

COOKING TOGETHER

FROM THE GARDEN
AT APOLLO RESIDENTIAL
ASSISTED LIVING



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INTRODUCTION

“Cooking gives residents a purpose. They feed others, not just themselves.”



Bill & Estève, June 23, 2023

“Smooth calm” is the phrase a caregiver uses to describe how care “feels” here at Apollo. This booklet shows how the mid-day meal and garden contribute to the smooth calm.

For five mornings this past summer (July and August 2023), caregivers and residents of Apollo made room for us amid the comings and goings at Apollo. In advance, one of five caregivers had planned the mid-day meal. We (Estève and Ellie) would arrive around ten a.m. and walk through the garden with the caregiver who would be cooking the noon meal. As we walked through the garden, we picked vegetables and herbs for the menu and shared stories along the way.

Then we came back inside. Next was the cooking activity. Each of the five visits centered on cooking with a resident who was game to participate. Previous research has shown that cooking interventions can lead to positive emotional states in patients with dementia, and improve their well-being. Residents were given several cooking options. Baking a cake was a favorite choice: dessert for the upcoming meal. As Estève would later explain: “Cooking gives residents a purpose. They feed others, not just themselves.”

While they cooked, residents shared memories and displayed super hand coordination - a skill that is sometimes diminished with age. Under the caregiver’s instruction, we then cooked together while conversing with the other caregivers and residents. Some days felt like the Apollo was its own cooking show! We rejoiced in executing the caregivers’ unique recipes – with a garden twist: breaded tilapia with potatoes and bok choy, a pineapple salad with carrot greens, samosas with a purslane salad.

From its inception, the garden at Apollo has been Estève’s brainchild. During the COVID pandemic, she was in the final stages of her PhD. As part of her dissertation research at the intersection of care and food systems, she secured funding to install a permaculture garden at Apollo to provide a place of respite for caregivers and residents, and nurture the landscape. Estève and Ellie had bonded a few years earlier at the Great American Seed Up in Phoenix, a seed bazaar that distributes climate-appropriate seeds throughout the Valley of the Sun. So when the summer of 2023 rolled around, Ellie was curious to see the fruit of Estève’s labor.



Christopher Zambakari shows Ellie Long around the garden

For the half hour or so before lunch, aromas mix and mingle in anticipation of the shared meal. Preparing fresh food, including produce and herbs from the garden, caregivers experimented with foods a new resident might like or that might address a resident's particular digestive concern. Preparing fresh meals around residents' palettes and dietary needs, caregivers take note and make adjustments along the way to make food that genuinely appeals to the residents.

Within the ebb and flow of the day, the kitchen and the garden become sites of pleasant curiosity and even wonder. During one of our first visits, a resident went to his room, retrieved a scrapbook, and pointed out photos from last year's bean harvest. Another resident marveled at the colorful corn kernels in a dried husk that a caregiver brought in from the garden. We took turns sizing up a sweet potato, the length and angle of an adult arm.

A caregiver wondered how the residents might respond to watermelon juice. Only one way to find out: juice some, serve it to the residents, and see who likes it. Most did. The same question was posed about the okra, a plant native of Africa and introduced to the Americas during the Atlantic slave trade. It is now a favorite of southern cuisine, but still rather unfamiliar to many palates. Jamaican and South Sudanese caregivers love it. They juice it, steam it, fry it.

As we witnessed, the mid-day meal can serve as a place of authentic connection for residents. As lunch was announced, a resident regularly took stock, offering instructions to us if she thought we could better assist the other residents as they found their places around the table. "We always get compliments about the food," director of Apollo, Dr. Christopher Zambakari observed, "It really makes a big difference."

"We always get compliments about the food. It really makes a big difference."

GEOFF AND MARTISHA

JUNE 19, 2023

COOKING ACTIVITY WITH GEOFF

Throughout the cooking activity, Geoff was very sweet, considerate, and cautious. Although he told Estève and Ellie he did not have a lot of previous experience with cooking, he demonstrated impressive focus and collaboration and carefully read the instructions on the cake mix box. As he lingered with Estève and Ellie over conversation, he began to share stories of cooking with his mother when he was a little boy. He fondly remembered that when he was eight years old, he would sit and talk with his mother while she baked cakes. The cooking activity at Apollo allowed Geoff to reconnect with his youth - he said - and make a dessert with meaningful ties to his family.

