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FEATURE STORY

Spicing Things Up

A little bolder, a little braver, and a whole lot more fun — because there is still plenty of gas in the tank.

Story by Debbie Ables

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“Spicing things up” has many connotations. It can mean transforming your mundane life with new adventures, opening yourself up to new and delightful tastes of all kinds. Why not cast tradition to the wind (along with the rules), or maybe just taking a chance on something new?

As we get older, life has a way of thinning out people, relationships, health and stamina, and that spark of adventure we once carried easily. It now dims if we let it. Recently, I could see it in my friends, both men and women were getting complacent. I even saw myself falling into that state of mind.

I have a dear friend who says she enjoys planning things more than actually doing them. I thought about that and said not me. I personally am finding I am ready to take on some new adventures in my personal life. I am feeling restless. No, I do not mean bungee jump off a bridge, climb a mountain, or sleep alone in the wilderness.



WHAT I WANT

I want to stretch my imagination. I want to develop my artistic capabilities. I want to become a better writer. I want to experience magic and passion with a companion — or TWO.

The Spice Rack: A brand-new crossword to fill in, print, and share — playful, a little saucy, and just blush-worthy enough to make you smile.

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IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

“I want to spice up my life. If not now, when?”

This is the year of the Chinese symbol the “Fire Horse.” It is said to be a year of chaos, transformation, and bold shifts. I am choosing to take that as a sign, a nudge or maybe a wink. I feel it is the moment to re-evaluate what thrills me, what feeds my soul, and what I want to invite into my life now.



And for those of you who prefer “spicing up” in the literal sense, I have included a playful tip sheet you can flavor up your meals with. But I am after more than a dash of cayenne or a sprinkle of cinnamon. I’m curious. I am open and ready to liven up everything — my days, my creativity, my connections, and my sense of wonder.

So tell me — are you spicing up your life too? If not now, when?

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A TREASURE THAT ONLY A FEW KNEW WAS THERE



Photo: Bryan Sherwood —
Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0

A Monk, a Poet, and a Quiet Little House in the Woods

Just about ten miles north of Bardstown, down a quiet country road in New Haven, sits the Abbey of Gethsemani — a working Trappist monastery where the monks keep a vow of silence and have made their famous fruitcake and cheese since the 1800s. Most folks drive right past without a clue that something even rarer is tucked back in the woods: Thomas Merton’s hermitage.

Merton was a world-famous monk, poet, and rebel who wrote *The Seven Storey Mountain* and turned a quiet life of prayer into the literary event of the 1940s. In 1965 he finally won permission to build a one-room hermitage on the abbey grounds — a little white house with a deep porch and rocking chairs — and became the first monk there in centuries to live as a hermit. He never quite got the silence he was after; he sneaked phone calls, drank beer with his guests, and traveled the world. He died in 1968, far from home, and the hermitage still stands, still used by a monk today.

It sits in the monks’ private enclosure, so you ask politely to be escorted. But stand on that porch for a minute and you will feel it — a whole life of questions, kept in the Kentucky woods, that almost nobody knew was there.

Photo: Thomas Merton’s hermitage, Abbey of Gethsemani, New Haven, KY. By Bryan Sherwood, via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0.

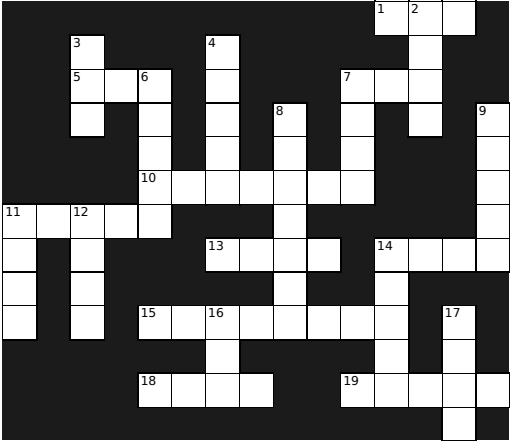
The monks still make their famous fruitcake and cheese — you can order it by mail or stop by the gift shop. The abbey grounds are open to visitors, and the church welcomes guests for prayer services throughout the day. It is one of those places that feels like a secret hiding in plain sight — and it has been there all along.

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THE SPICE RACK

A CROSSWORD TO MAKE YOU SMILE, BLUSH & CARRY ON

Fill it in, fill it out, and don't say we didn't warn you. Type your answers right into the squares below — then print it, save it, or hand it to the friend who needs a little spice in her life. (Solutions at the back? Not this time. A lady never tells.)



