



SIMPLE SUMMER PLEASURES

Sweet, Easy, Perfect

by Claire O'Neil

Summer ever beckons with the freedom of possibilities that long sunny days foster. It's a perfect time to cultivate the art of treating ourselves to simple pleasures.

Why? Author Neil Pasricha observes, "I like to stop and remember sometimes that we'll never be as young as we are right now. We only get 100 years or so to enjoy interior design, books, buffets and radio waves, clean sheets and good movie seats, bakery air, rain hair, bubble wrap and illegal naps."

The Toronto-based creator of the international bestseller, *The Book of Awesome: Snow Days, Bakery Air, Finding Money in Your Pocket, and Other Simple, Brilliant Things*, is on such a roll that he keeps adding to the list at 1000AwesomeThings.com.

All it takes to travel this pleasurable path is a little attitude adjustment and awareness, agrees Victoria Moran,

author of *Creating a Charmed Life*. She suggests we continually ask, "What simple thing can I do today that will make it an amazing day?"

What follows is not exactly a bucket list, but more like a summer "sand pail", sparked by *Natural Awakenings* publishers and contributors around the country. Taking cues from summers past and present, they are happy to offer a springboard to enjoyment.

Acting Like a Kid Again

Just the thought of summer days to come brings back memories of free time, family vacations and outdoor fun. Whether we go swimming, sip real lemonade on the porch or catch and release fireflies with our kids or grand-

kids, we love renewing that "in the moment" feeling for ourselves.

"I love hanging out with 3-year-olds," says Pasricha, "because they're still seeing the world for the first time. Every moment is right now."

If you're having trouble reaching your inner child, "Think of how you were when you were 10 years old," suggests Joy Behar, comedian and co-host of *The View*. "What did you like to do then?" Sometimes revisiting a childhood pleasure or two can provide the missing link to fresh summer fun. Here are some likely candidates.

Retro sweets. "Every time I heard the tinkling bell of the ice cream truck, I would run out on bare feet for a treat, stubbing my big toe more times than I want to remember," recalls Las Vegas Publisher Mary Ruetten of childhood summers in Southern California. Today, fresh fruit does the trick for her.

A dip in the ol' swimming hole. Reid Boyer, who publishes in Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley, observes, "Anyone that has experienced high summer heat knows the relief of a good, cool swimming hole. I still remember when my 4-year-old son and I packed up the pickup truck, drove to the community beach at the local lake and set up our picnic lunch, beach chairs and toys. We must have jumped off the end of that pier 100 times each, doing silly jumps and egging each other on to top the last pratfall. We laughed until our bellies hurt."

Bike riding and kite flying. "My all-time favorite summertime treat is bike riding," says Tina Woods, *Natural Awakenings'* New York City publisher. "Being free and blowing in the wind is sheer exuberance. Flying a kite feels like that too, and anytime I pass a kite off to someone else a huge smile breaks out across their face. It's beautiful to see!"

Horseback riding. Amy Hass, a longtime publisher in West Michigan, notes, "My fondest summer pastime as a girl was spending every daylight hour with my horse. I would get to the barn early in the morning when there was still dew on the ground and spend all day cleaning up the stalls and barn, grooming my horse and then taking her out on country trails or maybe

along the train tracks, or else practicing in the ring for our next show. She loved cooling off by going for a swim in Lake Michigan."

Superheroics. Why not, asks *Natural Awakenings* contributor Bill Van Arsdale, of Naples, Florida, who recalls a favorite summer adventure on Cape Cod. "We would tie long beach towels around our necks that reached our ankles, rear back and run as fast as we could through the scrub grass and moss to the edge, where the hard surface broke off into a plunging dune that met the Atlantic shore. For a brief moment, yelling 'Superman,' capes flapping, arms and legs flailing, we all became our hero, before landing in a delightful steep skid of clay, pebbles and coarse glacial sand."

Indulging the Senses

The sights, sounds, smells, tastes and textures of summer are easy to discover and recreate. They can be as simple as making the most of...

Tai chi at dawn. For Atlanta Publisher Larissa Stewart, taking her Tai chi or yoga practice outside—by a lake or stream—is a great way to start her day. "In the early morning, there is often a cool mist rising from the earth that feels so delicate on your skin and refreshing to breathe. Everything is at peace around you accompanied by the quiet twitter of birds as they awake with the morning sun."

Red wine at sunset. Jeff Browne, who publishes in New Mexico, loves getting out on a Vespa and scootering around by himself into the sunset. "Other times, I like to sit with friends on the portal (a New Mexican porch) and have a relaxing and feel-good therapeutic discussion, maybe accompanied by a glass of wine."

Dining alfresco. "On summer evenings," says Northern California Publisher Jaime Mitchell, "my loved ones and I take every opportunity to indulge in outdoor meals, complete with citronella candles and cool, crisp salads featuring our state's fresh summer fruits. Strawberries, peaches and nectarines become staples in my diet during warm months."

Classic clambake. As a youth, South Jersey publisher Don Moore spent summer vacations on Cape Cod, where, "Days spent by the water's edge annually culminated in a classic neighborhood New England clambake."