PREPARING LUNCH WITH MARTISHA

RECIPE: BREADED TILAPIA WITH POTATOES AND SALAD

INGREDIENTS:

- Tilapia
- Italian bread scrubs
- Bell peppers
- Knorr bouillon
- Garlic
- Potatoes
- Lettuce
- Tomatoes
- Carrots
- Cucumbers
- Oil

Like the other caregivers, Martisha has experience caring for patients with dementia. She and the other caregivers are also responsible for teaching residents and volunteers how to cook meals. During lunch preparations, Martisha assigned Estève and Ellie very specific tasks. "It became like a cooking show, Ellie explained, and we were acting like sous-chefs." The aroma, a mingling of sweet and savory smells and tastes, was quite distinctive, which created a unique sense of play and creativity.



FROM THE GARDEN

BOK CHOY



Bok choy is a cruciferous vegetable and is part of the same family as broccoli, cauliflower, Brussel sprouts, and cabbage. Bok choy is made up of leafy stalks that extend from a bulbous central stem. Its leaves are dark green, and its stems are either white or a lighter green. Bok choy is native to China and is a common ingredient in Chinese and other Asian cuisines. It has a crisp, crunchy texture, a slightly bitter, mineral flavor, and a slight nuttiness that comes out during cooking. Bok choy is rich in vitamins and minerals, especially vitamins C and K. It also offers some fiber, which supports digestive health and helps reduce the risk of many chronic diseases. Bok choy may have anticancer properties, support thyroid function and bone health, and promote heart health.

Bok choy is a winter vegetable and can easily tolerate a light frost. It is typically harvested twice a year, once in spring and once in fall. Although bok choy does not usually survive in the heat, it was shaded by a yucca plant and grew at Apollo in the summer, even with temperatures over one hundred degrees Fahrenheit thanks to the garden's microclimates!

TEPARY BEANS

Tepary beans are a little-known type of legume. The tepary bean plant has stems up to thirteen feet long, and its beans are small and grow in a variety of colors. White tepary beans have a slightly nutty flavor and a soft, creamy texture, whereas brown and black tepary beans have a more robust, earthy flavor. Tepary beans are native to the southwestern United States and are cultivated in Mexico and Arizona for their drought-resistant qualities. They are typically planted during monsoon season, flower in August, and are ready to be harvested in October. Tepary beans are high in protein, fiber, copper, folate, manganese, selenium, and bioactive compounds, all of which benefit human health.



BILL AND TIANNA

JUNE 23, 2023

COOKING ACTIVITY WITH BILL

Bill is a Vietnam War veteran. Before moving to Apollo, he lived by himself and gained some experience with cooking. While stirring the cake batter ingredients together, he used a mixing technique unlike anything Estève and Ellie had seen. He rolled the whisk between his palms, which worked very well. For Bill, cooking with Estève and Ellie was a bonding experience in which all individuals were present, paid attention, and interacted through a shared activity. After baking the cake, Bill shared his photo album with Estève and Ellie and talked about his family. The album, made by Bill's sister, included pictures of his niece and nephew, as well as the bean harvest at Apollo from the previous year. The baking activity with Bill highlighted the powerful relationship between food, memory, and family.

PREPARING LUNCH WITH TIANNA

RECIPE: CHICKEN SALAD WITH BAKED SWEET POTATOES

INGREDIENTS:

- Chicken breast
- Mayonnaise
- Mustard
- Red grapes
- Celery
- Green onions
- Toasted almonds
- Parsley
- Tarragon
- Lemon juice
- Red onion
- Sweet potatoes

Tianna is the youngest caregiver at Apollo. A strong advocate of healthy eating, Tianna is particularly keen on the Apollo garden's okra, a superfood rich in vitamins and minerals. Prior to the mid-day meal featured here, Tianna picked herbs in the garden for the lunch she had planned: chicken salad with baked sweet potatoes. Despite the high temperatures, the garden was lush and ripe with vegetation. Inside, Tianna cooked and stayed attentive to residents' concerns while also issuing friendly instructions for meal-prep with Estève and Ellie. Along the way, she shared her insights into what dementia care looks like at Apollo.



