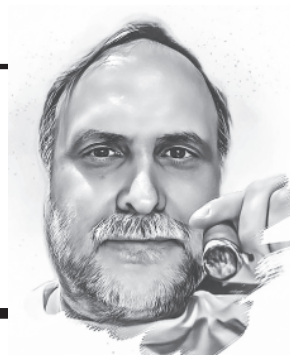
Columns

Hammock time is for the birds, unfortunately

Ramblin' Man

By David Porter



The birds at my house don't seem to like it when I'm in *their* yard.

One day last week, I took a stroll around the house, and a bird followed me all the way, squawking the whole time. I thought this must be how it feels to be a road commissioner or a Kindergarten teacher.

I can see how these feathered pipsqueaks can drive off larger predators. They nag them to death.

The weekend came, and I was feeling a little cooped up. I checked my phone a couple of times to see what the temperature was, and it was 50 degrees. That's a fine temperature if you're going to do yard work or exercise, but I never do yard work or exercise. It's a little cool for a hammock nap.

I don't normally rely on my smartphone for the temperature because I have a window. But opening the window would require opening the blinds and opening the blinds would require getting out of bed, and all that just seemed to be a lot of trouble for someone who just wants to know if it's hammock weather.

I rolled over in disappointment that I would have to be lazy indoors again. A few hours later, I woke up and checked my phone again. It was now 82 degrees. Eighty-two?! Why didn't somebody wake me? I'm missing out on prime hammock weather.

Well, I can't blame my wife. She wasn't home. She was out doing things that normal people do. I need an alarm clock that will go off based on the temperature rather than the time. Is there an app for that?

Anyway, I grabbed my hammock and a cigar and headed outside. I have ropes attached to two large cedar trees in the far corner of my backyard. My hammock clips to the ropes.

I love these two trees, and apparently, every bird in the neighborhood loves them, too. I haven't heard such clattering since my uncle lit up a cigar in the kitchen at a family reunion.

The birds didn't sound angry, but they didn't sound happy. They were communicative. It started with just a couple of birds, but in a few minutes, every bird in a two-mile radius seemed to converge on my cedar trees.

It was impossible to nap, and I suspect that was their intent. I thought maybe their little beaks would get tired, but they are persistent.

It made me wonder: When Edgar Allen Poe wrote his famously macabre poem The Raven, was he perhaps just trying to take a nap under a cedar tree?

I looked around the neighborhood. There are lots of big trees all around me, mostly maples. I didn't see any bird activity around any of them. The party was at my place.

I wondered if the birds merely have a preference for cedar trees, or was it my presence that disturbed them? I thought maybe there are nests in the trees and they felt threatened for that reason.

I don't know if any of them were songbirds. If they were, they weren't using their most euphonious voices. If the fowl were less foul, maybe Edgar Allen Poe would have written a more cheerful poem, and I could have gotten in a nap.

© Copyright 2023 by David Porter who can be reached at porter@ramblinman.us. I told the birds that my wife says if they want to claim the yard, they need to pay property taxes. They squawked at that, too.

Garage sale turns into a lesson in physics

So there I was

By Pete Buckley

So, I'm one of a hundred (or more) residents in my small town hosting a garage sale this past weekend. I've got a generic campaign-style sign that you can buy at Dollar General, advertising "GARAGE SALE" and stuck this into my front lawn like every other house in town.

I'm not selling much, but I do have a few large items for sale, including a massive entertainment center, two kayaks, and outdoor patio furniture. The standard starting time for garage sales is universally set at 8 a.m. and by 7:45 a.m. I am set up and assume the mandatory garage salesman position… sitting in a folding chair, with my cell phone cradled in my lap, and I'm armed with a steaming cup of coffee, ready to do battle with the throngs (I hope). Actually, I'm a pushover when it comes to garage sales because I accept almost any price offered by the bargain hunter, so it's not much of a battle, rather it is more like a surrender.

One of the first customers of the day is a mother-daughter team. The mother has salt and pepper hair and appears to be in her 60s, while her daughter has blonde hair, turning brown and she looks to be in her 40s. They are interested in the Amish-built matching outdoor furniture set, which includes a 2-seater glider, a rocker, and a sliding footstool. After a few seconds of negotiating (Will you take $100 instead of $120?… Sold!) they make the purchase.

The mother and daughter had traveled from Indiana and they did not have a truck or trailer to haul furniture. They decided to try to put everything into their minivan which was already filled with items they had bought at other garage sales throughout town. Placing the glider, rocker, and footstool into the minivan was like successfully figuring out a Rubik's cube.

I offered to help, but the new owners politely shoved me aside, as they knew that they needed someone with expertise in mathematics, angles, and slide rules, plus the ability to differentiate between the size of the furniture and the space of the space available within the minivan. I think these women intuitively knew that I would probably have difficulty in solving a grade school jigsaw puzzle, let alone a complicated matter like placing large, awkwardly-shaped furniture into a minivan.

The first thing the duo did (besides elbowing me out of the way), was to take out multiple 4-foot by 8-foot boards, a mini-bike, and a garden statute. Then they opened the tailgate before twisting and turning the glider every which way conceivable as they attempted to jam the glider into a space that seemed a bit too small.

Not to be discouraged, the dynamic duo spent a lengthy amount of time rotating the glider clockwise until finally using brute force (and the combined weight of the mother and daughter) to defy the laws of physics and push the glider successfully into the rear of the van.

Then they used some sort of voodoo magic to manipulate the rocker and footstool into crevices surrounding the glider. Afterwards, they shoved the boards, the mini-bike, and the statute into whatever opening they could find before saying a prayer that the tailgate would close. Against all odds, the tailgate closed and I gave the new owners a one-man standing ovation.

