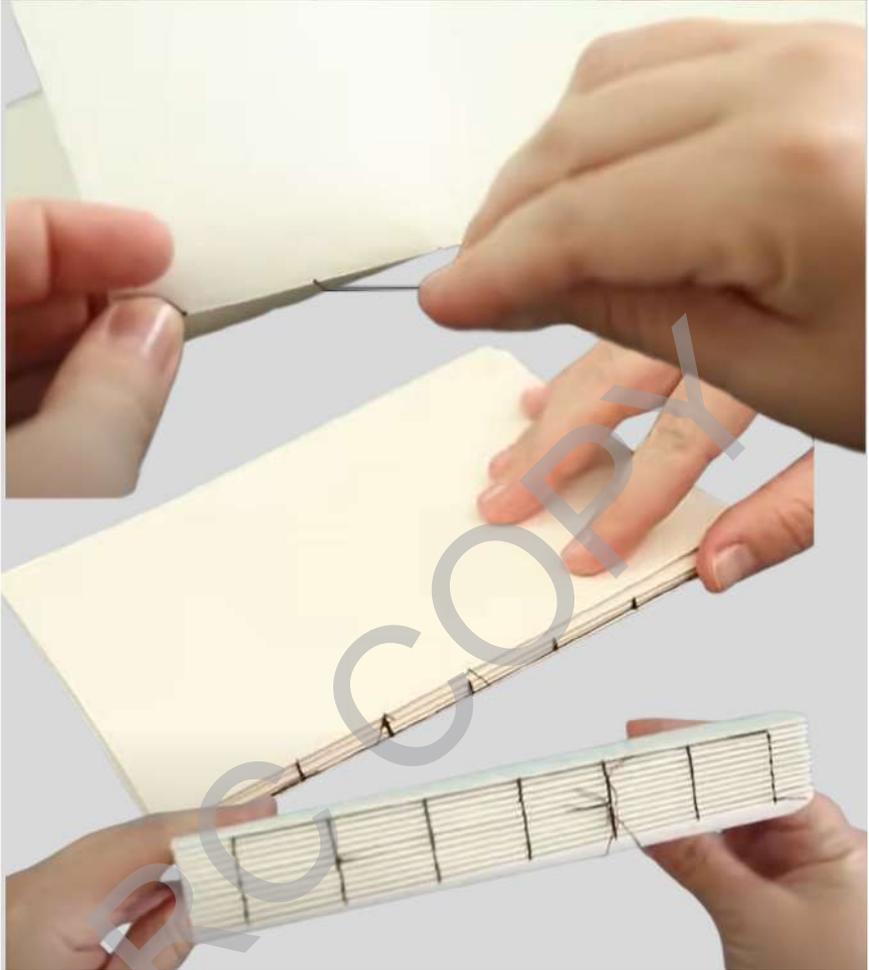
Start from the inside center hole, pushing the needle out to the spine, leaving a 5 cm tail inside.

Go down to the bottom hole and pass the needle through to the inside.

Next, move from the inside bottom hole all the way up to the top hole, coming out again.

Finally, return through the center hole from the outside to the inside.

Adjust so both thread ends are inside at the center, then tie them in a firm knot.



4. Add the Next Section with a Kettle Stitch

Prepare your next section:

Take another folded set of 4–5 pages (the same size as the first).

As before, mark 3 points along the fold: one about 1 cm from the top, one in the center, and one about 1 cm from the bottom.

Use your needle, awl, or thumbtack to pre-punch the holes at these points.

Thread your needle:

Cut another length of thread (about 60–70 cm).□

Thread your needle and knot the end.

Start sewing the new section:

Place the new section on top of your already-stitched section so their folds line up.

Begin from the inside center hole of the new section, just as you did before, and push the needle through to the spine, leaving a 5 cm tail inside.

Sew to the bottom hole:

Take the needle from the outside center hole down to the bottom hole and pass it inside.

Now your thread is on the inside again.

Link to the first section with a kettle stitch:

Before moving on, look at the first bound section. At the bottom hole, you'll see the horizontal thread crossing the spine.

Take your needle and pass it under that thread (not through the paper).

Pull snug — this links the second section securely to the first.

Move to the top hole:

Now take your needle all the way up the inside of the fold to the top hole and pass it through to the outside.

Again, link it to the first section by passing the needle under the horizontal thread at the top. Pull snug.□

Finish at the center:

Finally, bring your needle down from the outside into the center hole.

