

Homesteading in apartments or city homes:

A guide to getting started

By Sarah Kostyu from K7 Farm 11/11/2023

Urban Homesteading & Emergency Prep Expo

I speak to people on a regular basis who mention they can't wait until they move to property to "start" homesteading. But truth be told, they're wasting such valuable time waiting when they could be starting right where they're at! Homesteading is not all about lots of land and large animals, and it doesn't have to take a lot of money!

My homesteading began in a small apartment. Our lifestyle changed and grew with each move – from the apartment, to a home in the inner city, to a home in the suburbs, to our farm. I used each dwelling as an opportunity to hone homesteading skills that didn't require livestock or lots of land so that when we were ready for a farm, *I could just jump right in!* I already had a firm foundation in the very basics of homesteading that all other parts would build upon when we purchased land.

When I think about all the skills I brought with us to the farm, I am overcome with thankfulness that I didn't wait to learn basic skills. I would be so overwhelmed if I had tried to jump right in not knowing very much. I would have gotten over my head, taking on too much, making too many mistakes.

Now remember, all the things I am going to mention didn't happen overnight. Learning homesteading skills can seem overwhelming and some do come at a cost, but it doesn't have to come all at once and a lot of supplies you need can be borrowed, purchased used, or found on sale. I am the queen of doing things on the cheap, let me tell you that it's possible!

Everyone's timeline and priorities will look different based on the skills that are important to you.

Homesteading is defined by Merriam-Webster as: "the act or practice of living frugally or self-sufficiently (as on a homestead) especially by growing and preserving food"

Most homesteaders place a huge emphasis on food. Either growing it themselves, or some of it, supporting local growers by purchasing their food grown locally, hunting, fishing or foraging for it, bartering for it, or in some way having some sort of control over it and reducing their dependence on food purchased from stores. We all need to eat, and in many households the grocery budget could cost more each month than the mortgage. It make sense to find ways to reduce our dependence on grocery stores where food is mass produced, filled with unhealthy ingredients, and expensive!

While the information presented here is not complete *at all* it's just meant to give you a starting point and consider the possibilities! Feel free to send me a friend request on facebook, follow our farm page (K7 Farm – “That Teaching Farm”), or contact me directly if you have questions. I will be setting up homesteading classes for 2024 soon – I travel! So if you have a group of people interested in learning any homesteading skills I would be happy to teach you!

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Things you can do in general:

- Cook from scratch
 - Bake bread, bake pies, make homemade versions of convenience food, make yogurt, condiments, cereal, snacks, tortillas, pita bread, bread bowls, soups, lunch meat, sausage, sauces, pasta, render lard, possibilities are endless. I will be posting a free ebook on cooking from scratch on our members only blog in the next few weeks that details my best tips and a large list of all the things you can make easily, in your own kitchen.
 - Learn to cut up your own meat. Often its cheaper to buy quarters vs. individual roasts. Learn to cut up your own whole chickens to get several meals from one bird. Learn to cut your own steaks. Learning to cutting meat can mean you could potentially purchase your own large animal when it's ready to butcher, and do the job yourself.
 - Make sausages (its SO much cheaper to make your own breakfast and smoked sausages!), kielbasa, brats, hot dogs, etc. You can find smokers pretty affordably and they put these things in reach!

