

WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF

Homesteading

by Jessica Knowles



This book was written to assist you in your homesteading journey. It is being given as a gift to subscribers of the Homestead Helper, a weekly newsletter run by The 104 Homestead.

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Thank you!

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Welcome to the World of Homesteading

Welcome to the world of homesteading. We are in the technological age, meaning there is an endless supply of knowledge at our fingertips. Great! Well, maybe not.

It can be very overwhelming to break into something new with **that much information**.

Have you ever Googled something about starting a new diet? 200 pages worth of results that list hundreds of diets, hundreds of reviews saying such-and-such diet does not work, as well as variations people claim is **the** way to diet properly. Here you are Googling diets and you are at the point of giving up and grabbing an Oreo.

Several years ago, my dream was to live a simpler life, which I do for myself, and teach my children the value of taking care of themselves and the world we live in. I knew that starting a homesteading lifestyle when I live on slightly less than 1/4 of an acre just a short jaunt from the heart of my small town's village was going to be a daunting task. I started with a 10x10' garden plot, a four-year-old apple tree that still does not produce more than cherry-sized apples, and seven chickens. I began to make a few cleaning products, and I line-dry my clothes during the spring and summer, but I knew I wanted so much more. Most importantly, I wanted to do it in baby steps so I did not become overwhelmed and walk away from an important goal.

I decided to break down my big goal of being a self-sufficient homesteader into small goals towards sustainability. I chose to break it down into seasons so I was forced to think about what was most important to me and was also attainable. If I have 16 goals that all need to be completed in the middle of summer, I'm going to suffer burnout. If I have four goals for each of the four seasons, it is manageable.

I'm going to share with you my goals for the first year of homesteading. They are a great way to get your feet wet. If you do not have the same goals, that's okay! Switch them out for goals that are important to you.

Spring

- Plan a good spot for a garden/edible containers.
- Decide if livestock is a good option.
- Start drying my clothes on a clothesline.
- Learn how to help the bees and butterflies.

Summer

- Build a compost bin.
- Plant some edibles.
- Make a few personal care items.
- Learn how to eat seasonally.

Autumn

- Learn how to forage for wild edibles.
- Find out how to save seeds from the garden.
- Replace a few store-bought foods with homemade ones.
- Learn how to use a water bath canner.

Winter

- Create an indoor herb garden for the kitchen.
- Learn how to make greener cleaners.
- Make simple home remedies.
- Simplify. Reduce the things that are not important.

In this book, I am going to show you how to accomplish these goals and help you pave your road on your journey to homesteading and self-sufficiency. Let's get started with spring goals, shall we?



Spring Homestead Goal

Setting

Plan a good spot for a garden/edible containers.

Gardening is the epitome of homesteading. Not only are you producing your own food, but it is teaching you the value of food. When you care for plants from the time they are tiny seedlings until they produce enough for harvest, you understand the beauty that goes into the foods we eat.

It does not matter if your yard is small, or it is covered in shade, you can grow edibles. If you live somewhere where

edible gardening is frowned upon, there are still options. You can plant fruits as ornamental landscaping or mix herbs into your flower beds. Is there somewhere you can tuck in a few edible plants? Maybe a planter or two?

Remember, even if you plant just a handful of edibles, you are becoming more self-reliant.

More resources:

- [Small Space Vegetable Gardening](#)
- [Container Gardening with Fun Planters to Suit Your Style](#)
- [Setting Up a Veggie Garden in Your Backyard](#)
- [An Easy Guide to Mapping the Sun Without Gadgets](#)

Decide if livestock is a good option.

Livestock is not right for every homestead, but do not discount it just because your property is small or because you work outside of the home. Some livestock like rabbits and quail are good for small, urban homesteads. Rabbits can be used for meat, manure, and/or fiber. Quail can be used for eggs and/or meat. Poultry is a good solution for busy homesteaders. They do not require much daily care and they provide meat and eggs. Larger homesteaders might want to consider goats or cows as a source of dairy.

I urge you to consider all of the pros and cons (as well as your daily habits) when considering adding livestock to your homestead. Animals are a full-time responsibility.

You cannot just go on vacation when your dairy goat is in milk. You cannot forgo giving fresh water to the chickens when the temperatures plummet below freezing. As rewarding as homestead livestock is, it is a commitment.

