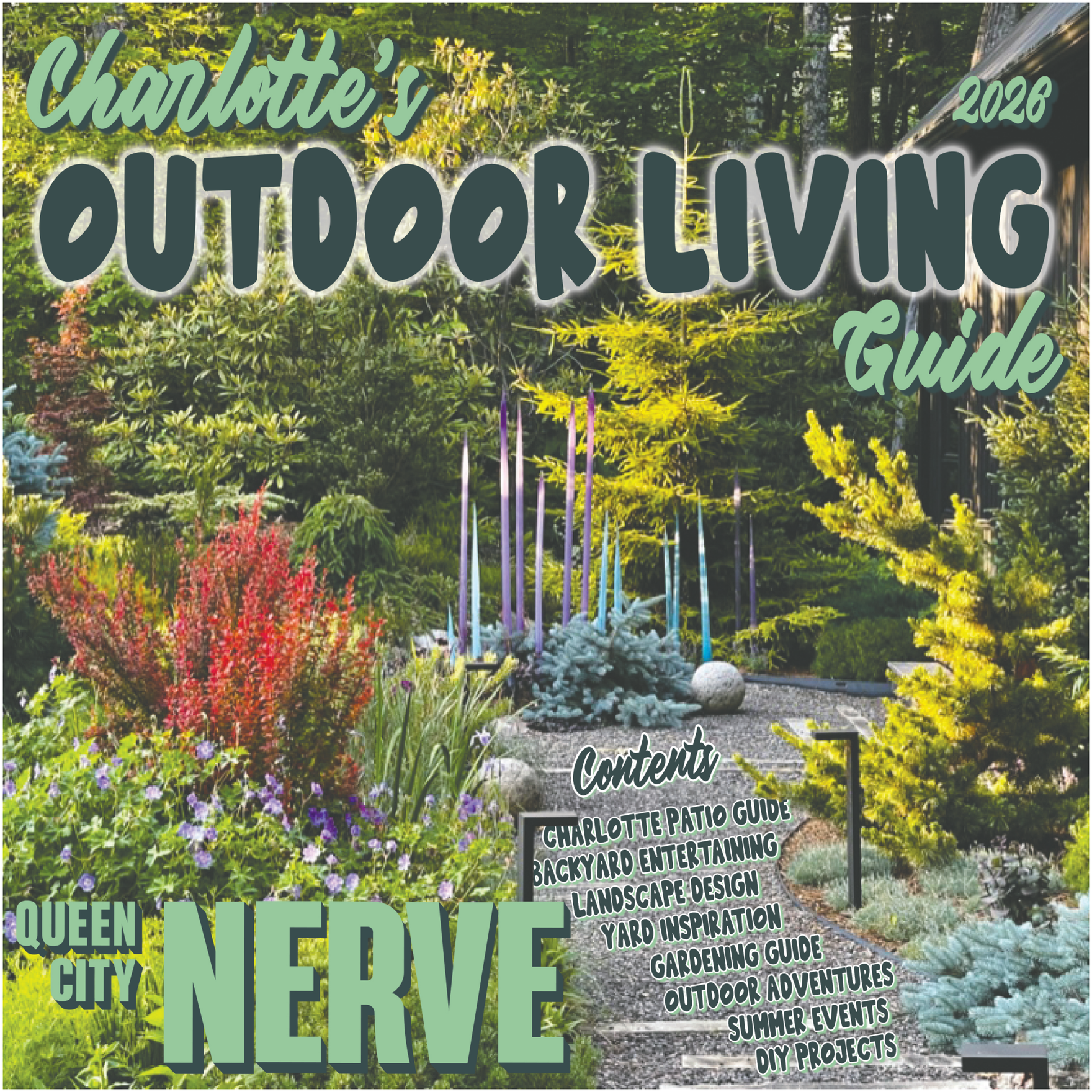
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Charlotte's OUTDOOR LIVING Guide 2026



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EDITOR'S NOTE

EXIT THE DOOMSCROLL

It ain't called the great indoors


Ryan Pitkin

BY RYAN PITKIN

Rather than deliver our usual Summer Guide consisting solely of event listings this June, we decided to switch things up by compiling an Outdoor Living Guide. Consider it your ultimate manual for how to touch grass this summer.

While most of my content in this issue involves things I know — summer events and my favorite patios on which to imbibe — I've learned a lot while overseeing the creation of all the other content.

I spoke to Jay Sifford of Sifford Garden Design, one of the area's most renowned landscape design firms, but I also took a lot out of the pieces written by our team members. Both Justin LaFrancois and Annie Keough shared their own DIY tips for projects that can transform your outdoor living space for the lowest possible cost.

There's news on pollinator gardens, yard inspiration from our readers, a guide to starting a garden on a budget, and even tips from contributor Clayton Sealey on how to turn your home into an entertainment venue for your friends, family and neighbors.

This all comes at a great time for me, as someone who, along with my wife, just marked our first anniversary as homeowners. When we bought our east Charlotte abode last summer, a big reason for our selection was the backyard, which nearly doubles the square footage of the house itself.

While we've got a fire pit and some miscellaneous yard furniture that we've put to good use over the last year, this summer we're hoping to really start capitalizing on the opportunities such a big yard affords us — build a patio, start a garden, do all the things.

And yet we live in the same economy as everyone else, so "all the things" are not always possible. This guide, however, will serve as a great starting point for us to set some goals and get our hands dirty in pursuing them.

If you've been looking for inspiration to make some changes in your own yard, we've got no shortage of expert tips and ideas for you in the pages to follow.

Or maybe you live in an apartment and don't really engage with the outdoor living area that surrounds your space. That's cool because we've got our usual Summer Guide full of events and then some, including my patio guide and Pat Moran's guide to outdoor adventures presented by NOVEL River District by Crescent Communities, with dozens of opportunities to get outside and enjoy nature in the Charlotte area this summer.

We've all done enough doomscrolling already this year. It's time to touch grass, for real.

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A lot to work with/Photo by Ryan Pitkin



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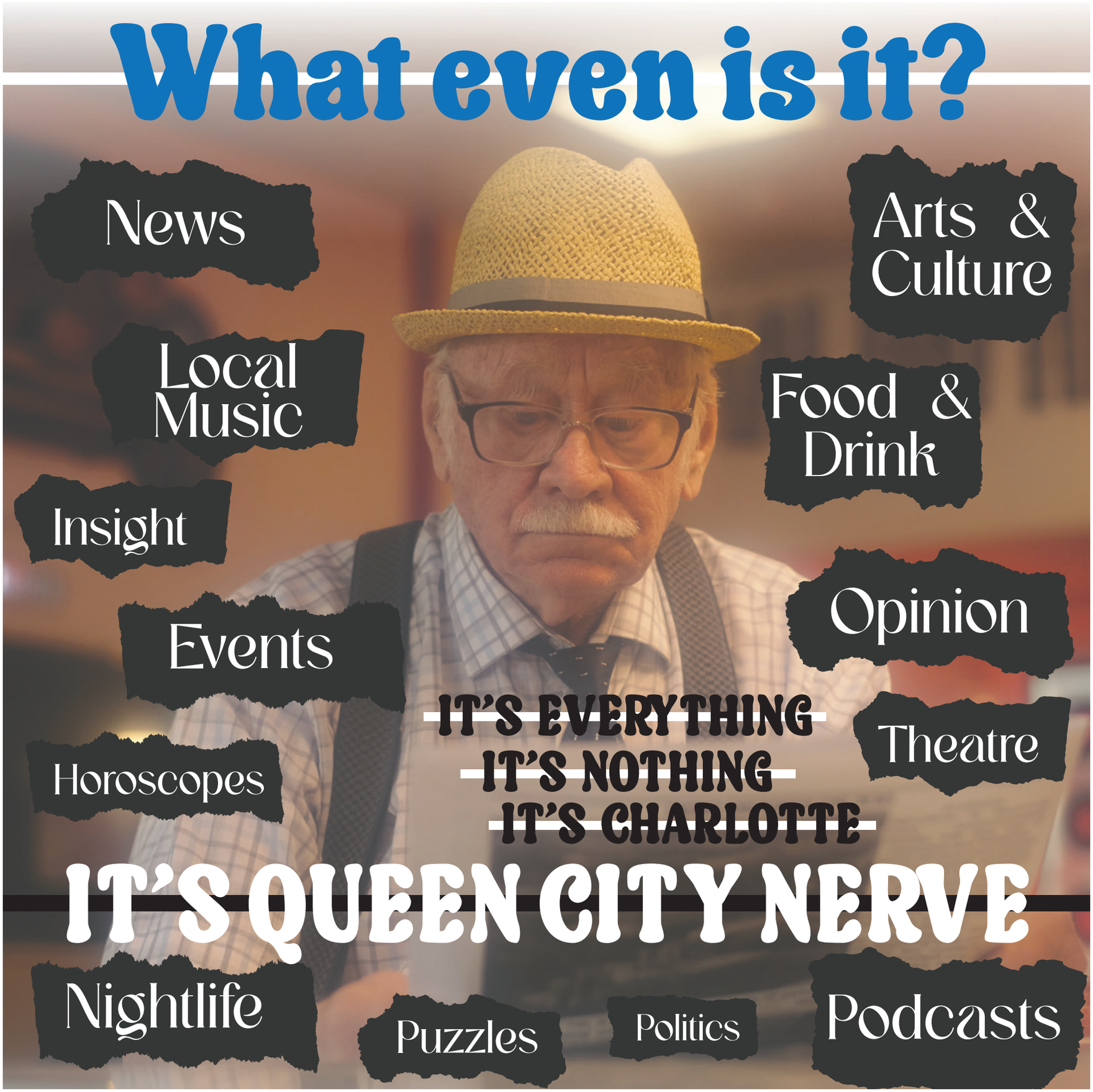
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What even is it?





Hestia Rooftop/via Facebook

CHARLOTTE PATIO GUIDE: EVERYTHING TASTES BETTER WHEN IT'S OUTSIDE

BY Ryan Pitkin

By the time we hit June, brunch just ain't brunch if you're not outside. The same goes for dinner, night caps, whatever...

While there are so many worthy patios to highlight across Charlotte, below we've selected just 10 of our favorites to help you decide if you're looking for someplace where you can take in some rays while you're sipping your cocktails or enjoying a meal.

NoDa: McHale's Pub

Recognized as Best New Nightlife Spot in the 2025 Best in the Nest, McHale's Pub has all the elements that a good patio needs: two outdoor bars (one of which is covered so you can enjoy your rugby match in the rain), dart boards, TVs in the covered area and outside, a mix of seating and all the string lights needed to set the vibe.



The early stages of the McHales' patio/Photo by Ryan Sumner



Dilworth Tasting Room/via Facebook

Park Road: Ed's Tavern

There are levels to this patio game and Ed's has them down pat. First, the "upstairs" patio is mostly enclosed, with a row of TVs and garage doors ready to spring open for the right weather. Then, head a few steps downstairs for the fully opened porch, with more TVs and no shortage of seating options.

Uptown: Nuvole Rooftop Twenty-Two

Following two months of renovations, Nuvole Rooftop TwentyTwo reopened and reclaimed its spot as Charlotte's highest indoor-outdoor rooftop lounge in 2025, adding gas fire pits outside to help curate the atmosphere. This sleek rooftop bar and restaurant blends upscale elegance with a laid-back atmosphere, all while providing an unmatched view of the Queen City skyline.

Dilworth: Dilworth Tasting Room

DTR's OG location in Dilworth has been a fan favorite since opening in 2017. The back patio is draped in vines, tables tuck into corners and the sweet, trickling koi pond creates a soothing soundscape. Decked out in lively hues of orange and white, the curious koi fish with puckered lips gently splash in the pond creating a tranquil backdrop for boozy conversation and munchies.

South End: The Waterman Fish Bar

Yes, recent construction to the north has obscured one of our favorite patio skyline views in the city, but that's no reason to drop The Waterman's rooftop bar and seating area from our list. The deck provides the perfect platform to rise above the madness of South Boulevard traffic and pretend you're on a lake or at the beach somewhere rather than in the heart of South End — not that there's anything wrong with that.

Plaza Midwood: Thomas Street Tavern

There is perhaps no more competitive street than Thomas Avenue for this category, with rooftop bars at Burial Beer Co. and Whiskey Warehouse, ground-level fun at Painted Rooster and The Improper Pig, and even the garage patio at Workman's Friend all vying for our pleasure-seeking attention. This column isn't even meant to be a competition, so we recommend you hop around to all of them, but it's just hard to beat all the fun to be had out back at Thomas Street.

North End: Canteen

Originally opened by NoDa Company Store founders Joey Hewell and Scott Lindsley, new owners Melissa LaVoy and David Dubiel relaunched Canteen at Camp North End last summer, and it's hard to beat that location. When Camp North End's Boileryard serves as your extended patio, even on the rare occasion that nothing is going on when you visit, you'll just be excited to get a tire swing to yourself.

University City: The Wine Vault

There is perhaps no better spot to set up shop and people-watch in University City than The Wine Vault, located right at the entrance to The Boardwalk at University City. Bring a friend, select a bottle of your favorite vino (or beer and snack selections) and watch the world go by. And when things get restless, you've got some of the best walking grounds around right down the sidewalk.

Eastover: Not Just Coffee

It's quaint enough to simply set up on the homestyle porch outside of Not Just Coffee's Providence Road location, but if you're looking to lock in and escape the hum of the constant traffic, a patio out back is enclosed with tall concrete walls and ivy, giving *Secret Garden* vibes and leaving you to work or catch up with an old friend in peace.

Ballantyne: Hestia

Not quite the newest but definitely the most bougie addition to our list, Hestia opened in 2023, leading the way for a Ballantyne that is evolving into something exciting through the development of The Bowl. Opened by Jane Wu of Panorama Holdings, the rooftop bar is aptly named Panorama Tower, providing views not only of Uptown but Carowinds and the distant foothills.

Outside 485: Hello, Sailor

With memories of Rusty Rudder still dancing in the heads of some of us longtime lakegoers, it's safe to say that the Kindreds have done more than enough to fully claim this Cornelius location on LKN and make it their own. With multiple levels of patios leading down to the docks, plus an outdoor bar that's out of the way of the dining public enough to feel like its own waterfront dive bar, Hello, Sailor is worth a trip outside of the Charlotte bubble even if you've got no business on the water. The food, views and booze are enough.

Ed's Tavern/via Facebook





Canteen at Camp North End/via Facebook

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A GUIDE TO BACKYARD ENTERTAINING



Neighborhood Happy Hour/Photo by Clayton Sealey

THE LOST ART OF THE HOME HANG: A GUIDE TO THROWING THE PERFECT BACKYARD PARTY

By Clayton Sealey

The air hums with conversation and a '90s hip-hop beat on a Charlotte neighborhood street. Folding chairs line a driveway. String lights sway overhead while somebody's cousin DJs from a Bluetooth speaker balanced on a cooler.

Kids dart between front yards as neighbors slowly drift over, pulled in by music, laughter and the smell of burgers on the grill. Parents relax without worrying about traffic, tabs or reservations. Bean bags land with a thud as cornhole boards clatter and conversations spill from porches to sidewalks as the evening stretches on.

You stop for a second and think: Why doesn't Charlotte feel like this more often?

In a city that has become increasingly polished, expensive and carefully programmed, the Home Hang remains one of the last truly accessible social spaces. It's where culture forms naturally, where neighbors become community, and where small gatherings create a warmth that bars and restaurants sometimes can't.

Consider this piece both as a reflection on why these spaces matter and a guide to creating the perfect Home Hang, no matter the scale.

Why the home hang is important

There's no denying it: We've become more isolated. Even those of us juggling multiple group chats struggle to break through the digital barrier, navigate busy schedules and simply spend time together in person.

It's also become significantly more expensive to socialize. I came of age in the early 2000s when cocktails cost single digits and a $20 bill could still buy a night worth talking about the next day.

Today, a casual evening out can quickly turn into a surprisingly expensive proposition, making the simple act of gathering with friends feel more complicated than it should.

That's where the Home Hang comes in. The beautiful thing is that it can be whatever you want it to be: a dinner party, a neighborhood happy hour, a birthday celebration, a potluck, or simply an excuse to enjoy Charlotte's (mostly) glorious weather.

Whatever the occasion, the point is simple: Get people together and have a good time.

And you don't have to do it all yourself. Ask everyone to bring a dish or a favorite beverage, or bring in a little professional help. Charlotte is full of bartenders, DJs, musicians, comedians, magicians and other creatives who can help elevate a gathering while supporting local talent.

Am I an expert? No. Do I throw the most memorable parties in Charlotte? Probably not. But I bring more than 20 years of experience creating opportunities for people to gather.

Over the years, I've hosted six backyard comedy shows, convinced Opera Carolina to perform for more than 100 friends, and celebrated milestone birthdays with food trucks, breweries, local bands, and four generations of family and friends in the confines of my own property.



A Don't Tell Comedy show/Courtesy of DTC

I also come by it honestly. I grew up watching my parents throw massive pig pickin's that brought people together from all over the region. Before that, my grandmother hosted the kinds of gatherings people still talked about decades later.

So no, I'm not an expert, but I've attended enough parties, cooked enough dinners and folded up enough chairs on the morning after to have a few thoughts on what works.

Launching a neighborhood happy hour

The best way to throw a great hang is to start with your neighbors. Honestly, they're the people most likely to call the cops if things get a little too loud, so making friends — or at the very least giving them a heads-up — is essential.

More importantly, most people are hungry for connection. Across generations, folks are surprisingly receptive to new friendships and shared experiences when you make it easy, welcoming and free.

I moved back to Charlotte during the pandemic in 2020. My wife and I had spent years hosting dinner parties and other shenanigans in Brooklyn, NYC and Savannah, Georgia, but moving back gave us our first opportunity to take things outside.

We landed in a small pocket of NoDa where we already knew a handful of neighbors. Looking back, that mattered more than we realized. One neighbor suggested what was then called Beer Bucket Friday and a tradition was born. Every two weeks,

a different neighbor hosted. It was simple, low-frills and came with nearly no expectations.

That's the beauty of the neighborhood happy hour; people bring their own drinks, it happens outdoors, and nobody feels pressure to impress anyone. Over time, acquaintances become friends and neighbors become community.

Research from The Social Life Project found that front porches and other semi-public spaces help neighbors build meaningful social connections, so something as simple as your own "Beer Bucket Friday" can form bonds and life-long friendships.

Dinner parties are the next step

As my dear friend Amber Donoghue, co-owner of PostScript, likes to say: "Less panel discussions and more dinner parties."

It's a mantra we could all live by. Dinner parties are how you turn the neighbors you met at Beer Bucket Friday into actual friends, mixing new faces with old ones and giving everyone a chance to connect.

