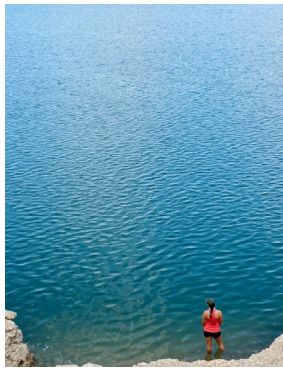


# The Commissary

a community digest by prickly pear



photos by Maria Vargas

## Editor's Note

by Maria Vargas

There's a quote by Orson Welles that I love, "The enemy of art is the absence of limitations." Limitations are necessary in making great art. When we are forced to operate within constraints, it grants our creative brain imaginative freedom.

These past seven months have certainly imposed limitations on us, thus grand opportunities to initiate more creativity in our lives. There's no time best suited for learning something new or creating something with our hands, than now.

We all face a choice, something author Robert Greene refers to as Alive Time vs Dead Time on the Daily Stoic podcast. You can choose two paths: sit around and wait for things to happen to you or seize this moment and make it a new beginning of some kind. We can look back on 2020 as one of the most fruitful periods of our lives. It can be what sets the table for the next chapter of your career or personal life. It all comes down to a choice.

Here at Prickly Pear Head Quarters (Luisa, myself, and our pet cactus) believe in choosing Alive Time which is why we started *The Commissary* in the first place. All of you who have contributed to it so far—you chose Alive time too.

What's next? First off, thank you for the kind words about the previous *The Commissary* edition. To say we felt tremendous support is an understatement. It made us smile hearing from folks saying they read it while drinking coffee or during their lunch break. We're so appreciative of your feedback and ideas of what we can improve and grow. Our goal is to make continuous improvements while still working to produce one edition per month. You simply reading these words means the world to us.

So, consider this your invitation to get out there and create. Use the limitations we're facing in 2020 to get the drawing pencils out or bring back to life that old blog of yours that's collecting dust. Get out and plant a garden or write a song. Alive Time or Dead Time, what will it be? The choice is yours. It's your world.



art by Kristina Kissel

## Gardenio Feature Story

by Maria and Luisa Vargas

Gardening puts us in tune with the rhythms of nature. It recalibrates our notion of time and puts us in sync with the seasons. Not only does it grant us self-sufficiency, but it also allows us to practice virtues of patience and consistency. Gardening is a reminder that we carry within ourselves the basic seeds of happiness. They require nurturing and a little sun and water, but ultimately we reap our harvest.

Although he spent years studying philosophy at Brown University in hopes of becoming a professor, Roman Gonzalez was surprised to find clarity away from his books and a bit closer to home, with plants. Now, he's become a different kind of teacher. Through his company, Gardenio, he's learned to simplify the complexities of gardening and its countless lessons so anyone with 6 inches of space can join the growing community of at-home gardeners.

Roman was in his early 20's when he became interested in cooking, running, and changing his relationship with food. On his runs around Hyde Park, he grew conscious about plants around him like wild basil and grapefruit trees. Roman's interest in gardening and running contributed to his curiosity about how we grow our food and the connection it has on our mental and physical health.

Gardenio reconnects people with food, neighbors, and themselves. It's a new type of garden club where members receive everything they need to grow their organic food in small outdoor spaces each season. While the current garden industry is a fragmented space not made for beginners, Gardenio members have special access to an app that houses care guides and offers a supportive community.

### Gardenio's DNA

Gardenio seeks to advance three public benefits which set them part from other gardening programs: sustainability, public health, and food justice.

*Sustainability* | While Roman believes the real answer to climate change is policy change, he also knows people growing their food contributes in a big way. Additionally, Gardenio uses compostable packaging and sources plants locally.

*Public health* | Gardenio advocates for the impact gardening has on public health. Studies show people who grow food are more likely to enjoy vegetables and eat more of them. Growing food long-term also provides well-studied physical and mental health benefits.

*Food justice* | Roman isn't afraid to speak up on political issues because



they're so intertwined with food. It impacts who produces, distributes, and receives it. Growing your food is a magically simple thing to do for the advancement of food justice.

### **The Answers Are Around You**

In his time studying philosophy, Roman had been looking out into the world for answers to the big fundamental questions on what it means to be human. However, it was while gardening that he realized the answers had been around him all along.

“Our relationship with nature is meaningful. We are part of a system. Not even in some mega cosmological way. Just part of a natural system on this earth,” Roman said

Gardening gave Roman what he'd been seeking in philosophy— meaning, happiness, and connection to the present. He says plants have an amazing ability to appreciate the current moment and reconnect with the parts of our brain that evolve with nature.