More resources:

- [4 Reasons to Consider Getting Rabbits for Your Homestead](#)
- [Why You Should Consider Quail Farming](#)
- [How To Care For Laying Hens: A Beginner's Guide to Everything](#)
- [Raising Goats on the Homestead – Assessing Expenses](#)

Start drying clothes on a clothesline.

Drying your clothes on a clothesline saves you approximately \$25 a month on your electricity bill. Possibly more if you have a large family and you use an electric dryer.

You can build a basic, freestanding clothesline for about \$40. If you are lucky enough to have a well-positioned tree and/or wall, you can set up a clothesline (pins and all) for just \$10. The savings start in the very first month.

In addition to keeping money in your pocket, you will preserve the integrity of your pocket as well. Dryers are hard on clothes. All the lint you pull from your dryer is the fibers of your clothes that have been knocked and tumbled loose and caught in the filter.

That weird blue haze on the dryer drum that was not there when you purchased your dryer is the dye leaching from your jeans.

With simple tips and tricks, line drying is easy to do in the spring, summer, and even autumn, though people often cringe at the thought of drying their clothes outdoors in the winter. Trudging outside in the snow to hang wet clothes might not seem appealing, but your clothes may dry faster and bleach more in the winter thanks to sublimation and the sun's rays bouncing off the reflective snow.

More resources:

→ [Line Dry Your Clothes in Winter](#)

→ [How to Use a Clothesline Correctly](#)

→ [Laundry Detergent Without the Yuck – Made at Home](#)

Learn how to help the bees and butterflies.

Do you love harvesting fresh produce from your garden? Do you enjoy gazing upon your flower beds? Thank the pollinators. Bees and butterflies help pollinate over 75% of our flowering plants and nearly 75% of our crops. The current decline in pollinator numbers affects wildlife as much as it does us. There are fewer nuts, seeds, and berries available to wild animals when the bees and butterflies are unable to pollinate plants.

The number one way to help bees and butterflies (as well as other beneficial insects) is to stop the use of pesticides. There are many safer options available. Another way you can help them is to plant a pollinator garden. Pollinator gardens provide a variety of shapes, colors, and flower types throughout the year. These gardens offer nutrients to the various types of pollinators when wild food might be scarce.

More resources:

- [Create a Meadow of Bee-Friendly Flowers](#)
 - [8 Herbs for the Permaculture Garden](#)
 - [Buying Beneficial Bugs for Organic Pest Control](#)
 - [Creating an Eco-Friendly Yard & Garden](#)
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Another great homestead-y spring activity is tapping for maple syrup ([or syrup from other varieties of trees](#)). While you are waiting for your sap to drip, you can begin gardening preparations.

There are many things that we are accustomed to buying that can easily be made at home. Trellises are [easy to make](#) from tree branches and other things you might find around your home. Plant markers can be made from smooth rocks, canning jar lids, or cut-up plastic containers.



Summer Homestead Goal Setting

Build a compost bin.

Why toss your food in the garbage when it can help you grow more food? That is where composting comes into play. Food scraps (which, along with grass clippings and other fresh materials) act as compost “greens.” When mixed with compost “browns” (such as newspaper, dried leaves, and sawdust), food scraps turn into beautifully completed compost that provides amazing resources for your plants. Compost bins can be large outdoor structures or small bins indoors. They can be pre-made or assembled with things you already have lying around.

For successful composting, remember to mix or layer greens that provide nitrogen and browns that provide carbon. Here are a few suggestions for compostable items:

Composting Greens

- Fruit and vegetable scraps
- Coffee grounds
- Fresh grass clippings
- Fresh weeds
- Rotted manures
- Spent (finished) plants

Composting Browns

- Dried leaves
- Hay and straw
- Sawdust (not pressure treated)
- Shredded paper products
- Nutshells
- Dryer lint

These items should not be composted:

- Fats, grease, oils, and lard
- Carnivore manures (cat and dog)
- Diseased plants
- Chemically treated plants or lawn clippings
- Dairy products and eggs (egg shells are okay)
- Magazines

Composting things you would ordinarily throw away not only keeps things out of the landfills but also gets you into the mindset of using things you bring into your home to their full potential.

More Resources:

- [Composting Guide for Beginners](#)
- [Composting with Worms \(Vermicompost\)](#)
- [A Guide to Homemade Leaf Mold: Nature's Free Compost](#)
- [Add a Compost Bin to Your Chicken Run](#)

Plant some edibles.