Constructing the rock-lined pit and stoking the fire took all day, remembers Moore. "Layers of potatoes, lobster, mussels, corn and clams were laid between rockweed. After we covered the pit with a wet tarp and buried it under sand, mouthwatering aromas would begin to escape into the breezy evening air." He adds, "I always felt close to nature when sitting on the beach listening to the crashing waves, while filling my hungry belly from a plate brimming with the ocean's bounty."



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Stargazing... on land. Graphic Designer Steve Hagedwood, of Bonita Springs, Florida, grew up in Nashville, Tennessee, where he began a lifelong fascination with the night sky. “Pop bought a pair of high-powered military binoculars at an army surplus sale after the big war; I had a smaller pair from Sears Roebuck & Co. We would wrangle in good spirits over who got which pair and how long each of us could hold onto them amid the stillness of the cool, night air filled with the sweet fragrances of honeysuckle and moonflowers,” he remembers.

... and on water. Peggy Malecki, *Natural Awakenings*’ Chicago publisher, loves the starry view from a friend’s sailboat on Lake Michigan. On one notable trip in a race across the lake, “In the wee hours of the midnight watch, the entire Milky Way galaxy stretched directly over the top of the boat as we caught small zephyrs off Traverse Bay,” she says. “Watching the Perseid meteor shower, we counted shooting stars and watched for satellites crawling through the night sky.”

Personal Pursuits

“Having space and time to nurture our creativity may be one of people’s authentic hungers,” muses author Sarah Ban Breathnach, well-known for her *Simple Abundance* books. She suggests maybe allotting an hour a day to dabble in a hobby, to paint, to plot or to throw pots. It can feel like taking a little vacation every day.

“Some days are shaped by summer pleasures, others are redeemed by them,” concludes Breathnach in *Simple Pleasures*. Making time for such simple joys nurtures an ongoing summer vacation state of mind.

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Just Do It for Fun

Here are more ideas for simple pleasures to get summer juices flowing, from *Natural Awakenings* publishers and staff around the country.

Picture perfect. I’d like to spend a month this summer at my friend’s house and set up my camera on a tripod near her bird feeders. She welcomes flocks of red and yellow finches, cardinals, blue jays and woodpeckers, all of which are fun to photograph. Plus, her flower gardens are awesome. Summer, here I come!
~ *Linda Sechrist, writer and editor, Nashville, Tennessee*

Potluck block party. Every second Sunday, our next-door neighbors would host a summer barbecue potluck that transformed into a mini-block party. Kids, parents and grandparents brought lawn chairs and set up rows of card tables covered with colorful camp blankets and old tablecloths. Someone always remembered to add a few Mason jars filled with puffy, purple-tinged hydrangeas, dainty red- and yellow-spurred columbines or the simple cheer of sunflowers.

We feasted on grilled goodies, accompanied by plump tomatoes, crisp cucumbers, raw carrot strips and steamed corn on the cob, all freshly picked that day from backyard gardens. Homemade baked beans sizzled in a pottery crock. If we were lucky, as a special treat, big wedges of sweet, ice-cold watermelon arrived as dessert.

~ *Barb Amrhein, editor, Naples, Florida*

Day at the beach. If there’s sun in the skies, you can safely bet that I’m sitting on my oceanside beach chair (which includes a beverage cup and foot rest) soaking up the rays, protected by natural sunscreen. With our house just three doors from paradise, we take advantage of it all summer long.

~ *Julia Lopez-Motherway, publisher, Long Island, New York*

Instant comfort. The neighborhood hangout spot when I was a kid was the garden of the only childless couple in our neighborhood. Many times we trekked home with gift bags full of ripe produce, a memory that surfaces every time I smell a freshly picked tomato.

~ *Maisie Raftery, publisher, Boston, Massachusetts*

Fun and games. As kids, a dozen of us liked to gather at the cul-de-sac at the top of our long and winding hill as soon as it was dark for a game of flashlight tag, a battery-powered version of hide-and-go-seek. The crickets would start chirruping and the forest behind our houses closed in, offset a bit by the sounds of after-dinner cleanup and televised news through open windows. If you were hit with the light, you had to surrender and the first one found became the next seeker; the rest of us, guided by the light in the stillness of the night, would sneak up and scare the heck out of whoever was “it”.

~ *Terry Chriswell, publisher, Denver, Colorado*

Unplugging once a week. One of the perks of living on the Eastern Shore of Mobile Bay is the amazing sunsets. On Fridays after a long workweek, we pack up for our own brand of happy hour on the bluff overlooking the city pier. We bring along a blanket to sit on, our favorite beverage and a snack to enjoy as we enjoy a simple evening of good conversation and a beautiful view.

~ *Meredith Montgomery, publisher, Mobile/Baldwin, Alabama*

River tubing. I love to dip my toes, fingers and backside into the cool, clear waters of a local river and let the current take me away; enjoying nature at its best is only enhanced by the playful noises of fellow loungers. It is a true delight!

~ *Karen Goins, publisher, San Antonio, Texas*