Homesteading Essentials (4)

From Garden Plot To Soup Pot!

Norman J Stone & F. A. Paris

Homesteading Essentials (4):

From Garden Plot To Soup Pot!

Modern Homesteading & Easy & Tasty Soups - 2 Book Bundle

Modern Homesteading
Easy Tasty Soups

Norman J Stone
&
F. A. Paris

www.deanburnpublications

Copyright

Further Reading:

As Homesteading and Survivalist issues pretty much go hand-in-hand, then readers may well find the following website on alternative energy production of some interest.
www.renergymax.com

Other Books In This Series:

Homesteading Essentials (1): Modern Homesteading & Slow Cooking.

Homesteading Essentials (2): Introduction To Homesteading & Alternative Energy Options.

Homesteading Essentials (3): From Garden Plot to Chicken Pot!

Table of Contents

BOOK 1: Modern Homesteading – Self Sufficiency:

Volume 1:

- Canning & Food Preservation

Volume 2:

- Raised Bed Gardening

Volume 3:

- Raising Chickens: My 5 Top Tips

Volume 4:

- Growing Organic vegetables: Organic gardening tips

Volume 5:

- Vermin Control

BOOK 2: Easy & Tasty Soups

Introduction

General Hints & Tips

- Making stock
- Spicy Root Vegetable Soup
- Cream of Mushroom Soup
- Carrot and Sweet Potato Soup
- French Onion Soup
- Potato & Vegetable Soup
- Cream of Celery Soup
- Potato & Leek Soup
- Cream of Cucumber Soup
- Farmhouse Cream of Tomato Soup
- Cream of Cauliflower Soup
- Ham & Lentil Soup
- Spicy Chicken & Sweetcorn Soup

Slow Cooker Soups

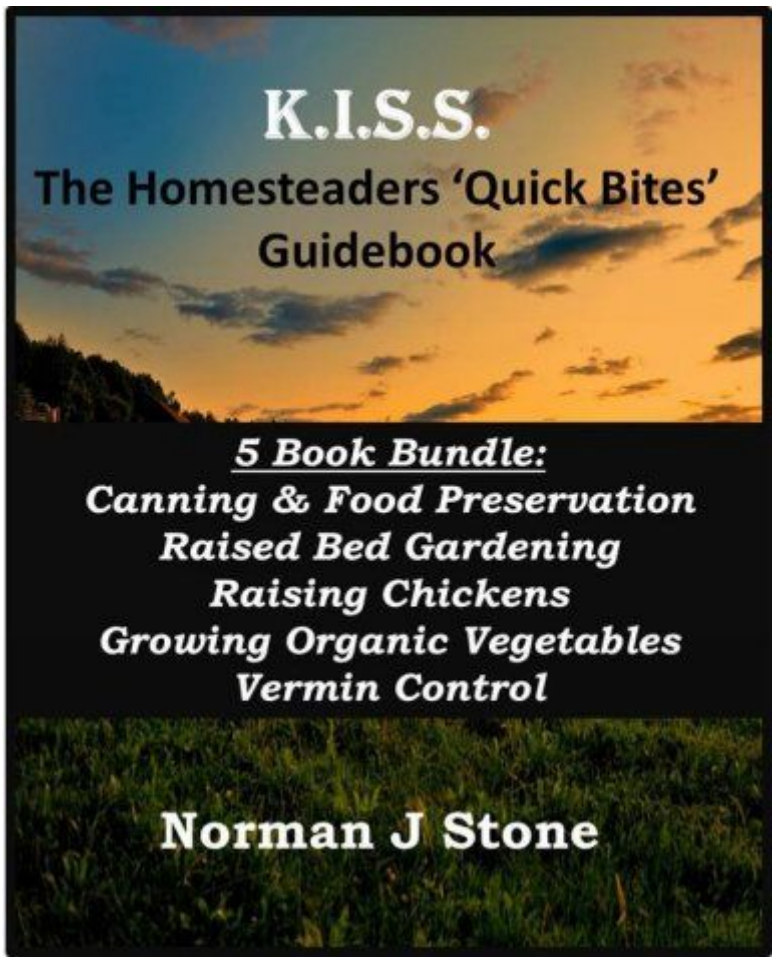
- Carrot & Red Lentil Soup
- Cod & Haddock Chowder
- Traditional Cock-A-Leekie Soup
- Slow Cooker Chicken Broth
- Smoked Gammon & Sweet Potato
- Traditional Ham & Pea
- Summary