Hopefully, you have found a place to plant some edibles around your property. Whether you are planning a full plot or sneaking them into your landscaping, you are sure to enjoy the “fruits” of your labors. The key to starting a garden is to start small. You can always expand your garden if you feel you can manage more. There is not much you can do, beyond walking away, if you start big and feel overwhelmed.

Many starting homesteaders discount gardening because they do not feel they have the land it takes to grow food. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Unless you live in an underground concrete bunker with no electricity, you can grow food. There are ways to grow in shade, small spaces, and poor soil... Where there is a will, there is a way.

More Resources:

- [The 15 Easiest Vegetables for Lazy Gardeners to Grow](#)
- [Garden Vegetables to Grow in the Shade](#)
- [A 3-Step Guide to Using Galvanized Bins as Planters](#)

→ [The Theory of Back to Eden Gardening](#)

Make a few personal care items.

Sure, Walmart sells products for dirt cheap, but there is another cost to consider. The cost of your health. There are some questionable ingredients in the commercial products we use on our bodies every day. Buying naturally made products is certainly a healthier choice, but the price tag can be considerably higher. The best option is to make these items at home. Often there are only a few ingredients and they only take a minute or two to make. Making your personal care items can save you money and help you feel good about the products you use.

More Resources:

→ [How to Make Natural Deodorant with 3 Simple Ingredients](#)

→ [Goat Milk Shampoo Bars for Healthy Hair](#)

→ [The Best DIY Dry Shampoo for Light or Dark Hair](#)

→ [42 Real Life Uses for Coconut Oil](#)

Learn how to eat seasonally.

Fresh foods contain their higher amounts of nutrients, nutrients that deplete as the food sits uneaten. "Fresh" foods that are being sold out-of-season have usually been treated with some sort of preservative. These preservatives make the

food appear fresh, but the nutrient content has still declined. Your wallet appreciates eating seasonally as much as your body does. Food purchased in season is often less expensive. If you can purchase local, seasonal food you are doing great, and if you are getting food from your garden, you are getting the best of the best.

Eating seasonally does not need to be hard. Farmer's markets are a great way to access local, seasonal foods. There is a bonus that you can meet the person who grew your food. You can ask them questions about their growing practices and there is a high likelihood that the food you were buying was sitting in the dirt that morning or the night before.

CSAs are another option for local, seasonal food if you are unable to grow your own. CSA stands for Community Supported Agriculture. You purchase a share of a farm's produce. The rules and workings of a CSA depend on the farm, but this is a great way to try foods you might not have otherwise tried. You get seasonal boxes throughout the growing season.

More Resources:

- [How to Store Fresh Produce for Winter](#)
- [Store Food for Optimal Freshness](#)

Another other great homestead-y summer activity is berry picking. Even if you do not have space on your homestead, you can usually find berries elsewhere. Maybe your friend down the road has some raspberries that they have invited you to come to pick.

Often rural areas offer “pick your own” patches where you can get strawberries, raspberries, and/or blueberries. When you get them home, there are so many fun ways you can use them. You can make homemade smoothies, pies, or fruit pancakes. You can freeze or can them to save for the off-season. You could even make [jams and jellies](#) with fun fruit combinations.



Autumn Homestead Goal

Setting

Learn how to forage for wild edibles.

What is better than inexpensive food? Free food! Nature provides an abundance of free food if you know where to look. Purslane, chickweed, miner's lettuce (all wild weeds), and even acorns are foods you can probably find in your area. Mushrooms are also prevalent in wild foods, though you need to spend time with an experienced 'shroomer to safely be able to forage for them.

Dandelions are a great example of abundant weeds that are wise to forage. Most people are trying to get rid of them, but

the homesteader actually goes out and buys seeds for them. Dandelions are not only edible but they can be used medicinally as well. You might even be able to strike a deal with one of your neighbors who enjoys a clean, manicured lawn.

More Resources:

→ [Backyard Foraging: Food from Your Yard](#)

→ [Pickled Wild Onions in Honey-Rosemary Brine](#)

Find out how to save seeds from the garden.

Also known as brown bagging, seed saving is an amazing skill to learn. Not only do you save money and control the quality of your plants from year-to-year, but it is also a very rewarding step towards self-sufficiency. Imagine this: no dashing to the store to discover all of the “good tomato seeds” have been sold out for the season and no wondering if a particular variety will grow well in your area.

Learning to save just one or two types of seeds each season is a great way to build skills without becoming overwhelmed. Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither will your seed collection. Flowers are a great way to start saving seeds. Lettuce, peas, beans, tomatoes, peppers, and many flowering herbs are also great starter plants to work with.