There is no correct size for a dinner party. It's whatever your dining table, kitchen island, porch table or collection of TV trays can comfortably handle. This is where conversations go deeper, where attention can be paid, and where relationships are built.

The goal isn't to impress anyone. It's to create a welcoming space, share a meal, and spend time together.

Some of my favorite places to find recipes for dinner parties:

The Defined Dish – We have cooked every single recipe in three cookbooks, no joke.

Primal Gourmet – Who doesn't love a bald Canadian with prominent eyebrows?

Food & Wine – Doesn't miss, simply put.

A Beautiful Plate – I've made their black pepper Parmesan biscuits at least 400 times.

Martha Stewart – The OG, insider trading and all.

What's Gaby Cooking – Found some real gems here.

Bon Appetit – There's a listicle for every occasion.

Once I've picked my recipes, everything goes into a spreadsheet. I organize tabs for the grocery list, what can be prepped ahead, what needs to be cooked day-of, and the timing of how everything comes together.
Cooking for a crowd is a lot more fun when you're organized, and it leaves more time to enjoy your guests instead of frantically looking for the paprika.

Backyard shows & cultural gatherings

Rule #1 of the Home Hang: There are no rules. Just because something sounds ridiculous doesn't mean it's impossible, or that your friends won't love it.

I have the phone number of a guy who organizes pop-up wrestling events saved in my contacts. Will I ever use it? Probably not. But I like keeping my options open. If you've got a flat 20-by-20-foot patch of backyard, who's to say you can't host a wrestling match?

If you want to create something memorable, sometimes all you have to do is ask. In 2022, I was more than a little jealous when I saw Opera Carolina hosting a backyard performance in Eastover. So I reached out and pitched them a simple idea: Why focus only on existing patrons when there are potential new audiences just a few ZIP codes away?

What followed was an unforgettable evening for dozens of friends and neighbors — one that also raised awareness and support for a local arts nonprofit.

My favorite gatherings, however, have been the six shows we've hosted with Don't Tell Comedy (donttellcomedy.com).



Celebrating the big 4-0/Photo by Sean Sherpa Mullen

There's something special about hearing laughter echo through the neighborhood and watching complete strangers leave with plans to grab drinks next week.

Don't be afraid to think outside the box. You'd be surprised how many unique experiences can happen in a backyard with a little creativity and a willingness to ask.

The big events nobody will ever forget (minus the brain fog)

This is where you hire the big guns. Throwing an unforgettable event takes everything you learned in the previous sections while asking for help from the professionals.

The bigger the crowd, the more it helps to outsource the things that keep you from actually enjoying your guests.

The last big party I threw was for my 40th birthday earlier this spring. I hired the following to help out with the evening:

Divine Barrel Brewing – This is my No. 1 ride-or-die brewery in Charlotte and their program director Jake Bock is always such a pleasure to work with.

Union Barbecue – Union Barbeque is owned by Holden Sasser; you might know his father Tom, who started Harpers and Mimosa Grill. Holden makes incredible barbecue and we promised to cover a sales minimum, which our friends easily hit and exceeded. *(Other food vendor favorites include Thyme & Trade, Chutney Cat, El Veneno, Five Little Birds, CLT Burger Box, and Chop Chop RedPot.)*

Bearded Bar Consulting – Years ago I designed the logo for the Cotton Room at Belfast Mill and forged a relationship with Matt Marenna. He's a great and engaging bartender.

The Eyebrows – Serendipity strikes again. My catty-corner neighbor has an awesome '70s-style punk band, my favorite genre. *(Other favorites for music include Harvey Cummings, Sonorous Wave, TeeJay Alston, and Jamie Overcash.)*

Charlotte has an incredible amount of hospitality/entertainment talent, what we lack in physical space for small businesses we make up for in folks that are looking to pop-up at your house or apartment building.

It's as easy as asking for recommendations on Instagram, Facebook, Reddit, or X. My DMs are also always open at my @CLTDevelopment accounts.

But the ultimate hang doesn't necessarily need hired help. You can buy a keg, you can batch cocktails, you can smoke/grill a bunch of meat from Costco and supplement with four different pasta/potato salads from Publix.

The truth is, nobody remembers whether the charcuterie board was perfectly arranged or whether you bought the right beer. They remember the conversations, the laughter, the new friendships and the feeling of belonging somewhere.

In a city growing as quickly as Charlotte, that's something worth making time for.

So invite the neighbors over. Pull some folding chairs into the driveway. Fire up a playlist. And start small; you never know what it might turn into.

CHARLOTTE OUTDOOR DESIGN TIPS

All photos courtesy of Sifford Garden Design



ONE OF THE REGION'S TOP LANDSCAPE DESIGNERS SHARES HIS TIPS ON HOW TO TURN YOUR YARD INTO A DESTINATION



Jay Sifford

In its February 2023 issue, Fine Gardening magazine described Jay Sifford as "magical."

A quick glance at the past projects carried out by Sifford's company, Jay Sifford Garden Design, shows the description was anything but hyperbolic.

As a garden designer, writer, speaker and frequent podcast guest, Sifford wastes no opportunity to espouse his belief that great gardens are built on four cornerstones: **art, magic, story and horticulture**.

With a style that leans into contemporary, prairie and Asian aesthetics, Sifford describes his relationship with plants as "a love affair." He approaches all of his projects from a psychological, philosophical and spiritual standpoint.

Since beginning on his journey of craftsmanship in 2008, Sifford has built a name for himself as one of the region's top landscape designers.

Named 'North Carolina's Most Outstanding Landscape Designer by LuxLife magazine in 2021, Sifford has won numerous awards from the home design and remodeling platform Houzz and a Perennial Plant Association award of merit in 2024 for one of his personal gardens,

Aside from Fine Gardening, his work has also been featured in Southern Living, Better Homes and Gardens, and Country Gardens as well as in several books.

Sifford cultivates a 300-square-foot courtyard garden in Davidson and a mountain escape in western North Carolina, where he nurtures a sunny, stylized meadow atop a septic field and a shade garden underneath a canopy of mature rhododendrons.

For our inaugural Outdoor Living Issue, we asked Sifford for his tips on cultivating a yard that will draw you (and your friends and family) outside this summer.

Queen City Nerve: When you look at a blank backyard, what are the first three things you analyze before you start designing?

Jay Sifford: I listen to what the space "says" to me, I ask a lot of questions regarding aesthetics and functional needs, and I look at what the site presents (soil, sunlight, deer pressure, etc.).

[***Editor's note:*** *"Deer pressure refers to the level of browsing and foraging stress a garden faces from local deer populations.*]

How do you balance beauty with function when creating outdoor living spaces?

I design gardens, so there has to be enough room for an emotive, immersive plant-based design. If there isn't, I'll pass on the project.

What do most homeowners get wrong or not consider when they first start dreaming about their yard?

An investment in an outdoor space is an investment in quality of life. It's much more than a way to "decorate the yard."

How does the design change for different types of yards — a 'party yard' versus a 'quiet coffee spot' or 'family play yard,' for example?

Most people are multidimensional, and a yard should be too. Even in a fairly small space, areas can be designated for different purposes, to incite different emotional and mental responses.

Creating "garden rooms" for different purposes, if done correctly, can make a small yard feel larger, not smaller.

What are a few 'workhorse' plants that thrive in Charlotte's climate because they're tough, attractive and low-maintenance?

Ornamental grasses and sedges are at the top of that list. There are different varieties for most any microclimate, from wet shade to dry shade to wet sun to dry sun. Most are environmentally friendly as well.

Distyliums are another workhorse. It's a native evergreen shrub that I use in place of laurels. Ferns are great for shadier spots. There are fern species for everything from boggy areas to fairly dry, shady areas.



One of Sifford's western NC designs.

CHARLOTTE OUTDOOR DESIGN TIPS



Working with the space you have

What are some low-maintenance design tips that can help keep a yard from looking boring or barren?

Consider the mature size of your plants; doing so will cut maintenance time dramatically.

Also, plant in masses, in drifts. A mass of say 25 of the same plant will make a dramatic statement as opposed to one of this and two of this. It will also cut maintenance because all of the plants in that area require the same care. And mulch covers a multitude of sins!

What plant or material choices do you often have to talk homeowners out of because they just don't perform well here?

Artificial turf. It's expensive, bad for the environment and looks too perfect to be real. Crepe myrtles come to mind as well. They are messy, produce a plethora of seedlings, and come back from the root stock if cut.

People plant them too close to houses and hardscape, then chop them off every year. If you're going to do that, put the tree out of its misery and kill it!

Lastly, many of the ever-popular laurels tend to get fungal diseases. Plant distylium instead!

If someone is working with a modest budget, how do you recommend phasing a project out over time?

Start with the most used area(s), or the most visually prominent areas. Buy the best quality materials you can afford. Even though your money won't go as far in the short-term, you'll be much happier in the long run.

And if you aren't a gardener, hire a well-versed professional designer. Their guidance will save you a lot of money buying plants that are not well-suited for your situation.

What quick lighting changes make the biggest difference in how a yard feels at night?

I think less is more when it comes to lighting. Pathway lighting is an important safety feature. A few uplights on specimen trees is fine, but I'm not a fan of lighting the facade of the house; it can easily look like Vegas gone bad.

What are some simple ways to make a yard more sustainable here — whether that's through water use, plant choices, or habitat?

Reduce the size of the lawn to what's needed. I call that having a "lawn by design" rather than a "lawn by default." Water less frequently but for longer periods of time. The roots will grow deeper and you'll have a more drought resistant landscape. Mulching also helps.

Consider buying plants with deeper root systems as well. If possible, dedicate part of your yard to creating a bird- and pollinator-friendly garden, especially if you have smaller children. It will get them off their computers and into nature.

Lastly, properly sited and maintained plants will be less susceptible to pests and diseases, which will reduce the need for chemicals.

What should homeowners know or do before they meet with a landscape designer to get the most from that first consultation?

Make a "mood board," i.e. collect photos of things you like, and things you don't like. I learn more from what I don't like than from what I do.

Be realistic about expectations and budget. Most people don't realize what things cost, especially since Covid.

Lastly, create and maintain an open line of communication between you and your designer. Good surprises are great; bad surprises are not.

According to Sifford's website, "Sifford Garden Design seeks clients who desire something different, who celebrate quality craftsmanship, who are open-minded with regard to new and creative ideas, who prioritize the transformative benefits of an immersive garden, and who, after a collaborative dialogue on a beautiful new look, trust our process and vision."

Learn more at siffordgardendesign.com.





Another Sifford design.



Photos courtesy of Ambiance Garden Design

A GUIDE TO GARDENING FOR THE BEGINNER ON A BUDGET

By Annie Keough



An urban garden design from Suzanne Wilkerson

I am known to be incredibly cheap. When I first became interested in gardening, the sheer amount of information and upfront costs overwhelmed me so much that I put off planting for months.

While gardening is a hobby that can easily become expensive if done with intention, I was less concerned with the long-term sustainability of my garden and more so with the initial investment.

I have since overcome my original anxiety to build a rather substantial garden, keeping a rewarding hobby on a modest budget over the last five years. So I'm here to share my tips for economically strapped beginners who would like to do the same.

Build with what you have

Raised garden beds are a fantastic way to create a space-saving garden oasis. While most raised garden beds are made of metal or cedar and are built to last, the price tag can range from $50 to the high $300s.

This may not seem like a lot to some, but it simply wasn't doable for me at the time.

Instead, I built all four of my raised garden beds with materials I found around my lawn. The first I made with some bricks I dug up in my backyard. Another with medium-sized branches that I cut up and staked closely together into the ground to create a wall of sticks.

My personal favorite was the large keyhole-shaped wattle garden bed that I made by driving down foundation stakes every 2 feet and interweaving long, pliable branches to construct a woven structure.

Typically, you want your raised garden bed to have a depth of at least 12 inches to allow your plants' respective root systems room to grow. This doesn't mean you have to blow your entire budget on soil to fill the whole thing; I line the bottom of my raised beds with large logs, sprinkle in a thick layer of dried leaves and top it off with about 6 inches of soil.

I don't buy my soil, either; I usually use a mixture of homemade compost, horse manure that I get for free at a local equestrian center, perlite, peat moss and worm castings. Those last three are the only materials I'm willing to buy.

My favorite method of growing is square foot gardening, known as the SFG method, which maximizes your growing space by planting specific quantities of each crop per square foot.

If you don't have the space for raised beds, you can also opt for container gardening. Most nurseries have more empty plastic containers than they know what to do with and won't mind if you ask to take a few off their hands for free.

Container-friendly vegetables like strawberries, tomatoes and most herbs will thrive as long as they have enough space for their roots to grow.

Relying on the experts

The Old Farmers Almanac (almanac.com/gardening) is an amazing resource and will become your Bible for the first few months. It allows you to input your address so as to provide a comprehensive planting calendar and guide, informing you of specific dates to plant your seeds and what will no longer grow based on the date you search.

While my advice isn't groundbreaking and is based solely on anecdotal experience, I had the opportunity to talk with garden design specialist Suzanne Wilkerson, owner of Ambiance Garden Design, to get some professional advice for gardening beginners.

When folks are imagining their garden design, they need to back up and consider what experience they want from their garden, Wilkerson said.

"People start off with, 'What do I like? What do I dislike? What's right, what's wrong? @What's in vogue?'" she said. "Those are really all the wrong ways to start."

Having a garden is like getting a puppy, Wilkerson explained. You go to a pound and select an adorable little puppy, bring it home to your studio apartment and, before you know it, the little puppy becomes a Great Dane.

"You have to size your garden to your lifestyle," she said. "At the end of the day, what you really want is to enjoy your space, enjoy it in alignment with your lifestyle ... You love it until it becomes your every-weekend job and then you don't love it anymore."

This means taking time to consider the space you have, the function it's meant to serve and the time you're willing to commit to maintaining it.

Asking the right questions

There are some simple questions that aspiring gardeners should ask themselves, according to Wilkerson.

Do you have a large backyard that you enjoy with your children? Then make sure to balance ornamental plants or hardscapes with interactive space. Do you live in an apartment with a small balcony? Select compact plants with low flower drop for less clean-up time.

Considering the longevity of your garden can also save you time and money in the long run. Wilkerson prefers to offer her clients "investment quality plants" that will last from 10 to 100 years and provide the owner with a long bloom season.

She also accounts for the longevity of the planter itself. While big box stores sell beautiful but expensive planters that won't last more than two years, local outdoor shops like Pineville's Crescent Garden Company's planters come with a 10-year warranty and offer self-watering planters that can go weeks without manual watering.

While these considerations are valuable, most beginner gardeners are eager to get their hands dirty and want to know what plants are hot and what are not.

"When I talk about beginner gardening, I really look for simple things that are not invasive, that are easy to maintain [and] that are semi drought resistant," Wilkerson said ***(see sidebar on next page)***.

"Everything I do in a garden is going to be planted with function, with the idea of disease reduction, with reducing the amount of effort that someone has to put in," Wilkerson said.

"I always want it to be esthetically beautiful, but I also want all of the work that we do and that I do personally," she continued, "to be highly functional, to really give people that winning experience so that they never hate their garden, they always love their nature experience, their garden experience, their growing experience."

Learn more about Wilkerson's company, Ambiance Garden Design, at ambiancegardendesign.com.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROTECTING POLLINATORS

By Annie Keough

Perfectly manicured turf grass lawns have not only become the norm in America but, in many cases, the law.

A vast majority of cities across the country have some form of overgrown vegetation ordinance incorporated in its municipal health and sanitation codes, and Charlotte is no exception.

The issue with these ordinances is that they leave no room for folks to practice conservation on their properties and foster intentionally maintained, environmentally beneficial plants through the cultivation of pollinator gardens.

"Traditional landscapes and conventional landscapes do not offer food, cover and places for animals like pollinators to raise their young," says Alden Picard, vice president of community engagement with the North Carolina Wildlife Federation. "Lawns are dead landscapes."

Traditional turf grass lawns cover over 50 million acres of land in the United States, consuming nearly 3 trillion gallons of water a year, 200 million gallons of gas from mowing, and 70 million pounds of pesticides, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Ornamental plants that decorate conventional lawns are not recognized as food by pollinators, which are critical to the foundation of the food web and are responsible for pollinating our native plants and food crops, Picard said.

Without native pollinators, we lose the pollination services that sustain the food web and North Carolina's $102 billion agricultural industry, he added.

"Pollinators are easy wildlife species to target [from] where we live because we live with pollinators, they're everywhere," said Picard. "We can create habitat on our small little parcels."

Pollinator habitats are a landscape area designed to support pollinator species including bees, butterflies, moths and birds. The diverse selection of plants, mostly native to the southeastern US, provide nectar, pollen and habitat across seasons and is maintained without the use of pesticides.

Naturalistic landscapes are carefully designed and maintained areas of vegetation that reflect an ecosystem native to the southeastern US using regionally native and adapted plant species.

These habitats aid pollinators like bumblebees that, unlike our native honeybees, can pollinate through buzz pollination and are the reason we're able to enjoy crops like tomatoes and blueberries.

In addition to providing food, pollinator habitats contribute stems for nest cavities and a place for insects to overwinter or lay their eggs, whereas traditional lawns cannot provide the habitat requirements that wildlife needs, Picard said.

In Charlotte, until recently, the Overgrown Vegetation section of the city's Health and Sanitation Ordinance made it unlawful for property owners to allow their grass, weeds or other vegetation to grow higher than 12 inches for risk of being cited and fined $150 by the city.

Picard said the city would provide two warnings to infringing property owners before sending contracted landscapers to cut back all vegetation.

The language in the section did not allow for pollinator habitats or naturalistic landscapes in accordance with the code, so Picard and other pollinator protectors addressed the Charlotte City Council repeatedly over a span of months to urge council members to exempt pollinator habitats and naturalistic landscapes from the ordinance.

The council voted unanimously on Feb. 9 to approve the ordinance change and include definitions of pollinator habitats and naturalistic landscapes in the new language.

"Now folks are empowered and even encouraged to landscape like this and practice conservation on their properties," Picard said.

Though this ordinance change will not supersede any homeowners association rules in place, Picard is hopeful that the city is leading by example and HOAs will eventually empower their residents to follow suit.

Though North Carolina has a plethora of natural parks, nature reserves and wildlife refuges, 85% of all land is owned privately.

"If we don't start doing conservation where we live on our private lands, we're going to keep losing wildlife," Picard said. "You don't have to have 50 acres ... [to] sustain and help restore populations of insects on smaller lots and then when we do it collectively, it has a huge impact."

Should a property owner wish to take advantage of these habitat exemptions, they must register with the city by submitting photos of their habitats, allowing the city's Code Enforcement inspectors to distinguish intentional habitats from neglected, nuisance vegetation, the city's website said.

Visit tinyurl.com/CLTPollinators to learn more or to register your own pollinator habitat.