To say I was impressed with these maneuvers is an understatement. How anyone could have managed to get that furniture into that minivan is a mystery. Perhaps Governor Pritzker could use these two to figure out how to balance the State of Illinois pension deficit.

Hamburgers the standard-bearer of grilling season

Let's Cook

By Linda Hoskins

One thing I love about grilling season is hamburgers! Usually we shape the patties, add some pepper and grill, adding Cheddar cheese at the end. However, once in a while it's nice to change the burgers a bit. Here is a recipe that we fix once or twice during the summer. This is a perfect recipe for those who like a little kick in their burgers. The cheese added to the burger takes some of the zip off the jalapeno. If you are worried about the heat, try a little less jalapeno.

Jalapeno Popper Burgers

Makes 4 burgers

1 lb. 80% lean hamburger
1 jalapeno, seeded and finely chopped
2 oz. cream cheese, softened
1/2 cup shredded Cheddar cheese
2 green onions, finely chopped
1 tsp salt
1 tsp black pepper
1 tsp garlic powder
4 Cheddar cheese slices

Preheat grill to high. In a small bowl, combine cream cheese, shredded Cheddar cheese, green onions and half the jalapenos with a fork. In a bigger bowl, with your hands, combine the hamburger, salt, pepper, garlic powder and remaining jalapenos. Divide into 4 portions. For each burger, poke an indent in the middle and add about 1 Tbsp of cream cheese mixture. Wrap the hamburger around it and form a patty.

Grill burgers for 3 minutes. Flip and top with sliced cheese, grill 3 minutes or until desired doneness..

When I make these, I always fix the patties earlier in the day and refrigerate covered until time to grill. Without refrigeration time, I find the hamburger gets too warm and soft and then falls apart on the grill. Or you could make them, pop them into the freezer for a few minutes. If you want extra kick, spread a bit of sriracha on buns. I found this recipe in a magazine a few years ago, and it suggested adding a couple slices of cooked bacon and potato chips to be stacked on the burger. We have not added these, but it does sound good.

Here is a recipe for asparagus that I have not tried yet, but it sounds wonderful. R.H. Kirch of St. Clair County sent it to me.This recipe calls for canned asparagus, but I think it would be a great way to use that fresh asparagus that maybe is still good but looking a bit wilted.

Asparagus Dish

Submitted by R.H. Kirch

14 thin slices ham
mustard
2 can asparagus spears
3 Tbsp butter
2 Tbsp flour
1 1/2 cups milk
3/4 tsp salt
1/4 tsp pepper
1 cup grated Cheddar cheese
1/4 cup sliced green onions

Spread each slice of ham with mustard. Lay 3 asparagus spears on each slice of ham. Roll up tightly, place seam side down in a baking dish, alternating tips for a nice appearance and even cooking. In a pan, melt butter. Stir in flour, add milk. Stir and cook till boiling. Add salt and pepper. Stir in cheeses until melted. Add green onions. Pour over the ham wrapped spears. Cover and bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes, until hot and bubbly. Makes 6 servings.

If you have a recipe to share, please send to letscook!@heraldpubs.com or mail to Mascoutah Herald, PO Box C, Mascoutah IL 62258. Thanks and Happy Cooking!

Keep arthritis in check by doing three things

Real Life Wellness

By Dr. Bill Hemmer

Last week, we discussed bone and joint health. We all need to pay better attention to this because if you want to live a strong healthy life, your bones and joints are going to be the only way to do it. So, let's talk about three things you can do today to keep your joints and bones healthy.

Just as we talked about last week, movement is the most important first step. Without movement, bones get weaker, joints get weaker, and cartilage starts to die. The second thing you can do is hydrate yourself. Getting enough water into your system ensures your muscles and joints can stay lubricated. The final thing to do is to keep your overall inflammation under control.

When I was a young boy, my grandma had trouble getting around because of the severe hip arthritis she had. I only remember her walking a few times before she got a wheelchair. Once she got her chair, I never saw her walk again. It wasn't long before many other complications from being in a wheelchair began to show up for her.

Her legs started to swell. She developed blood clots in her legs. She began to have multiple sores pop up on her legs and she complained of terrible leg cramps and pain that didn't allow her to rest well. These symptoms continued to worsen because her ability to move lymph fluid through her legs was severely compromised for her lack of movement.

Your lymph system doesn't have a pump. Lymph only moves throughout your system by muscle contraction and movement of the limbs. So, we she couldn't get out of the wheelchair anymore, her lymph fluid became stagnant and bad things started to happen to her.

I know you are probably getting tired of me talking about hydration, but it is one of the best and most effective ways to help yourself every day! Your muscles are the reservoir for your stored water and so when you become dehydrated, your muscle water is depleted first. This depletion leads to muscle cramping, tightness, and pain.

If you put a pinch of Sea salt into your daily water glass, your ability to absorb that water is greatly increased. Sea salt creates a more electrically charged water and adds electrolytes, which makes that water easier for your body to absorb. The easiest way to know if you are holding on to the water is to pay attention how long after you drink water it takes you to go to the bathroom. If you go quickly after you drink your water (less than 2 hours), you aren't absorbing that water too well.

The final piece to keep your arthritis from continuing to get worse is to control your daily inflammation. Literally every gland, organ, and tissue are negatively affected by too much inflammation. Luckily, there are many ways to decrease your daily inflammation load. Eat real food, drinking your water, exercise and taking an anti-inflammatory like Turmeric, Boswellia and Omega 3 fish oils all help to control excess inflammation without causing any side-effects.

Next week, I'm going to discuss how over 97% of the people reading this article fail to pass a very simple test on living a healthy lifestyle. Plus, I will explain how it is not your fault!