More Resources:

- [Seed Saving & Printable Seed Packets](#)
- [Seed Saving 101 – An Encyclopedia of Seed Saving](#)
- [Your Guide to Reading and Understanding a Seed Packet](#)

Replace a few store-bought foods with homemade ones.

Cooking from scratch does not have to be scary. Many of your daily staples are not nearly as intimidating as they may seem. For example, pancakes made from scratch with real ingredients take the same amount of time and effort as box mix pancakes (plus, they taste better and cost less). Applesauce is another easy make-at-home food.

Just steam the apples and mash; mixing them with maple syrup, vanilla, cinnamon, or maybe nutmeg to create the perfect flavor combination.

A beautiful thing happens when you begin to cook from scratch. It starts with losing your taste for unpackage-and-heat foods you use to think tasted fine. After that comes the magic of sitting down at the table. When you have taken the time to prepare a meal (or even just a portion of a meal) from scratch, it is hard to just serve and go sit in front of the TV. You want to sit and truly enjoy the fruits of your labor. The third thing that happens is your appreciation

for quality ingredients. You will notice that the freshest ingredients enhance your favorite recipes.

More Resources:

- [Homemade Tortillas & Other Foods to Make from Scratch](#)
- [Tips for Making the Best Chocolate Chip Cookies](#)
- [How to Make Homemade Hot Chocolate](#)
- [The Ultimate \(Easy\) Sandwich Bread](#)

Learn how to use a water bath canner.

Water bath canning is a great place to start if you are interested in preserving foods.

You do not need to have a specific pot for canning (and a stock pot will do), but even if you choose to get an actual water bath canner, they do not cost much. You can get a complete canning set for less than \$30. If you are just getting started, I recommend finding a mentor. If you do not know anyone who cans, try looking for local classes or contacting your state's cooperative extension. YouTube and the Ball's Blue Book of Preserving are also amazing resources.

The best part about learning how to can is that you are able to preserve foods beyond your own garden. Did your neighbor bring by a bushel of berries? Did you get a great bargain at the farmer's market? You can preserve those goodies as well. You can not only preserve them, but you can create jams and jellies, vegetable combinations, sauces, salsas, and more.

More Resources:

- [Water Bath Canning Recipes & FAQs](#)
 - [Flippin' Jelly: The Truth About Inversion Canning](#)
 - [How To Make Homemade Spaghetti Sauce From Scratch](#)
 - [Dill Pickle Recipe \(with Surprise Leaf for Crispiness\)](#)
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Some other great homestead-y autumn activities include additional food preservation techniques. Explore techniques like fermenting, [drying](#), and pickling. Remember, you do not need to grow all of the food you preserve. If you get a great deal on strawberries during their peak season, try preserving them so you can enjoy them in the dead of winter.



Winter Homestead Goal

Setting

Create an indoor herb garden for the kitchen.

If you already have herbs growing outdoors, you can easily bring them indoors to enjoy through the winter. If you do not have already established plants, it is easy to start many of them from seed. Some great options for indoor herbs include chives, oregano, thyme, and parsley. Some people say that rosemary is a good candidate for growing indoors, but I have yet to successfully grow it (indoors or out). When choosing herbs for your indoor garden, choose herbs you will actually

use and that benefit from trimmings (since that is how you will be harvesting them).

Windowsill gardens are fun and easy to make. There are many container options to choose from. You can use simple planters or you can use unusual items like mason jars, teacups, tin cans, or repurposed rain gutters (which are cute when hung on a wall).

When choosing containers for your indoor herb garden, remember that they need to drain. You can often use a household drill for making drain holes, but some materials (like glass and ceramic) require a special drill bit. If you are still worried about over-watering and draining, you can fill the bottom of your containers with pebbles.

More Resources:

→ [10 Fabulous Reasons to Garden Indoors](#)

→ [Your Guide to Healthy Houseplants](#)

Learn how to make greener cleaners.

Commercially manufactured cleaners are filled with chemicals that have been proven to be harmful to humans and the environment, yet we continue to use them because we want to get our homes really clean. I used to stick with heavy-duty cleaners because I thought it was the only thing that would really clean my home. In fact, anything with the words Ultra, Mega, or Super was a magnet for me. When a friend said that vinegar was the best cleaner ever, I figured

she was some health nut that did not understand real cleaning. Turns out she was completely correct.

