



Better Home Living

The Newsletter That's Both Informative and Fun!

February

I hope you enjoy this month's newsletter!

Mari's Cleaning Solutions

Cheap, and Useful, Tool

Curtain tension rods aren't just for curtains.

The useful little devices can help you create all sorts of things:

- Under the kitchen sink, use tension rods as a hanger for spray cleaners.
- In cabinets, tension rods can be used upright for plate or pan lid separators.
- In closets, use them to hang shoes, according to HGTV.
- In craft spaces, use them to hang spools of ribbon.
- In kitchens, use them to hang rolls of paper towels in cabinets or under the sink.

Spay and neuter: Save the Animals

Pet owners should watch for low-cost neuter and spay offers at the end of February in honor of Spay Day, Feb. 25 and World Spay Day, Feb. 27.

It's the kindest thing you can do for a family pet. Neutering limits wandering and aggression, and extends the life of your pet, according to the Humane Society.

In the United States, about 6 million to 8 million homeless animals enter animal shelters every year. About half of these animals are adopted. The other half are euthanized. In some states, as many as 300,000 homeless animals are euthanized in animal shelters each year.

Be kind. Save an animal by getting your pet neutered.



Valentine Lore Abounds

Superstitions abound about Valentine's Day and many involve birds.

If the first bird a girl sees on Valentine's Day is a robin, she will know she is to marry a sailor. If she sees a goldfinch, she will marry a millionaire and if she sees a sparrow, she will be the wife of a poor man. But if she glimpses a woodpecker first, she will never marry.

So go many of the tales that have become part of the lore (though many have been forgotten) of love and Valentine's Day. Here are a few others:

The oldest known valentine card still in existence is on display at the British Museum. This valentine is a love poem written by the Duke of Orleans to his wife while he was imprisoned in the Tower of London.

Christian tradition for Valentine's Day dates to the third century, when a kindly priest named Valentinus was arrested by emperor Claudius II for crimes that included helping Christian martyrs and marrying young lovers in secret. Some sources say that, while in jail before his martyrdom, Valentinus wrote a letter to his jailer's daughter, signing it "From Your Valentine." If that is true, Valentinus started a powerful tradition.

Today, according to the Greeting Card Association, 1 billion cards are sent for Valentine's Day, second only to Christmas (2.5 billion).

Flowers are another tradition of Valentine's Day. Red roses are said to denote true love. A pansy declares loving thoughts, a periwinkle suggests early friendship and a red tulip professes powerful love.

Do You Know...

Thanks a Bunch!

... Someone that could use our services? Perhaps a friend, family member, co-worker, or someone from church?

When a new client signs up for regular cleaning services at your recommendation; you will receive \$50 off your cleaning after their 3rd cleaning!

If you would think of 3 or 4 people that could use our services, then don't hesitate to call them and give them our name and phone number. Be sure to have them mention your name when they call so we can send your Bonus!

"We look forward to our cleaning day with the ladies. They are thorough, very pleasant, and good workers. Thank you!"
-Linda H.

Secret Sauce: Sriracha Spices Up Steak and Peppers

The wildly popular Sriracha hot sauce will put some spice into your Valentine dinner.

Sriracha is the 80-year-old invention of a Thai cook, Thanom Chakkapak, who limited the secret sauce to family and friends until her friends demanded more. She then manufactured the sauce, quickly making it the most popular sauce in Thailand.



According to Community Table, the sauce was unknown in the West until a Vietnamese immigrant marketed his own version of the sauce through Huy Fong Foods with the famous rooster logo.

Today, its fame is widespread, and you can find it on the shelves of nearly any grocery store.

Its name is pronounced See-rah-jah, as if the syllables were separate words.

This recipe for flank steak and peppers from emeals.com showcases the flavors of Sriracha. Experiment with the sauce, since it is spicy.

Sriracha Steak and Peppers

Ingredients:

1/2-pound flank steak	2 cloves garlic, minced
1/2 teaspoon pepper	2 tablespoons soy sauce
4 teaspoons toasted sesame oil	1 tablespoon water
1 red bell pepper thinly sliced (or any color),	1 1/2 teaspoons Sriracha hot sauce
1 cup thinly sliced green onions	1 1/2 teaspoons cornstarch

Instructions:

Thinly slice beef across the grain; sprinkle with pepper. Heat 2 teaspoons oil in a large wok or nonstick skillet over high heat. Add beef to pan, and cook 3 minutes or until browned. Remove from pan. Heat 2 teaspoons oil in same skillet over medium-high heat. Add bell pepper, green onions and garlic; cook 3 minutes or until tender. Whisk together soy sauce, water, Sriracha and cornstarch in a small bowl until blended. Add beef and sauce mixture to pan. Bring to a boil and cook 1 to 2 minutes, stirring constantly, or until sauce is thickened.