FROM THE GARDEN



BASIL

Basil is an aromatic, leafy green herb of the mint family. Its leaves are glossy and oval-shaped, with smooth or slightly toothed edges. There are several different varieties of basil, including sweet basil, bush or Greek basil, Thai basil, cinnamon basil, lettuce basil, and holy basil. Sweet basil, the most widely grown variety, has a licorice-clove flavor and is renowned for its use in Italian and Mediterranean dishes. Basil is native to India and other tropical regions stretching from Africa to Southeast Asia. It is extremely frost-sensitive and grows best in warm climates. Although basil is not a significant source of nutrients, it does provide some vitamin K and beneficial plant compounds that have antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and other health properties. Basil, especially as an essential oil or tea, is a popular folk remedy for ailments like nausea and bug bites and is widely used in holistic medicine systems.

FIONA AND RODA

JULY 6, 2023

COOKING ACTIVITY WITH FIONA

Fiona is over one hundred years old, with smart, piercing eyes, a “no nonsense” disposition, and a very kind heart. The caregivers call her “grandma.” She runs a tight ship, clearly taking pride in Apollo’s smooth calm. As such, she also keeps an eye out for the other residents. For instance, she instructed Ellie to move her book-bag from an end table where Ellie had left it once walking through the door: What had Ellie been thinking?! That locale is the jurisdiction of a fellow resident! She also showed Estève and Ellie how to clean the mixing bowl with a spatula to ensure that not a single drop was wasted. When asked to pick the flavor of cake, Fiona exclaimed, “Of course, chocolate! Is there anything better than chocolate?”

PREPARING LUNCH WITH RODA

RECIPE: SAMOSAS WITH GREEN SALAD AND FRENCH FRIES

INGREDIENTS:

- Tortillas
- French fries
- Tomatoes
- Lettuce
- Ground beef
- Oil
- Garlic
- Chicken flavor bouillon
- Ketchup
- Sweet peas and carrots mix

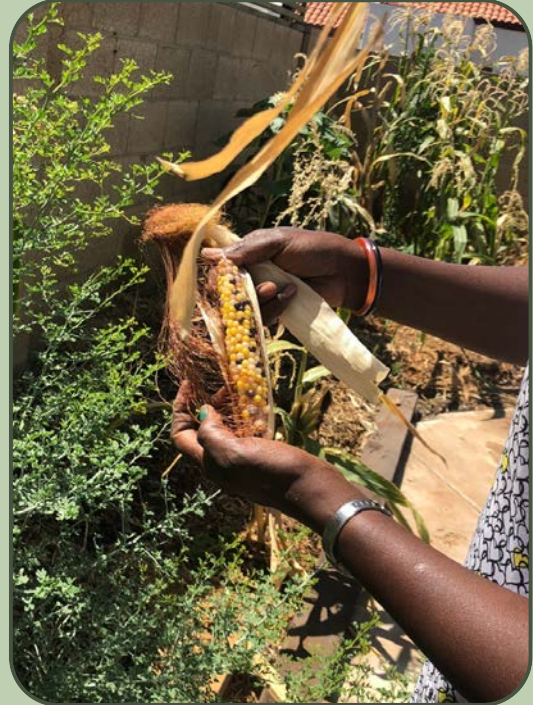
Roda is a former refugee from South Sudan. In the garden, Roda recognized several vegetables such as purslane, corn, and sweet potatoes that also grow in South Sudan. While preparing lunch, Roda taught Estève and Ellie how to make samosas with halved tortillas, ground beef, sweet peas, and carrots. She used a mix of flour and water to serve as the glue to hold the triangle together. As Estève expressed, “This was an amazing cooking lesson, and I felt like I left the session with a new skill.” Roda cooked french fries for the meal in a brand-new air fryer, which was a generous gift from a resident’s family. This was the first time any of the caregivers or residents had used an air fryer! Geoff was very curious about the new machine and asked: “Is this how people make french fries these days?”