"The goal is not for people to let their lawns grow unmowed," Picard said. "That's really not the best wildlife practice. The best wildlife practice is to reduce your areas that are lawn and replace [them] with native plants. That's what this is all about; reducing your turf grass and replacing those areas with pollinator habitats or naturalistic landscapes, or both."

Known as the Butterfly Highway, the NCWF's flagship program is an initiative to restore pollinator habitat on lands that are impacted by agriculture or development.

The program encourages folks to create pollinator gardens using a mix of native seeds called the Butterfly Highway seed packet. All proceeds go into pollinator conservation across the state, Picard said.

NCWF's local chapter, the Charlotte Wildlife Stewards, will hold a webinar with city staff on June 24 to discuss what led to the ordinance change, the importance of pollinators and local wildlife, and FAQs to raise awareness about the new registration process and habitat exemptions.

"We've destroyed so much habitat through development, but we can restore that habitat in our yards, in our city parks, in our neighborhoods, in our places of worship," Picard said.

"We could bring back some of these critical elements of the food web," he continued. "The most important things for this to happen is codifying it, making it law, legally giving people the option to do this and not penalizing them."

SUZANNE WILKERSON'S TOP BEGINNER-FRIENDLY PLANTS TO GROW (AND AVOID)

Paniculata Hydrangea: A full-sun plant (six plus hours of direct sunlight daily) that can grow 3 to 4 feet tall. Low maintenance and low disease. Multiple flower blooms from mid-June into the frost. Best to mix with an "evergreen" plant like gardenias.
Boxwood: An evergreen shrub that has been hybridized to reduce disease. Grows very well with gypsum in partial shade (three to six hours of direct sun).
Camellias: Sasanqua camellias grow well in full sun while japonica camellias need partial shade.
Beauty Berry: A type of shrub that can grow 5 to 8 feet tall in full sun to part shade. Great for hoisting butterflies and produces purple and white berries for wildlife to feed on.
Azaleas: An all-time standard in evergreens that thrive in partial shade. Depending on which hybridized breed you select the flowers will bloom in the spring and last eight to 10 weeks.
Baptisia: A drought proof native plant that comes in a variety of colors. Baptisias can live 20 to 40 years and are excellent pollinator plants.
Cardinal Flower: Can tolerate full sun or partial shade to put off vibrant red or indigo flowers. Will attract pollinators like hummingbirds.
Black-Eyed Susan: A quintessential native plant that is low maintenance, drought tolerant and highly resilient to North Carolina summers. Grows best in full sun.
Millenium Onion: An ornamental onion variety that repels unwanted wildlife like deer or squirrels. Puts off a pinkish-purple bloom and thrives in full sun to partial shade.
Coreopsis: A full sun-loving plant with a long bloom period and comes in a variety of colors.
Daylily: A classic beauty that is drought tolerant and likes full sun to partial shade. While typical daylilies have short bloom periods, certain hybridized versions will bloom all summer long — ask your local nursery for a rebloomer daylily hybrid.
Butterfly Bush: Attracts its namesake and thrives in full sun. Wilkerson warns against getting the native or standard butterfly bush, instead suggesting a hybridized version that will grow only three to four feet tall and bloom all summer.
Floribunda and Tea Roses: Highly disease resistant shrub rose varieties that require full sun. Most rose varieties benefit from companion plants like catmint and produce beautiful blooms when planted on top of a banana.

If you prefer your plants edible, Wilkerson suggests growing **blueberry bushes** (you'll need at least three to ensure successful cross-pollination, as they're known to be "tri-pollinators") or **brown turkey figs**.

Along with her list of favorites, Wilkerson provided a list of plants that people should "absolutely avoid," listed here:

Knockout Roses: Extremely disease-ridden. The common rosette disease will prohibit you from planting another plant in the rose category for another six years until the disease leaves the soil.
Nandinas: The berries produced by the nandina category are poisonous to birds.
Loropetalum (aka Chinese Fringe Flower): Can grow up to 15 feet tall and take over your yard. If you do buy a loropetalum, make sure to get the ultimate dwarf breed for easy maintenance.
Any vine is forbidden by Wilkerson except for the **Deciduous Clematis vine** with 5 to 8 inches of flower diameters. After this vine has finished blooming you can cut it down to 4 inches and that same vine will rebloom up to three times in a single summer.

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FROM GREENWAYS TO BLUEWAYS, THE CHARLOTTE AREA HOLDS SO MANY WAYS TO ENJOY NATURE THIS SUMMER

By Pat Moran

The uninitiated may think of Charlotte as just an urban center built around a banking hub, but true outdoorsy folks know the Charlotte metro is home to so many opportunities to enjoy nature and seek adventure.

Take the Carolina Thread Trail, for example, a regional network of connected greenways with more than 425 miles of trails and 170 miles of blueway spanning 15 counties. For residents and visitors looking to get a little more active, there's rafting or mountain biking at the Whitewater Center, wake surfing on Lake Norman, paddleboarding on Mountain Island Lake, or seasonal swimming at the historic granite quarry, Carrigan Farms.

"Charlotte allows visitors to explore a vibrant city and reconnect with the outdoors in the same trip," said Laura White, chief brand and strategy officer with the Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority. "During the summer months especially, travelers are looking for destinations where they can spend time outside, discover something new and still enjoy great dining, entertainment and culture ... That balance is part of what makes Charlotte such a rewarding destination."

Below, we've compiled a list of ways you can engage with the outdoors in the Charlotte area this summer. There's no reason not to put the phone down and get back to nature this season.

WATER ADVENTURES

Rafting at US National Whitewater Center

5000 Whitewater Center Pkwy • $69-$79 • whitewater.org/activity/whitewater-rafting

Whether testing the waters as a beginner or paddling with proficiency, rafting enthusiasts can shoot the rapids where the pros train at US National Whitewater Center (USNWC). Shortly after opening in 2006, the facility was designated an official Olympic training site in 2007. Since then, three paddlers with the 2021 US Canoe/Kayak team, including canoeist and Bryson City native Evy Leibfarth, trained at the center. Leibfarth returned for training at USNWC three years later and went on to win a bronze medal at the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris.

Recreational paddlers are following in the powerful wake of Olympians when they hit the world's largest, constantly recirculating artificial river. The 3,750-foot waterway splits into two channels: the 984-foot-long competition course and the 1,804-foot-long wilderness course. On both, expert guides pilot visitors down rapids ranging from Class II (a fun and splashy ride) through to Class IV (a rambunctious rodeo with large, unavoidable waves). Patrons can choose from three different styles of rafting including an introductory family-friendly option; a faster paced, intermediate alternative; or an intense and turbulent adventure. Helmets, paddles and personal flotation devices are provided.

Through September, on Thursdays and Fridays after 6:30 p.m., USNWC offers patrons Big Water Sessions, where the facility's 620-horsepower submersible pumps push more water into the channels to create bigger waves and more whitewater.

Boating on Lake Norman

Encompassing 32,000 acres and 520 miles of shoreline spanning four counties — Mecklenburg, Iredell, Lincoln, and Catawba — Lake Norman is the largest man-made body of water in North Carolina. A great way to experience this inland freshwater sea is by boat, and you don't have to own a craft or know how to pilot one to do it.

With a selection of chartered cruises to choose from, including Carolina Cruising Charters and Ride LKN Wake & Surf Co., you can cruise by waterfront estates, anchor in secluded coves to swim or spot bald eagles, blue herons and deer along the wooded shorelines of Lake Norman State Park.

Fishing on Lake Wylie

Like Lake Norman to the north, Lake Wylie was created when the Catawba Power Company (now Duke Energy) dammed the Catawba River. Covering 13,400 acres and featuring 325 miles of shoreline, Lake Wylie boasts stellar fishing for catfish, crappie, striped bass and freshwater drum.

Top fishing spots include the Buster Boyd Bridge area, which offers numerous submerged structures and drop-offs. It is known for its bass and crappie fishing. Featuring deep holes and an abundant catfish population, Big Allison Creek is also popular. With plenty of submerged vegetation and rocky structures, the Copperhead Island area is noted for bass fishing.

Notable Mentions

Catawba River Blueway: Paddlers can explore the 30-mile stretch of flatwater on the Catawba River between Lake Wylie Hydro Dam and Lansford Canal State Park.

Anne Springs Close Greenway: The 2,100-acre natural preserve in Fort Mill, South Carolina, encompasses several lakes and ponds where patrons can kayak, paddleboard or fish.

Mountain Island Lake: The man-made lake offers launch sites for canoes, kayaks and paddleboards. There are several fishing spots, and swimming near the lake's central sandbar is accessible by boat.

The Quarry at Carrigan Farms: The 25-foot deep natural quarry in Mooresville is the perfect way to cool off in the summer. There's a $20-$30 admission free, plus a $5 deposit.



Great Outdoor Provision Co.



Rafting at US National Whitewater Center

TRAILWAYS/GREENWAYS

Kings Mountain Gateway Trail

807 S. Battleground Ave., Kings Mountain

Part of the extensive Carolina Thread Trail, a network of connected greenways, trails and blueways that reaches 15 counties and two states, the Kings Mountain Gateway Trail is American Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant. The trailhead is connected to 2 miles of street and sidewalk connections through downtown Kings Mountain, offering a range of experiences including an easy .7-mile gravel and asphalt loop that traverses a former quarry railroad, plus a 4.5-mile gravel trail that runs through the quarry property. Along the way, hikers can check out a butterfly garden plateau and a cardio hill made from earth dug out of the quarry.

Latta Nature Preserve

6000 Sample Road, Huntersville • $12-$16 • carolinaraptorcenter.org

Sitting alongside Mountain Island Lake, this 1,480-acre preserve contains 16 miles of trails that offer hikers, nature enthusiasts and horseback riders the opportunity to explore a variety of terrain while enjoying scenic views of the lake, forests and streams. The only Mecklenburg County property open to horseback riding, the preserve designates 13 miles as horseback and hiking trails, while 3 miles are set aside for hiking only. Latta Nature Preserve is also home to the Carolina Raptor Center, an educational nonprofit that protects and medically rehabilitates birds of prey. Its three-quarter-mile Raptor Trail is a zoo highlighting birds of prey, including eagles, hawks, owls and vultures.

South Fork Rail Trail

2677 Laboratory Road, Lincolnton

Another part of the Carolina Thread Trail, the South Fork Rail Trail features 1.8 miles of natural surface and crushed gravel trail winding gently through Lincoln County's 324-acre Rhyne Conservation Preserve. Hikers will pass mature floodplain forests along the South Fork Catawba River, a bald cypress swamp, rock outcrops and bountiful wildflowers.

Part of the Butterfly Highway, a conservation initiative to restore native pollinator habitats, the preserve is also habitat for migratory songbirds and other wildlife species. Across the South Fork River, visitors can see the historic Laboratory Mill, now an event venue. The mill earned its name because the site served as a medical laboratory during the Civil War.

Rocky Branch Trail

700 Eagle Road, Cramerton

Yet another skein of the Carolina Thread Trail, the Rocky Branch Trail is an enhanced natural surface trail that is part of the 55-acre Rocky Branch Park. The project is the result of a collaboration between Belmont and Cramerton, and has transformed a public open space into an urban trail system for runners, hikers, walkers and mountain biking enthusiasts. Over 4 miles of pathway wind through hilly terrain, under a thick timber canopy, and over a bridged creek. Several single-track mountain bike trails extend off the main trail segment, offering opportunities for cyclists of various experience levels to enjoy.

Notable Mentions

Little Sugar Creek Greenway: Connecting several parks, schools, recreational facilities, shopping and dining areas, gardens and public art pieces, the greenway stretches for more than 19 miles from Brevard Street in NoDa to the Catawba River in South Carolina.

McDowell Creek Greenway: Often bustling with cyclists and walkers, the popular 2.8-mile greenway links Cornelius to Huntersville and connects to 2.18 miles of other urban trails.

The Trail of History: This trail in Midtown Charlotte follows the Little Sugar Creek Greenway pedestrian walkway along Kings Drive, passing statues depicting local historic figures like Loonis McGlohon, Captain James Jack and Dr. Annie Alexander.

North Carolina Civil Rights Trail: The Charlotte portion of the NC Civil Rights Trail spotlights markers and monuments celebrating desegregation, voting rights and landmark court decisions.

Crowder's Mountain Backside Trail: Crowder's Mountain State Park near Kings Mountain includes trails to two peaks, Crowder's Mountain and The Pinnacle. Starting at the park's Visitor Center, the 5-mile Backside Trail rises gently at first before ascending the last half-mile in a steep 360-foot climb. The trail ends in a series of steps carved into the western summit of Crowder's Mountain.



The Carolina Thread Trail

MORE ON THE NEXT PAGE >>>

At NOVEL River District, luxury and nature come together to create a lifestyle that feels both vibrant and effortlessly connected. Nestled within Charlotte's expansive River District community, NOVEL invites residents to embrace a more adventurous way of living — where scenic trails, riverfront experiences, and over 500 acres of preserved green space are just outside your door. Inspired by the idea of a life that is "wildly tamed," the community pairs thoughtfully designed apartment homes and resort-style amenities with the energy of Westrow, The River District's emerging town center. Whether it's a morning walk along the trails, an evening gathering with friends, or a quick commute to Uptown or the airport, NOVEL River District offers the perfect balance of urban convenience, natural beauty, and elevated living for a true urban sanctuary and a home like no other.



NOVEL
RIVER DISTRICT



GUIDED ADVENTURES

Paddle the 11 Mills Blueway - Catawba River

A flatwater paddling adventure also serves as a trip back in time to the Charlotte region's rich textile history. The 11 MIlls Blueway is a "trail" of waterways that takes its name from 11 historic textile mills built and owned by the Lineberger and Stowe families, prominent Gaston County textile pioneers, in the early 1900s. The mills, designed to produce long, smooth cotton or wool fibers ideal for weaving and knitting, are mostly gone now, but a few ruins of the Piedmont's linthead past remain along the blueway. Though the Catawba River and its tributary, the South Fork, converge beneath Lake Wylie, the two blueways do not connect. So, 11 Mills is actually two blueways.

The Catawba River Route starts just below Mountain Island Lake, and flows south to Belmont. There are several points where you can put your boat in or step out for a visit, including River Street Park in Mount Holly. About 2 miles downstream, the river splits into two channels; the right takes you to Tailrace Marina and the left to the US National Whitewater Center's dock. Another 2 miles downstream, Kevin Loftin Riverfront Park offers a spot to stretch your legs. Another half-mile brings you near the historic Spectrum Dyed Yarns mill building that is now the rum producing Muddy River Distillery. If you're interested in paddling this stretch of the blueway, we suggest checking in with Catawba Riverkeeper Paddling Club, which offers eco-tours of area waterways as well as volunteer clean-up opportunities. Paddling Club annual membership fees are $60, with a $30 add-on to join the kayak club. Visit catawbariverkeeper.org for more info.

Charlotte Liberty Walk

Coupled with narration that you can play on your phone, the Charlotte Liberty Walk is a self-guided tour of Revolutionary War-era sites and historic markers in Uptown. The walk starts on South Tryon Street and proceeds north to a marker near Trade and Tryon streets commemorating the 1780 Battle of Charlotte, where American militia fired three volleys at British troops before beating an orderly retreat. Elsewhere on the route, walkers can stop at sites including Settlers Cemetery, established circa 1768, and the first location of Queens College. Other markers acknowledge people like Ishmael Titus, an enslaved Black man who won his freedom after serving in the American army. Visit charlottelibertywalk.com for more info.

Paddle the 11 Mills Blueway - South Fork

The South Fork 11 MIlls Blueway route starts at Spencer Mountain, 20 miles west of the Catawba, and continues downriver to the foot of Cramer Mountain. Paddling by more than 1,300 acres of land protected by the Catawba Lands Conservancy, visitors will find whitewater below Spencer Mountain Boat Launch as well as the South Fork Trail, which passes the ruins of two 19th-century textile mills. Adventurers will take their boats out to continue downriver at Adam Springs Portage, then then pass Cramerton's Goat Island Park — where 19th-century textile engineer Stuart Cramer released goats to control vegetation — before paddling near Cramerton's historic Black neighborhood Baltimore.



11 Mills Blueway/Courtesy of Go Gaston NC

LOCAL OUTFITTERS

Great Outdoor Provision Company

4275 Park Road, greatoutdoorprovision.com

Great Outdoor Provision Company has been a mainstay of Charlotte's Park Road Shopping Center since the early 1990s, but the outdoor-lifestyle clothing and gear retailer has been around much longer than that. The outfitter opened its first Queen City location on Independence Boulevard in 1981, but its origins stretch back to 1972 when founder Tom Valone opened shop in a 120-square-foot space at the back of a Carrboro bicycle shop. Since then, the company has grown to encompass nine stores throughout North Carolina and Virginia.

Great Outdoor Provision Company stocks camping gear, fishing equipment and climbing necessities. Outdoor and adventure wear, including brands like Patagonia and Teva, are perennial sellers. Charlotte store employee and keyholder Jackson Foltz says June is the time of year when recreational kayaks and paddleboards fly off the shelves. "It ramps up a bit, especially with kids off during the summer and families going on trips," Foltz says.

On Land Trust Day, the first Saturday in June, a percentage of all sales made at Great Outdoor Provision Company's stores went toward land and river conservancies throughout NC and VA, including Piedmont Land Conservancy, Conservation Trust of North Carolina and more. In 2025, the company raised money through raffles and its WNC Give-Back t-shirt, designed by the Charlotte shop's Cheryl Yount, donating the funds to western NC relief organization MountainTrue.

Gear Goat XCHG

3038 Eastway Drive, geargoatx.com

Specializing in new and used cycling sales and service as well as camping, hiking, backpacking, running, skiing, snowboarding and climbing equipment, outdoor consignment shop Gear Goat XCHG is nestled in the Eastway Crossing Shopping Center in east Charlotte. True to the local business's tagline, "reuse, relive, relove," the shop offers a hassle-free system for people to unload bikes and outdoor gear stored in their garages, closets and sheds in exchange for money, allowing customers to find quality outdoor gear for reasonable prices. There is arguably no outfitter more local than Gear Goat XCHG, because every product the store sells has been owned by someone in the community.

Outfitters

5000 Whitewater Center Pkwy., whitewater.org/outfitters

In addition to paddling and whitewater rafting on its artificial river, the US National Whitewater Center (USNWC) offers over 40 miles of trails for hikers, runners, and mountain bikers; six ziplines up to 1,500 feet long and 100 feet high; and one of the largest outdoor climbing facilities in the US. With all that activity going on, people will need gear. That's why Outfitters, a 5,000-square-foot outdoor shop is located on the property. The store carries paddlesports, running, climbing and biking equipment as well as clothing. In addition to Whitewater branded items, Outfitters also carries gear from brands including Arcteryx, Black Diamond, Patagonia and Rab.