- Learn to make cheese. As long as the milk is not ultra-pasturized, you can make cheese. There is a common misconception that you need access to raw milk for cheesemaking and that is not true (but you could join a herdshare and get raw milk on a weekly basis from a local dairy farm if there are any near you – that’s the legal way to get a hold of raw milk in Michigan).
- Make your own chicken and beef broth, stock and bouillon
- Create your own tasty homemade soups – many of which can utilize the leftover bits of food in your fridge you aren’t sure what else to do with.
- Take control of what’s on your plate. When you learn to cook from scratch, you begin to understand how food works and how to make it nourish your body. You can omit or substitute ingredients to feed the needs in your family, instead of purchasing food pre-made where you have no control.
- What do you buy when grocery shopping? Learn to make it at home. Hone your grocery list down to purchasing raw, basic ingredients. Then, look at what you buy and figure out what you can make and grow yourself! See how low your grocery budget can go!
- Preserve food
 - Learn to can meats, vegetables, fruits, jams/jellies, soups and stocks, dry beans, and more. Food will be shelf stable for a couple years or even longer. Buy produce in bulk when it’s in season, local/fresh and CHEAP! Your local farmers market is a great place to source local foods.
 - I really love canning dry beans – you rehydrate them (don’t can bean puree), can them, then have canned beans on the shelf for making refried beans, burritos, ham and bean soup, and other meals that use beans. Doing it this way saves a bunch, especially if you have a large family that loves refried beans and could easily eat 4 or more normal cans in a single meal.
 - Canning food can save you a bunch of money when it’s done right – but you can make it less cost effective, too.
 - Canning can take on many forms. The most reliably safe and tested ways to can food is by waterbath or pressure canning (which method will depend on what you’re canning, as low acid foods should be pressure canned and high acid foods should be waterbath canned). Follow the National Center for Food Preservations methods to keep you and your family safe. I also **teach canning classes and teach both methods.**
 - Learn to dehydrate food, either in the oven or in a dehydrator (often found at thrift stores), you can store lots of food in a small amount of space. When stored properly, dehydrated food can last for years.
 - Learn how to cure and smoke meats.
 - Learn to ferment food. Sauerkraut and other vegetables, apple cider vinegar and more!

- Learn to freeze food – bulk cook and store convenience meals in the freezer so you aren't tempted to eat out on busy nights. Make pasta in bulk and freeze it fresh (or dry and store it), freeze little bits of this and that instead of letting it go bad in the fridge (and keep an inventory list) and learn to get creative in using those ingredients when money is tight and you need to eat at home vs. go to the store. You could also cook and freeze rice, mashed potatoes and other parts to side dishes to take some of the work out of meal prep.
- Learn to plan meals, and shop based off of what you can purchase locally and in-season, what's on sale, and what you've already got on hand. If you can find some raw ingredients at a great price, you can purchase extra to freeze and use another week you may not be able to so easily afford food.
- Forage/Hunt
 - There is public land available for hunting, or you can lease land, or work out an arrangement with a landowner. Generally where there is a will there is a way, and some land owners don't mind sharing their land with responsible hunters.
 - Don't be afraid of fresh roadkill. You can get free roadkill permits ([Roadkill Salvage Permit](#)) for deer hit by cars, and if you process the meat yourself, it's free meat in the freezer! The permit is available for free, and online, so unless you need a police officer you don't need to wait for one to take the deer. Grab and go! Paying a processor is often still an affordable way to get meat in the freezer that you don't have to hunt for.
 - Forage for nuts! Walnuts, acorns, hickory nuts are all edible and yummy. There is a basic processing protocol but all are healthy – and free.
 - Forage for fruits: wild raspberries, blackberries, strawberries, grapes. Many "weeds" are medicinal and freely available, just avoid any found on the roadside.
 - Ask permission to gather fruits from a neighbors fruit tree. Many people in city and suburban home have fruit trees and find the fruit becomes a nuisance.
 - Look for maple trees (any maple variety) and ask permission to tap them to make syrup. Build a little evaporator in your backyard that uses scrap wood for heat, and boil your own maple syrup.
 - Mushrooms are fun to forage also, just know what you're looking for as some can look edible but are poisonous.
- Grow a garden
 - Learn to garden in-ground, in raised beds, or in containers. Pick a location that is full sun, fertile, and near a water source. Consider how you will control weeds, such as by weeding, or mulching. Take time in the off season to research common local garden pests and develop a plan to protect your garden from them. Decide if you want to start all your plants from seed or buy seedlings, and if you plan to start seeds, take time during the off season to figure out when they're started (not all at the same time!), and gather equipment. Luckily, garden

consultations are a popular option I offer and I can help you figure all of this out if you're interested.

