

People & Places



A woman wearing a face mask, to protect against the spread of the new coronavirus, visits a botanical garden in Tokyo on Aug 10. (AP)

Food

Exhilaration and fatigue

Home cooks assess new normal during pandemic

It's been months since the coronavirus pandemic limited restaurant options and caused many people — even the most kitchen-phobic among us — to try to cook more.

How are people faring?

Some are experiencing cooking fatigue. Others have found they enjoy preparing and eating homemade food more than they expected. Some new habits and skills appear likely to last.

Before she began quarantining in late March, 33-year-old television producer **Erika Navarrete Nagle** of Denver had never cooked chicken.

"I was a mess in the kitchen," she says. "I grew up in a Cuban family with a mother and sister who always cooked for me. You'd think I picked up a thing or two, but I've always been a workaholic and I never made time nor had the desire to cook."

"It took a global pandemic and mandatory quarantine for me to learn," she says.

She's feeling great about her progress: "I jumped up and down when I sautéed my first onions and garlic. I almost took to social media to brag."

Navarrete loved her mom's Cuban chicken breast recipe, and asked for the recipe. "My mom is a typical Cuban mom cook ... no measurements, just 'a ojo,' which means 'eye it.' I don't do 'a ojo,'" she says.

After some fails, Navarrete Nagle has mastered it. Mostly, however, she relies on cookbooks these days. "I've always been intimidated by cookbooks; now they are my best friends!"

John Wing, a travel agent in New York City, used to spend a lot of time in his car ferrying kids to and from activities. He was already the primary cook in his household of 5 people, but since March, when his driving duties abated, he's been cooking more than ever.

His everyday cooking style hasn't changed much — he is sticking with his repertoire of chicken cutlets, fajitas, pasta, salmon and homemade pizza, balancing the different preferences of three kids living at home.

Wing also has dug into a few cooking projects, like homemade bagels, learning the proper way to deep fry, and perfecting his scones game. The family has begun ordering in more now, too, and his kids have taken up baking.

Control

"The hugest adjustment for me was surrendering my control over food shopping," says Wing. He describes himself as "that guy who picks up and looks at almost every package of berries before picking the one," and an intuitive shopper who likes to walk up and down every aisle of the market in lieu of using lists. Since the pandemic started, he has been ordering online, which has taken some getting used to.

Emmie Lee, who lives with her husband and two teenagers in New York City, was already an avid cook, but has used her extra time during the pandemic to stretch those muscles. Her babysitter used to make peerless Chinese dumplings, and Lee made it a mission to replicate them with her family's help. "We can't produce them at the incredible rate she can pleat them, but they are delicious!"

Other cooking projects have included Taiwanese beef noodle soup, Spanish tortillas and tahdig (Persian rice). Lee started her quarantine cooking by focusing on foods the family normally ordered in or ate out, trying to satisfy those cravings in her own kitchen.

She also has become a fan of preparing large pieces of meat and re-using that protein for a few meals in different ways. She re-purposes them in salads, sandwiches, or simple rice or pasta bowls. (AP)



People wear face masks while riding the wooden roller coaster at Playland amusement park at the Pacific National Exhibition in Vancouver on Aug 9. The roller coaster and other rides are operating at a reduced capacity due to COVID-19. Guests are required to wear face masks or coverings while waiting in lines and while on rides and the park is closed for an hour each afternoon for sanitization. (AP)



Barragán



Obrador

Variety

MEXICO CITY: Distance learning will begin for more than 30 million Mexican school children Aug 24, but a return to classrooms will remain an uncertain goal, the country's education secretary has said.

Secretary Esteban **Moctezuma Barragán** and executives from the country's largest television networks presented in broad strokes a plan to put educational instruction on television.

Moctezuma said that risks to in-person education continue being too high. Officials fear children could become coronavirus carriers, infecting relatives at home.

"We wanted to return to in-person classes, but it is not possible, nor prudent," Moctezuma said.

Students will not return to classrooms until the government's version of a spotlight to evaluate the pandemic's risk is safely at green.

Throughout **Latin America**, nearly all schooling is being carried out online or through television as the pandemic continues to surge here. School districts around the world are struggling with the decision, knowing that for most students there is no substitute for in-person instruction.

Students continue attending schools in **Nicaragua** and students are scheduled to return to the classroom in **Cuba** on Sept 1. "It is returning to classes with all of the formality," said President **Andrés Manuel López Obrador**. "This is not an emergency or transitory course. It is starting classes in accordance with the education plan." (AP)

Education

Unhappy with school options

Worried parents assemble learning 'pods'

MIAMI, Aug 10, (AP): On the 4-acre farm at the edge of the Everglades where Timea Hunter runs a horse academy, she has hosted plenty of parties, picnics and workshops. So with her children's school building closed, she figured why not use it also a classroom?

While her son and daughter will participate in distance learning at their school, she plans to hire a teacher together with the families of four to six other children who could provide supplemental, in-person instruction on the farm shaded by royal poinciana trees.

