

Mindful Moments

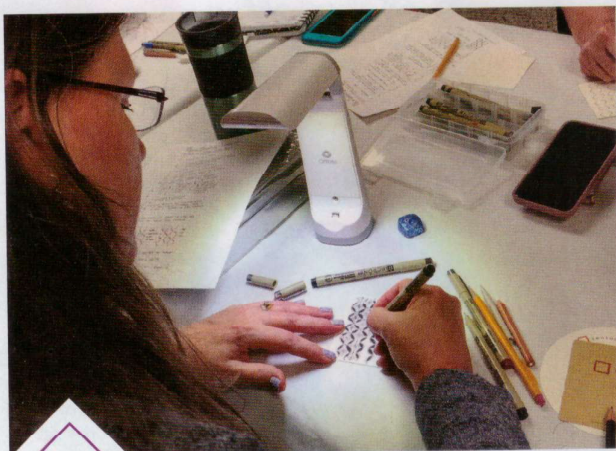
These relaxing, repetitive activities just may help you find your zen.

BY LISA A. BEACH

WHEN TRACY WOSABA felt her stressful life reaching the breaking point, she found relief by learning to meditate. Wanting to share the concept with others, Wosaba founded Winter Park Meditation & Mindfulness in May 2017.

"Mindfulness is a practice of being in the present moment and fully engaged with your senses in whatever you're doing while you're doing it, without judgment," she explains. "We're often either thinking ahead or looking behind. But the present moment is where life meets living."

Many studies tout the health benefits of mindfulness, including stress reduction, better focus, and improved well-being. So, if you're ready for some peace of mind, try these nurturing activities.



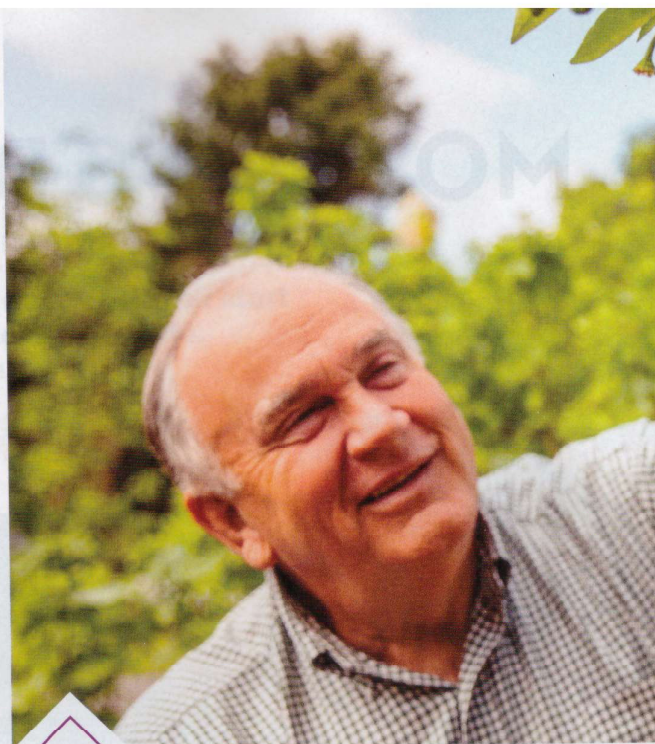
ZENTANGLE

IF YOU'RE CAPTIVATED BY INTRICATE PATTERNS, you might be drawn to Zentangle, an easy-to-learn artform that uses just a few simple tools (paper, pencil, marker) to create beautiful images by drawing structured patterns. Think of it as doodling with a purpose—in a relaxing, fun way.

The best part? It's easy. "If you can hold a pencil, you can learn to Zentangle," says Adele Bruno, certified Zentangle teacher at the Casselberry Art House. Bruno caught the joyful spark back in 2011 and now teaches monthly Zentangle workshops.

The full, eight-step method starts and ends with appreciation—a reflection of the mindful approach this artform takes. But in its simplest form, Zentangle involves using a pencil to make corner dots on a sheet of paper, connecting those dots to form a square border, and drawing one or more lines, called "strings," inside to separate it into sections. Then grab your pen and get ready to tangle. The patterns are where the magic happens, as you lose yourself in the rhythmic motion.

"One of the mantras is, there are no mistakes," says Bruno. "It's metaphorical for life." Each stroke is a mindful, focused stroke—not a sketch—with your pen traveling from point A to point B. "But if it doesn't go where you want it to go, you just make it into something else. We call it creative opportunity rather than mistake."



