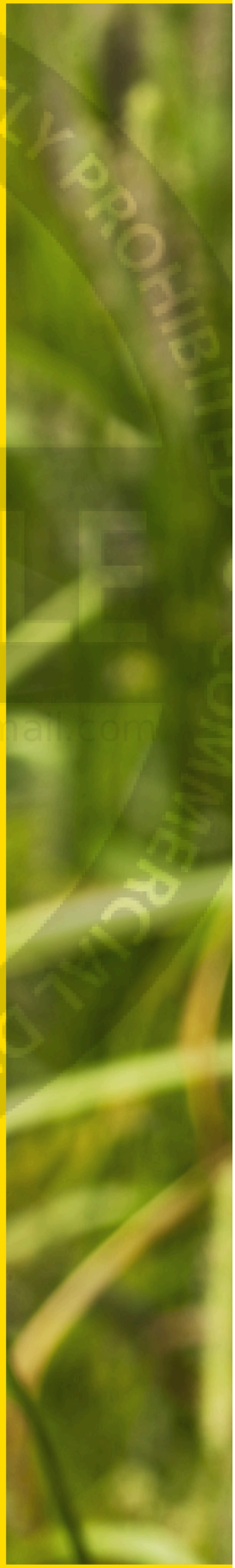
- Summer

WELLNESS

keep the peace

11 little ways to preserve your fun, healthy summer vibe even as fall stress ramps up.

BY MEGHAN RABBITT



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What is it about summer that makes healthy living feel easier?

Maybe it's the extra daylight that inspires us to go for a walk every morning or evening or to get together with friends for impromptu patio hangs. It could be the piles of pretty produce at the farmers' market that practically beg us to have a big salad for lunch. Or maybe it's the vacation time we take—an opportunity to unplug and unwind.

No wonder so many of us get a bad case of "the Mondays" when autumn rolls around. As the pace of life picks up, those healthy routines that felt second nature to us just a few weeks ago can start to slip away.

This season, what if we didn't let that happen? What if we kept up all the happy-making and good-for-us habits that feel effortless in the summer even as life takes a turn for the hectic?

There are ways! We asked experts to tell us how they flip the script on fall and hold on to the calm energy of summer. Their advice offers the assurance that while summer may be over, the way it makes us feel can last.

stay easy-breezy

One of the best parts of summer is how gentle we are on ourselves. Stayed up too late due to an epic block party? Oh, well. Decided to skip the gym so you could catch sunset at the beach? No biggie. The fact that it's hardcore back-to-work time doesn't mean you have to jump into too-rigid routines and then beat yourself up for not sticking to them perfectly. In fact, you probably have more leeway than you think.

Take exercise, for example. "Your body doesn't care if you do a single hour-long full-body strength routine. Your body only cares if you do nothing," says Vonda Wright, M.D., an orthopedic sports surgeon and the author of *Unbreakable: A Woman's Guide to Aging With Power*. So break your workouts into smaller chunks if that makes them feel more doable as your schedule gets busier.

When it comes to sleep, yes, having a consistent bedtime and wake-up time—even on weekends—is ideal.