BOOK 1: Modern Homesteading – Self Sufficiency:

5 Books Bundle Beginners Guide To Canning & Food Preservation; Raised Bed Gardening; Raising Chickens; Growing Organic Vegetables; Vermin Control:

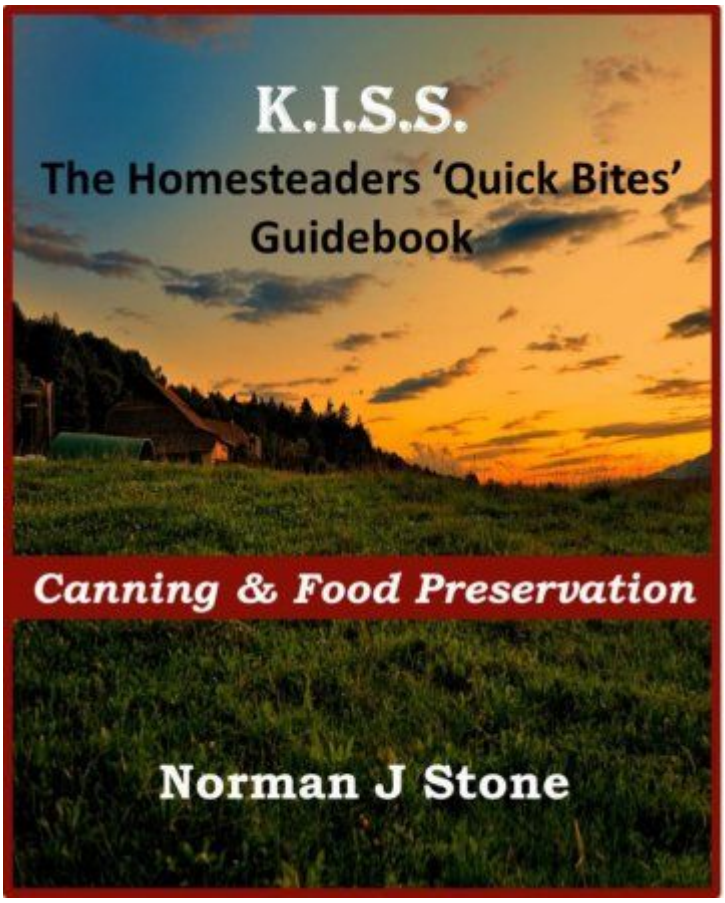
By

Norman J Stone


K.I.S.S.
The Homesteaders 'Quick Bites' Guidebook
5 Book Bundle:
Canning & Food Preservation
Raised Bed Gardening
Raising Chickens
Growing Organic Vegetables
Vermin Control
Norman J Stone

Volume 1:

Canning & Food Preservation



Contents

Introduction

If you are running your own homesteading or small farm, or even find yourself interested in the whole idea of canning or preserving your food; then I am confident that you will find the contents of this publication informative and valuable.

Preserving food goes back of course to the beginning of time, to an age when there were no freezers – unless you lived in the colder regions of the planet – and food had to be preserved if you were going to survive through the winter season. Now of course there is far more to preserving food, than just for survival.

A major part of food preservation was and is, to enable the individual to eat and enjoy the fruits of their labour, long after the season for that particular fruit or vegetable is over. There are of course many other reasons for preserving food; these are some of the most important:

- **Less Waste:** Why waste food? By preserving your garden produce, you ensure that it does not go to waste. Most of the time a garden produces far more vegetables or fruit than we can eat in the one sitting – preserving food means that we do not have to throw it away because it has gone bad.
- **Economic:** Food costs money; if we do not preserve our garden produce in some way, then we have to throw it away – along with the money it will cost to replace it from the supermarket!
- **Health:** Organic material has the unfortunate tendency to go bad! If we preserve or food by any of the means that will be discussed later in this work; then we can assure ourselves of good healthy produce for the family table.
- **Preserve Flavour:** Canning or freezing for instance is an excellent way of preserving flavour. When food ripens and is ready to eat and full of flavour, it does not stop there; It soon over-ripens to produce rotten food. Preserving helps to keep that full flavour for another day.
- **Enhance Flavour:** Preserving food by the means of smoking or pickling for instance can add a whole new world of exciting flavours to your produce. Pickles or Chutneys for instances make excellent flavour enhancers to many food dishes, and smoking fish, meat or cheeses can have amazing tasty results!