FROM THE GARDEN

MULTI-COLORED CORN

Flint corn, the most common variety of multi-colored corn, is known for its hard, slightly translucent kernels and its color palette of red, orange, yellow, gold, and blue. Native to North America, flint corn is well-adapted to cooler weather and was developed by Native Americans over one thousand years ago. It is mainly used to make cornmeal, as well as hominy, grits, polenta, atole, and masa. Several residents at Apollo were fascinated by the multi-colored kernels, especially Geoff. He was very curious about the corn and shared that he had never seen anything like it before.



SWEET POTATOES

Sweet potatoes are widely cultivated in warm, temperate climates and are an important food crop in the southern United States, tropical America and the Caribbean, the warmer islands of the Pacific, Japan, and parts of Russia. Sweet potatoes have strong root systems that break up compacted soil and improve the soil's structure and fertility. Sweet potatoes are highly nutritious and are rich in vitamin A, vitamin C, manganese, antioxidants, and fiber. Consuming sweet potatoes can promote gut health, provide cancer-fighting properties, support healthy vision, enhance brain function, and boost the immune system.

GRETTA AND MARWA

JULY 7, 2023

COOKING ACTIVITY WITH GRETTA

Gretta is a proper lady who is always in a good mood. Although she was slightly hesitant to cook at first, she happily participated in the activity once she was told Estève and Ellie needed help. Gretta handled all of the steps in the cake-making process on her own as if she knew perfectly how to make one. She cracked the eggs, poured the oil, and mixed the cake batter ingredients without any instructions.

PREPARING LUNCH WITH MARWA

RECIPE: PORK CHOPS WITH MASHED POTATOES AND GREEN BEANS

INGREDIENTS:

- Pork chops
- Mashed potatoes
- Fried onions
- Smoked BBQ sauce
- Cut green beans (canned)
- Chicken flavored seasoning

Marwa loves cooking. At Apollo, all caregivers know how to cook, which is a rare requirement for care homes. During meal preparations, caregivers and residents can smell food all throughout Apollo. Marwa explained that brain connections are made through sensory stimulation, which is especially important for people with dementia. Since cooking involves all five senses, many people find it calming and invigorating – an effect Estève and Ellie witnessed among residents at Apollo.



FROM THE GARDEN



CARROTS

Wild carrots, also known as “Queen Anne’s lace”, are native to Eurasia and were unintentionally distributed as a weed in the United States during European colonization. Domesticated carrots are now extensively grown throughout temperate zones around the world. As a cool-season vegetable, carrots are best planted in early spring and fall and do not thrive during hot weather. And yet, amidst the heat of July, carrots grow at Apollo, nestled between a wall and a mesquite tree. They are found in many colors, including red, orange, yellow, white, and purple. Carrots contain nutrients such as beta-carotene, fiber, vitamin K1, potassium, and antioxidants. Health benefits of carrots include a reduced risk of cancer, lower blood cholesterol, weight loss, and improved eye health.

PURSLANE (RIGLA)

Roda and Marwa both recognized purslane their her home in Africa. They mentioned that the leaves are called “rigla”, which is the Arabic name for purslane. Rigla holds cultural significance for Roda. In the spring, Roda gave rigla seeds to some of the volunteers, explaining that rigla is a highly nutritious food and an important part of her traditional diet. As it happens, rigla grows like a weed in Arizona, which has a similar climate to Sudan and South Sudan

Purslane, or rigla, is a succulent plant with reddish-green stems, small, rounded green leaves, and tiny yellow flowers. Although it is known as a weed in many cultures, purslane is also an edible and highly nutritious vegetable. The texture of purslane stems and leaves is crunchy and the taste is slightly sour or salty, similar to spinach and watercress. Purslane grows in a wide range of climates and regions around the world. It appears every spring and survives throughout the hot summer months, as it can tolerate drought. A superfood, purslane is an excellent source of beta-carotene, vitamin C, omega-3 fatty acids, and minerals such as potassium, magnesium, and calcium. Consuming purslane can reduce inflammation, stimulate detoxification, improve bone health, alleviate respiratory conditions, and help fight diabetes.