Trivia Teaser – Spread Your Wings

1. In Greek mythology, who flew too close to the sun on wings held together with wax and fell into the sea?
a-Hermes, b-Hesperus, c-Zephyr, d-Icarus.

2. Paul McCartney & Wings performed the theme song for which James Bond movie? a-"Goldfinger," b-"Diamonds are Forever," c-"Live and Let Die," d-"Octopussy."

3. Which bird has the largest wingspan of birds capable of flight?
a-Condor, b-Albatross, c-Bald eagle, d-Booby.

4. From 1979-2017, the Detroit Red Wings played home games in an arena named after which professional boxer?
a-Joe Louis, b-Jersey Joe Walcott, c-Muhammad Ali, d-Sugar Ray Robinson.

5. How many Buffalo wings are served in a Hooters Tailgate Bucket?
a-24, b-50, c-75, d-100.

6. Which job did Lowell Mather, played by Thomas Haden Church, have on the NBC sitcom "Wings"?
a-Mechanic, b-Caterer, c-Photographer, d-Bartender.

7. Who sang "The Wind Beneath My Wings" to Johnny Carson during his penultimate appearance on "The Tonight Show"?
a-Barbara Walters, b-Bette Midler, c-Barbra Streisand, d-Barry Manilow.

8. According to chaos theory, the flapping of the wings of which creature can cause a hurricane?
a-Sparrow, b-Dragonfly, c-Hummingbird, d-Butterfly.

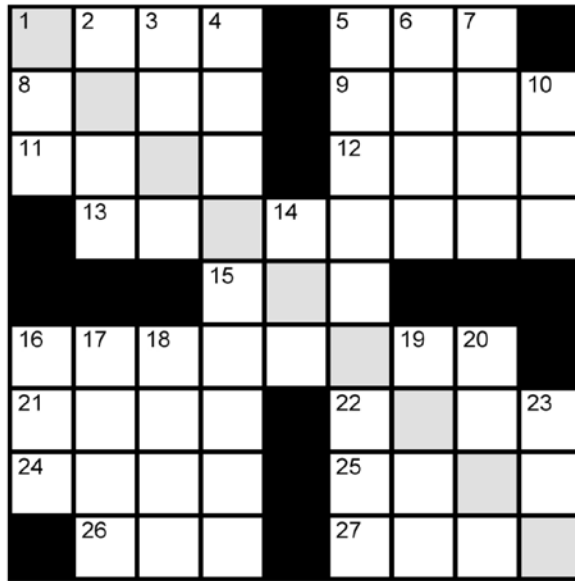
9. Which U.S. state was the home of President Josiah Bartlet on TV's "The West Wing"?
a-New Hampshire, b-Pennsylvania, c-Indiana, d-Oregon.

10. Which country singer's hits include "Sing Me Back Home," "If We Make It Through December" and "Silver Wings"?
a-Toby Keith, b-Merle Haggard, c-Steve Earle, d-Jerry Reed.

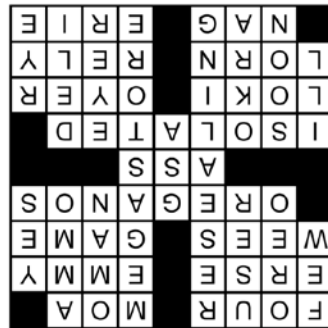
Overhand Swim

Across

1. Gettysburg Address starter
 5. Extinct flightless bird
 8. Gaelic language
 9. TV award
 11. "Pee-___ Big Adventure" (1985\ film)
 12. Up for it
 13. Greek herbs
 15. Beast of burden
 16. Remote
 21. Mischievous Norse god
 22. ___ and terminator (criminal court)
 24. Desolate
 25. Bank (on)
 26. Bother
 27. Buffalo's county
- Down
1. Small number
 2. Hydrox alternative
 3. Computer operator
 4. Closing again
 5. Target or Walmart
 6. Arab League member
 7. BBs, e.g.



10. "Indubitably"
14. Fed. construction overseer
16. Down with the flu
17. Procrastinator's promise
18. Gumbo ingredient
19. Ogler
20. Pastrami purveyor
23. "The Catcher in the ___"



The headline is a clue to the answer in the diagonal.