As you can see there are several very good reasons for preserving your excess produce from the garden, most of which are not difficult and easy to implement.

Preservation Methods

Smoking and Salting

As you may imagine, smoking and salting as a method of preservation applies mainly – but not exclusively – to meat cheese and fish dishes. I say not exclusively because there are any number of vegetables that can be smoked to add a unique flavour.

There are two types of smoking that can be applied to foodstuffs, and they are ‘Hot smoking’ and cold smoking. The main difference being in that when a product is hot smoked, then it is partially or completely cooked also. Cold smoking is a system whereby the heat from the fire does not get to the produce, and so it is cured only via the smoke.

Hot smoked food However will not keep as long (in fact has to be eaten very soon after smoking) as the cold smoked produce – as long as it has been properly cured in a salt brine of the type described below.

Smokers:

A homemade smoker is really quite simple to build, and is basically a chamber to add your shavings for the smoking – leading to a chamber where your produce is hung. For hot smoking then this is usually in the same area so that the hot smoke flavours and cooks at the same time.

Cold smokers are connected to the chamber that holds the meat via a pipe, so that the smoke is cold before it gets there.

The wood shaving used for smoking must be free from excess resin, which thereby excludes pine wood. Hickory, beech, oak or any number of hardwoods can be used for smoking. Additionally shavings from apple trees or pear trees can add an extra ‘zing’ to the flavours. Adding apple slices to the shavings themselves can also work exceptionally well.

Store bought smokers:
There are a multitude of different manufactured smokers on the market and a simple perusal through Amazon or Google will give you all the information you need, along with costings for these.

Salt brine preserving:
If you are considering cold smoking then you must also be aware that although smoke is an antimicrobial and antioxidant, smoke in itself is not a very good preservative, and is used mainly for flavouring in cold smoking. This means that you will have to preserve your meat or fish in salt brine for instance. This can be made from several recipes; the one below being a general brine for meat and fish.

Ingredients to make approx 1 quart of brine, is quite simple. Take four cups of water and add to a bowl with a ¼ quarter cup of brown cane sugar; and a ¼ cup of 'Kosher' salt. Do not confuse the word 'Kosher' with the Jewish Kosher food! 'Kosher' salt is simply a name given for this salt which has a larger grain than table salt, and has no additives in it.

After mixing all the ingredients together you will have your brine. Next, immerse the produce in the salt brine for 24 hours for it to infuse properly. Make sure that the meat is full immersed in the brine, and if need be just multiply the ingredients to produce more.

That will produce your basic brine, however you can enhance the flavours by adding soy sauce, herbs or chopped apples for instance to give a truly unique flavour. Treacle or molasses can also be used to add excellent flavour to your meat dishes.

Hang your meats or whatever produce, in a cool place to drip dry for a few hours and then you are all ready to smoke in your smoker. Meat salt cured in this fashion can last for several months without smoking; however the smoking process just enhances the whole process and the flavours exponentially.

Salting:
Often meat just has raw salt added in order to cure it, without the use of a liquid brine; as in the case of prosciutto ham for instance. The raw ham is simply placed in a large container and the salt added and rubbed in thoroughly. The salt itself draws out the water from the micro-organisms using a process called osmosis, thereby extending the life of the meat. A concentration of table salt equalling 20% is needed for salt curing.

Dry Storage

Storing food in certain conditions can also be a very effective way of preserving them for later use. This is usually a simple case of storing them in suitable packaging where necessary, and keeping them in a cool dry area. This must also be free from any possible vermin encroachment as rats and mice do love a bit of well stored fruit and vegetables included in their diet!

Apples and pears of the later varieties can be simply stored by wrapping in newspaper and placing carefully in a cool dark place.

