



Turn your dreams of country living into reality.

Ever since 1970, when MOTHER EARTH NEWS was founded, readers have been writing in with questions about homesteading and stories about their own experiences with rural living. We get calls and e-mails every week confirming that thousands of Americans still dream of going “back to the land” to learn to grow their own food, build their own homes, generate electricity from renewable sources and live a self-reliant lifestyle.

Often, people ask us “What should I do first? How can I learn what I need to know?” To answer these questions, we’ve gathered advice from people with decades of experience with different kinds of homestead living.

Although many people dream of buying several acres in the country, you can start homesteading wherever you are. Heidi Hunt, an assistant editor at MOTHER EARTH NEWS, frequently talks to readers who are considering buying land in the country. Hunt homesteaded on a farm in northeastern Washington, where she built a cabin, gardened and spent many hours chopping wood. She says she always recommends learning as many homesteading skills as possible before moving. “Planting, harvesting and preserving food are skills that can be practiced almost anywhere,” Hunt says.

In fact, many aspects of homesteading work as well in the city or suburbs as in the country. Solar panels, straw bale building, wood heat and collecting rainwater are all possible in the city or suburbs, and even raising chickens is allowed in many cities. Just be careful to check all relevant zoning and local ordinances before you get started.



Livestock Basics

Type	Suggested minimum space for one animal	Types of food	Benefits
Bees	One hive, or wooden beekeeping box for (Average 20,000 bees/colony)	Pollen, nectar	Honey, wax, pollination garden and orchard
Chickens	Housing: 3 to 4 square feet/bird	Pasture, greens, insects, cracked corn, a balanced poultry ration	Eggs, meat, pest control
Ducks	Housing: 5 to 6 square feet/bird Pond access optional	Pasture, greens, snails, insects, cracked corn, supplemental pellets	Eggs, meat, pest control
Goats	Housing: 20 to 25 square feet Pasture area: 0.2 to 6 acres	Pasture in the summer; hay and supplemental grain in the winter; salt and mineral mix	Meat, milk, manure, control of brush
Sheep	Housing: 15 to 20 square feet Pasture area: 0.2 to 8 acres	Pasture in the summer; hay and supplemental grain in the winter; trace-mineralized salt at all times	Meat, milk, manure, wool, “mowing” grass, weed control
Pigs	Housing: 48 square feet with exercise yard	Pasture, corn and soybean meal, small grains (wheat, oats, barley, etc.)	Meat, manure, “tilling” garden spaces
Cattle	Housing: 50 to 75 square feet Pasture area: 1 to 40 acres	Pasture, supplemental feeds such as shelled corn, soybean meal, molasses and rice bran, crop residues, hay	Meat, milk, manure

The acreage and feed requirements above are general guides. The lower ends of the pasture suggestions are for rainy areas, the higher figures are for arid regions. The types of food that animals need can vary widely depending on the farming methods being used.

Whatever your homesteading plans, Hunt says it’s important to focus on your priorities. Decide which parts of the dream are most important to you. “Then, do your research,” she says.

“Learn the skills and find out what’s involved. Each new homesteading activity requires new tools and skills, as well as a certain amount of money and energy.”



Some of these activities require more money and time than others — another reason why it's a good idea to start with smaller projects, such as learning to garden before buying farmland, or doing some basic home repairs before deciding to build your own home. If you

pursue larger projects, there are many ways to learn more about your interests. For potential farmers, apprenticeships and volunteer opportunities on organic farms can be invaluable. Renewable energy workshops around the country help people learn about small-scale solar or

wind power. To learn about building, options range from volunteering with Habitat for Humanity to attending straw-bale building parties and natural building workshops.

Homesteading Resources

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Country Skills

The Encyclopedia of Country Living,

by Carla Emery

The Have-More Plan, by Ed and Carolyn Robinson

Living on an Acre, by the U.S. Department of Agriculture

Home and Energy

The Natural House, by Dan Chiras

Renovation: A Complete Guide

by Michael Litchfield

The Solar-Electric House, by Steve Strong

Wind Energy Basics, by Paul Gipe

Personal Accounts

The Good Life, by Helen and Scott Nearing

Just the Greatest Life, by David Schafer

Rural Renaissance, by John Ivanko and Lisa Kivirist

Food and Farming

All Flesh is Grass, by Gene Logsdon

Barnyard in your Backyard

by Gail Damerow

The Big Book of Preserving the Harvest

by Carol W. Costenbader

Four Season Harvest, by Eliot Coleman

Vegetable Gardener's Bible, by Ed Smith

You Can Farm, by Joel Salatin

WEB RESOURCES

MOTHER'S Homesteading Articles. Search more than 30 years of articles on homesteading at www.MotherEarthNews.com.

ATTRA: The National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service

www.attra.org

Cooperative Extension Offices

www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension/

U.S. Department of Energy

www.eere.energy.gov/consumer/renewable_energy

USDA Summary of Land Prices

usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/reports/nassr/other/plr-bb/land0805.pdf