GARDENING

THE PROCESS OF BEING ELBOW-DEEP IN DIRT SEEMS like a natural fit for mindfulness. As Robert Bowden, director of Harry P. Leu Gardens, points out, "When you're outside working with plants or soil, you're in sync with nature."

Gardening allows you the pause you need for mindfulness. As you concentrate on the effort—whether you're digging, weeding, planting, or harvesting—you're absorbed in the moment. "For a short respite, other things in your life float away, and you're one-on-one with that plant," says Bowden. "Gardening is always presented as an opportunity to separate yourself from whatever else is happening."

Plus, gardening allows you to tap into your senses—from hearing the bamboo rustle in the breeze to catching a whiff of orange trees in bloom. "That's what people really enjoy about gardening," Bowden says. "And we're mindful of that when we design our gardens to create an entire experience." He suggests home gardeners adopt a similar approach, incorporating all the senses when planning a garden or buying plants.

Bowden offers this advice for gardening as a stress-relieving activity: Start out small, slow and easy. "Let go of the judgment, be easy on yourself, and don't overthink it," he advises. "You can make mistakes in gardening and you can recover, realizing it really wasn't a big deal."





BREADMAKING

STEVEN HOGUE, A MIXER AT OLDE HEARTH BREAD COMPANY in Casselberry, turns to the cadence of kneading dough to practice mindfulness.

"Baking, where everything is made with intention, requires focus and attention," says Hogue. "It's not a hobby where you can take everything and just slop it into a bowl. You have to know what you're doing, how things are going, and how to handle any hiccups along the way."

Hogue finds the baking process grounding, allowing him to acknowledge his thoughts and allow them to pass so he can continue with the task at hand. "When I'm mixing dough, this is my time to be with myself and focus on producing a beautiful product," he says. "I'm not worrying about my telephone bill being due."

As a hands-on process, baking heightens the senses. When kneading dough, Hogue says to really feel it and allow it to work itself through your palms and fingers. "By feeling the strands of gluten develop and manipulating the mass of dough, you're able to form a tangible reward that combines all the senses." Plus, baking teaches patience, as it takes time, compromising with the dough, learning from mistakes and, most importantly, accepting the finished product.

His advice for prospective mindful bakers? Start small, and don't be upset by mistakes—they happen. "In baking and in life, you have to be reflexive to your environment."



POTTERY

DOES A SPINNING POTTERY WHEEL REMIND you of the scene from *Ghost* with "Unchained Melody" playing in the background? In the 1990 movie, a relaxed Demi Moore focuses on shaping clay, slipping one hand inside the vase while running her finger along the pliable exterior as it spins. She's immersed in the zone.

Longtime potter Vincent Sansone, the ceramics program manager at Winter Park's Creadle School of Art, frequently sees this mindful focus in his classes. "You can get totally lost in the activity," he says.

Creating pottery requires using your whole body, not just your hands. "The pot is spinning, and you must anchor your hand and arm to catch the clay as it spins toward you," Sansone explains. You're aware of how you're using your muscles to steady your body and mold the clay. "The better you get, the more your creative energy is awakened. It's like meditation," he adds.

Like many artforms, pottery emphasizes process over results. But some people enjoy making something simpler. "I also teach how to make pinch pots, which is more relaxing and uses only your hands and fingers," Sansone says. "You can pay attention to what the clay does when you press on it without worrying about posture or wheel speed. It's a great stress-reliever."



KNITTING

STITCH BY STITCH, KNITTING CONJURES UP IMAGES

of artisans transforming strands of yarn into finished pieces. For Marney Gibson, co-owner of KNIT! in Longwood, the mindfulness of knitting starts with the selection of the yarn.

"Once you know what you're going to make, you choose the yarn based on feel, texture, weight and color," says Gibson, noting how mindfulness is woven into the process before knitters even pick up a needle. "Customers will mull over the selection for a long time, as yarn selection plays a key role in a piece they might be working on for six months."

As you get into the repetitive nature of knitting, it requires focus and triggers a relaxed, almost meditative state. You're in the moment, enjoying the process, and paying attention to what you're doing. You feel the weight of the yarn as it glides through your fingers with the rhythmic movement of the needles. You take in the colorful patterns you're creating row by row. You hear the occasional clickety-clack of the needles as you knit one, purl two.

If you're knitting a piece as a gift, such as a blanket for a baby shower, you can focus your thoughts on mother and baby, asking for health, wellness and protection. You can repeat a positive thought or meditative chant with each stitch, bringing intention to what you're creating.

"Knitting lets people be in their own world in the process," Gibson says.