A traditional way of storing potatoes is simply to either leave them in the ground, as long as they are not prone to get a deep frost; or storing them in boxes in your ‘cool dark area’ covered with straw or sacking material. This can be used with most root vegetables, including carrots, parsnips, pumpkins, radishes etc. If you have a lot of them, then try layering about 1 foot deep before adding a layer of straw to each layer to prevent damage.

Vegetables such as onions or shallots, after being lifted from the ground and laid down for a day or two to dry out; must be strung together and hung up to dry properly. Once they have dried then they will last indefinitely if kept hanging in your cool place.

Pickles & Relishes

A favourite ages-old method of preserving fruit and vegetables is of course pickles. Many people confuse this with chutneys, however the difference between the two is that pickles preserve, while chutneys flavour, and have little preservation qualities as such.

Pickling has as much to do however with flavouring as it has to do with food preservation, as the vast amount of pickles on the supermarket shelves can testify to!

As for the pickle brine itself, it is a simple mixture of

White vinegar, spring water and kosher salt. A typical mix would be: 6 cups of spring water, 3 cups of vinegar and ½ cup of kosher (or pickling) salt.

Cucumber and gherkins are of course well known candidates for pickling, however this method can cover a wide variety of vegetables, the principle however being the same.

Whisk your mixture together thoroughly and bring to the boil in a saucepan. Parboil the vegetables for about two minutes in a separate saucepan. After you have chosen your vegetables (fresh picked is best) and prepared by dicing, chopping or whatever; strain and add to pre-prepared jars, packing closely together. Add the brine mixture to within ½ inch of the top of the jar. When the mixture has cooled, then tighten lid and leave for about two weeks to mature.
To make a sweet brine mixture then simply add cane sugar to the mix. This can be especially tasty when pickling beetroot for instance. A sweet pickle vinegar can also be used.

Pickle Relishes:

Pickle relishes in the United States are predominantly of pickled cucumber; however there are a huge variety of relish dishes and recipes worldwide. The difference between a pickle relish and just plain pickle, is really just the fact that relish pickles are finely chopped and mixed together to form a spreadable mix that can be used on sandwiches, salads etc.

The process for making relish is the same as above except for the fact that you can mix several vegetable types, and also add chilli, herbs or fruit, to spice it up a little according to individual taste. Cider vinegar can also replace pickle vinegar to give that fruitier flavour.

Jams, Jellies and Marmalade

Preserving with sugar is again as old as the hills, in fact the ancient Egyptians knew the preserving properties of things such as honey very well (honey is the only food substance that does not decay).

Preserving fruit by making jams and Jellies is an age old tradition of the country folks and is an excellent addition to the larder. Homemade Jam has a flavour all of its own and just cannot be beaten by the store brands.

Canning and Bottling

As might be suggested by the title! This is simply a method of preserving your produce by boiling and adding to sterilized bottles or cans. Meat and fish are easier to preserve through freezing rather than using this method, unless you are familiar with the process of food preparation to prevent possible bacterial contamination.
In the actual canning process a special pressure cooker is used in order to bring the ingredients up to the proper temperature, and to fill the cans under pressure (about 10psi) to guarantee a proper seal.
Because of the dangers of contamination by botulism for instance; it is always recommended that proper information regarding sterilization and temperatures, times etc, are obtained before attempting home canning as a method of preservation.

Freezing

Freezing is probably the widest used method of preservation today – at least in the westernized world. It is simple and requires little preparation in most cases. Probably the biggest weakness in freezing as a preservation method is purely practical – if you get a power cut, then you are in trouble!

When freezing meat and fish, then as a general rule fish should be eaten no later than 3-4 months; Meat no later than around 6 months.

To freeze vegetables then it is better to par-boil the vegetables for two minutes or so; leave to cool before adding to the freezer. Pack your veg (and everything else for that matter) in usable sized bags to avoid the whole lot sticking together, before adding to

the freezer. Fruit of course does not need par boiled and should be added to the freezer immediately after thorough cleaning.

Freezing is well known for keeping the flavour of the product frozen, and also for limiting any microbiological growth owing to the lower temperatures. In terms of health risks, it is probably one of the safest methods of home preservation.

Air Drying

This is a method has been used since ancient times particularly in the hotter regions of the world. It preserves food by removing the moisture and is widely used for preserving grain for instance. Parma ham and beef jerky are both examples of meat air drying; as is the plumb which becomes a prune and the grape which becomes a raisin after this form of preservation.