More natural, healthy, and environmentally-friendly cleaners are becoming available in big box stores, but the price tag is rather high. I am happy that people are becoming more aware of the safety of the day-to-day products they use, but I am a woman on a budget. Thankfully, we can make many of these cleaning products at home and they are just as effective (if not more so) than their commercial competitors.

More Resources:

- [Cleaning Products from Scratch for the Whole House](#)
- [7 Best Green Cleaners for Your Home \(and 4 to avoid\)](#)
- [Remove Cooking Spray Residue & Prevent It](#)
- [Naturally Clean Your Oven & Stove Top](#)

Make simple home remedies.

Home remedies are great for a variety of reasons. The first is that they can often be assembled with things you already have around the home. This might be my favorite reason because the last thing I want to do when I'm sick or uncomfortable is get dressed and go to town to buy something. The second is that it often takes fewer "ingredients" to heal your ailment than you may have used in the past.

OTC cough medicines contain lengthy lists of ingredients (often to treat things you may not be suffering from, such as congestion) and have warnings that most people casually ignore. Did you know that high doses of cough medicine can cause brain damage, seizures, and even death? (Source: KidsHealth.org) Health risks like this are the reason home remedies are coming back into popularity.

When it comes to home remedies because they are natural, they are safe, right? Wrong. Natural does not necessarily mean safe. Do your homework before trying home remedies and start with simple recipes that have a long, well-documented track record.

More Resources:

- [Elderberry Syrup: A Delicious Guide To Making Your Own](#)
- [Homemade Fire Cider for Cold & Flu Season](#)
- [What is a Salve? How to Use & Make Your Own Salves](#)
- [Homemade Cough Syrup: An Easy Recipe](#)

Simplify. Reduce the things that are not important.

Have you heard the expression that less is more? This should be the homesteader's creed. When you have less, you appreciate more. Simplifying does not mean getting rid of all of your belongings. It means letting go of things that are not meaningful to you.

Simplifying does not just involve tangible things (like the fondue set you never use), but it also involves actions. Have you been doing homestead-y things that you do not enjoy? Are these things not enriching your life? Stop doing them! There is no competition where you have to do X, Y, and Z in order to win a Homesteader Award.

Another great homestead-y winter activity includes teaching yourself a [new craft or skill](#).

Maybe you have always wanted to knit or crochet your own dishcloths. There are amazing video tutorials available on YouTube and patterns available at Ravelry.com If fiber arts are not your forte, maybe woodworking or candle making is. Winter can be long and might be the perfect time of year to learn something new.



Reaching Your Homestead Goals

It's hard to reach goals on your own. Everyone enjoys having a buddy, right? One of the greatest steps you can take on your homesteading journey is becoming part of a community. A community of like-minded individuals who encourage you when you need encouragement, answer your questions when you are lost and confused, and celebrate your successes with you. The 104 Homestead wants to provide that community for you. Our [Facebook Page](#) is a great place to get your questions answered and share ideas. The 104 Homestead's [Pinterest Page](#) is wonderful for getting ideas for homesteads of all sizes. Want a glimmer into my daily homesteading life (okay, maybe not daily)? Follow me on [Instagram](#) for my unedited life.

If there is anything I can do to help you on your homesteading journey, please don't hesitate to reach out to me. You can reply to our Homestead Helper newsletters or email me at jessica@104homestead.com.

Happy homesteading!

Jessica E. Knowles

Below you will find homesteading goal worksheets. These worksheets will help you identify what goals are important to you and assist you in reaching them. To print out the worksheets, print pages 31-39. You can print out new copies each year and track the growth of your homestead.

Worksheets for Homestead

Goal Setting

When setting your homesteading goals, ask yourself a few questions. These questions will help you decide just how deep into the homesteading lifestyle you want to go.

Maybe you think you want to live like your great great grandmother, but the reality is that you just want to save a few bucks and eat healthier.

- Why do I want to do this?
- What am I doing right now that I can build on?
- How will I know when I have reached my goal?
- What has held me back so far?
- Who can help me?

Make sure your goals are realistic. Maybe you dream of living on a farm with livestock and fields of amber grains, but you live in a second-floor apartment in Manhattan. That does not mean you cannot be a homesteader, it just means you will need to find things you can do where you are. Make sure your goals fit this **S.M.A.R.T.** criteria:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**ttainable
- **R**ealistic
- **T**imely