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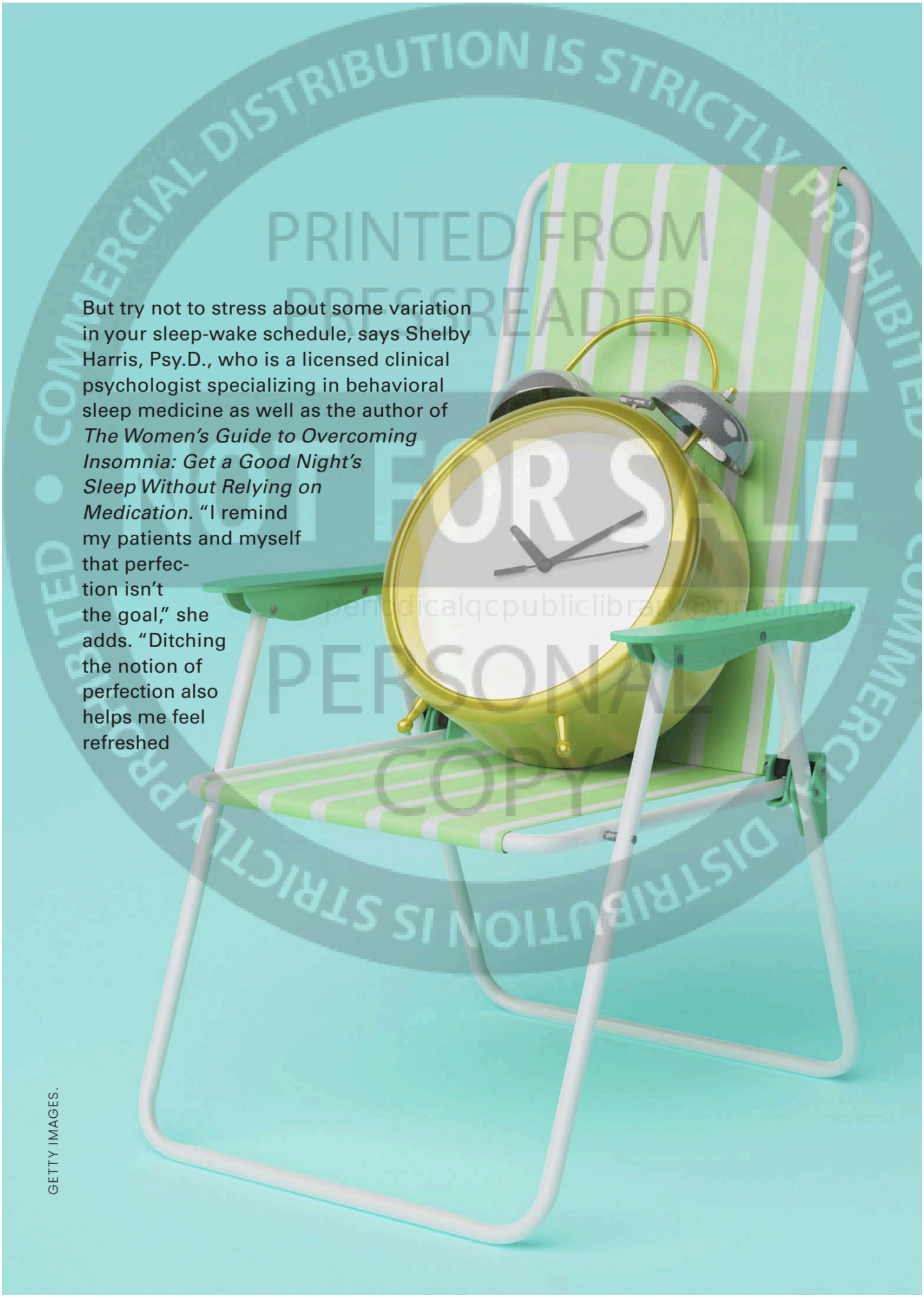
But try not to stress about some variation in your sleep-wake schedule, says Shelby Harris, Psy.D., who is a licensed clinical psychologist specializing in behavioral sleep medicine as well as the author of *The Women's Guide to Overcoming Insomnia: Get a Good Night's Sleep Without Relying on Medication.* "I remind my patients and myself that perfection isn't the goal," she adds. "Ditching the notion of perfection also helps me feel refreshed



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when I wake up." Apply her advice to most areas of life, and there's a good chance you'll feel freer overall.

freeze summer for later

Summer tomato season is officially over when frost hits, so pick or buy as many tomatoes as you can, says best-selling author and James Beard Award winner Joanne Molinaro (a.k.a. the Korean Vegan), and get cooking. "One of my favorite things to do in early fall is make my own red sauce with those stunning heirloom tomatoes, which make the most flavorful homemade marinara you'll ever have," she says. Also, Molinaro says she uses more basil in her tomato sauce than most recipes call for, which gives the sauce "extra summeriness."