The ancient American settlers used this method regularly for preserving their food, as it was simple to do in the hot sun, and low humidity; and once done it keeps the full flavour of the produce dried in this way.

Mainly the fruit or meat was hung up in the hot sun until fully dried out. This made the food lightweight and easy to transport. Nowadays we can purchase food dehydrators to accomplish the same thing – even on a rainy day! The result is a quick burst of flavour and energy, ideal for busy lives or camping holidays etc. If you have a fan-assisted oven that goes below 140F then this can be used to great effect for drying food. Any higher than 140F though will just cook the food. A temperature of around 130-140F would be ideal.

If air drying meat or poultry, then it is recommended that poultry is brought up to 160F, and meat to 165F before commencing the drying process.
Dried vegetables are especially useful for making soups or casseroles, as they are easy to handle and full of flavour once water is added.

Storage of dried foods have to be in an airtight container, to protect them from the elements and the predations of vermin or insects. They must also be kept in a cool dry place in order to preserve them properly. If kept in sealed polythene bags, then be sure that all air is removed first.

Vacum Packing

Vacum Packing is becoming particularly popular with home preservation; however this is not a method of preservation as such. It will increase the shelf life of a product simply because it is removing the preserver’s worst enemy – the air. However if vacum packing is used in conjunction with the preservation methods described here, then it can add significantly to the effectiveness of the methods employed.

Summary:

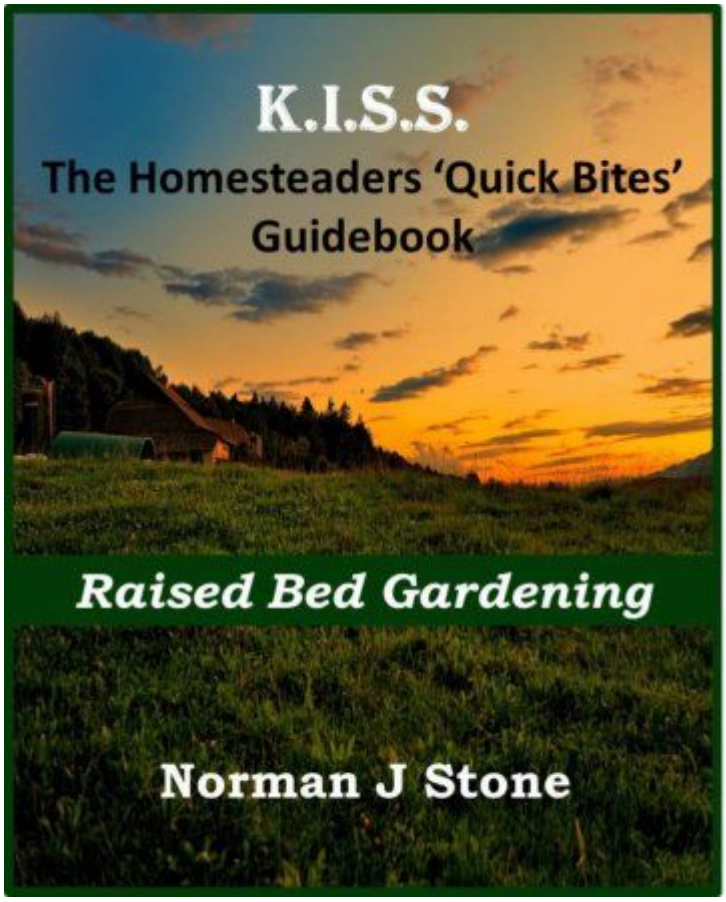
There are of course many books written on the subject of preserving foodstuffs; and some indeed go into great detail depending on your chosen method of preserving your produce. This book however has been written to lay out in the simplest terms the various popular methods traditionally employed in order to preserve a variety of foodstuffs.

What you have to preserve may well depend on the type of homesteading or small farm you run. Likewise the type of preservation method employed will depend to some extent on the produce that you have at your disposal. Indeed you may well just live in a ‘normal’ house and wish to know more about the techniques involved in preserving your own produce.

I trust that you have found this introductory work helpful in laying out the basics and aiding you in your decisions.