### **Relationship with Death**

This philosophy is what inspired Gardenio's Infinite Lives program where if a member's plant dies, Gardenio will send a new one. It's about reshaping people's notion of plant death. Nothing is ever guaranteed, plants do die, but Gardenio encourages people to do their best and accept if the plant doesn't do well.

Roman shared a story about someone who left a basil plant outside during a freeze. “I killed my basil,” they said. But Roman replied, “The freeze killed the basil, you didn't!” It's normal for plants to die, yet many people measure their success in keeping plants alive. Some plants are meant to be annuals and some perennials. It all has a life cycle.

“It's really interesting to teach those lessons,” Roman said. “What's always motivated me, maybe as part of a wannabe teacher, is just showing people their value and worth and ability. In the plant world, we're constantly being taught persistence, competence, and challenges.”

### **Relationship with Time**

In our daily lives, we often forget things take time. Food grows from seeds that must be planted,

watered, nurtured, harvested, transported, and sold. They only grow during certain seasons, rely heavily on the weather, and it's not always a guarantee. We're so accustomed to having immediate access to food year-round at grocery stores. So, a huge benefit of tending to our garden is you get a different relationship with time and value your food more.

For Roman, the most exciting thing about having a garden is eating in tune with the seasons. Come winter you can grow kale, cabbages, and broccoli. In the spring you can harvest carrots, cucumbers, and peppers. Gardening keeps you in the flow with nature.

### **Debunking the Myths**

There are quite a few misconceptions about what it takes to start a garden. Things like, “I need space, I don't own a home, I don't get any sun.” But according to Roman, there's usually always something you can grow. If you have 6 inches of space, you can probably grow something. Most of all, he thinks people underestimate what plants can bring to a person's life.

Plants are not always producing at the same time and it's not always lush, so it's about being humble. But there's something special about

growing even just a little mint in a pot. It's not time-intensive and takes 30 seconds to water. You can smell it, taste it. It brings a grounding feeling, especially because it's your home, Roman says. "It's this feeling that you're setting down roots because you're literally setting down roots. It can be very impactful even in small doses."

Gardenio's focus is exactly that. It's helping people who are new to gardening and getting them up and running on a small scale.

### Accessibility and Diversity



Gardenio embodies the power of diversity and makes gardening accessible to people who didn't have it before.

Diversity also expands to his team. Roman shared how he once got a letter from an intern who expressed how much it meant to work on such a diverse team led by a LatinX founder and female technical co-founder.

Roman says, "Part of the reason I wanted to start something myself is that I realized my entire career I had been working for white men or white women who were working for white men. It was just this feeling of, I know I can do this. My friends can do this too."

His story reminds us that purpose and happiness can often be found in the simplest forms. Gardenio is creating lifelong food gardeners who will be the driving force of social, environmental, and personal change.

***"It might be a pipe dream, but I believe if people start seeing themselves as more connected and kinder, we can push the world implicitly in this very fundamental, spiritual level. We can make the world a little better for all of us." – Roman Gonzalez***



Our friends [@GrowGardenio](#) are offering Prickly Pear Pals \$10 off a first season membership with code: **PRICKLYPEAR10** at checkout. Learn more at [GrowGardenio.com](#)

## Apple Walnut Baked Oatmeal

by Holly Richardson



Adapted from [Cookie and Kate Paleo & gluten-free, dairy-free, vegan](#)

Recipe makes: 1 8x8 pan or a pie dish

### Ingredients:

- 2 cups rolled oats
- 1 tablespoon coconut brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon of cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon of baking powder
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- 1 tablespoon of almond butter
- 1 cup walnuts
- 1 banana, mashed
- 2 apples, chopped
- 1 cup almond milk
- 2 chia eggs
- 2 tablespoons melted coconut oil
- 1 teaspoon of vanilla

### Directions:

Preheat oven to 350

Optional: sauté chopped apples in pan on low heat with maple syrup and coconut brown sugar for 5 minutes, or until soft.

Combine dry ingredients in bowl first, then add wet. Mix thoroughly. Pour evenly in the pan and bake for 30-40 min. Let it cool.

For pro tips and the full recipe [click here](#).





# How To Practice Emotional Honesty

by Lillian Seidel

A few months ago, someone described an experience to me as “weird.” Though this is normal language, it stuck out to me at the time. “Weird isn’t the right word,” I thought. The situation was not odd, unexpected, or Halloween-esque. I realized that “weird” was a placeholder for a more vulnerable word, maybe “disappointing” or “frustrating;” “worrisome” or “saddening.” I began to notice when I would say I “felt weird about” something, rather than just naming that I was anxious or uncertain. Similarly, I noticed when myself and others would end bouts of emotional catharsis with, “But it’s fine” or “It’s whatever.” I thought two factors could be at play.

