

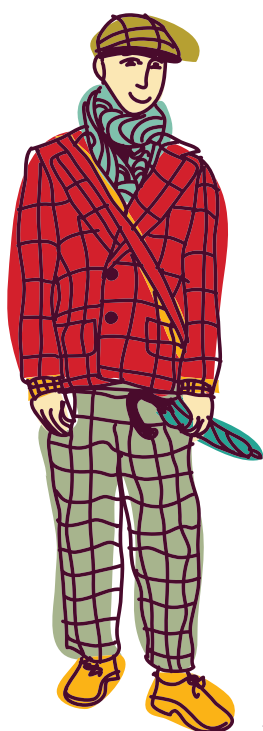
7 ways to cultivate community

Many people are craving the benefits of community – diversity, mutual support, interesting happenings in their locale. So how do we cultivate this kind of community?

Sure, we want our privacy and we need our breathing space, but it's not a zero sum game. You can know thy neighbour, and get away with the undies on the couch scenario too.

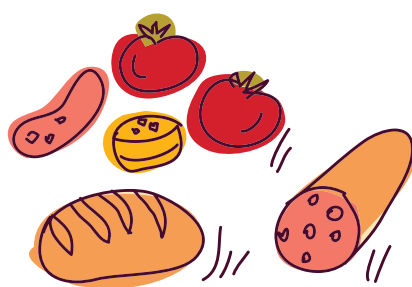
For those (like me) who feel that life has moved a little too far in opposite direction, give these tactics a go:

Walk around your local area – take it in, smell it, explore it. Notice what you notice. Walk down new paths, discover local reserves and local businesses. Make a note of anything new and vow to come back to it.



Make eye contact with the people you pass, maybe you smile, maybe you nod (don't worry instinct will kick in). Some will ignore you, others will be surprised, but the sparks of electricity that come from genuine human connections are the ones you'll tend to remember most.

Know your local barista, butcher, chemist, and grocer. Understand which businesses are owned locally and support them. Google your local hardware or nursery before heading to the bigger chains, sometimes these businesses are hidden in plain sight.



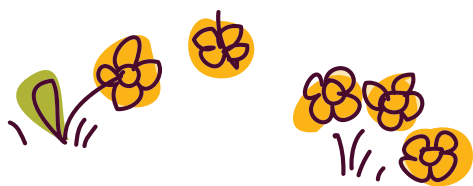
Ask your neighbours for help. I think we would all agree that respecting privacy is important, especially when we live in such close quarters in urban environments, but knowing who you share walls with is important. Asking for help or offering your own assistance is a non-threatening way to break down barriers between people (especially those who might not want to share a meal with you just yet ... Give them time).

If you tend to cook alone (or on that note, if you tend to rarely cook), start up a dinner club. Better done with people you know well (it's a commitment thing), this is a great way to share the load of shopping, cooking and cleaning. This is the opposite of the elaborate dinner party. People can agree on the framework – how healthy it should be, how much it should cost and how late you all want to linger – and then get into the routine. What's important here is that people feel that they're getting the nourishment they need at the price they want, with the added benefit of a shared meal (i.e. unless included in the initial brief, a red wine binge every eve. is probably going to bring this ritual to a swift end).



If you're quite active on social networks and have found yourself with a wide bunch of Internet friends, consider taking it offline. Anyone who has connected with others over a shared passion online, knows that Internet friendships are real (they are!). This is a great opportunity to bring equally enthused people together over the thing they're enthused about. This is rare in real life friendships, where circumstance and location tends to be the starting point. It's pretty frickin' amazing to have a dinner party with people who swoon over Burrata like you do, or care about politics like you do, or are into some obscure craft like you are. Try it.

So not everyone's into your thing, but they're probably curious about it. Offer to teach others your skill – whether it's yoga, cooking, knitting or surfing – if you spend time on it, you certainly know more than those who don't, and it's a beautiful thing to share your love with people around you. In fact it's contagious! Aim for diversity in ages and people, and don't get too formal about it. You might want to cover the costs of hiring the space or materials for the session, but you probably won't want to charge for your time. It's not that your time's not valuable, it's just that after connecting with people over something you genuinely want them to learn and love, you'll start to realise you'd pay for that joy. That perspective alone is priceless.



All of these efforts take a little engineering. If these ideas are raised with friends or neighbours to a response of panic and abort, realise that they are not rejecting your offer of community, but they are worried about their time. Hell, people are busier than ever – the aim is not to make life more difficult for them. So consider what people around you need, and try to marry that with your need for connection. My bet is there's probably a sweet spot in there somewhere – and everyone just may win in the end.

~ Johanna, Make Do Co.