Volume 2:

Raised Bed Gardening



Introduction

There are many people that are under the illusion that a raised bed garden, is only for those with little space to spare for a proper garden – this is in fact not true. Growing vegetables using the raised bed principle is both economic and very fruitful, and is really all about producing a larger harvest in a smaller space. What this does is free up more space for other uses, such as rearing chickens!

Even if you are fortunate enough to have many acres of land to grow your vegetables, I hope to show here that it may certainly be worth your while to consider raised bed gardening for your ‘kitchen vegetables’ and perhaps use the larger space for cash crops such as barley or corn for instance.

So what is a raised bed? In its simplest form a raised bed is an area that is raised up of the ground by placing a barrier around an area usually about 6 foot by 3 foot and filling this area with compost. The height is usually somewhere between 6 inches and 24 inches, with 18 inches probably the most popular. Height is something important to take into consideration before planning your raised bed, as I will explain further in the following passages.

Raised Bed Advantages

As I have mentioned, even if you have a large area of ground at your disposal, a raised bed has several advantages over the 'traditional' gardening method. I mention the word traditional as it is more what we are used to perhaps, however the idea of growing vegetables in a raised bed situation is far from new, and does in fact go far back into antiquity. Many civilisations have little choice but to grow in a raised bed, perhaps because of the poorness of the soil, or more likely because of the shortage of land available for growing on.

Any mountainous region where there is human habitation will undoubtedly have a system of raised bed gardening, but it will most likely be called 'terraced gardening'. This is where a hilly area is adapted by building terraces to create flat growing areas – this is in fact another aspect of a raised bed garden.

So just what are the advantages in this type of gardening? Well here are a few of them to consider.

- **Space saving**: There is no doubt that in a limited space, this method of growing vegetables can be super productive. Because of the fact that you do not have to create pathways between the vegetables, you can plant much closer together therefore allowing for a larger crop in a much smaller space. This also applies because you do not have the same trouble with weeding, and so do not have to leave space for the garden hoe to clear out the weeds. It has also been calculated that while a traditional gardening system can waste up to 70% of the available space owing to the need for access to maintain and weed the crop; a raised bed system only loses around 35% of the space because of the reasons just described. This effectiveness only multiplies if you are using a system of multiple raised beds, instead of only the one. The reason is that you are not multiplying the areas taken up by access pathways, as one path serves two raised beds – one on each side.
- **Easy Maintenance**: As has already been mentioned, weeding is far easier in a raised bed for a number of reasons. First of all, a raised bed is filled not with garden soil, but with a mixture of compost with plenty of organic material. If soil is added it must be no more that 20% of the total mix-in my opinion. This is important because this keeps the compost mixture loose, allowing for easy weeding and better crop growth. Secondly this mixture is not walked on at all during the normal maintenance/harvesting routines. This in turn keeps the soil soft and easy to turn over or remove the odd weed.
- **More productive:** A raised bed is also more productive than traditional garden methods in a number of ways. First of all you have a longer

growing season, as the compost in the raised bed warms up earlier than the garden ground; allowing for earlier planting. The compost itself has been chosen for the crop you are about to grow (or should be), unlike the garden ground where a lot of the nutrients are simply lost in the wider area. Also the compost is lighter and less compact, allowing for a better root system to form and better delivery of the nutrients needed for the plants. Because the plant is not battling the weeds for nutrients and water, this also means a healthier, fuller vegetable.

- **Pest Resistant:** A raised bed has an immediate advantage over the traditional method especially when it comes to garden pests such as slugs or snails. Because you have a barrier built in, so to speak, it is easy to adapt this barrier to keep away the slugs without any great effort. Simply fix some copper tape around the edge of the structure (slugs will not cross copper as it reacts to their slime); and no more slug problem. When it comes to pests such as the carrot fly, again the raised element means that you are less likely to be bothered with them – especially if you have opted for the higher sided model. The carrot fly seldom flies above two feet so you can raise the sides with some plywood even, if you have a lower raised bed model planned.
- **More adaptable:** This system of gardening is very adaptable to changes, depending on what you are growing. With a little imagination you can easily adapt the system to build on a polytunnel or greenhouse structure, allowing for any number of more exotic plants especially if you live in cooler climates. A simple framework can also be built on to add insect mesh or bird mesh to keep your crop safe from the predations of either foe. A fine insect mesh will stop butterflies and moths from landing and laying their eggs.
- **More accessible:** Finally (I could go on!), a raised bed is ideal for the elderly or perhaps disabled, simply because there is not so much bending over work to be done with a raised bed. With a little forward planning the raised bed system can be set-up so that there is a wide enough space for wheelchair access between the beds, and the beds are built high enough to allow for maintaining the crops without the need to get out of the wheelchair. Because there is no turning over of the soil required and certainly no double digging involved with this system – it is ideal for someone with physically limited abilities, who still wants to share in the enjoyment of gardening.