- Succession plant to make the most of your space all season long.
- Figure out what your family eats, how often you want to eat it, if you want to preserve it, and how much to grow.
- Learn to save seed to reduce your dependence on seed companies and cut costs, while preserving your favorite varieties of vegetables.
- Go beyond a designated garden space and explore food forests, hydroponics, or growing indoors (you can easily grow peas, green beans, herbs and lettuces/greens without expensive grow lights) and permaculture.
- Compost. Turn your food scraps, untreated paper products, coffee grounds, eggshells and many, many more things into compost, which will nourish the soil in your garden and becomes free fertilizer!
- Apartment dwellers can consider balcony gardens, window gardens, hydroponics, or asking permission for an in-ground garden. You can even compost in a bin!
- When growing your own food at home is simply not an option, consider renting a plot at a nearby community garden, borrow space in a neighbors yard, or buy a share in a local farms farmshare.
- Consider *small* animals
 - Check with local ordinances first
 - Chickens are becoming more common in city limits. You can raise chickens for eggs and/or meat, there are many different breeds and they can be suited for either or both purposes. Chickens are affordable and don't require much space!
 - Rabbits are a very popular, quiet, non-smelly, affordable way to dip your feet into raising animals for meat. We raised meat rabbits in our back yard and butchered the rabbits at a friends farm until we moved to our farm. You could easily do the butchering in your own backyard using non-firearm methods for dispatch.
 - Vermiculture – yes. Worms will aid in your composting and produce incredible castings for your garden.

Homesteading isn't *all* about food, though. There are many others ways to boost your self sufficiency and reduce your dependence on others in general.

- Useful crafts:
 - Wooden utensils
 - Basket weaving with foraged fibers/vines
 - Homemade Soap
 - Fiber weaving, spinning
 - Sewing
 - Whittling

- Tanning (each animal has enough brains to tan its own hide, should you choose to go this route)
- Homemade Goods
 - Homemade cleaners
 - Homemade personal care products such as face wash, shampoo bars, lotions, body soaps, bath bombs, bath salts, spa products, etc.
- Learn to make your own
 - Clothes
 - Quilts
 - Childrens toys
 - Cloth diapers
 - Wash cloths, dish cloths

Things you can do *right now*:

- Commit to learning to make one more thing from scratch for Thanksgiving. Maybe this year you'll learn to make pie crust or bake bread rolls from scratch. Then, learn to make turkey stock from the bones of your turkey! Ask people you know to save their turkey bones for you too, then consider freezing or canning the stock!
- Plant garlic before the ground freezes, even in containers!
- Think about a garden. Gardens need fertile soil, access to water, and full sun. If you are going to garden in containers start collecting large, food-safe containers now, such as 5 gallon buckets and more. One year I put a crib side standing up, so the slats were horizontal. I then mounted Ikea hanging kitchen cups on the slats and had a small herb garden. The fall and winter is a fantastic time to start making garden plans and order seeds before the spring rush. Gardens can be in ground, in raised beds, or containers. You can grow food vertically to conserve space.
- Learn to make soap. The recipe I use most calls for olive oil, coconut oil, tallow or lard, water (or milk), and lye. Super simple and affordable – and I teach classes on how to make it!
- You can find good deals right now on apples, potatoes, carrots and squash. Look at farm stands to find reduced produce they need to move before cold weather hits. Find out if people you know have leftover pumpkins that have not yet been carved, Roast the seeds (squash seeds, too!) and cook the pumpkin. Apples can be canned as slices or as apple pie filling using a waterbath (nothing more needed than a pot with a lid and some sort of a rack on the bottom – even if just canning rings zip-tied together). You can also freeze or dehydrate apples. Carrots should be pressure canned or frozen (or dehydrated), as well as squash or pumpkin (but don't can puree – just cubes – and puree once they're out of the jar)

- Make a list of the skills you'd like to learn or the things you'd like to do. Then, commit to learn them. Borrow books from the library, take classes, watch your favorite homesteading or cooking youtubers.
- Volunteer at a homestead and learn the multitude of ways homesteading can look and learn from various families. Any homesteading family has wisdom to share, and there are so many ways to do some things, there is rarely ever only one 'right' way. While a homestead family doesn't operate only during business hours, you might volunteer to come help with chores one day, or help cook dinner, lend a hand in the areas you are most interested in to learn more. Over the summer maybe you'd offer to help in the garden regularly in exchange for fresh produce.

Are you inspired?

I'm happy to answer further questions!

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We have a facebook page (K7 Farm "That Teaching Farm") and a blog (www.k7farm.com) and a subscription-based blog with lots of recipes and information (www.k7farm.com/members)

From the farm I offer:

- Mentoring
- Deer Processing
- Homesteading Classes (I also travel to you!)
- Farmshare Program
- Garden Consulting