On the inside of the fold, tie the thread to the 5 cm tail you left earlier. Knot securely.

Now you've joined your second section to the first using a kettle stitch!

Repeat for additional sections:

For each new section, repeat the same process: pre-punch 3 holes, sew from the center out, and loop under the thread of the section below at each end.

Each time you add a new section, it gets easier and sturdier.

5. Strengthen the Spine

When all sections are stitched, check that they are lined up evenly.

Apply a thin but generous layer of PVA glue across the stitched spine with your finger or a small brush.

Cut a piece of paper (about 60 mm by 105 mm) and press it firmly onto the glued spine to reinforce it.

Clamp the pages together with binding clips and let dry fully (about 30 minutes).□

6. Trim the Pages

Once dry, use a steel ruler and craft knife to trim any uneven edges so the block looks neat and uniform.□

7. Cut the Cover Boards

From your 2 mm cardboard, cut **two rectangles** slightly larger than your finished pages—about 3 mm extra on the top, bottom, and outer edge.

For example, if your folded pages measure 74.25 mm by 105 mm, cut your covers at 77 mm by 111 mm.□

8. Cover the Boards

Choose colored or patterned paper for your outer cover.

Cut it so that it is about 25 mm larger than the cardboard on each side.

Spread glue evenly across one cardboard board. Place it face-down onto the back of your cover paper. Smooth out air bubbles.

Trim the corners of the cover paper at a diagonal, leaving a small gap (about 2 mm) from the corner of the board so the paper can fold neatly.

Fold the edges over the board and glue them down tightly. Repeat for the second cover.□

9. Create the Spine

Cut a strip of paper for the spine, about 45 mm wide and 160 mm long.

Glue the spine strip flat on the table. Place the two covers onto it, leaving just enough space in the center for the thickness of the text block (about 3–5 mm).

Press down firmly and let dry.

Glue an additional strip (about 45 mm by 100 mm) on the inside spine for extra strength.□

10. Add the Endpapers

Cut two pieces of decorative paper (about 148.5 mm by 105 mm) and fold each in half.

Glue one folded piece to the very first page of your text block, aligning the fold with the spine. Repeat on the last page.

Now glue the other half of each endpaper onto the inside of the covers. These endpapers hide the stitching and attach the block of pages to the cover. □

11. Press and Dry

Close your book and place it under a heavy object (like a stack of other books) for a few hours to dry flat and firm.

12. Final Touches

Add edges, labels, or decorative paper scraps if you like.

Your section-stitched mini journal is now complete! It's sturdy enough to hold your daily gratitude reflections and small enough to carry with you.



Gratitude Journal Prompts

When you sit down with your journal, don't worry about writing perfectly. Gratitude is about noticing, not performing. Use these prompts to spark ideas, and let your list grow naturally:

- A small comfort from today — something simple like a warm drink, a soft blanket, or a moment of quiet.
- A person you're thankful for — and why they matter in your life right now.
- A place that feels like home — whether it's your living room, a favorite bench, or somewhere outdoors.
- Something your body allows you to do — walking, hugging, breathing deeply, laughing.
- A challenge that shaped you — what you've learned or how you've grown through it.
- A sound that brings you joy — birdsong, music, rain on the roof, laughter.
- A meal or food you're grateful for — either from today or from a memory.
- A kindness you received recently — big or small, noticed or unexpected.
- A memory that still makes you smile.
- Something in nature you appreciate right now — the sky, a tree, a breeze, or the season's change.
- An object you own that carries meaning — not because it's valuable, but because it connects you to a story.
- Something you're looking forward to — a hope, a plan, or a dream.□

Encourage yourself to go beyond lists when you feel ready: write a few sentences about *why* you're grateful, how it makes you feel, or what it teaches you. Over time, these small reflections become threads woven into the fabric of your days—a pattern of noticing and appreciation that sustains you long after the page is filled.

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December: Handmade Ornaments

Symbols of Memory and Meaning

As the year comes to a close, December offers us a natural pause—a time to look back at where we've been, what we've created, and what we've learned. This chapter, the final handmade project of our year together, feels especially symbolic. Making ornaments is more than a seasonal craft; it's a way to capture memories in tangible form. Each piece can carry meaning: a salt-dough star that recalls the candle-making warmth of January, a crocheted snowflake that honors September's quiet rhythms, or even an ornament shaped to symbolize a personal milestone from the year. In this way, the act of ornament-making becomes a ritual of reflection, a way to honor the year just lived and to prepare our hearts for the one to come.