GRETTA AND JADA

JULY 13, 2023

COOKING ACTIVITY WITH GRETTA

Gretta appreciated the first cooking experience and was eager to participate again. This time, she chose to make a fruit salad. The research team had pre-cut all the fruits so Gretta would not need to use the knife. Gretta first placed the fruits, including strawberries, blueberries, and grapes, in a green bowl to wash them, then transposed them into a fruit salad bowl under Jada's guidance. Gretta took care to create a colorful, beautiful arrangement of all the fruits.

PREPARING LUNCH WITH JADA

RECIPE: SAUTEED PORK WITH POTATOES, VEGETABLE MEDLEY, AND PINEAPPLE SALAD

INGREDIENTS:

- Fresh pork
- Butter beans
- Tomatoes
- Bell peppers
- Potatoes
- Onions
- Lettuce
- Pineapple

Jada is from Jamaica. At Apollo, she works with her husband. Her eighteen-year-old son who has special needs also accompanies her to Apollo. His spirit exudes smooth calm as he keeps the residents company while joining them in many of the daily activities. Jada knows almost all of the plants in the garden and has stories for many of them. She told Estève and Ellie how she soaks rosemary in water or oil, then puts the solution on her hair to make it stronger. In the kitchen, Jada skillfully marinated the pork and prepared the pineapple salad with a Jamaican twist. The final meal boasted amazing colors and mouth-watering flavors.



FROM THE GARDEN



CHILI PEPPERS

Chili peppers originated from the northern Amazon basin, making them indigenous to Central and South America, Mexico, southern United States, and the West Indies by natural spread. Chili peppers grow best in hot, dry summer seasons and continue bearing until frost. They are rich in vitamins and minerals like Vitamin C, Vitamin B6, Vitamin K1, potassium, copper, and vitamin A. They are also an excellent source of the plant compound capsanthin, which is responsible for their red color and has powerful antioxidant properties that may fight cancer. Consuming chili peppers can improve digestive health and metabolism, alleviate migraines, provide joint pain relief, fight inflammation, support cardiovascular health, decrease risks of type 2 diabetes, improve cognitive functions, and promote red blood cell growth.

ROSEMARY

Rosemary is an evergreen aromatic herb of the mint family. It grows in bushes with wood-like stems, short, pine-like needles, and white, pink, purple, or blue flowers. Its leaves have a pungent, slightly bitter taste and are used as a culinary herb, in perfumery, and as an emblem of remembrance. Rosemary is native to the Mediterranean region and is widely grown in gardens in warm climates. Hailed since ancient times for its medicinal properties, rosemary provides some iron, calcium, and vitamin B6 and can help alleviate muscle pain, improve memory, boost the immune and circulatory system, and promote hair growth.



CARROT GREENS

Carrot greens are the delicate, leafy tops attached to fresh carrots. Not only are they edible, but they are also a versatile ingredient in savory dishes such as soups, salads, and curries. Carrot greens have an earthy, bitter flavor and are packed with nutrients. They are rich in vitamin A, fiber, vitamin C, calcium, iron, vitamin K, and antioxidants. Health benefits of carrot greens include their ability to boost the immune system, improve vision, eliminate toxins, regulate blood pressure, improve bone density, and aid in digestion.

CONCLUSION

They say: “Old age sucks.” There is the body, of course. The body that could run for miles, spend sleepless nights, and promptly get up every morning without cracks or pain is now slower, more susceptible to break, and tires early. It needs a med box and a set schedule. Even harder is the way people treat you differently. Your kids and even grandkids – whom you taught everything – now tell you what to do. Perhaps you are starting to forget. What year is this? Why are my car keys in the fridge? Where do I live again? At some point, you might be told to leave your own house to move into an unfamiliar environment, with people that you have never seen in your life. Scary, isn't it?