Notable Mentions

The Spoke Easy: Whether you're hitting trails or taking part in the urban Critical Mass ride, The Spoke Easy is there to make cycling more accessible to all. Located in the heart of Elizabeth with a bar and live music on Friday nights, the business is the perfect spot to find your community while waiting on a repair or simply window shopping for gear. 1530 Elizabeth Ave., Suite 100.

Jesse Browns: In 1970, adventurer and outdoorsman Jesse Brown opened the first specialty outfitter store in the southeast in Greer, South Carolina. Shortly after, the store moved to Charlotte and added a fly-fishing department to its selection of outdoor gear, clothing and accessories. 4732 Sharon Road.

Sierra Charlotte: Sierra offers products for active and outdoor lifestyles, including clothing and gear for camping, hiking, biking, fishing, boating, swimming, hunting, skiing and snowboarding. 9555-B South Blvd.

REI Charlotte: This national retailer offers outdoor enthusiasts gear and clothing for camping, climbing, cycling, fitness, hiking and more. The Charlotte store includes bicycle repair services and a full-service ski and snowboard shop offering professional tuning, waxing and repairs. 9755 Northlake Centre Pkwy.



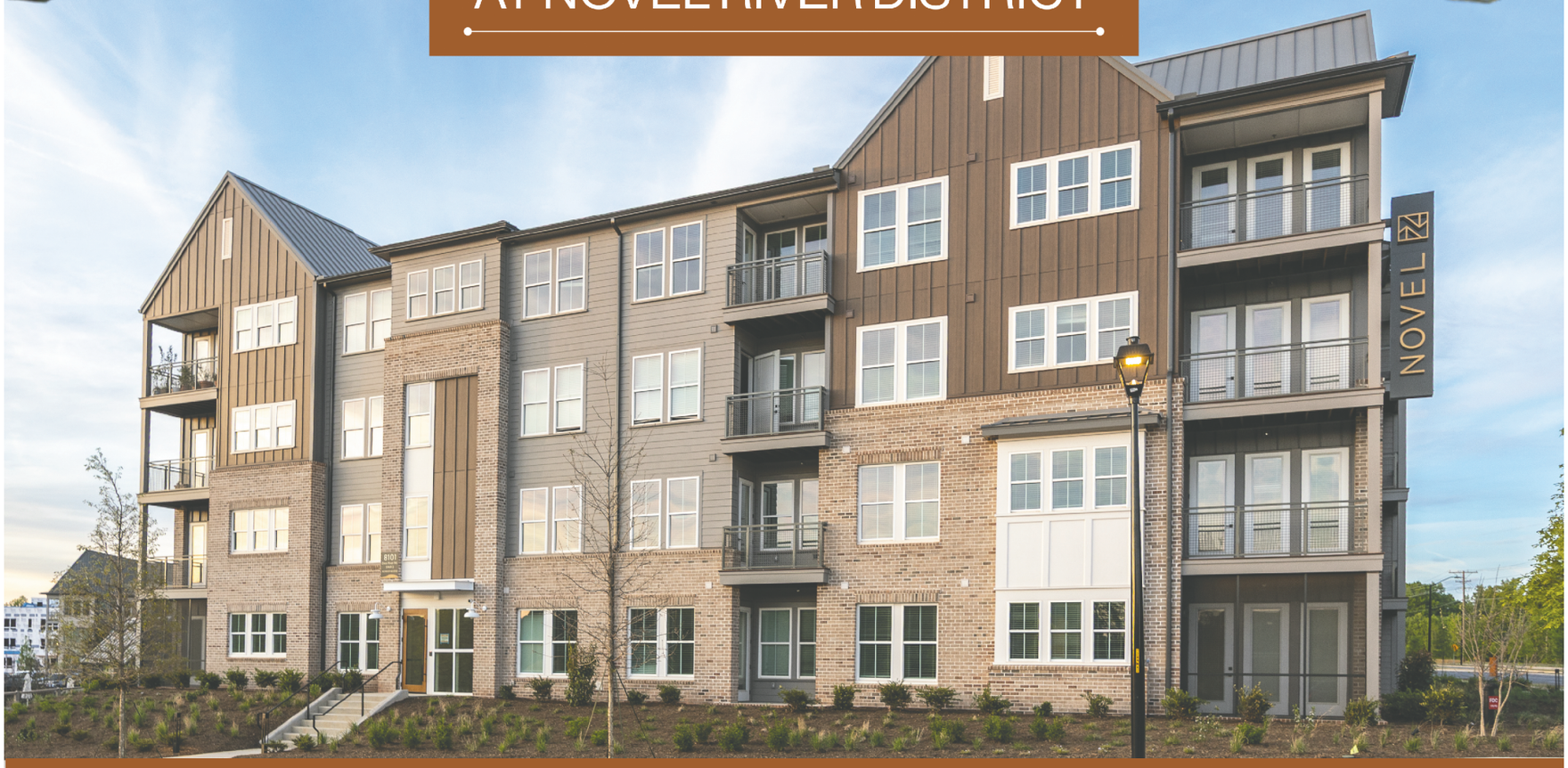
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SUMMER EVENTS GUIDE



Boileryard Brunch/Photo by Ben Franke

SUMMER GUIDE 2026

The hottest outdoor events in Charlotte this summer

Things are heating up in more ways than one. We're here to provide you with reasons to get outside and touch some grass. Just make sure you stay hydrated.

LIVE MUSIC

TRULIANT AMPHITHEATER

707 Pavilion Blvd.; truliantamp.com

July 8: Santana & The Doobie Brothers
July 12: Ne-Yo & Akon
July 14: Train
July 16: Jimmy Buffett's Coral Reefer Band
July 18: Chicago & Styx
July 21: Motionless in White
July 24: Lynyrd Skynyrd & Foreigner
July 28: Toto w/ Christopher Cross, The Romantics
July 30: John Mellencamp
August 1: Hillary Duff
August 7: Tape B w/ Levity, Know Good
August 10: Muse
August 12: Kesha
August 14: Tim McGraw
August 15: 5 Seconds of Summer
August 16: Avenged Sevenfold w/ Good Charlotte
August 17: Mötley Crüe
August 22: Luke Bryan
August 23: Jack Johnson
August 24: Rob Zombie w/ Marilyn Manson, The Hu, Orgy
August 26: Josh Groban
September 1: Kehlani
September 5: $UICIDEBOY$
September 8: Hayley Williams
September 9: Empire of the Sun
September 10: Staind
September 12: Iron Maiden
September 13: James Taylor
September 15: BABYMETAL
September 16: John Fogerty w/ Steve Winwood
September 17: The Strokes
September 18: Wu-Tang Clan
September 19: Treaty Oak Revival
September 20: TLC w/ Salt-n-Pepa, En Vogue

SKYLA CREDIT UNION AMPHITHEATRE

1000 NC Music Factory Blvd.; skylacuamp.com

July 17: Turnpike Troubadours
July 18: Lindsey Stirling
July 27: Yeat
August 7: The Fray w/ Dashboard Confessional
August 16: Ella Mai
August 29: Blues Traveler w/ Gin Blossoms, Spin Doctors
September 5: NEEDTOBREATHE
September 11: Billy Currington w/ Kip Moore
September 18: Rainbow Kitten Surprise

THE FILLMORE

820 Hamilton St.; fillmorenc.com

June 21: 'Sistas Who Kill'
June 26: smokedope2016
June 28: Idobi Radio School w/ Honey Revenge
July 9: Flyleaf w/ Lacey Sturm
July 14: Story of the Year w/ Silverstein
July 15: Earl Sweatshirt w/ Mike
July 19: T.I.
July 22: Qveen Herby
July 24: BossMan Dlow
July 25: Fetty Wap
July 26: 42 Dugg w/ Babyface Ray
July 29: Kail Lowry
July 30: Oliver Tree
August 5: Chance Peña
August 18: Poppy
August 21: Bop to the Top
August 23: El Tri
September 3: Jack Harlow
September 6: Hulvey
September 16: Phantogram
September 19: Black Veil Brides

THE UNDERGROUND

820 Hamilton St.; fillmorenc.com

June 23: Yung Bleu
June 24: Kenny Mason
June 26: Gasolina Reggaeton Party
June 27: Josiah & the Bonnevilles
June 28: TopOppGen
July 11: Hawt Mess
July 14: Buffalo Traffic Jam
July 17: Noise Complaints R&B Party
July 18: BabyChiefDoit
July 25: Who's Bad: Michael Jackson Experience
July 31: Reprise
August 5: Nine Vicious
August 27: Clarent
August 29: Queen City Metalfest
August 30: Jutes
September 3: Rio Da Yung OG
September 4: The Aquabats!
September 5: Channel Tres
September 10: 3Quency
September 11: Lyfe Jennings
September 13: The Bouncing Souls
September 19: Jet

OVENS AUDITORIUM

2700 E. Independence Blvd.; boplex.com

June 21: The Kevin Langue Show
June 27: Pablo Cruise w/ Atlanta Rhythm Section, Orleans
July 11: Blackberry Smoke
July 25: Toosii w/ Ann Marie
August 1: Hermanos Espinoza
August 2: The Princess Bride: An Inconceivable Evening w/ Cary Elwes
August 8: John Mulaney
August 9: Bronco
August 11: Brit Floyd
August 12: Mon Laferte
August 14: Mariachazo
August 16: Los Tucanes De Tijuana
August 16: The Wiggles
August 20-21: Nikki Glaser
September 10: Juanes
September 11: Nurse John

TD AMP BALLANTYNE

11115 Upper Ave., tdampballantyne.com

July 10: moe. w/ Umphrey's McGee
July 22: Rick Springfield
July 24: Buju Banton & Stephen Marley
July 31: Ballantyne Beats: Mo Money
August 7: Ballantyne Beats: Tell Me Lies
August 15: Jeff Foxworthy
September 11: Ballantyne Beats: The Broken Hearts

BANK OF AMERICA STADIUM

800 S. Mint St.; bankofamericastadium.com

July 11: AC/DC
July 17-18: Usher w/ Chris Brown

BLUMENTHAL ARTS

Venues vary; blumenthalarts.org

June 27: Joe Jackson @ Knight Theater
August 1: Soul of Charlotte @ Stage Door Theater
August 29: Consuela Ivy Sings Natalie Cole @ Stage Door Theater
August 29: Rick Ross @ Belk Theater

CHARLOTTE SYMPHONY

charlottesymphony.org

June 21: Summer Pops: Hollywood Hits @ Symphony Park
June 25: CSO @ Pineville Lake Park
June 26: CSO @ McGuire Nuclear Station
June 27: CSO @ Village Park
June 28: Summer Pops: Celebrate America @ Symphony Park
July 4: Charlotte Stars & Stripes Spectacular @ Truist Field

U.S. NATIONAL WHITEWATER CENTER RIVER JAM

5000 Whitewater Center Pkwy.; whitewater.org

June 25: Deltaphonic
June 26: The Jesse Williams Band
June 27: Ajeva
July 2: Fo Daniels
July 3: Derrick Dove & the Peacekeepers w/ Andy Thomas
July 4: Eddie 9V
July 9: Chill Paxton
July 10: Magenta Sunshine
July 11: Dalton Kiser & the Downwind
July 16: Kendall Street Company
July 18: The Fretliners
July 23: Tomorrow's Problem
July 24: Brother Smith
July 25: The Woods
July 30: Hustle Souls
August 6: Wayne Baker Brooks
August 7: Scott T. Smith
August 8: The Steepwater Band
August 13: Selwyn Birchwood
August 15: Sydney Adams
August 20: Mountain Walrus
August 21: Flow Tribe
August 22: Sam Morrow
August 27: New Dawn Starkestra
August 28: Bedford
August 29: Parker Barrow
September 3: Miss Tess
September 5: Empire Strikes Brass
September 10: Parlor Greens
September 11: Grayson Jenkins
September 12: Joslyn & the Sweet Compression
September 17: The Mallett Brothers Band
September 18: Funk You

MECK SOUNDS

Locations vary between Mecklenburg County parks, 7-9 p.m.; tinyurl.com/MeckSounds2026

July 16: The Hitmen Party Band @ Pearl Street Park
August 20: Boz Biz Band @ Park Road Park

ARTS & CULTURE

THEATRE CHARLOTTE

501 Queens Road; theatrecharlotte.org

June 18-21: Seussical, Jr.
July 10-18: Big Fish
July 24-25: Matilda the Musical, Jr.

THREE BONE THEATRE

The Arts Factory at West End Studios, 1545 W. Trade St.; threebonetheatre.com

Aug. 21-Sept. 6: Sovereignty

MATTHEWS PLAYHOUSE

Fullwood Theatre, 100 E. McDowell St., Matthews; matthewsplayhouse.com

July 10-26: Hairspray

BELK THEATER

130 N. Tryon St., blumenthalarts.org

August 11-16: & Juliet
September 8-13: Hell's Kitchen

BOOTH PLAYHOUSE

130 N. Tryon St., blumenthalarts.org

Through June 28: Charlotte Squawks 21: Hold My Beer!
July 7-Aug. 9: Dracula, A Comedy of Errors
August 28-29: The Cher Show
September 3-6: Late Nite Catechism

STAGE DOOR THEATER

155 N. College St.; blumenthalarts.org

June 21: We Love Dads Comedy Show
July 12: TJ & Dave
July 18: Sondheim on Sondheim

BOILERYARD BRUNCH

July 26 & Aug. 23 • noon-4 p.m. • Camp North End • Free • camp.nc

Named Best Day Party in Queen City Nerve's 2025 Best in the Nest issue, Boileryard Brunch is in full swing for its third season. Expect a brunch-style cookout, live arts, cocktails, a Thrift Pony market, and spins from Dammit Wesley and other DJs.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT LIVE
Wednesdays • 5-9 p.m. • Locations vary • Free • mintmuseum.org

Presented by Bank of America, Wednesday Night Live includes free admission to the Mint Museum, Bechtler Museum and Gantt Center every Wednesday as well as live entertainment or programming at one of the four Levine Center for the Arts institutions each week. Special programming ranges from dance performances to spoken-word artists to film screenings.

SPORTS

CHARLOTTE KNIGHTS
Truist Field, 324 S. Mint St.; milb.com/charlotte-knights

June 23-28 vs. Rochester
July 7-12 vs. Nashville
July 21-26 vs. Norfolk
August 4-9 vs. Durham
August 25-30 vs. Memphis
Sept. 8-13 vs. Buffalo

CHARLOTTE CROWN
Bojangles Coliseum, 2700 E. Independence Blvd.; boplex.com

July 30 vs. Greensboro Groove
August 1 vs. Savannah Steel
August 2 vs. Jacksonville Waves
August 5 vs. Savannah Steel
August 8-9 vs. Savannah Steel
August 13-15 vs. Jacksonville Waves
August 22-23 vs. Greensboro Groove

CAROLINA PANTHERS
Bank of America Stadium, 800 S. Mint St.; panthers.com

PRESEASON
August 28 vs. Houston Texans

KEEP POUNDING HIGH SCHOOL CLASSIC
Aug. 29 • 4 p.m. • Bank of America Stadium • $10 • bankofamericastadium.com

The Keep Pounding High School Classic brings together top regional high school teams for back-to-back matchups: Indian Land (Lancaster) vs. Northwestern (Rock Hill) at 4 p.m. followed by Cardinal Gibbons (Raleigh) vs. Hough (Cornelius) at 8 p.m.

REGULAR SEASON
September 13 vs. Chicago Bears

CHARLOTTE FC
Bank of America Stadium, 800 S. Mint St.; charlottefootballclub.com

July 22 vs. Atlanta United FC
August 4 vs. Pumas UNAM (Leagues Cup)
August 7 vs. Atlas FC (Leagues Cup)
August 11 vs. C.F. Pachuca (Leagues Cup)
August 15 vs. Columbus Crew
August 22 vs. DC United
September 5 vs. Houston Dynamo FC

MLS ALL-STAR GAME
July 29 • 8 p.m. • Bank of America Stadium • $60 and up • charlottefootballclub.com

Major League Soccer (MLS) Commissioner Don Garber came to town last summer to officially announce that Charlotte FC will host the 2026 MLS All-Star Game, marking the first-ever all-star game played at Bank of America Stadium. The match, which will see the MLS All-Star Team face off against the Liga MX All-Stars of Mexico, will be accompanied by a week-long celebration of soccer and culture with a full slate of fan events throughout the city, including community programming and fan entertainment such as the MLS All-Star Skills Challenge, the MLS NEXT All-Star Game, and MLS All-Star Soccer Celebration.



Charlotte Crown is the city's newest pro sports team.

CHARLOTTE INDEPENDENCE
American Legion Memorial Stadium, 310 N. Kings Drive; charlotteindependence.com

June 24 vs. Greenville Triumph SC
July 1 vs. Corpus Christi FC
July 18 vs. Chattanooga Red Wolves SC
July 25 vs. Richmond Kickers
August 1 vs. One Knoxville SC
August 8 vs. Greenville Triumph SC
August 15 vs. Sarasota Paradise
August 29 vs. AV Alta FC (Meck County Sportsplex)
September 12 vs. Westchester SC

COOK OUT SUMMER SHOOTOUT
Charlotte Motor Speedway, 5555 Concord Pkwy. S; charlottemotorspeedway.com

Watch racing's future stars battle it out in Legend Cars and Bandoleros on the frontstretch quarter-mile at the Speedway, with each new week bringing a different theme.