But the advice to stock up doesn't apply only to tomatoes—use it with whatever you grow or love most from the farmers' market. You'll thank yourself later for the pesto, summer-veggie soup, or strawberry jam.

Pro tip: Ask for "seconds" at your farmers' market—produce items that don't look perfect but still taste delicious and are often deeply discounted. Freeze your treats so you'll have a taste of summer well into fall.

write a "do-less list"

Fall has a certain back-to-business energy that fills the calendar with lots of to-do's. Managers tend to return from summer vacation with renewed determination about what needs to happen for the business, which often translates into more work all around.

The antidote: Make a "do-less list." The idea comes from parent-coaching team Ashley Graber, L.M.F.T., and Maria Evans, L.M.F.T., psychotherapists and the authors of *Raising Calm Kids in a World of Worry: Tools to Ease Anxiety and Overwhelm*, but their advice also applies to the child-free and those of us who are past the demanding early days of parenthood.

Your do-less list might include saying no to requests to volunteer (even for organizations you really believe in) or drawing boundaries at work to ensure that you won't be checking email or opening spreadsheets during your evenings or weekends. "Summer tends to honor rest, choice, and space, whereas fall often doesn't," says Graber. "A do-less list works like an emotional permission slip. It can help remind us that we can reenter structure without overcommitting."

plan for joy on your calendar

If you were lucky enough to take a vacation this summer, you know how happy-making that break from "real life" can feel—and how tough reentry can be. And if you don't have another vacation on the calendar, fall can start to look bleak. "That's why it's important to plant seeds of joy on your calendar," says Lucy McBride, M.D., a primary care doctor and the author of the Substack newsletter "Are You Okay?"

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Set a standing date to take a walk with your bestie—say, the first Friday each month. Buy concert tickets to make a night of it with friends. Take a screen-free Sunday or spend a day off work digging in the garden or immersing yourself in a good book. Put these activities on the calendar and protect those dates.

"When you're plotting out what your fall will look like, remember that little sips of brain rest really can go a long way toward countering the overwhelm and anxiety that come with all our responsibilities," says Dr. McBride. "You don't need a big vacation to feel like you've had a rest."

keep your goals compassionate

Back-to-school season can often have a "new year, new you" vibe even if it has been decades since you were a student. We wind up tempted to set new (and often very ambitious) objectives for ourselves at this time: *I will work out every morning. I will cut out all simple carbs and eat more veggies. I will get that promotion I deserve.*

Go ahead and lean into the energy this season brings, but when you're setting your goals, start by defining what success will look and feel like when you honor your well-being, energy, and joy, not just your output or results, says Amina AlTai, an executive coach and the author of *The Ambition Trap: How to Stop Chasing and Start Living*. "Our ambition can drive us to chase the biggest, boldest milestones without checking in to see if the goal is compassionate in the context of our lives," she says. "Setting what I call 'kind goals' can help you break the cycle of overwork and create space for both meaningful progress and sustainable self-care."

AlTai recommends writing down your goals, then having an honest check-in with yourself: Has waking up at 5:30 a.m. to work out in the past not stuck because it makes you feel exhausted? Is it realistic to think you'll never have bread, cake, or cookies in the few months before the holidays? How can you tweak these goals so they will feel more doable and joyful?

"Because the summer months may remind us that we want more ease, connection, and play in our lives, now is a perfect time to listen to the inner voice pointing us in the direction of what we want more of rather than falling into the trap of hustle and depletion," AlTai adds.

play a summer soundtrack

September can bring a sense of dread as summer mornings (when we are more likely to ease into the day) are replaced with routines that often feel stressful and time-crunched. If mornings become painful, create a playlist of your favorite summer songs—think road trip anthems and acoustic sets you always play at summer barbecues—to evoke the carefree pace of summer.