ACROSS

1. **1**. Number of companions Debbie is open to
2. **5**. What's still in the tank, so Debbie says
3. **7**. What divorcees admit they're finally having
4. **10**. Ten times stronger than a jalapeño
5. **11**. How a good flirt makes you feel
6. **13**. A little sweet, a little ____
7. **14**. Where the gas is (so Debbie swears)
8. **15**. Warming, sweet, blush-inducing spice
9. **18**. Debbie's sheet of them — a little saucy
10. **19**. Animal in this year's Chinese symbol

DOWN

1. **2**. Pairs nicely with a second date
2. **3**. Just a number, per this issue
3. **4**. What some readers are trading in for a newer model
4. **6**. How Debbie is choosing to live this year
5. **7**. Horse's partner in the Chinese zodiac
6. **8**. Comforting, familiar, a little underrated
7. **9**. A little ____ of heat — and of life
8. **11**. What your cheeks do after the cinnamon
9. **12**. Dinner, drinks, or a long walk
10. **14**. It takes two and a little nerve
11. **16**. What you take after a very good afternoon
12. **17**. A little one can make you blush

CLEAR ANSWERS

PRINT PUZZLE

Tip: click any square and start typing. Use your arrow keys to move around. Nothing here is saved to a server — it's all yours.



SCAN TO PLAY ONLINE

Type your answers right on your phone or computer — the interactive puzzle with working clues and auto-advance is just a scan away.
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SPICES MAKE EVERYTHING NICE

AN EDITABLE TIP SHEET — FILL IT IN, DOWNLOAD IT, KEEP IT

Spice is personality in a jar. Read each one, then make it yours — add your own twist in the boxes below, jot down who (or what) it pairs best with, and download your finished sheet to keep or share. The first five are yours to fill in fully; the rest are a teaser for what’s coming next issue.

1. CAYENNE

THE SPICE

10X stronger than a jalapeno with a strong, spicy hit.

WHAT IT SETS IN MOTION

A spark of heat — like a Latin lover who convinces you to look at recipes together and maybe try one that scares you a little.

MY OWN TWIST (WRITE YOUR OWN)

PAIRS BEST WITH...

a person, a song, a memory...

2. CLOVES

THE SPICE

Intense (a little goes a long way), aromatic, but slightly bitter.

WHAT IT SETS IN MOTION

The spice of holidays and memory — celebrate any night as if it's special.

MY OWN TWIST (WRITE YOUR OWN)

PAIRS BEST WITH...

a person, a song, a memory...

3. CINNAMON

THE SPICE

Pungent, sweet, and warming.

WHAT IT SETS IN MOTION

A blush-inducing sweetness that warms your cheeks and your mood.

MY OWN TWIST (WRITE YOUR OWN)

PAIRS BEST WITH...

a person, a song, a memory...

4. GINGER

THE SPICE

Sweet while slightly spicy and peppery.

WHAT IT SETS IN MOTION

A little sweet, a little wild — perfect for setting the mood where rules don't count.

MY OWN TWIST (WRITE YOUR OWN)

PAIRS BEST WITH...

a person, a song, a memory...

5. VANILLA

THE SPICE

Sweet aroma with a steady, smoky taste.

WHAT IT SETS IN MOTION

Comforting and familiar — like a safe arm around your shoulder when you need grounding.

MY OWN TWIST (WRITE YOUR OWN)

PAIRS BEST WITH...

a person, a song, a memory...

6. STAR ANISE

THE SPICE

Warm, sweet, and licorice-like.

WHAT IT SETS IN MOTION

A gentle invitation to slow the morning with coffee in bed.

Want the rest of this one — and the rest of the cabinet? The full Spice Notes sheet is reserved for subscribers. **Unlock the whole sheet in the next issue.**

7. CARDAMOM

THE SPICE

Pungent with lemon and mint hints.

WHAT IT SETS IN MOTION

Bright and surprising — like fine Bourbon cocktails shared with someone who makes you laugh.

Want the rest of this one — and the rest of the cabinet? The full Spice Notes sheet is reserved for subscribers. **Unlock the whole sheet in the next issue.**

8. NUTMEG

THE SPICE

Nutty with a hint of heat.

WHAT IT SETS IN MOTION

Cozy and intimate — perfect for nestling under a warm blanket.

Want the rest of this one — and the rest of the cabinet? The full Spice Notes sheet is reserved for subscribers. **Unlock the whole sheet in the next issue.**

9. ALLSPICE

WHAT IT SETS IN MOTION

A reminder that too much of a good thing can be deliciously dangerous.