June 23 vs. Speedway Sports Night
June 29 vs. Speedway Safari Night
June 30 vs. Red, White & Vroom
July 7 vs. Laps & Lassos
July 14 vs. Lug Nut's Birthday Party: Mascot Go-Kart Race
July 21 vs. Christmas in July
July 28 vs. Champions Night

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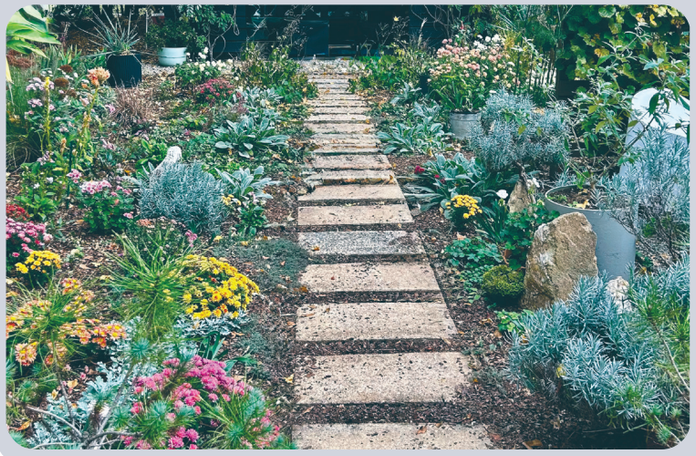
UPCOMING SHOWS
Joe Gatto 6/11 - 6/13
Kelly Kellz (Kelly Davis) 6/17
Godfrey 6/18 - 6/20
Therapy Gecko 6/21
Jeremiah (J.J.) Williamson 6/21
Ahren Belisle 6/24
Adele Givens 6/25 - 6/27
Ben Bankas 6/28
Sydney Castillo 7/2
Desi Banks 7/3 - 7/5
Luke Capasso 7/8
Craig Conant 7/9 - 7/11
Anthony Robustiano 7/12
Chris Higgins 7/15
Darren Fleet 7/16
Dustin Ybarra 7/17
James Austin Johnson 7/18
Pauly Shore 7/20
David C. Smalley 7/22
Jamie Lissow 7/23 - 7/25
Mike Epps 7/24 - 7/26
Phylicia Dshea 7/30
Corey B 7/31 - 8/2
Pat Burtscher 8/6
George Wallace 8/7 - 8/8
Peter Antoniou: Psychic Comedian 8/9
Bob The Drag Queen 8/13 - 8/15
Dale Elliott Jr 8/16

LOCAL BACKYARD INSPIRATION

Charlotte's backyard culture runs deep. From compact Dilworth patios strung with lights to wide NoDa yards with pergolas and pizza ovens — these are the outdoor rooms where neighbors gather, kids play, and summer actually happens.



Kathi Graves @kathigravesart







Carlynn Ferguson



LOCAL BACKYARD INSPIRATION

"I got tired of watching my husband work to make the "perfect" lawn, knowing it would only look great for a couple of months before fungus and other issues undid all his efforts (we don't use chemical interventions). So one day in the summer of 2022, I announced that I was going to dig up EVERY blade of grass and replace the entire yard with a garden. And the rest is history....

We have had a vegetable garden for about 10 years and I had flowers and succulents in planters but growing an actual garden of flowers/herbs/shrubs, especially perennials, was mostly uncharted territory for me. I began gathering anything and everything I could find that I liked and started sticking it in the ground, with no "real" plan, no real idea how it would look and no idea how to actually keep things alive. I knew the color palette I liked and that's about it.

We're beginning our fourth growing season and I can't believe how different it looks. It's not an exaggeration to say that I've probably moved 100 plants from their original spot and I've lost count of how many different varieties I have now. We've added blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, muscadines and kiwis into the mix, so the edible bounty of fruits and vegetables literally sustains our bodies. It's been quite an adventure and there are many days where I'm overwhelmed with the sheer volume of work it requires day after day, especially when I'm the singular worker bee. But the labor itself is good medicine for my soul and my body and the beauty brings me back into the awe and wonder of it all."

- Kathi Graves

"We moved into our house in 2003, and fell in love with our hilly backyard, which reminded me of the mountains where I grew up. We decided to add in a water feature, and now have this beautiful waterfall. The critters love it too: birds, frogs, squirrels, etc.- our mountain home away from the mountains!"

- Jim Cunningham

"When we moved into our home in 1990, a challenging slope to our backyard presented no problem to my creative and hard working husband. Over the years, he designed and built a terraced backyard haven—complete with level beds for flowers and plants, a potting shed, a "to scale" horseshoe pit, and a horseshoe area. We have enjoyed entertaining family and friends, relaxing on our deck, and appreciating the beauty that surrounds us as we savor 'our little corner of the world.'"

- Sheila Smith

Jim Cunningham





Sheila Smith





THREE WEEKEND DIY PROJECTS TO TRANSFORM YOUR YARD



A lounge zone can replace or accompany a patio/Courtesy of Ambiance Garden Design

These three projects are designed for Charlotte yards, doable in a weekend, and good for small lots, clay soil, and real-life schedules

By Justin LaFrancois

Charlotte summers make you want to live outside, but a lot of backyards just aren't there yet. Maybe your "patio" is a grill on a patch of grass, your garden lives in randomly collected pots, or you're hopping through mud every time you take the dog out at night.

The good news is that you don't have to pour a full concrete slab or hire a crew tomorrow to make your yard work better. With some planning and a basic run to the local hardware or garden center, you can carve out a seating area, start a real garden and fix the torn-up traffic zones in a couple of weekends (or just one if you've got the time, heart and money).

We pulled together three projects that check all the boxes for Charlotte DIYers: they work in heat and humidity, respect usual HOA regulations, and don't require a professional tool collection. Pick one to start or try all three; it's your roadmap to a backyard that actually reflects the time and money you put into it.

Project 1: Weekend Pea Gravel Patio or Lounge Zone

Create a defined hangout space without pouring concrete.

Some backyard upgrades require permits, contractors and a budget that quickly balloons. A pea gravel patio, on the other hand, is approachable, affordable and surprisingly transformative, especially for yards that need better drainage, clearer function and a little more charm. Well-built gravel patios rely on a defined border, a stable base, landscape fabric, and a 2-to-3-inch gravel layer, which makes them practical for weekend DIYers looking for that "wow" factor.

If your outdoor space currently comprises a grill on grass, a pair of chairs with nowhere to land, or a muddy patch that never quite became a patio, this project could solves several of your problems. It will create a dedicated zone for lounging or dining that takes on water well and can be styled up with planters, pavers or lighting once the base is in place.

What you'll need: Measuring tape • Stakes and string or marking spray paint • Shovel and hard rake • Tamper or plate compactor • Landscape fabric • Edging material such as steel, composite, brick, or pressure-treated lumber • Crushed stone base, if needed for stability • Pea gravel • Wheelbarrow and work gloves

Quick facts
Best for: small backyards, side yards, seating zones, fire-pit areas
Skill level: beginner to intermediate
Time: one weekend
Budget: lower than pavers or poured concrete

Smart upgrade
Blend the patio into the yard with a short stepping-stone path or a pair of large planters. It makes the project feel integrated instead of dropped into place.

Step 1: Choose the spot and size

Choose a spot that feels close enough to the house to be convenient but far enough away to feel like its own area. A footprint of about 8-by-10 feet or 10-by-10 feet is enough for a pair of lounge chairs, a bistro table or a compact dining setup, which makes it a good fit for both small and midsize yards.

Before digging, think about how the space will actually be used. If the goal is morning coffee, utilize a spot that catches softer light. If it will be used for entertaining, keep it near the grill, door or an existing patio.

Step 2: Create the border

Use stakes and string, a garden hose or marking paint to lay out the shape on the ground. Rectangles and squares are the easiest to build, but a gentle curve can soften a small yard and feel more landscaped.

Walk the perimeter before you commit. Make sure there is enough space to pull out chairs, move around a table or add planters without everything feeling cramped.

Step 3: Prep the base

Remove all grass, weeds, roots and debris inside your site. Dig down several inches so the finished patio will sit neatly in the yard rather than looking like it was dumped on top of the grass. Utilize the hard rake for this step, scraping the surface repeatedly and removing excess soil with your shovel.

This is especially important if your yard has compacted soil or drainage issues. Charlotte-area yards often hold heavy clay and are susceptible to pooling water, so taking time to prep the base will make the patio more stable and last longer.

Rake the area smooth and tamp the soil down firmly. If the ground is especially uneven or soft, add a thin layer of crushed stone first then compact it to create a more solid base for the gravel.

Keep a slight slope away from the house so water moves off the patio instead of settling in the middle. It does not need to be dramatic, just enough pitch to encourage drainage.

Pro tip: If you're dealing with an area that's known to get soggy, this is a good time to dig a shallow channel to direct water away or add a thin layer of crushed stone under the fabric (next step). Crushed stone in a channel is one of the most frequently used drainage solutions short of going with a full French drain install.

Step 4: Install edging and landscape fabric

Edging will keep the patio looking intentional instead of temporary. Install metal, composite, brick or timber edging around the perimeter and secure it according to the product directions.

This step matters more than people think; good edging helps hold the gravel in place, maintains the shape, and gives the project a finished, professionally designed look. When placing the edging, it should be placed in the base to separate it from the yard, not placed above the base.

Roll the landscape fabric across the cleared area and cut it to fit. Overlap the seams slightly if you need more than one strip, then pin it down so it stays flat. Home improvement stores sell pins specifically for landscape fabric, usually nearby in the same aisle.

The fabric helps separate the gravel from the soil below and slows weed growth, meaning less maintenance later.

Budget option: You can use pavers or bricks you already have to create a simple border. I have had success using remaining scraps of treated lumber with minimal digging to reinforce them.

Step 5: Add and level the gravel

Pour in the pea gravel and spread it evenly with a rake. A few inches of gravel usually creates enough depth to feel substantial underfoot while still being easy to level. No human has ever correctly guessed the exact amount of pea gravel they need for a given project, so perhaps schedule time for a second trip to the hardware store.

Check the surface as you go. You want it to feel even and comfortable to walk on, with no obvious low spots where water might collect or furniture may wobble.

Step 6: Style it!

Once the gravel is level, add furniture and accessories that define your planned usage for the patio. A pair of chairs and a small table create a simple lounge. A dining set, umbrella and planters make an outdoor room.

Large containers at the corners help anchor the space visually. An outdoor rug made for gravel-friendly use, a fire pit or string lights nearby can make the finished area feel more polished without adding much cost.

THREE WEEKEND DIY PROJECTS TO TRANSFORM YOUR YARD

Project 2: Raised Bed or Container Garden Starter Zone

Grow herbs, veggies, and pollinator plants even in clay and tiny yards.

A raised garden bed is a great way to start growing in a yard that has compacted soil or inconsistent drainage and not much usable space. It offers control over the soil, keeps planting manageable, and makes it easier to grow herbs, vegetables and pollinator-friendly flowers without fighting whatever is going on underground. Raised beds do best in a relatively level area with at least six hours of sun and easy access to water. Many beginner guides recommend a width of about 3 to 4 feet so the center stays easy to reach.

For Charlotte homeowners, that combination matters. If the native soil feels heavy, sticky or unreliable, a raised bed lets you sidestep a lot of those frustrations and focus on plants that actually have a chance. Good soil mix is the key and extension guidance suggests filling beds with a compost-rich mix, often around a 1:1 blend of compost and soilless growing mix, with some topsoil added in certain cases.

What you'll need: Tape measure • Shovel and garden fork or spade • Drill/driver with bits and driver tips • Hand saw or circular saw (if cutting lumber) • Level • Wheelbarrow or buckets for moving soil • Work gloves • Raised-bed or garden soil mix • Mulch for the top • Plants or seeds (herbs, veggies, and/or flowers) • Rot-resistant lumber or raised-bed kit panels • Exterior-grade deck or construction screws

Quick facts
Best for: beginners, small yards, side yards, sunny fence lines
Skill level: beginner
Time: one weekend
Best payoff: fresh herbs, easy vegetables, and a yard that feels more alive

Smart upgrade
Add a gravel or mulch path around the bed to keep the area neat and easier to access after rain. Raised beds surrounded by clean pathways tend to feel much more polished.

Step 1: Pick your spot and scale

Most vegetables, herbs and flowering annuals need at least six hours of sun a day, so start there. Raised-bed guides consistently recommend choosing a spot that is relatively level and close to a hose or spigot because convenience matters when summer heat kicks in.

That last point is easy to underestimate. A garden bed tucked into the farthest corner of the yard may look nice on day one, but if it is a hassle to water you're less likely to maintain it regularly.

HOA tip: For homeowners in HOA neighborhoods or renters, three to five large containers (think 16–24 inches wide) along a fence or patio edge can do the same job.

Step 2: Build or place your bed/containers

There are endless videos, plans and products to purchase. This article is to help give ideas, but if you want plans for building your own garden planter box, check out YouTube!

Wood is the classic choice for a simple raised bed, but metal kits and other ready-made options can work too. Build a rectangular frame, place it on the cleared ground, and make sure it sits level before you fill it.

Clear away grass and weeds where the bed will sit, then loosen the soil below with a garden fork or spade rather than flipping it over completely.

Some home gardeners add cardboard, landscape fabric or hardware cloth at the bottom, depending on the site and whether they are trying to suppress grass or protect the bed from burrowing pests.

Step 3: Use the right soil mix

Do not fill the bed with straight clay from the yard. Instead, use a rich mix of compost and growing media designed for raised beds. Experts recommend a 1:1 blend of compost and soilless growing mix, with topsoil sometimes added depending on bed depth and conditions.

Other gardening sources recommend variations on that formula, often combining topsoil, compost and organic matter in ratios that prioritize drainage, nutrients and water retention. Regardless of which mix you use, the goal is loose, fertile soil that holds moisture without staying waterlogged.

Step 4: Choose "easy win" plants for Charlotte

- Herbs like basil, rosemary, thyme and mint (in its own pot).
- Heat-loving veggies like cherry tomatoes, peppers and bush beans.
- Pollinator-friendly flowers like zinnias, salvia, and coneflower.
- Arrange taller plants toward the back or center and shorter ones along the edges for a full look without shading everything out.

Step 5: Set up watering and maintenance

Once planted, water the bed thoroughly so moisture reaches the full depth of the soil. Then add a light mulch layer to help regulate temperature, reduce evaporation, and slow weeds.

This matters in summer. Raised beds can dry out faster than in-ground planting, especially in full sun, so building a simple watering habit early saves trouble later.

Water tip: Add a simple drip kit or soaker hose if you can. Otherwise, commit to a quick watering each morning during the hottest months. Check moisture by sticking your finger a couple of inches into the soil and if it's dry there, it's time to water.

Project 3: DIY Path and Lighting Refresh

Fix the muddy cut-through and make your yard feel inviting after dark.

Some outdoor projects are less about "wow" and more about relief. A clean path and a few well-placed lights can fix the muddy shortcut, the dark side of the yard, or the awkward stretch between the patio and the gate that nobody enjoys using after sunset. Path projects typically start with clearing and excavating the route, adding a compacted base, setting stones or gravel, then layering in lighting that matches how the space is used.

That makes this one of the best DIY upgrades for a real-life yard. It adds function first, but the visual payoff is immediate, too. Solar lights are the easiest entry point for most homeowners while low-voltage systems offer a more polished result for those ready to take on a slightly bigger project.

What you'll need: Tape measure • Shovel or edging tool • Rake • Tamper for compacting base material • Utility knife or shears (for landscape fabric) • **For low voltage:** wire stripper, screwdriver, and possibly a small trenching tool • Work gloves • Solar path lights or low-voltage path lights • Stepping stones, pavers, or flagstone • Gravel, crushed stone, or paver base • Edging (metal, plastic, brick, or timber) • Landscape fabric for under the path

Step 1: Map the real path

Before you buy materials, pay attention to where people naturally walk. The grass has likely been matted down or worn away along this traffic lane. That "desire path" is more useful than a geometric line dreamed up on paper.

Once you know the route, outline it with a hose, stakes or marking paint. A straight run feels crisp and modern while a gentle curve feels softer and more garden-like. Keep the width practical; even a narrow path should feel comfortable enough for regular use.

Step 2: Choose your materials

Good DIY-friendly options:

- Stepping stones set in mulch or gravel
- Pavers laid in a simple pattern
- A narrow pea gravel path to match your lounge area (Project 1)

For tight budgets, stepping stones spaced in a "hopscotch" pattern through mulch works well and uses fewer materials.

Step 3: Prep the ground

Remove grass, weeds and a few inches of soil along the marked path (Same as in Project 1).

If the path tends to stay wet, add a layer of crushed stone or base gravel and compact it before setting anything on top. That extra prep improves drainage and helps prevent wobbling stones later.

Pro tip: Keep the path slightly crowned (higher in the center) or with a gentle tilt to one side so water doesn't sit on top.

Step 4: Set stones or lay gravel

If you are using stepping stones, place each one on a leveled bed of fine gravel, decomposed granite or paver sand rather than setting it directly on dirt. Use a rubber mallet to gently pound the pavers into the leveled bed.

If you are going with gravel, add edging and landscape fabric first, then fill the path until the material sits just below the top of the border.

Check that the finished surface is stable underfoot with no rocking stones or ankle-twisting gaps. Use sand and the rubber mallet to make small adjustments.

Sand is essential for setting and leveling your outdoor projects, grab an extra bag at the hardware store and keep it for the next one.

Step 5: Add lighting

Think about what you want the lights to do. Are they there to guide feet safely along the path, highlight landscaping or create a softer evening mood?

For most homeowners, the easiest approach is a series of solar path lights placed along one or both sides of the route. For a more built-in look, low-voltage path lights offer stronger, more reliable illumination, but they require wiring, a transformer and more planning.

Safety tip: Make sure any wiring is rated for outdoor use and buried or shielded per manufacturer instructions. Be careful not to dig too deep without calling 8-1-1 first.

Charlotte climate tip: Choose fixtures rated for heat and humidity, and clean the solar lenses a couple of times a season to keep the light output strong.

Quick facts
Best for: side yards, garden access, back doors, patio-to-gate routes
Skill level: beginner to intermediate
Time: one weekend
Biggest payoff: cleaner movement, less mud, and better nighttime use

Smart upgrade
Match the path material to another feature in the yard, such as a gravel patio, planter border, or raised bed. Repeating materials makes the whole landscape feel more cohesive.

You don't have to do all three of these projects in a single season for your yard to feel different. Even one weekend spent carving out a small patio, planting a starter garden, or fixing a muddy cut-through can change how often you step outside and how long you stay there.

Think of these as building blocks. A defined seating area, a pocket of green that thrives in our climate and a path that looks good day and night. Throw in some furniture, a grill, maybe a few string lights and suddenly your yard stops being that thing you feel guilty about and becomes an extension of your home.

'THE WORST MOTEL IN THE STATE'

June 10-21 • times vary • The Arts Factory, 1545 W. Trade St. • $32 • tinyurl.com/WorstMotelCLT

In February, Charlotte's polymath director-writer-actor Elyse A. Williams produced her self-penned show *Love, Compassion, & Comedy* at Charlotte Off-Broadway's black box theater at the VAPA Center. The collection of four one-act plays tackled how people connect through memory, humor and tenderness. For her new adult comedy, Williams' trains her acerbic sensibility toward more provocative connections at a run-down "no-tell" motel, where rooms are rented by the month or by the hour. An ambitious journalist reluctantly gets to know the workers and clientele at this dilapidated den of iniquity, where customers are guaranteed a rough night's sleep — if they sleep at all.

EDGAR ALLAN POE SPEAKEASY: THE MUSICAL

June 11-13 • times vary • The Palmer Building, 2601 E 7th St. • $47 • tinyurl.com/EdgarAllanPoeMusical

The Edgar Allan Poe Speakeasy has rolled through town twice before, coupling gothic poetry readings and barnstorming dramatizations of iconic Poe stories like "The Cask of Amontillado" with Poe-themed craft cocktails. For its third iteration, the sepulchral production adds a musical touch. Poe's world of terror and madness is accompanied by the appropriately dramatic and creepy music of Danny Elfman, composer of over 100 film scores including *Edward Scissorhands* and *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. As an enthusiastic cast belts out shivery showtunes with phantasmal panache, four cocktails will be served at appropriate moments throughout the evening to enhance each tale of mystery and imagination.