The tradition of decorating evergreen trees has roots that stretch back centuries, long before electric lights and glass baubles. Ancient peoples brought greenery indoors in midwinter as a symbol of life's endurance through the darkest season. In 16th-century Germany, decorated Christmas trees as we know them began to appear, adorned with apples, wafers, and paper roses. Later, families added candles, fruits, and eventually glass ornaments—hand-blown treasures from artisans in Lauscha that became cherished heirlooms. Over time, ornaments evolved into deeply personal tokens: souvenirs from travels, gifts from loved ones, or handmade keepsakes crafted at the kitchen table. So even if you

don't celebrate Christmas or put up a Christmas tree, ornaments can still be a deeply personal reminder for you to put somewhere in your home.

The beauty of handmade ornaments lies in their diversity. They can be shaped from salt dough, folded from paper, sewn from felt, molded from clay, woven from twine, or even assembled from natural elements like pinecones and dried citrus. This wide variety of materials means there is no single “right” way to craft them—only your way. Each ornament becomes a canvas for personalization, carrying not just seasonal cheer but your own memories, symbols, and style.

The therapeutic power of making ornaments lies not only in their beauty but in their symbolism. Cutting, stitching, painting, or tying allows us to slow down in a season that often rushes by. With each loop of thread or press of dough, we create space for mindfulness, presence, and memory. Handmade ornaments remind us that joy doesn't need to be bought; it can be shaped with our own hands and infused with our own stories. Hanging these pieces on the tree is like placing memory upon memory—an archive of gratitude, creativity, and connection that grows year after year.

As you begin, consider choosing an ornament that tells a story about this year. Maybe you want to create something that represents the handmade habits you practiced throughout these months—an ice cream cone in felt to remember July, a miniature crocheted square for September, or a small book-shaped ornament to recall November's gratitude journal. Or perhaps your ornament will capture a single moment or memory—a family trip, a milestone, or even a quiet day that meant more than you realized at the time.

This chapter will guide you through a few simple techniques to get you started:

Salt Dough Ornaments – rustic and timeless, easy to make with pantry ingredients.

Felt and Fabric Ornaments – soft, colorful, and perfect for stitching by hand.

Paper Ornaments – folded or cut into stars, garlands, or snowflakes.

Nature-Inspired Ornaments – pinecones, cinnamon sticks, or dried oranges for a fragrant, earthy touch.

Think of these not just as crafts, but as vessels of memory. When you hang them on your tree—or gift them to someone you love—you're creating more than decoration. You're creating a keepsake, a story, a reminder that beauty and meaning can be handmade.

Step-by-Step Guides

Salt Dough Ornaments

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup salt
- 1 cup warm water
- Rolling pin
- Cookie cutters
- Baking sheet
- Acrylic paints, markers, or varnish for decorating

Instructions:

- Mix the flour, salt, and water in a bowl until a dough forms. Knead until smooth.
- Roll out the dough to about ¼ inch thick.
- Use cookie cutters (stars, hearts, trees, circles) or freehand shapes with a knife.
- Use a straw or skewer to poke a hole at the top for hanging.
- Bake at 200°F (90°C) for 2–3 hours until hardened, or leave to air dry for several days.
- Once cooled, paint, decorate, or seal with varnish.
- Add ribbon or twine to hang.

Personalization Tip: Press leaves, lace, or stamps into the dough before baking for natural or textured designs.



Paper Snowflakes or Stars

- White or colored paper
- Scissors
- Glue or tape (optional)
- Thread or string

Instructions:

- Fold a square piece of paper into halves and then into triangles.
- Cut shapes along the folded edges—triangles, diamonds, or curves.
- Open carefully to reveal your snowflake.
- For stars, layer and glue several snowflakes or folded strips together.

- Attach thread for hanging.

Personalization Tip: Use metallic or patterned paper, or add glitter for sparkle.

Felt Ornaments

- Felt sheets in different colors
- Scissors
- Needle and embroidery thread
- Stuffing (cotton, scrap fabric, or batting)
- Ribbon or twine

Instructions:

- Cut two identical shapes from felt (tree, heart, mitten, star).
- Place them together and stitch around the edges with a blanket or running stitch, leaving a small opening.
- Add stuffing to give it dimension, then finish stitching.
- Attach ribbon or twine for hanging.

Personalization Tip: Embroider initials, stitch on buttons, or use contrasting thread for decorative edges.