"We have a very nice picnic area, a mini playground and big tables where the kids can sit under the shade and they can study there," Hunter said. "We are not educated to do this, so everybody is freaking out and saying, 'What are we gonna do, how are we going to do it?'"

As the coronavirus pandemic has clouded hopes of reopening schools nationwide, parents who want more than remote instruction have been scrambling to hire tutors and private teachers for small groups of children. The race to set up "learning pods" threatens to vastly deepen inequities in access to education.

In some cases, parents are paying thousands of dollars each to include their children in pods, promising teachers \$40 to \$100 an hour or more. A Facebook group on learning pods attracted more than 30,000 members within three weeks of being formed and launched numerous offshoots in states and cities. New sites like pod-up.com and partnerpods.org have emerged offering to connect families and instructors.

Florida Gov Ron DeSantis, a Re-

publican, has called learning pods "luxuries" that are not an option for low-income parents.

"We hear these different things about some parents are going to create their own learning pods and all this other stuff, and just to understand that is really going to be dependent on financial wherewithal and what income bracket they are in," DeSantis said at a recent education discussion. "When you have working-class parents, they really do need to have an option."

Learning

Hunter said distance learning was extremely hard on her 9-year-old son. She said the teacher met with the class once a week and then left the rest up to the parents. Now she also worries about a younger daughter who is entering kindergarten.

"They just gave us all the projects, all the stuff we needed to do was overwhelming. I had to sit with my son and explain everything," she said.

Among those considering work as pod instructors are teachers like Jeanette Matas who are leery of going back to their jobs. Matas, a 42-year-old reading teacher in Miami, knows from seeing her 6th-grade and 7th-grade students take care of younger siblings while also juggling virtual classes that students from lower-income families get "the short end of the stick."

But her grandmother died of COVID-19 after her caretaker infected her, and her own third-grade daughter has suffered from respiratory infections that kept her away from school for weeks. So she is also considering taking a year of leave and getting hired to teach her own pod, bringing along her children.

"It has hit too close to home," she

said. "I don't want to go to the classroom."

Some view the pods as a necessary and even creative solution to the crisis facing the education system.

"It is civil society in action," said Lindsey Burke, director of the Center for Education Policy at the conservative Heritage Foundation, which advocates for school choice policies that allow public funding to follow students to private or alternative schools.

Tina Cheuk, an education researcher at California Polytechnic State University, said she is troubled by the trend toward learning pods and the related push to finance them with public funding that normally would go to the schools.

"That decision has implications for public education," she said. Not only would it defund public education but it threatens to de-professionalize teachers, who are often "replaced" in pods by college students or retirees, she said.

"You choosing to be in a pod may seem very innocent — well, of course, it makes sense. I'm looking out for my family," Cheuk said. "It's these unintended consequences for public education, which we either ignore or we choose to ignore because our private interests trump the others that we don't know."

A group of Oakland, California, elementary school principals spelled out their concerns in open letter, reminding parents that health professionals recommend limiting in-person interactions and pointing out the potential to "cause feelings of exclusion, especially for kids who may see or hear of their peers congregating and learning together while they remain isolated."

LONDON: Time spent in lockdown was just superb for Palmerston, the chief mouser at the UK Foreign Office.

It was so good, in fact, that the cat has

decided to leave sorting out international affairs to the human diplomats and retire to the countryside after four long, hard years on the job.



In this Aug 6, 2020 file photo, Diane Floyd, a seventh grade math teacher at Guntown Middle School, goes over the daily schedule and bell times with her new students on their first day back to school for the Lee County District in Guntown, Miss. As schools reopen around the country, their ability to quickly identify and contain coronavirus outbreaks before they get out of hand is about to be put to the test. (AP)

Palmerston made it official in a letter sent in his name to **Simon McDonald**, the office's permanent under-secretary, which explained that he wanted more time "away from the limelight".

"I have found life away from the front line relaxed, quieter, and easier," a letter signed with two paw prints said. It was posted on Twitter.

Palmerston, who is named after the longest-serving British Foreign Secretary, **Lord Palmerston**, arrived in April 2016 as a rescue cat. (AP)

WEST ADDISON, Vt: A Vermont skydiver who lost his prosthetic leg during a jump has it back, thanks to a farmer who kept an eye out for it and spotted it in a soybean field.

Double amputee **Chris Marckres**, of **Hyde Park**, went for a jump Saturday at Vermont Skydiving Adventures in West Addison and lost one of his prosthetic legs after leaping from the plane.

"I think my adrenaline was so high and I was just so excited, I didn't realize I had lost it," Marckres told NECN and NBC10 Boston.

Marckres, who was harnessed to an instructor, landed safely.

He then put out the word on social media that he'd lost his leg. Farmer Joe Marszalkowski saw the post before finding the prosthetic in a soybean field. Beyond a few scratches, it was undamaged. (AP)