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"Music creates rhythm and mood, and it can help turn mornings into a ritual instead of a rush," says Evans. "It's also a nod to summer's sensory freedom, helping us through sound, memory, and movement."

take a pause

Remember when you were on summer vacation and didn't jump to answer texts right away? (Remember a time before everyone had a smartphone?) It's possible to carry that energy forward into fall, says Paul Leonardi, Ph.D., a professor of technology management at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the author of *Digital Exhaustion: Simple Rules for Reclaiming Your Life*. "Instant replies trap us in reactive mode, which is both exhausting and unsustainable," he says. "Slowing your replies lets you reclaim your rhythm

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and respond when your mind and your energy are ready."

In case you're worried that others will notice you slacking off on your replies and get annoyed, don't be: It turns out that a slower response that is well thought out and contains a good level of detail is more satisfying for the recipient and helps avoid lots of back-and-forth messages, says Leonardi, adding, "Even better, many of those ambiguous messages you don't reply to right away magically solve themselves when you wait a bit."

dot your day with mini treats

As stress ratchets up at work, we tend to look at the mountain we have to climb rather than focusing on our next step. That's a sign to take time, even just a few minutes, to narrow your focus and do just one thing that makes you happy—what Bree Groff, author of *Today Was Fun: A Book About Work (Seriously)*, calls "thin-slicing joy."

"Maybe that means getting a cappuccino with cinnamon on top to take into an annoying meeting, or making a lunchtime phone date with your bestie who you know will listen to you complain and make you laugh," says Groff. "It's not that this takes away all your stress or worries, but it can help you enjoy those beautiful little moments you may not otherwise be able to see."

A few moments of mindfulness can serve the same purpose, says Jill Dawson, a licensed professional counselor in Boulder, CO. Take a moment to listen to the sound of the water going into your water bottle as you fill it up, or to really feel your feet on the ground when you're standing in line at the grocery store. "Over time, these little moments add up to an overall sense of calm," says Dawson.

gather your squad

Being surrounded by your favorite people with no agenda except to catch up and enjoy the time together needn't be restricted to the summer months. Plan a cozy fall friends' weekend—whether it's in a rented cabin, in someone's living room, or in a backyard with fairy lights and a firepit. There's something about cooking together, playing a nostalgic board game, or simply staying up late chatting and laughing that'll make you feel as if you're at summer camp again.

go clubbing

One of the biggest bummers of fall is having fewer hours of daylight. While you can't make it stay lighter longer, you can plan to counter the urge to change into your pajamas and sink into the couch at 4 p.m. or so. One solution: Start or join a club. It can be a book club, a wine club, an investment club, a Swedish-footwear appreciation club—anything, as long as it's regular, suggests Maureen Petrosky, an entertaining and lifestyle expert and the author of *Wine Club*.