The first is that we can’t be emotionally honest if we don’t know what emotions we’re feeling. Perhaps when my friends or I label our emotions as “whatever” or “fine” or “weird” it’s because we’re not close enough to ourselves to understand and name this emotion. We may have never really practiced it – it’s not particularly encouraged in mainstream society (i.e., “How are you?” as a rhetorical nicety).<sup>1</sup> Further, we may intentionally choose not to explore our emotions because we fear they may be unpleasant.

The second is that we may know what the emotion is and even admit it to ourselves but be afraid to acknowledge it in front of others because it requires emotional vulnerability.<sup>2</sup>

Maybe the reasons are different for

different people. Maybe there’s another factor or some combination of both. But if either of the above explanations resonates with you, what can you do about it?

1. Practice. If you struggle to identify your emotions, consider learning by doing. One way to practice is to slow down and catch yourself in the moment.<sup>3</sup> Ask yourself what you’re feeling, and allow yourself to feel it. What need of yours isn’t being met at this moment? It helps to approach this process with non-judgmental curiosity.<sup>4</sup> Then you take what you can from the situation – a lesson about your needs or how you’d like to change your behavior in the future – and move on.<sup>5</sup>

2. Take baby steps. Emotional vulnerability does not come overnight. The extent to which it is appropriate also varies by situation. Practice sharing your feelings with a trusted friend. The more comfortable you get in these specific situations, the more prepared you’ll be in others.

3. Seek professional help when you need it. No one should ever have to struggle alone. If you struggle to identify and communicate your needs, a professional can help you develop both skills and confidence with this.

Lastly, this stuff takes time. It can be challenging. But it is absolutely achievable and worth it to live in closer harmony with yourself and more intimate relations with others.

[Click here to see citations.](#)



# Mollycules: A Different Kind of Bake Sale

by Molly Kogan

Black Lives Matter was founded in 2013, yet it took nationwide protests in 2020 for me to learn about black history, police brutality, and systemic racism. From Netflix documentaries to Kendrick Lamar's music I couldn't stop consuming content explaining why black lives matter. As a graduate student on a budget, I didn't know what else I could do in addition to educating myself. I wanted to donate money and time to local organizations, but I had limited amounts of both resources. Then I saw a friend post about an organization called Bakers Against Racism. It was a group organizing a countrywide bake sale to raise money for a charity of your choice fighting for the rights of black people. I knew what I could bake, I knew I could afford ingredients, and I knew I had time to do it, so I signed up.

I bought \$14 worth of baking ingredients to make Pineapple Mollycules, my invention of a vegan fruit bread bite. I decided to sell 18 Mollycules, a number in Judaism representing life, for \$3. At this price, and based on how many ingredients I bought, I could turn my \$14 purchase into a \$66 donation to the Austin Justice Coalition. I launched my bake sale on Instagram and immediately received orders and direct donations. Not only that, but some people donated baking supply funds so I could restock ingredients. By the end of my one-week bake sale, my \$14 turned into a \$650 donation. Never in my life had I donated such a large sum of money before and it felt great. I knew this was just the start of how I could help worthy nonprofit

organizations in addition to Bakers Against Racism.

Mollycules raised \$400 for The City Mission which helps house and rehabilitates homeless people in Cleveland, OH. The next sale raised \$454 for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) in memory of my coworker, Paul Degregory, that took his life in 2017.

My current bake sale is raising money for nonprofits fighting voter suppression as well as honoring the life of my friend that was a politician and died in Washington DC.

These bake sales have transformed from simply raising money to a therapeutic method for me to cope with the loss of loved ones.

What is next? During the holiday season, I will continue to bake and raise money for AFSP. I know that December is a difficult time for people, and I think this cause deserves a lot of support. Additionally, Paul was known for his love of peppermint schnapps, and I cannot wait to make a chocolate candy cane brownie bite to honor his memory. In the future I hope to afford to rent kitchen space so I could talk to local businesses about selling Mollycules. I hope that Mollycules can generate donations rather than profits, and I would love for them to be accessible to a wider audience.