When stepping into the unknown, food makes a world of difference. Delicious smells and textures resonate deep inside, bringing comfort and calm to the most disoriented residents. That is because food is not just food. Food is part of our earliest core memories, and eating delicious food activates those memories. Food also connects us with the earth, subconsciously reminding us that we are part of nature, and that nature takes care of us. At Apollo Residential Assisted Living, the caregiving team is very attuned to the powers of deliciousness. As a result, food and the garden evidently became protagonists of this project.

We had two main goals for this project: (1) exploring the benefits of multisensory exploration for dementia patients, and (2) reconnecting food preparation with the landscape's story by using edible foods from the garden.

Through the dessert-making activities with the residents, we observed their focus, willingness to participate, and eagerness to share their memories with us. Their memories were expressed in words – like Geoff speaking of his mother and Bill speaking of his photo album – and through their bodies – in Fiona's impeccable bowl cleaning technique and Gretta's careful ordering of the fruit salad. Even those who did not want to participate in the activities were curious to see us cook with the caregivers, asked questions, smiled, and enjoyed the lunch. This pilot provided very encouraging results to develop dementia research outside of the biomedical model, in ways that are empowering and meaningful for the residents. The decision to hire a recreational therapist to organize weekly activities focused on food, arts, fitness, and music was one of the direct outcomes of this research.



Cooking activity, November 18, 2023



Beets, lettuce, potatoes, and broccoli



Meal prep harvest, February 24, 2024

What of the garden? Since the project, the garden has continued its growth and evolution. The winter season gave beets, carrots, bok choy, cilantro, broccoli, and kale. Most of these had self-seeded from the previous year. A thick layer of mulch was added to the ground to protect the ground, capture moisture, and provide nutrients to the soil. As we are approaching Easter, tomatoes, eggplants, lettuces, sunflowers, sweet peas and strawberries are growing. The leaves of the fig trees are coming back, and there is hope to harvest bananas, guavas, and pomegranates this year. When the weather allows it, the lunch is served in the garden, so residents can watch the plants, the birds, and all the life growing and transforming at its own pace. A composting program will be rolled out at the end of the year to return the nutrients into the soil, and the caregiving team is developing new recipes to further integrate the edible plants in the meals served at Apollo.

We want to express our sincere gratitude to the caregivers, who generously shared their stories and expertise over the course of the sessions. We were touched to observe their affection for the residents, and their dedication to give them the best of themselves – far beyond the job requirements. They shared their sadness when residents die and explained how they pay respects to their souls. We witnessed their encouragement to the residents, their kind words, their hugs, and their artistry in creating “smooth calm.”

The adage might be true and “old age” comes with many challenges. Yet the caregivers all reminded us that aging is a privilege, and to respect those in their care as the beneficiaries of an immense blessing.

– Estève Giraud & Ellie Long, March 2024

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS



Fiona Sauvé and Estève Giraud brainstorm this booklet's format and content

ESTÈVE GIRAUD

Estève Giraud is the Director of Research at the ASU Swette Center for Sustainable Food Systems, where she currently leads the Swette Center data collection and analysis efforts for the USDA Transition to Organic Partnership Program which aims to support US farmers to transition to organic agriculture. She also works with a team of local partners and the City of Tempe to foster food and agriculture access and knowledge for low-income communities. Her research interests lay at the nexus of ethics of care and food systems, and include organic agriculture, urban agriculture, food policy, food security, food sovereignty, sustainability and food systems resilience among others. Estève holds a Ph.D. in Sustainability from Arizona State University, a Master in Economics and Management from University Pompeu Fabra (Spain), and a Master in Business from Toulouse Business School (France). In her free time, she loves to cook and garden, and she is currently in training to become a Master Gardener.