HAVANA NIGHT

June 13 • 5-10 p.m. • Camp North End, 300 Camp Road • Free • camp.nc

For nearly 20 years Carlotan Talents has promoted Latin music, entertainment and culture throughout the Southeast. Founder Tony Arreaza is a legendary local musician in his own right and a Queen City treasure. The fifth annual edition of Carlotan Talents' Havana Night approximates a joyous, colorful Cuban street celebration in the heart of Camp North End. With members hailing from Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Peru, and the US, Charlotte-based headliner Orquesta Mayor plays new era salsa, an update on the venerable genre's mix of Latin jazz horns, syncopated Afro-Cuban rhythms and multiple vocalists. A performance by Charlotte's Rumbao Latin Dance Company rounds out the evening of passion, soul and style.



Alexa Jenson
Photo by Braydon Curry
6/18



Edgar Allan Poe Speakeasy: The Musical
Promotional photo
6/11-6/13

MIDWOOD MARKET & CRAWL

June 14 • noon-4 p.m. • Plaza Midwood • Free • plazamidwood.co/midwood-market

Unlike traditional vendor markets that gather everyone into one space, Midwood Market is intentionally woven throughout the brick-and-mortar establishments in the historic and artsy neighborhood's business district. Vendors are paired with local storefronts, creating a walkable experience that encourages shoppers to explore, discover and support the businesses that define Plaza Midwood's distinct character. Promoters say the market's model focuses on building relationships between businesses and patrons. It's a laudable goal for a historic, colorful neighborhood besieged by rampant development, rising commercial rents and incursions by soulless chain stores. Free Jump Transit rides will shuttle attendees from one end of the business district to the other.

CLAYPOOL GOLD

June 15 • 6:30 p.m. • TD Amp Ballantyne, 11115 Upper Ave. • $71 and up • ampballantyne.com

Claypool Gold brings three iconic Les Claypool projects together on one stage. Claypool's inventive playing, innate sense of funk and antic sense of humor made bass guitar cool again after a fallow post-early '80s period. A string of hit albums and a theme for the animated TV series South Park, propelled Claypool's alt-metal-funk-rock trio Primus to the epicenter of the 1990s-2000s zeitgeist. Claypool's Frog Brigade is a free-range, ever-evolving jam band that values Frank Zappa and King Crimson over Dave Matthews. The Claypool Lennon Delirium is the groovy psychedelic-progressive rock collaboration between Claypool and Ghost of Sabre Tooth Tiger guitarist-vocalist Sean Ono Lennon.

MELODRAMATIC, ALEXA JENSON

June 18 • 7:30 p.m. • Evening Muse, 3227 N. Davidson St. • $17 • eveningmuse.com

Melodramatic is the brain-and-soul child of NC songwriter Tyler Spencer. An amiable collision of indie rock, folk and experimental pop, Melodramatic's catchy yet off-kilter 2026 single "Valley Boy" rides discordant cascading guitar, bubbly synths and throaty, near-whispered vocals and celestial choruses. Amid danceable pop melodies, rocking grooves and boldly vulnerable lyrics, Jenson's supple voice ranges from powerful declaration to free-falling alt-country lilt. Her alt-rock-tinged 2025 single "The Good Fight" continues her string of powerful yet controlled, emotive yet cool performances poised between revelation and meltdown that recall country music's high priestess of resilience through heartbreak, Patsy Cline.



'Sistas Who Kill' cohosts MaRah & Taz
Via Facebook
6/21

'SISTAS WHO KILL': BACK FROM THE DEAD

June 21 • 8 p.m. • The Fillmore, 820 Hamilton St. • $35-$60 • fillmorenc.com

Seventy-year-old Renee DiPietro went to prison for 20-40 years after stabbing Michael Sides to death with a 16-inch blade hidden in her walking cane. Gaylyn Morris was convicted of voluntary manslaughter after running over her cheating boyfriend with her car. Both women have had their stories told on the *Sistas Who Kill* podcast. Hosted by friends MaRah and Taz, this traveling edition of the popular podcast tells true crime stories about Black women who murder and how those women are treated differently by the justice system. True crime meets social justice in these stories about Black women, told by Black women.

FOXTIDE

June 23 • 7:30 p.m. • Evening Muse, 3227 N Davidson St. • $24-$26 • eveningmuse.com

With interlocking, rocking guitars and Elijah Gibbins-Croft's plaintive, prematurely world-weary vocals, Foxtide's breakthrough 2023 single "Hold On" drew comparisons to The Strokes. Since then, the San Diego three-piece has parlayed their mix of surf music, the early-aughts rock revival, and jazz touches into a satisfying catalog of engaging pop rock. Celestial synths swarm through the band's 2026 LP *Entropy*, adding textures to tunes like the swooning title track and the chunky, soaring "Cut and Dry." As a side note, bassist Oey James pledged to run a marathon in a Canadian tuxedo — a blue-jeans-and-jean-jacket combo — if the new LP reached 10,000 pre-saves, which it's already surpassed.

REUBEN VINCENT

June 19 • 8 p.m. • Underground, 820 Hamilton St. • $31 • fillmorenc.com

While attending Myers Park High School, rapper Reuben Vincent dropped his stunning 2017 debut album *Myers Park*. Under the mentorship of NC producer 9th Wonder, Vincent seems every inch the prodigy on the collection, threading intricate rhyme patterns with nimble vocals across introspective soundscapes. Signing to Roc Nation in 2021, Vincent became the third NC emcee to sign to Jay-Z's label and delivered the slicker *Love is War* LP in 2023. His triumphant 2025 LP *Welcome Home* fittingly coincided with a homecoming show in Charlotte. Embracing the regenerative power of touching one's roots, *Welcome Home* balances the youthful verve of Vincent's debut with the polish of Love is War.

EMANUEL WYNTER, SONNY MILES

June 20 • 9 p.m. • Snug Harbor, 1228 Gordon St. • $17 • snugrock.com

Vocalist and classically trained violinist Emanuel Wynter commands stages with playing that harkens to Stéphane Grappelli's gypsy-jazz bowing and Vassar Clements' rapid-fire bluegrass fiddling. His 2022 live LP *From Orbit* introduced many fans to his genre-blending songwriting, which embraces love, loss, nostalgia and imagination. Wynter's wide range is exemplified by his 2025 single "One30," a soaring soul-jazz gem propelled by Wynter's plangent guitar with nary a violin in sight. Winston-Salem singer-songwriter-multi-instrumentalist Sonny Miles crafts self-described ego-free "working-class R&B." Buffeted by luxurious harmonies, Miles can be smooth and dreamy on cuts like "WENUNEED," or discordant and rocking on the guitar-dominated "U."

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SOUNDWAVE

WEDNESDAY JUN. 10

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Subvertigo w/ Doused, Sparkler, Snowblinder, Cold Summer II (The Milestone)

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Jessica Baio w/ Britton (Amos' Southend)
- Dance Gavin Dance (The Fillmore)
- Shindig Does the Greatest Hits feat. DJ Blondzai & DJ HostModern (Tommy's Pub)

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- Nathan Davis (Comet Grill)

JAZZ/BLUES
- Blackhawk Quintet's Bop Theory Jazz Jam (Eighty Eights)*
- Kokoroko (The Underground)
- Wednesday Jazz Jam feat. Lovell Bradford Trio (VisArt Video)*

COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
- Shelby Stone (Evening Muse)

FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
- Pocket Aces (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*
- Vinyl Williams w/ Hott Mt, Jork (Snug Harbor)

OPEN MIC
- House of Funk (Middle C Jazz)
- Singer/Songwriter Open Mic (The Rooster)*
- Starlight Jams Open Mic (Starlight on 22nd)*

THURSDAY JUN. 11

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Old Mervs (Amos' Southend)
- Scrlett w/ Overlay, The Soviet Maneuver, Redacted (The Milestone)
- Muelas w/ This Island Earth, Grave Hunter (Petra's)
- Drivin N Cryin w/ Dallas Tetnus (Visulite Theatre)

JAZZ/BLUES
- The Big Idea (Eighty Eights)
- Spyro Gyra (Middle C Jazz)

HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
- Freddie Gibbs (The Fillmore)

FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
- Hot Pocket (Comet Grill)
- Shana Blake's Musical Menagerie (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- GRAHAM (Neighborhood Theatre)

FRIDAY JUN. 12

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Deaf Andrews w/ Owen & The Smokes and Woody (Amos' Southend)
- Lenny Federal Band (Comet Grill)*
- Seneca Burns w/ Harm, Overthinker, Infinxty, Moving Boxes (The Milestone)
- Susto & Friends (Neighborhood Theatre)
- Y'all're w/ The Menders, Alyce Inversion Project, Kim Ware (The Rooster)
- The Mad Tea Party w/ Petrov, Sanpriest, Scribblers (Snug Harbor)

JAZZ/BLUES
- Nero Tindal IV (Eighty Eights)
- Bob Baldwin (Middle C Jazz)

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Cyber Synthesis: Anime Rave (Blackbox Theater)
- The Last Dinner Party (The Fillmore)
- Stacey Pullen (The Music Yard)
- Pucci Mane (The Spoke Easy)
- Hemlocke Springs (The Underground)

COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
- Jackson Harden Band w/ Flat Tired, Wes & The Railroaders (Evening Muse)
- July Turner w/ Brett Milstead (Goldie's)
- Avery Creek (Heist Brewery & Barrel Arts)

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- Anna Kimm w/ Mina Roth, Courtney Puckett (Petra's)

HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
- A$AP Rocky (Spectrum Center)

COVER BANDS
- Nirvanna (Visulite Theatre)

SATURDAY JUN. 13

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Randy Franklin & the Sardines (Comet Grill)
- Merc w/ Wastoid, Victim Complex, Find Out (The Milestone)
- Turn Cold w/ Leverage, Endera, Oceans Run Red, Nothing Breathing (The Rooster)
- Kevin Morby (The Underground)

HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
- PawPaw Rod (Neighborhood Theatre)

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Kloud (Blackbox Theater)
- Wake Me Up: 2010s EDM Throwback (The Music Yard)
- Ultraviolet Sapphic Dance Party (Petra's)
- Requiem feat. DJ Velvetine, DJ Sanity Ana, DJ Dil3mma (Tommy's Pub)

JAZZ/BLUES
- Harvey Cummings Experience (Eighty Eights)

FUNK/JAM BAND/REGGAE
- OOF! (Birdsong Brewing)
- The Bright Light Social Hour w/ DELAFUNK, Pleasure House (Snug Harbor)

LATIN/K-POP/WORLD
- Havana Night: Orquesta Mayor w/ Luis Hernández y Calle Cuba (Camp North End)

EXPERIMENTAL/MIXED-GENRE/FESTIVAL
- A Starlight Night feat. Emily June, Group Therapy, The Oyster

COVER BANDS
- Bring Out Yer Dead (Amos' Southend)
- Y2K Kids w/ Violent Gypsies (Goldie's)
- Toast (Bread tribute) (Knight Theater)
- Mandyl Evans performs Teddy Pendergrass (Middle C Jazz)
- Nectar (Phish tribute) w/ Dan Staton Trio (Primal Brewery)
- Crawling (Linkin Park tribute) w/ Arms Wide Open (Visulite Theatre)

SUNDAY JUN. 14

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Between Two Trees w/ Transport, Roller Dogs, Major League Debut (The Milestone)
- Deathbloom w/ Rectoplasm, Vanta, No Sign of Life (The Rooster)
- Wednesday (The Underground)

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Passion Pit (The Fillmore)

JAZZ/BLUES
- Omari & the Hellhounds (Comet Grill)*
- Braxton Bateman (Eighty Eights)*
- Caleb Caudle & The Sweet Critters w/ Elonzo Wesley (Petra's)

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- Kay and Patrick Crouch (Free Range Brewing)
- James Brock & Friends (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
- Charlotte Symphony Summer Pops: Best of Broadway (Symphony Park)

FAMILY
- Ballantyne School of Music Summer Jam '26 (Visulite Theatre)

COVER BANDS
- Mandyl Evans performs Teddy Pendergrass (Middle C Jazz)

MONDAY JUN. 15

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- sace6 w/ John Harvie (Snug Harbor)

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- Evan Honer (The Underground)

JAZZ/BLUES
- The Bill Hanna Legacy Jazz Session (Petra's)

OPEN MIC
- Find Your Muse Open Mic feat. Jean Mach (Evening Muse)

TUESDAY JUN. 16

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Wolfmother (The Fillmore)
- Backwash w/ Outside Dog, Straightjacket (The Milestone)
- Claypool Gold (TD Amp Ballantyne)
- The Beths (The Underground)

HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
- Jill Scott (Belk Theater)

JAZZ/BLUES
- Menastree (Evening Muse)

COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
- CLT Bluegrass Allstars (Comet Grill)*

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Lee Harris feat. Davor Bozic (Knight Theater)
- Bustié w/ Mostly Mesh, Corpse Dust, Solemn Shapes (Snug Harbor)
- RÜFÜS DU SOL (Truliant Amphitheater)

OPEN MIC
- Crown Collab Funk Jam & Open Mic (Crown Station)*
- Open Mic Night feat. The Smokin J's (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*



Susto & Friends will perform at Neighborhood Theatre on June 12/Via Facebook

SOUNDWAVE

CHARLOTTE'S LIVE MUSIC CALENDAR * JUN. 10 - JUN. 23 *

WEDNESDAY JUN. 17

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Jinjer (The Fillmore)
- Black Season Witch w/ Secret Idol, DJ Vampoison (The Milestone)
- Tony Jupiter (Snug Harbor)

JAZZ/BLUES
- Blackhawk Quintet's Bop Theory Jazz Jam (Eighty Eights)*
- Ramsey's Leads feat. Charles Craig (Middle C Jazz)
- Wednesday Jazz Jam feat. Lovell Bradford Trio (VisArt Video)*

FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
- Pocket Aces (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
- Big K.R.I.T. (The Underground)

COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
- Hiram (Comet Grill)
- Singlewide (Free Range Brewing)

CHRISTIAN/GOSPEL/RELIGIOUS
- Forrest Frank w/ Tori Kelly, Cory Asbury, The Figs (Spectrum Center)

OPEN MIC
- Singer/Songwriter Open Mic (The Rooster)*
- Starlight Jams Open Mic (Starlight on 22nd)*

THURSDAY JUN. 18

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Pretty Baby w/ Horace Pinker, Celebration Summer, Late Bloomer (The Milestone)
- Leaving For Arizona w/ Baby In The 90s, Midsummers, Big Backyard (Petra's)
- Evanescence w/ Spiritbox, Nova Twins (Truliant Amphitheater)
- Spite (The Underground)

HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
- Wale w/ Smino (Skyla Amphitheatre)

JAZZ/BLUES
- Pocket Scotch (Eighty Eights)
- Java Band (Middle C Jazz)

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Pan!c Emo Night (Crown Station)

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- Josh Daniel (Comet Grill)
- Melodramatic w/ Alexa Jenson (Evening Muse)

FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
- Shana Blake's Musical Menagerie (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

FRIDAY JUN. 19

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- The Lenny Federal Band (Comet Grill)*
- Kill Lincoln w/ Jer, Bad Operation, Flying Raccoon Suit (The Milestone)

JAZZ/BLUES
- K. Omari Wilkerson (Eighty Eights)
- Marion Meadows (Middle C Jazz)
- Bill Miller Band w/ House of Bones (The Rooster)

FUNK/JAM BANDS/REGGAE
- The Hip Abduction (The Fillmore)
- The String Cheese Incident (TD Amp Ballantyne)

HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
- Phaze Gawd (The Spoke Easy)
- Reuben Vincent (The Underground)

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Deorro (Blackbox Theater)
- All My Friends Are Fly: Juneteenth Celebration (The Music Yard)
- Twin Flame: Juneteenth Edition (Petra's)
- Scene Report: Juneteenth Dance Experience (Snug Harbor)
- Juneteenth RnB and Afrobeat Celebration (Starlight on 22nd)

EXPERIMENTAL/MIXED-GENRE/FESTIVAL
- Lullabies & Life: A Poetic Juneteenth Celebration (Carolina Theatre)

COVER BANDS
- Feeling 22 (Taylor Swift tribute) (Amos' Southend)
- Chasing Phoenix w/ Anna J (Goldie's)
- Confetti Cannon (Primal Brewery)
- Abbey Road Live (Visulite Theatre)

SATURDAY JUN. 20

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Kittie w/ Kingdom of Giants, Gore (The Fillmore)
- Its Snakes w/ God Dam Wolves, Trick Threat (Starlight on 22nd)

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Black Tiger Sex Machine (Blackbox Theater)
- Digital Noir feat. DJ Spider, FalloutDJSteve (The Milestone)
- LF System (The Music Yard)
- The Human League (TD Amp Ballantyne)

HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
- Emanuel Wynter w/ Sonny Miles (Snug Harbor)

COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
- Cowboy Junkies (Carolina Theatre)
- Jason Moss & the Hosses (Carolina Theatre)

JAZZ/BLUES
- Sanpriest (Eighty Eights)
- Marion Meadows (Middle C Jazz)

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- Dave Desmelik (Birdsong Brewing)

COVER BANDS
- Glam Rock Battle Royale (Amos' Southend)
- Sweet Leaf w/ Pluto Duo (Goldie's)
- Now That's What I Call Dad Rock (The Rooster)
- Jeremy's Ten (Pearl Jam tribute) (Visulite Theatre)

SUNDAY JUN. 21

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Hazy Sunday (Petra's)

JAZZ/BLUES
- Omari & the Hellhounds (Comet Grill)*
- Braxton Bateman (Eighty Eights)*
- Marion Meadows (Middle C Jazz)
- Matt Walsh & The Movers (Primal Brewery)

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- David Childers (Free Range Brewing)
- James Brock & Friends (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*

CLASSICAL/INSTRUMENTAL
- Charlotte Symphony Summer Pops: Hollywood Hits (Symphony Park)

MONDAY JUN. 22

ROCK/PUNK/METAL
- Blanket Approval w/ Shelf Life, STEV (Snug Harbor)

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- The Bill Hanna Legacy Jazz Session (Petra's)

TUESDAY JUN. 23

HIP-HOP/SOUL/R&B
- Yung Bleu (The Underground)

COUNTRY/FOLK/AMERICANA
- CLT Bluegrass Allstars (Comet Grill)*

POP/DANCE/ELECTRONIC/DJ
- Benton w/ Micah Kolk, Wilde Green (Snug Harbor)

SINGER-SONGWRITER/ACOUSTIC
- De Moore w/ Jessica Watson, Alex Austin (The Long Room)

COVER BANDS
- Broadway After Dark: All That Jazz (Middle C Jazz)

OPEN MIC
- Crown Collab Funk Jam & Open Mic (Crown Station)*
- Open Mic Night feat. The Smokin J's (Smokey Joe's Cafe & Bar)*



Passion Pit will perform at The Fillmore on June 14/Photo by Nan Palmero

*WEEKLY EVENTS THAT MAY BE SUBJECT TO CHANGE.
VISIT QCNERVE.COM FOR THE FULL SOUNDWAVE LISTING

The Soundwave is Queen City Nerve's comprehensive guide to live music happening in Charlotte every night of the week. This list is pulled together by our editorial team every other week from combing through Charlotte music venue calendars and separated by genre. None of these listings are paid advertisements. We understand that many non-traditional music venues offer live music like coffee shops, breweries, art galleries, community events and more.