Natural Ornaments (Dried Citrus & Pinecones)

- Oranges, lemons, or limes
- Baking sheet and parchment paper
- Whole pinecones
- Twine, hot glue, optional glitter or cinnamon sticks

Instructions for Citrus:

- Slice fruit into thin rounds.
- Place on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Bake at 200°F (90°C) for 2–3 hours, flipping occasionally, until fully dry.
- Thread twine through a small slit or around the rind.

Instructions for Pinecones:

- Tie twine around the base or hot glue it to the top for a hanger.
- Add glitter to the tips or tuck in small sprigs of greenery.
- *Personalization Tip:* Combine citrus slices and pinecones in clusters for a rustic, fragrant ornament.

Scrap Ribbon or Fabric Ornaments

- Scraps of ribbon, yarn, or fabric
- Small sticks or dowels
- Twine

Instructions:

- Cut fabric or ribbon into short strips.
- Tie the strips onto the stick, layering them until it resembles a small tree shape.
- Trim into a triangle shape.
- Add twine to the top for hanging.

Personalization Tip: Use different textures (lace, burlap, velvet) for a layered, boho effect.



Storage & Longevity Tips

Store ornaments in tissue paper or small boxes to prevent breakage or flattening.

For salt dough, apply a thin coat of sealant to prevent moisture damage.

Keep natural ornaments in a dry, cool place to avoid mold.

Felt, fabric, and paper ornaments last best if kept away from direct moisture and heat. □

Journal Questions & Reflection Prompts

- What is one memory from this year you'd like to “hang on the tree” of your life—something worth remembering each December?
- If you could make an ornament to symbolize your personal growth this year, what would it look like? What materials would you use?
- Which handmade project from this year brought you the most joy? Why?

- Think of a tradition (old or new) that makes the holiday season meaningful to you. How could you capture it in a handmade ornament?
- Write about a person you'd like to honor with an ornament. What would you create to represent them?
- Describe a moment this year that at first seemed small, but now feels significant. How could you memorialize it?
- What handmade traditions from your childhood do you remember around the holidays? How do they inspire (or challenge) you today?
- Imagine your future self, five years from now, unpacking this year's ornament. What would you want them to feel or remember?
- If your tree could "speak," what stories would it tell through the ornaments you've chosen or made?
- End the year with gratitude: list three handmade moments (from crafts, cooking, writing, or any act of creating) that helped shape your year.

Conclusion

A Year in our Hands

As we come to the end of this year-long journey of handmade habits, I invite you to pause and look back at what your hands have created. From the warmth of a hand-poured candle in January to the sparkle of a December ornament, each month has been a thread in a tapestry—a story told not in words alone, but in touch, texture, and time.

Perhaps your projects were simple, imperfect, or unfinished. Perhaps they surprised you with beauty you didn't expect. Whatever form they took, they carried your presence. Each handmade act was a reminder that you are capable of slowing down, paying attention, and leaving a mark that is uniquely yours.

The ornament-making of December feels like a fitting conclusion. We hang ornaments to remember—moments, people, traditions, and the years that shape us. As you look at what you've made, consider each craft this year as an ornament of memory, each skill a small keepsake of patience and presence. Together, they tell a story not only of what you made, but of how you lived.

This book was never about perfect products, but about process—finding therapy in rhythm, grounding in touch, and joy in creation. May the habits you've explored this year continue to echo into the next, reminding you that your hands can always bring beauty, meaning, and renewal.

Here's to another year of making, remembering, and cherishing the handmade life.

Year-End Journaling and Reflection-Prompts

- Which handmade project from this year brought you the most joy? Why?
- Which was the most challenging? What did you learn from that challenge?
- How did your sense of patience, presence, or mindfulness grow through these crafts?
- Each month carried a theme—light, growth, nourishment, rhythm, simplicity, gratitude, memory. Which theme spoke to you most deeply?
- What connections do you see between the skills you practiced with your hands and the lessons you carried in your heart?
- Did you discover new rhythms or rituals in your life because of these handmade habits?
- Who in your life benefitted from something you made this year? How did it feel to share your creations?
- What unexpected gratitudes surfaced as you slowed down with each project?
- Which craft would you most like to pass on or teach to someone else?
- What handmade habit do you hope to carry into the coming year?
- Is there a new skill or craft you want to learn next?
- If you were to create an “ornament” to symbolize this year, what would it look like, and why?