FIONA SAUVÉ

Fiona Sauvé is a graduate student pursuing a master's degree in Narrative Studies and a graduate certificate in Nonprofit Leadership and Management at Arizona State University (ASU). She has recently started a new position as Multimedia Journalist at ASU Watts College of Public Service & Community Solutions. There she assists in creating, writing, and editing digital marketing content to promote the people and programs of Watts College. In May 2023, Fiona graduated summa cum laude from Barrett, The Honors College at ASU with a bachelor's degree in English (Writing, Rhetorics, and Literacies) and a minor in Violin Performance. After graduate school, she plans to be an inspirational storyteller for a faith-based nonprofit organization and a freelance writer, violinist, musician, singer, songwriter, and private violin teacher. In addition to writing and music, her greatest passions are her Catholic faith and her desire to serve those around her. Through her original works of creative nonfiction, poetry, and music, Fiona aspires to bring light to topics such as faith, human dignity, identity, homelessness, poverty, and mental health issues. Fiona designed the layout and wrote the content for this booklet.



Ellie Long and Pascale Jarvis brainstorm the watercolor images to be included in the booklet

ELENORE LONG

Elenore Long is specialist in the field of rhetoric and writing studies who examines and theorizes how displaced individuals engage with and respond to global, social, cultural, and economic disruptions. With a focus on the rhetorical dimensions of public life, she builds local partnerships with people who are often cast to society's margins and whose access to a polity cannot be assumed or taken for granted. Her critical, community-based, transdisciplinary research methodologies demonstrate what grassroots, use-inspired research and development look like in rhetoric and writing studies. This research is guided by questions such as, How do people call others to discover their interdependencies—the precise terms on which their own thriving is mixed up in the thriving of others, often across deep differences? Long is a professor of English at Arizona State University.

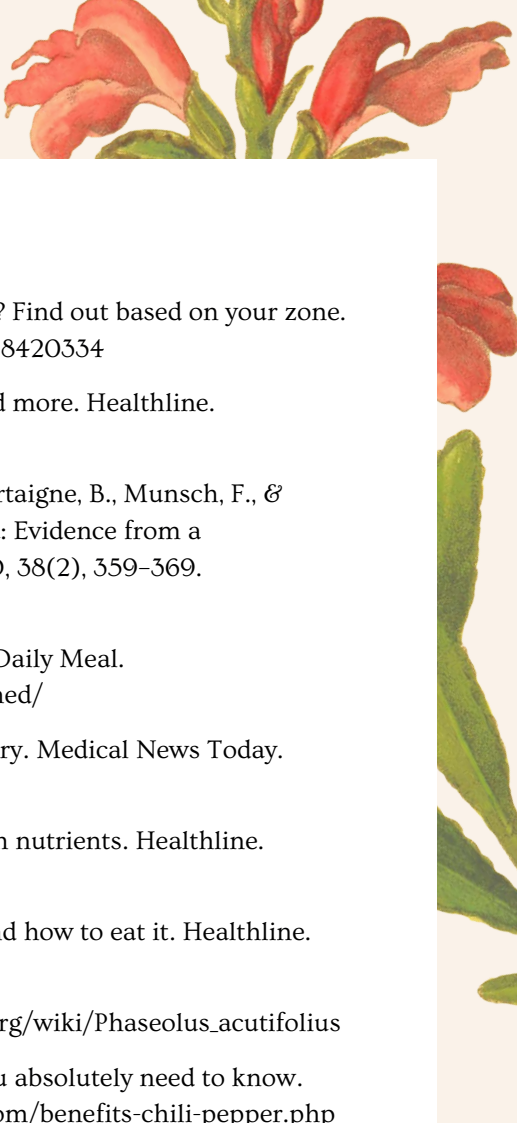
PASCALE JARVIS

Pascale Jarvis drew and painted the watercolors for this booklet. Pascale is a relief printmaker, a craft they learned while studying creative writing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. After graduating in 2019, Pascale returned to their childhood home of Massachusetts to refurbish an old farmhouse at the foot of Mt. Tom. Photographing plants and creatures on Mt. Tom, sketching and carving them from linoleum, and printing them by hand, their practice continues their stewardship of the mountain. Pascale says prints are a way to focus one's exquisite attention to place - and to all the renewal accompanying that deep connection. Along with printmaking, Pascale also gardens, coaches other writers, and paints.



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