Facts to Teach Your New Teen Driver

Teen drivers are inexperienced, usually distracted, and impulsive, statistics show. That's every single teenager, from the A student to the wild child.

That won't come as news to the insurance industry, which charges high rates for teen drivers. But, teens might not know the dangers of their own inexperience. Parents who are teaching their kids to drive might point out some sad truths.

First, teens have a lot of car accidents and car accidents kill.

Of all age groups, 16-year-olds have the highest crash rates, and a full third of all deaths among 13- to 19-year-olds are likely to occur in a car crash. In fact, more than 3,000 people die in car accidents every single day.

Second, teens are unusually distracted behind the wheel.

According to dosomething.org, more than half of teen drivers admit they use a phone while driving.

More worrisome is that texting can take eyes off the road for almost five seconds -- a lot of time for something to go wrong. Car and Driver Magazine did a study on this and found texting while driving had the same effect as driving drunk.

Teens must learn to leave their phones unanswered while driving. That's a lesson adults can learn too since 27 percent of adults have read or sent a text message while driving.

Third, driving around teen friends can be deadly. Fatality rates increase with each extra passenger in the car. It's dangerous for the driver and for the teen rider. Fewer than half of teens say they would speak up if the driver was scaring them.

Teens must also recognize that their inexperience can get them into trouble.

Driving in poor conditions such as snow, fog, or rain can be dangerous, and teens must give the task their complete attention.

- 1-d, Icarus
- 2-c, "Live and Let Die"
- 3-b, Albatross
- 4-a, Joe Louis
- 5-b, 50
- 6-a, Mechanic
- 7-b, Bette Midler
- 8-d, Butterfly
- 9-a, New Hampshire
- 10-b, Merle Haggard

Mortgage Interest Deduction and the New Tax Plan

A new tax plan passed by Congress in December 2017 allows taxpayers to deduct mortgage interest up to \$750,000.

This is lower than the previous limit of \$1 million.

The limit only affects new mortgages, not existing mortgages.

Since the median list price of a home is \$270,000, most homeowners won't be affected by the limit decrease. It is expected to affect about 1.3 percent of new mortgages on very expensive homes, usually in expensive housing markets such as coastal areas.

The new limits on deductions aren't expected to affect many people nationally, according to realtor.com. That's because homeowners can only take the deduction if they itemize and only about one-third of taxpayers do that. Of those that itemize, just over 21 percent use the deduction. However, it will affect high-cost markets in local areas.

Experts are divided as to the impact of the new tax plan on housing. Some see the tax changes as encouraging renting in high-cost areas, causing housing prices to fall. On the other hand, with a higher standard deduction, taxpayers in lower brackets could find themselves able to buy a home. That could push prices up, according to realtor.com.



"Why aren't I in school? I have an app that does that for me."

Keeping Track of a Child at a Theme Park

One minute you are holding your kid's hand, and the next, he's gone.

At a crowded theme park, jostling crowds or just a busy kid can quickly turn a fun day into a terrifying experience for child and parent.

That was one mother's fear as she struggled to hold on to her child at a theme park and she came up with a clever solution.

Michelle Walsh solved the problem that day by writing her cell phone number on her child's arm. But later she improved upon the idea, creating the SafetyTat, a temporary tattoo for kids.

According to The Wall Street Journal, the plan worked well for one family touring a huge science center. In an instant, they lost track of their 4-year-old daughter. Then, just as quickly, the mother's cell phone began ringing: Security had the child at the front desk. The tattoo worked.

SafetyTats are sold in children's stores, amusement parks, travel stores, and online at safetytat.com.

You can get sticky labels with a place for a phone number and medical information.

Customized water-based tattoos can also be ordered online.

Flour Doesn't Last Forever

If you buy flour in December for special baking, you will probably have some left over in February.

The good news is that, if you've stored it in an air-tight container, it's probably still good for Valentine's Day cakes.

A good rule of thumb is to throw away wheat flour in four to six months, according to Eat by Date. Self-rising flour, which has baking powder in it, has a shorter shelf life.

Corn flour can last up to a year.

Buying the right amount helps prevent waste. One five-pound bag of flour equals 17.5 cups.

CONGRATULATIONS to Elizabeth Ortega in her additional new role of Property Inspector. Elizabeth is doing an outstanding job in her new position.

Thank you Elizabeth

New Addition to Mari's Property Management & Cleaning Services

Gloria Serrano. Gloria is our new Office Assistant and doing an incredible job for us.

Thank you Gloria



*How great is the love
the Father has lavished on us,
that we should be called children of God!*

1 John 3:1