Her advice: Invite a small group of

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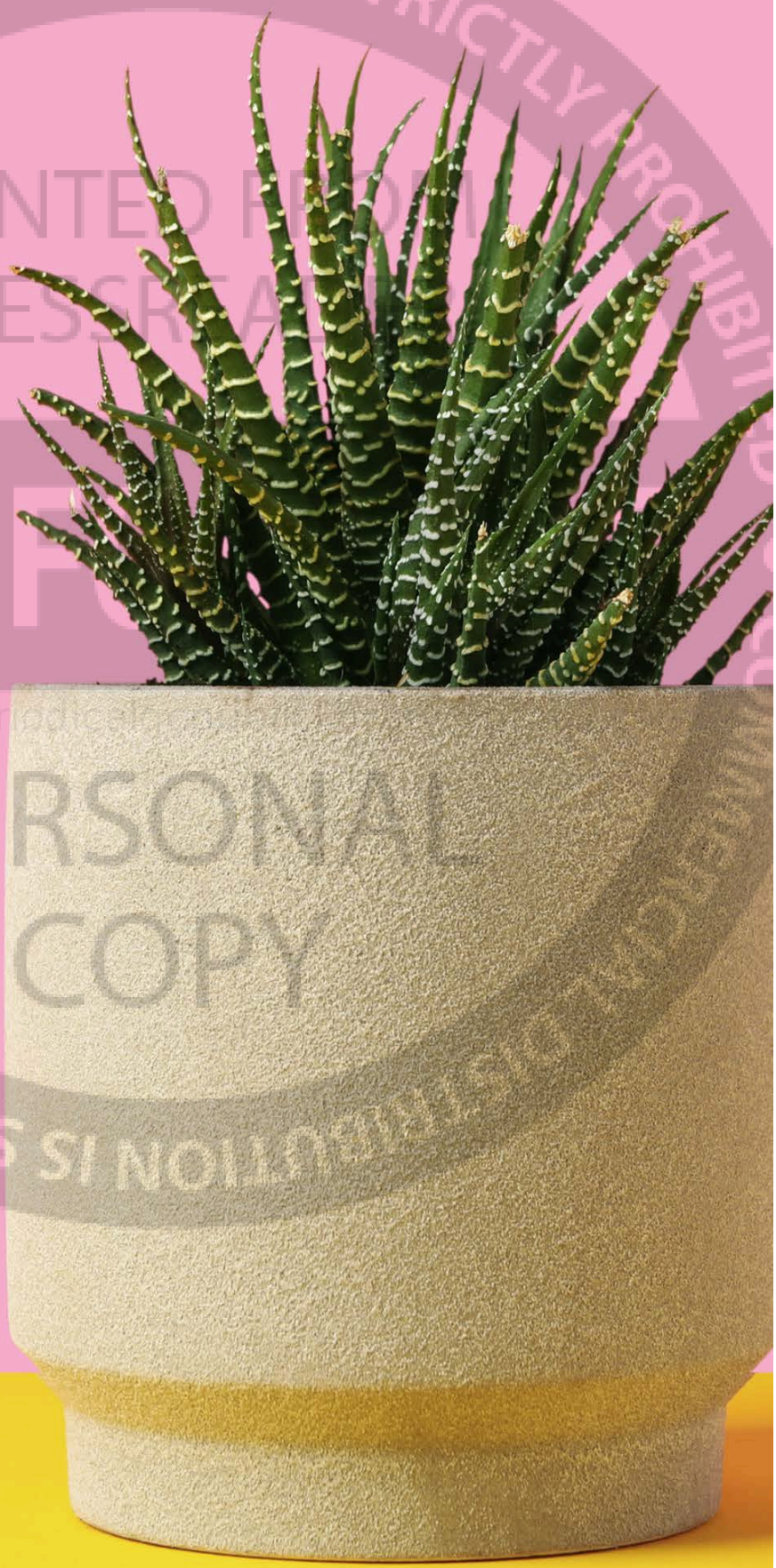
friends (no more than 10), plan to meet biweekly or monthly, and have a clear focus for each gathering. "This makes it less likely that people will bail—including you," she says. To make it even easier on everyone, meet at a restaurant with a great happy hour. "This way nobody has to go to the trouble of hosting and you can still be home by 8 p.m., which tends to make everyone happy."



bring the outdoors in

Looking for a little hit of the serenity you feel when out in nature? Add some greenery inside your home. Buy a few low-light-loving snake plants, philodendrons, and peace lilies. Add some potted herb plants to a sunny spot in your kitchen. Even simpler: Buy a bunch of basil, mint, or parsley and store it in a mason jar filled with water on your windowsill. "These herbs are inexpensive and low-maintenance," says Petrosky. "Just clip off what you want to use in a recipe or a drink and it'll grow back for months."

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