Stay up to date on Mollycule bake sales on Molly's Instagram [@mollycule428](https://www.instagram.com/mollycule428) or by email at [mollycule428@gmail.com](mailto:mollycule428@gmail.com)

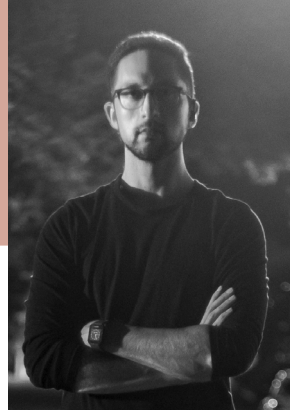


# Creative Contributors



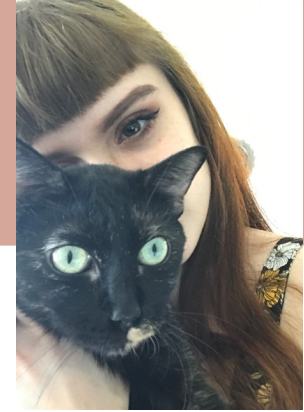
Holly Richardson

Hi, it's Holly. Contradictory creative. Steady strategist. Habitual wanderer. Centered yoga instructor. Running buddy. Relaxation reveler. Coffee devotee. Electrolyte enthusiast. Light chaser. Dark poet. Healthy treat maker. Indulgent food finder. Detailed planner. Uncharted trail seeker. Marketing mind. Free spirit soul. Lover of books. Hates writing bios. [@hollyrichardson88](https://www.instagram.com/hollyrichardson88)



Andrew Holmes

Andrew Holmes is an Austinite—by way of New England—who made it to town on the whim of an Anthony Bourdain “No Reservations” episode almost a decade ago. For many years, Andrew had worked in highly-stylized studio lifestyle photography, but his current photographic work has shifted to capturing a balance of natural light and shadow. When not creating, Andrew spends his time as a new father to a baby Bear and an ornery senior chihuahua. You can find more of his work at [www.aholmesphoto.net](http://www.aholmesphoto.net) or on instagram at [@aholmesphoto](https://www.instagram.com/aholmesphoto).



Kristina Kissel

Hello! I'm Kristina, an artistic cat and plant parent! I love using nature and warm tones to inspire my organic styled art. I'm also a barista at Dear Diary Coffeehouse.

[@siber.tiger](https://www.instagram.com/siber.tiger)

## MYCLIMATECONNECTIONS

Visit [myclimateconnections.com](https://myclimateconnections.com) to see the impact of your climate footprint and learn ways you can improve it.

## Bake Sale October 31st

At Dear Diary Coffeehouse  
Austin, TX

[Click here for details](#)





# Writers



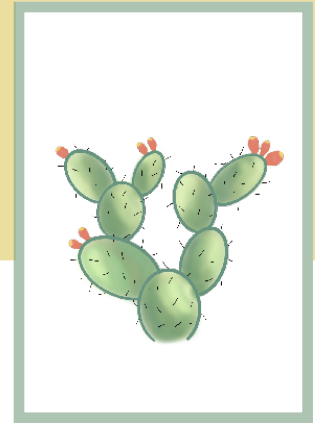
Molly Kogan

Originally from Cleveland, I moved to Austin, TX in 2014 to begin my PhD in Analytical Chemistry at UT Austin. I transitioned from vegetarian to vegan in 2016 and love developing vegan recipes to help others make a smooth transition to a plant-based diet. I am also a runner and enjoy all the free fitness opportunities available in Austin. [@mollycule428](https://www.instagram.com/mollycule428)



Lillian Seidel

Hi I'm Lillian! I write about wellness, personal growth, kindness, and inclusivity. I'm by no means an expert on psychology, leadership, wellness, or other topics, but my goal is sharing research and tangible resources for you along with my personal vignettes. While I don't expect my insights to resonate with everyone, I hope to invite reflection on how these topics come to bear in your own life.



Could be you!

Want to contribute to next month's issue of The Commissary? Have any suggestions or thoughts you'd like to share? We'd love to hear from you! Contact us at [howdy@pricklypearatx.com](mailto:howdy@pricklypearatx.com) and follow us on Instagram [@pricklypearatx](https://www.instagram.com/pricklypearatx).

## Monthly Picks

### Book

[Americanah](#)  
by Chimamanda Ngoi  
[Adiche](#)

### Podcast

[The Yes Theory](#)  
[Podcast -](#)  
[The Problem With](#)  
[Productivity](#)

### Recipe:

[Prickly Pear's Tahini](#)  
[Cacao Truffles](#)



## One More Thing...

We had a blast creating this second edition of The Commissary and hope you enjoyed it too. Next is thinking about how we can refine it. We want you, our Prickly Pals, to have a voice in what we change and how we can improve. We'd greatly appreciate it if you could fill out [this short questionnaire](#).