This list may not have every event listed. To have a venue included in the editorial compilation of this list, please send an email to info@qcnerve.com with the subject "Soundwave."

QUEEN CITY NERVE

HOROSCOPE

2026 King Features Synd., Inc.

JUNE 10 - JUNE 16

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) Operating under a full head of self-esteem makes you want to tackle a matter that you had shied away from. OK, but be sure to arm yourself with facts before you make a move.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) A smart move you recently made caught the attention of a lot of people, including some with financial deals to offer. Use your Taurean wariness to check them out thoroughly.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) Shyness might keep you from asking for more information on a potentially important matter. But your curiosity grows stronger by midweek and gives you the impetus for data-gathering.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) Taking on too many tasks may not be the wise thing to do at this time. You might overspend both your physical and emotional energy reserves and have to miss out on some upcoming events.

LEO (July 23 to August 22) Try to keep your spending at an affordable level. Splurging now — especially on credit — could create a problem if your finances are too low for you to take advantage of a possible opportunity.

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22) You might not approve of a colleague's behavior over much of the week. But don't play the judgmental Virgo card here. As always, check the facts before you assume the worst.

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22) Coping with an old issue that has suddenly reemerged could take a big toll on your emotional energies. Decide whether you really want to pursue the possibilities here.

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21) For all your skill in keeping your secrets safe, you could be unwittingly letting one slip out by the way you're behaving in a new relationship. Are congratulations soon to be in order?

SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21) Good old-fashioned horse sense could help you get around people who unknowingly or deliberately put obstacles in your way. Ignore the confusion and follow your own lead.

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19) A puzzling attitude change from friendly to chilly in a colleague might stem from a long-hidden resentment that suddenly bubbled up. An open and honest talk should resolve the problem.

AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18) This week, many ever-generous Aquarians might find themselves feeling an acquisitive urge. If so, indulge it. You've earned the right to treat yourself to wonderful things.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20) Expect to get a lot of advice on how to go about implementing your plans. But once you've sorted it all out, you'll probably find that, once again, your way will be the best way.

BORN THIS WEEK: You enjoy the quiet times of your life, but when you're in the mood, you can throw a party that everyone will want to attend.

JUNE 17 - JUNE 23

ARIES (March 21 to April 19) Things that usually come easily and quickly for the Aries Lamb might need more of your time and attention during the next several days. Try to be patient as you work things out.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20) A changing situation can create some complications. But if you apply your sensible Bovine mind to what seems to be a hopeless tangle of confusion, you'll soon sort things out.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20) Creating a new look for your surroundings is fun. Expect to hear mostly positive comments on your efforts, as well as some well-intended suggestions that you might want to note.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22) Maybe you'd rather do anything else than what you're "stuck with" right now. But if you stop complaining, you might see how this could lead to something with real potential.

LEO (July 23 to August 22) Even a proud Leo ultimately recovers from hurt feelings. However, a damaged relationship might never heal unless you're willing to spend more time and effort in trying to work things out.

VIRGO (August 23 to September 22) There are lots of changes on the horizon, so be prepared to make some adjustments in your usually fine-tuned life. One change might even impact a personal decision that you've been putting off.

LIBRA (September 23 to October 22) Being the dependable person you are could work in your favor for a project that requires both skill and accountability. But check this out carefully -- there could be a hidden downside.

SCORPIO (October 23 to November 21) A temperamental outburst about a mishandled project causes some fallout. Be sure to couple an apology with an explanation. A new opportunity beckons by week's end.

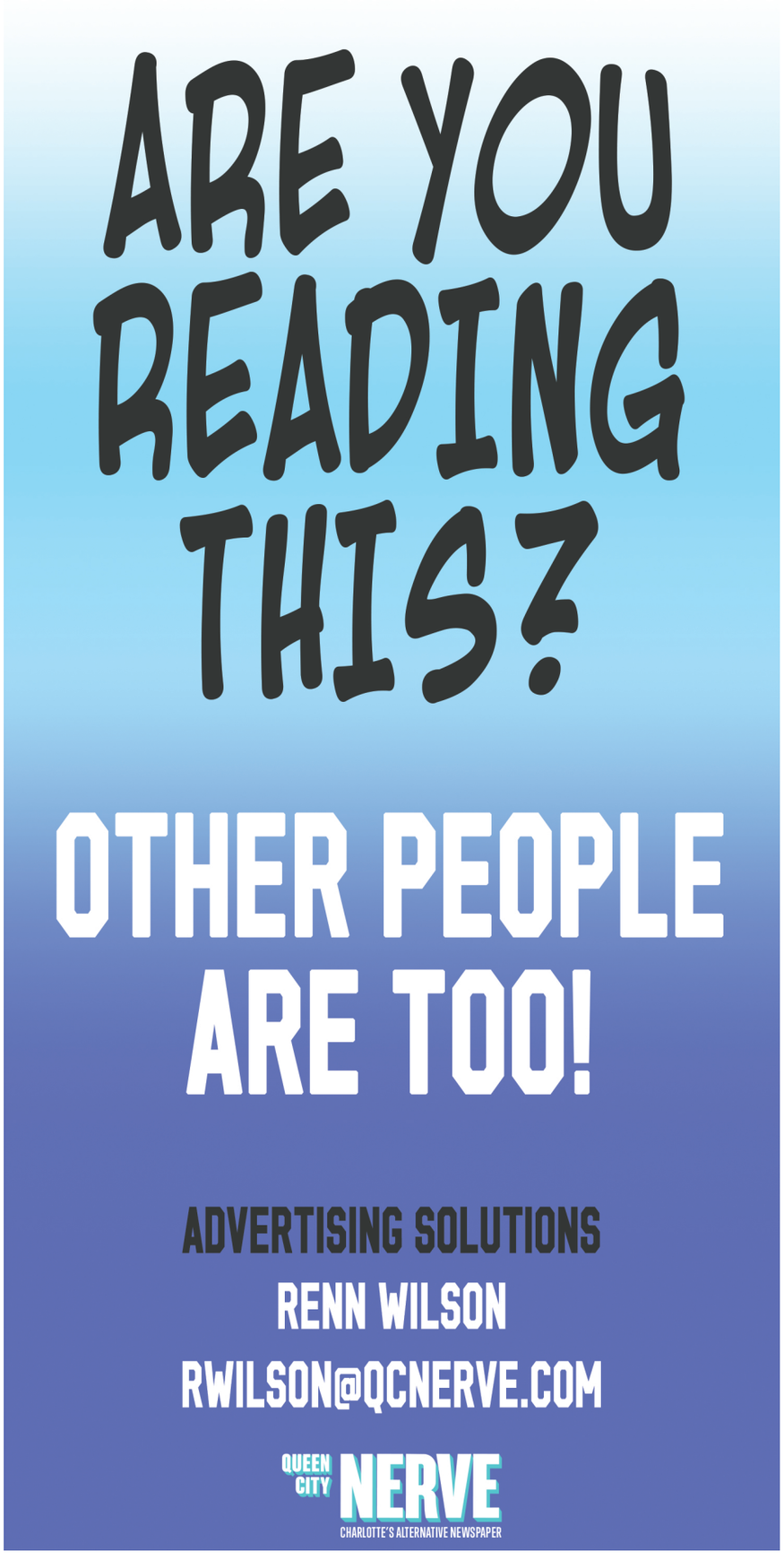
SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21) Changing horses midstream is usually unwise — but sometimes necessary. Examine your options carefully before making a decision. A trusted colleague offers good advice.

CAPRICORN (December 22 to January 19) While much of your time is involved with business matters, more enjoyable opportunities open up by week's end. Enjoy yourself, but be careful that you don't overspend!

AQUARIUS (January 20 to February 18) A "revelation" expands your perspective on what is really going on in the workplace. What you learn could make a difference in your career path. Continue to be alert for more news.

PISCES (February 19 to March 20) Not wanting to make waves might be the safest way to deal with a difficult situation. But no substantive changes can be made unless you share your assessments with others.

BORN THIS WEEK: You have a way of talking to people that makes them want to listen. You could find a successful career in politics.



TRIVIA TEST
BY FIFI RODRIGUEZ

1. TELEVISION: Who is the long-time host of the reality show "Survivor"?
2. MOVIES: What is the song playing when the lead characters dance the twist in "Pulp Fiction"?
3. U.S. STATES: The first president, George Washington, was born in which colony that would later become a state?
4. GEOGRAPHY: Which South American country controls Easter Island?
5. MYTHOLOGY: To which mythological character is the Parthenon dedicated?
6. LITERATURE: Which war is the background for Anthony Doerr's novel "All the Light We Cannot See"?
7. MATH: What is the sum of the first five prime numbers?
8. INVENTORS: Which inventor developed more than 300 products from peanuts?
9. MUSIC: Who won Album of the Year at the 2026 Grammys?
10. HISTORY: In what year did U.S. women earn the right to open credit cards in their own names?

SUDOKU
BY LINDA THISTLE

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	3					7		
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				7		8		
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1								

PLACE A NUMBER IN THE EMPTY BOXES IN SUCH A WAY THAT EACH ROW ACROSS, EACH COLUMN DOWN AND EACH SMALL 9-BOX SQUARE CONTAINS ALL OF THE NUMBERS ONE TO NINE.

Even Exchange
by Donna Pettman

Each numbered row contains two clues and two 6-letter answers. The two answers differ from each other by only one letter, which has already been inserted. For example, if you exchange the A from MASTER for an I, you get MISTER. Do not change the order of the letters.

1. Mannerly	__ __ __ __ T __	Crime squad	__ __ __ __ C __
2. Made from milk	__ __ __ R __	Per diem	__ __ __ L __
3. Take heed	__ __ T __ __ __	Beginner	__ __ V __ __ __
4. Wallpaper glue	__ __ __ __ E	Linguine or fettucine	__ __ __ __ A
5. Bend in the road	__ __ __ V __	Witch's whammy	__ __ __ S __
6. Regular customer	__ __ __ __ __ N	Walk the beat	__ __ __ __ __ L
7. Exchanges	T __ __ __ __ __	Teacher's scores	G __ __ __ __ __
8. On no account	__ __ V __ __	More modern	__ __ W __ __
9. Secluded	__ __ N __ __ __	Attractive	__ __ V __ __ __
10. Up and about	__ __ __ K __	Cognizant	__ __ __ R __

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CryptoQuip

This is a simple substitution cipher in which each letter used stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Solution is accomplished by trial and error.

Clue: **H** equals **Y**

M UBNRQ ICVJYMPRH PBJ VCIBFFCPQ JOYJ JYMRBV JB YPHBPC CRZC. OC QMQP'J ZNMJ FC UCRR.

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CryptoQuote

AXYDLBAAXR is **LONGFELLOW**

One letter stands for another. In this sample, **A** is used for the three L's, **X** for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each week the code letters are different.

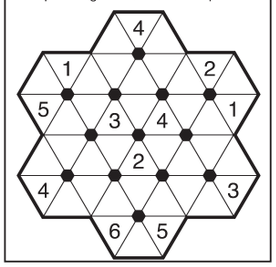
PEBH GDR EQAB LODIBH XEB PDNM, YX NBYFHL DABN GDR. PEBH YX YL RHLODIBH, GDR NBYFH DABN YX.

— QNQSYQH ONDABNS

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SNOWFLAKES
by Japheth Light

There are 13 black hexagons in the puzzle. Place the numbers 1 - 6 around each of them. No number can be repeated in any partial hexagon shape along the border of the puzzle.



GO FIGURE!

The idea of Go Figure is to arrive at the figures given at the bottom and right-hand columns of the diagram by following the arithmetic signs in the order they are given (that is, from left to right and top to bottom). Use only the numbers below the diagram to complete its blank squares and use each of the nine numbers only once.

	+		-		= 13			
-		+		+				
	+		+		= 10			
×		+		×				
	+		×		= 65			
= 63		= 14		= 40				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

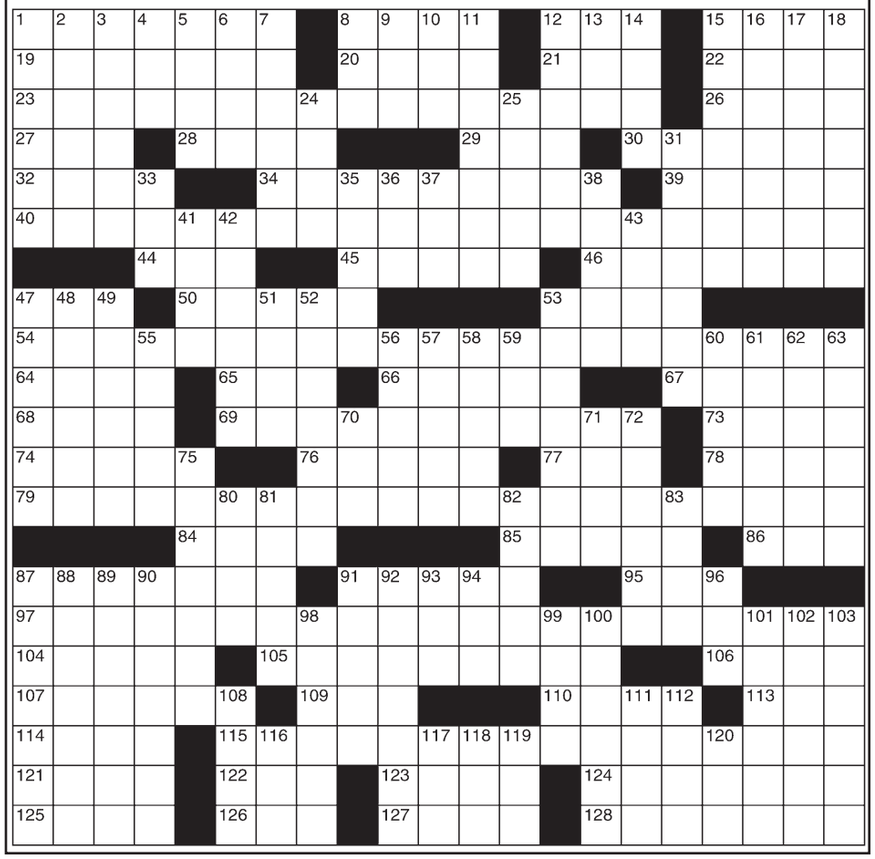
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CROSSWORD
FLAVOR NOT TO SAVOR

2026 King Features Synd., Inc.

ACROSS
1 Film blooper compilation
8 Illinois and Iowa's trees
12 "Bali —"
15 Bushy hair-dos, for short
19 "Stephen," in Paris
20 Cookie often twisted apart
21 Boat mover
22 Engrossed
23 Start of a riddle
26 Concerning
27 Mil. title
28 Lysol target
29 D.C. insider
30 Contribute one's share
32 Kitchen pests
34 Starts litigation
39 Stop on —
40 Riddle, part 2
44 "— Misérables"
45 Taking way too much, in brief
46 Loud weather events, for short
47 Inner city, informally
50 Leopard markings
53 "Eso —" (Paul Anka song)
54 Riddle, part 3
64 Cave effect
65 Bovine beast
66 Celebrity astrologer Sydney
67 Omit, as a vowel
68 College head
69 Acrobats' springy apparatuses
73 3/15, e.g.
74 Map book
76 Artist Dufy or film director Walsh
77 Critical hosp. area
78 Lock lips
79 Riddle, part 4
84 Tiny charged things
85 "It wouldn't — first time"
86 Poppa
87 Intraparty rifts
91 Vast South American plain
95 Football coach Parseghian
97 End of the riddle
104 Awaken
105 Arizona waterway with the Roosevelt Dam
106 Vikings' tale, perhaps
107 Novelist Hemingway
109 Original "King Kong" studio
110 Cast forth
113 Moose's kin
114 Art gallery in London
115 Riddle's answer
121 Drummer Burke or pitcher Labine
122 Iraq export
123 Full of zeal
124 Before now
125 The lady's
126 Norm: Abbr.
127 Sort
128 Lutz or axel performers

DOWN
1 Showy trinket
2 Wisdom deity
3 Behemoths
4 On Soc. Security, e.g.
5 Prefix with skeleton
6 Writer Blyton
7 Made the first move
8 "Impressive!"
9 Consist of
10 Pub barrel
11 "The meal is ready!"
12 "— at the Moon" (1951 Hank Williams song)
13 Partner of 8-Down
14 — -Z ('80s Camaro)
15 "Yep, alas"
16 More hoarse
17 Ideal condition
18 High-minded sorts?
24 Duet plus one
25 Juvenile
31 Must exist
33 Longtime NBC show inits.
35 Unconfined
36 "77 Sunset Strip" actor Byrnes
37 Biol. or anat.
38 Schlepped
41 Composer/pianist John
42 Facet
43 Actress Rae of "Vengeance"
47 Employed for the purpose of
48 Head for very quickly
49 So as to be 50% less
51 — about (around)
52 Hinders
53 Detective Phil Fish's wife on "Fish"
55 Achieved victory in
56 Sitting on — the world
57 Love, in Paris
58 "ER" actor Eriq La —
59 Prefix with cycle or state
60 "This pleases me!"
61 Cleaned a little, with "up"
62 Texas or Ukraine city
63 Owned (up)
70 Actress West
71 Genuine, in Germany
72 Of a similar kind to
75 Rustling sounds
80 Place to live
81 Tech. schools
82 Channel for hoops fans
83 Zeus' wife
87 Elongate
88 Hymn with harmonies
89 Poltergeist, e.g.
90 "Evidently ..."
91 Oompah band music
92 Coin-op cafeteria
93 Bus. bigwig
94 Letter after upsilon
96 Reactions to cute babies
98 Maude's partner in a 1971 film
99 Intrusive plant
100 Military forces
101 Edmund Spenser's "The — Queene"
102 More hideous
103 Los Angeles hoops team
108 "Terrible" time for tots
111 Writer Dinesen
112 Reid of "Sharknado"
116 #1 song, e.g.
117 Climbing vine
118 Pointer
119 Lofty poem
120 Diner sandwich, for short



AERIN IT OUT

AN OUT IS AN OUT

A sweaty family outing to Truist Field for Banana Ball

BY AERIN SPRUILL

When it comes to being "outside" these days, there are two buckets; I fall into the post-COVID, viral memes and rap references bucket rather than the legit "touch grass" bucket.

But in the spirit of Queen City Nerve's Outdoor Living Guide, and another round of forced "the parents are back in town" activities, we arrive at my first reluctant recounting of a baseball game in more than I don't know how long, courtesy of a Banana Ball League takeover at Truist Field (where the Knights play, for those not so up on their sports venues).

It was the perfect storm of everything I despise as a 30-almost-40-something:

Actually being outdoors when the humidity is giving…eff your edges.

A "sport" I never watch or engage with, especially due to the fluctuation in game length and, of course, just being outdoors.

A stadium of sold-out seats, which means too many people and new rules of entry.

And, last but not least, expensive drinks that are needed to survive the experience.

My anxiety was through the roof from the moment my Lyft picked me up to drop me off at Grand Bohemian, the closest destination I could think of that would keep me from walking a mile in shoes I didn't want to walk in to a clusterfuck I didn't want to deal with.

In true Gen X fashion, mom couldn't figure out how to send my ticket via text so she had to "meet me" 20 minutes ahead of schedule, causing perceived disruption for a ticket checker. Panicked, I quickened my pace, concerned about my arrival time given the road closures unique to the "regular" baseball games in Uptown.

Luckily, I was quickly able to identify her go-to uniform of a shmedium-length "breathable" dress and proceeded through security.

As soon as we crossed the threshold into the "covered" concessions, my anxiety peaked as I forced myself to slow my pace, caught behind the shufflers taking in the sights and those who are simply directionally/socially unaware and confused, impeding my social-spectrum-induced inclination toward the "best route."

Enter the "unleashed" children just far enough away from their tipsy parents to be considered "running amok." They added another layer as we neared the "right" section which, of course, led to a fumbled attempt by my mother to relocate the tickets that we just used for my entry.

Finally in my seat, my little sister and her baseball-loving classmate were beaming with pure excitement, donning ready-to-sign Dalmation stuffed animals, the mascot for the Firefighters team on the field, and a baseball she caught during the pre-game warmups.

Despite my urge not to do as I'm told in public settings, I re-engineered my brain to find reprieve for my sticky thighs when commanded to stand with the collective. (Or watch over my little sister and her friend as they crawled over similarly disposed adults for an autograph and "selfies" with the "thirst taps" of ballers strategically placed on the sideline or in the stands.)

In between moments of childless, Millennial panic, I found it intriguing that such a diverse range of people genuinely seemed to enjoy this spectacle.

Granted, the curiosity arose in short spurts. Like when visuals of a player dancing in sync with a "fairly fit" version of an AI-generated Shrek were cast on the big screen and it garnered a collective laugh.

Or when any song prompted the audience to get involved, and to my surprise, everyone was united.

Or when it became clear that every Gen Alpha, Gen Z-er, Millennial, Gen X-er, and Baby Boomer in attendance was collectively drooling over the same muscular hotties simply playing their role.

But mostly when I imagined the look on my mother's face if I suddenly yelled, "Sign my boobs!"

Before the sun set, I remember thinking, "In any other circumstance, I'd never." But recognizing the telltale signs of an impending family-wide attention-span collapse, I finally unclenched enough to take it all in.

Even with the chaos of angsty adults, who should be aware of how beyond excited children, well past their bedtimes, behave in real life…

Even surrounded by said children, loud music and enough flashing lights, dance breaks, sing-alongs and mascot-adjacent chaos to overwhelm my neurodivergent brain…

I couldn't help but imagine the memories that are created in any baseball stadium for both families who love the sport and those who've never experienced it, especially with this level of theatrics.

The first foul ball. The first autograph. The first game that turns a casual outing into a tradition. The first time seeing a baseball game framed by that breathtaking Queen City skyline.

That made me think of my family and, by extension, our sweet little thoughtful, softballing plus-one. Even though I was 10 minutes past a nervous system short circuit, I know a core memory was made for everyone next to me.

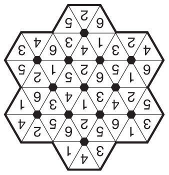
It'll probably be another decade before I go to a baseball game Uptown, but if you want some wholesome content "outdoors," maybe a night out at the "old ball game" by way of Truist Field is the curveball that your routine could use.

INFO@QCNERVE.COM

PUZZLE ANSWERS

G	A	G	R	E	E	L	■	O	A	K	S	■	H	A	I	■	F	R	O	S
E	T	I	E	N	N	E	■	O	R	E	O	■	O	A	R	■	R	A	P	T
W	H	A	T	D	I	D	T	H	E	G	U	Y	W	H	O	■	A	S	T	O
G	E	N	■	O	D	O	R	■	■	■	P	O	L	■	C	H	I	P	I	N
A	N	T	S	■	■	F	I	L	E	S	S	U	I	T	■	A	D	I	M	E
W	A	S	N	T	A	F	O	O	D	C	O	N	N	O	I	S	S	E	U	R
■	■	■	L	E	S	■	■	O	D	I	N	G	■	T	S	T	O	R	M	S
U	R	B	■	S	P	O	T	S	■	■	■	■	B	E	S	O	■	■	■	■
S	A	Y	W	H	E	N	H	E	T	A	S	T	E	D	A	B	I	T	O	F
E	C	H	O	■	C	O	W	■	O	M	A	R	R	■	■	E	L	I	D	E
D	E	A	N	■	T	R	A	M	P	O	L	I	N	E	S	■	I	D	E	S
A	T	L	A	S	■	■	R	A	O	U	L	■	I	C	U	■	K	I	S	S
S	O	F	T	W	H	I	T	E	F	R	E	N	C	H	C	H	E	E	S	E
■	■	■	■	I	O	N	S	■	■	■	■	B	E	T	H	E	■	D	A	D
S	C	H	I	S	M	S	■	P	A	M	P	A	■	■	A	R	A	■	■	■
T	H	A	T	H	E	T	H	O	U	G	H	T	W	A	S	A	W	F	U	L
R	O	U	S	E	■	S	A	L	T	R	I	V	E	R	■	■	S	A	G	A
E	R	N	E	S	T	■	R	K	O	■	■	■	E	M	I	T	■	E	L	K
T	A	T	E	■	W	H	O	A	M	I	T	O	D	I	S	A	B	R	I	E
C	L	E	M	■	O	I	L	■	A	V	I	D	■	E	A	R	L	I	E	R
H	E	R	S	■	S	T	D	■	T	Y	P	E	■	S	K	A	T	E	R	S

4	3	8	9	6	2	7	5	1
2	9	5	7	1	4	3	6	8
6	1	7	8	5	3	9	4	2
9	5	4	3	7	1	8	2	6
3	8	1	4	2	6	5	9	7
7	2	6	5	9	8	1	3	4
5	4	3	6	8	7	2	1	9
8	6	2	1	3	9	4	7	5
1	7	9	2	4	5	6	8	3



CryptoQuote
answer

When you have spoken the word, it reigns over you. When it is unspoken, you reign over it.
— Arabian Proverb

CryptoQuip
answer

I would certainly not recommend that tailor to anyone else. He didn't suit me well.

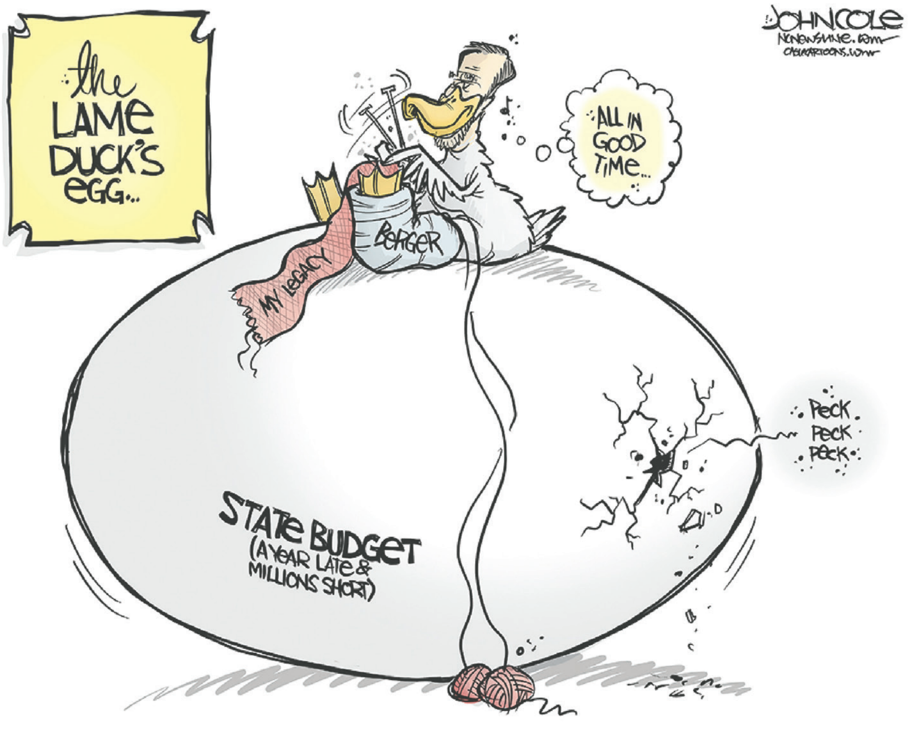
Even Exchange
answers

1. Polite, Police
2. Dairy, Daily
3. Notice, Novice
4. Paste, Pasta
5. Curve, Curse
6. Patron, Patrol
7. Trades, Grades
8. Never, Newer
9. Lonely, Lovely
10. Awake, Aware

8	+	7	-	2	= 13
-	■	+	■	+	■
1	+	3	+	6	= 10
×	■	+	■	×	■
9	+	4	×	5	= 65
= 63	■	= 14	■	= 40	■

Trivia Answers

1. Jeff Probst.
2. "You Never Can Tell," Chuck Berry.
3. Virginia.
4. Chile.
5. The Greek goddess Athena.
6. World War II.
7. 28 (2 + 3 + 5 + 7 + 11).
8. George Washington Carver.
9. Bad Bunny.
10. 1974.



"The Lame Duck's Egg" by John Cole, originally for NC Newsline

SAVAGE LOVE

LIVING ON A CYCLE

Quickies

BY DAN SAVAGE

I'm a woman living with a supportive, caring man. We've been together on and off for 20 years. The sex is always hot when we get back together. Then, after a year, the sex fades to nothingness. I believe the problem is that hot "reunited" sex only turns me on for a while and then I crave a more passionate, erotic connection, which is not his thing. He's a wham-bam kind of guy. This time around, after we didn't have sex for a year, he had an affair. I was devastated. Help?

Break up with him for cheating on you, get back together when (or if) you can forgive him for cheating on you, then dump him when the sex has started to fade but before he cheats on you again. Then start the cycle over again.

Will hooking up and having fun while single lessen my hunger for an LTR? I'm horny!

I met my husband doing something fun and sleazy (drunken one-night stand in Seattle) and I met my boyfriend of 12 years doing something fun and sleazy with my husband (sex dungeon in Berlin). So, if you go into your hookups with the right mindset — your fun hookup partner might make a great life partner — you could wind up finding the LTR you want while you're having the fun you need.

Should I take on a summer lover even though I really want a partner?

Yes! But don't use that word — it's gross.

I got on a dating app and pretty much instantly matched with the couples counselor I saw with my ex. This feels unethical. Am I right?

It's not unethical for a couples counselor to get on dating apps and — according to the American Psychological Association — it's not unethical for a mental health provider to date a former client provided more than two years have elapsed since the client/provider relationship was terminated. (There are, of course, other considerations.)

P.S. I'm assuming this person "swiped right" on you and that weirded you out. If your pictures aren't recent and/or aren't representative, there's a chance your former counselor didn't recognize you. There's also a chance your former counselor is a creep. You aren't required to see this person just because you matched on an app. If this is giving you the icks, block 'em.

What's the most creative way you've ever heard of someone ending a relationship honestly?

I've seen some extremely dramatic breakup videos — people confronting cheating partners with evidence of an affair, sometimes at the altar in front of family and friends — but those breakups strike me as performative, vindictive and (perhaps) deeply satisfying, but not "creative." And I'm not even sure what a "creative" breakup would look like or why someone would want to get creative with a breakup. Breakups should be simple and direct, not elaborate staged. The flash-mob proposal fad was bad enough; do we want to live in a world with flash-mob breakups?

Thinking about staging an old-school flash-mob wedding proposal. Good idea or not? And if not, why not? Is there a reason people don't seem to do them anymore?

"Do it," said a good friend who staged a flash-mob wedding proposal that went viral a decade and a half ago. "The worst that could happen is your partner says no and you're humiliated in front of a bunch of people. The second worst is they say yes and then leave you for someone else after you're married — you'll still be humiliated, but in front of fewer people." (Full disclosure: My friend's partner said yes, married him, and then left him for someone else. Still, he has no regrets — not about his marriage or about the flash-mob proposal he organized.)

What do gay men think of shirt-cocking? Women of all orientations seem to be united in our disgust of the practice, but are there any gay men who think it's hot? I'm all for shirtless and naked men, but shirt-cocking is just … well, gross, in my estimation.

I have something of an in-house expert when it comes to shirt-cocking, aka "Donald Ducking," which is when a man wears a t-shirt and nothing else.

"I love it," said Terry Miller, my husband and a huge fan of shirt-cocking. "Maybe it was an old locker room moment that imprinted on me. But there's something about a hot guy in a cropped tee and a Speedo or naked from the waist down. Fucking hottest thing ever."

My husband, of course, speaks for all gay men everywhere.

What are your thoughts on the film *Thanks for Sharing*?

Do you mean the 2012 romantic comedy about sex addicts starring Mark Ruffalo and Gwyneth Paltrow? Haven't seen it. No spoilers!

Navigating the kink scene online as a professional educator … Is it possible? Is it silly to share pics?

Thomas Rosengren was an award-winning sixth grade teacher in Minnesota — one of 11 finalists for the state's Teacher of the Year award — when a right-wing "news" website found some PG-13 pics of him in leather and posted them. Rosengren was promptly fired. This didn't happen in 1996; it happened in 2026. So, while it's definitely possible to navigate the kink scene as a professional educator, you'll need to be very careful about where you post your pics and who you share them with.

I've never heard you talk about my kink: hotpast. Some people get turned on by listening to their partners talk about the sex life they had before they met. Like most men, I started out jealous if my girlfriend mentioned anything about her past. But as our relationship progressed — my girlfriend is now my wife — it became a turn on for me. I know I'm not alone. It's hotwifing light!

Since sharing stories about previous sexual experiences is sometimes a gateway to cuckolding, I shared your letter with Hopeful Cuck, one of the hosts of the *Cuck My Life* podcast. If this is a kink, Hopeful and his crew would know about it. If it didn't already have a name, Hopeful and his crew could make it happen.

"I dropped this question into the hive mind," said Hopeful. "'Complimentary Compersion,' and 'retrocompersion' got tossed out as other possible names for this kink, but we all agreed that 'hotpast' is the best name for it. For some men, this might be a stand-in for 'actual' cuckolding. So many men can't imagine their wives sleeping with someone new but get turned on by the idea that she used to sleep with new guys. It's also a much safer option for women. Is it a gateway? Probably not for all, but it can be a first step for some! We love the idea!"

Is it normal for my orgasms to get stronger the older I get?

It's normal for you, you lucky bastard.

Dating a friend's ex: out of bounds or fair play?

Fair play. Setting up a friend with your ex? God-level play.

P.S. Friends don't blindside friends. If you're dating your friend's ex, do the right thing and tell them yourself. Don't let them find out about it from a mutual or — even worse — from social media.

Great sex with my ex who says he could never be in love with me again? Yes or no?

I would be happy to have great sex with your ex — if he's hot. (What's his Insta?)

P.S. My editor gently suggested that you might be asking whether you should have great sex with your ex again and not whether I would like to have great sex with your ex. If that's the case, my advice would be … as my advice so often is … it depends. Fucking an ex who doesn't love you when you still love them keeps an already existing wound open and could leave you with another, even deeper wound when your ex inevitably moves on. For your own sake, having mediocre sex with someone else is probably a better idea than having great sex with your ex — assuming you were asking about yourself and not offering your ex to me.

Monogamous heterosexual here. I do anal with my GF and I wanna donate blood. Should I lie on the form?

If you're having anal sex in the context of a monogamous relationship that has been going on for longer than three months, you're allowed — gay or straight — to donate blood, no lies required.

I lived with a close female friend last year. Her boyfriend entered the picture while we were living together, and she started showing disordered traits. After she started having tantrums when she didn't get her way, I moved out. When I returned to grab something I left behind, she was full-on crying, and then got mad when I didn't show her any empathy. I haven't talked to her in six months, she reaches out monthly about other stuff I left and I always tell her to give it away or toss it. Should I keep this friendship closed? She has no friends now and the last friend she lived with also moved out early and isn't friends with her anymore, but she is friends with some of my other friends.

You aren't obligated to stay in touch with someone you find unpleasant — even if the source of their unpleasantness is the result of an untreated mental illness you aren't qualified to diagnose.

P.S. So, she has no friends … except for the friends you have in common?

I am a 70-year-old, cisgender, closeted bisexual man. I've been happily married to a woman for 40 monogamous years. My wife is very accepting of gays but has no empathy for bisexual people, which is the reason I haven't told her. She occasionally takes trips with family without me. During those trips I spend a lot of time with a friend of mine in a similar situation. My feelings for my friend are deep. My friend and I have agreed to no sex and to not doing anything that would be considered cheating. What is your opinion on what is possible for us — feelings or more — but wouldn't be considered cheating?

Does my opinion really matter? The issue is the wife and her opinions, which have kept you in the closet for the last 40 years. If you don't want to cheat, you'll have to wait until you're a widower to do anything remotely sexual with your similarly situated friend.

P.S. Bisexual and happily married to a biphobe for 40 years?

P.P.S. No butt stuff.

Got problems? Yes, you do! Email your question for the column to mailbox@savage.love; or record your question for the Savage Lovecast at savage.love/askdan; podcasts, columns and more at Savage.Love.

A PLAY WITH SOME BITE



DRACULA

A COMEDY of TERRORS

BY GORDON GREENBERG AND STEVE ROSEN

PNC Broadway Lights SERIES

BLUMENTHAL ARTS

JULY 7–AUG. 9
BOOTH PLAYHOUSE

AT BLUMENTHAL ARTS CENTER

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