Building A Raised Bed

Building a raised bed in its simplest form need not be difficult, and in fact is within most peoples capabilities whether or not you are good at do-it-yourself. The easiest structure for a raised bed is a simple timber frame made with 6 inch by 1 inch timbers. Start by cutting two lengths at six feet long and two at three feet long; nail at the

corners to form a rectangular framework. This can be laid on the ground as per the pictures you see in this article and filled in following the instructions following.

If you are planning to do a higher bed – say 18inches, then it is simply a matter of adding stakes to the corners and the sides to support the frame-work. This can be done as a separate structure and then fitted into place, or it can be built on-site; this is perhaps the easiest way for most people.

The sides of the raised bed itself can be made from virtually anything that will hold in the compost, Corrugated iron, railway sleepers (make sure there is no creosote leaking), brickwork, concrete etc. Think of where it is going and how it will fit in with the surroundings, you do not want to have a structure that looks like a complete eyesore after all. Old or untreated Railway sleepers are a favourite as they will last for years without any more work needing done to them, and can look exceptionally good in a raised bed situation.

Choosing The Location

Choosing the correct location of the raised bed is of course essential, if you are to give your crops the best chance for ‘producing the goods’. Make sure that it gets at least 6-8 hours full sunshine, and is not under or near large overhanging trees. These will shade the bed and drop dew and insects all over the structure; this is of course common sense – but worth mentioning nevertheless.

Another thing to take into consideration is that you may not want to place your raised bed, in an area that is already very productive. For instance if you have an area that is unusable because of the soil condition, but is otherwise an excellent spot with adequate sunshine etc; then you should place your raised bed structure here and save the other plot for planting a different crop if needed.

This way you are maximizing your potential with little extra effort. Also it could be that you have a sloped area that is unsuitable for growing vegetables simply because of the slope; this is ideal for a raised bed structure as you can level the growing area by making one side of the raised bed higher than the other. A simple solution but very effective for this kind of gardening and goes back to the idea of terraced gardening mentioned at the beginning of the article. In this instance put a little extra support in the ‘downside’ to prevent it bulging owing to gravity and the weight of in infill against the sides.

Raised Bed Layout

Positioning the raised bed depends on whether or not you are planning more than one bed. A single bed is easy, just put it where you have sorted out a space, leaving enough room to get around it for maintaining your plants. With multiple beds you get the advantage of numbers, using what is known as economy of scale. In simple terms this means that you will grow more than double the veg with less than double the space, because you will not use up double the space by using two beds; this is because the maintenance space between the beds is the same as you would need anyway for just one bed. If you multiply this several times you in fact save a lot of space and grow exponentially more vegetables – enough said about that I think!

The gap between the beds should be around two feet, but obviously more if you need wheelchair access for instance. To cut down on maintenance, then the path system has to be either mulched down with a tree-bark or similar material laid over a weed suppressant fabric. This may seem like a bit of extra hassle but believe me it is worth it in the long run, and will save lots of time that is better spent picking your veg – or watching you favourite football match! Again however, if you are needing wheelchair access then be sure that you use a material suitable for wheeling the chair upon. Or compact the ground with fine gravel dust, if you want a cheaper option.

Decking between the beds is a particularly effective and good looking solution here – but it can work out rather expensive if you have a large area to cover.

Infilling The Bed

As mentioned earlier, infilling a raised bed structure is not simply a matter of filling with topsoil. There are a couple of reasons for this. One is that the soil itself tends to become very compact in a raised bed, in the same way that it does in container gardening. Another is that you do not want to be picking out weeds from the soil you have just used in the bed. If you use garden soil then you are simply transplanting old problems into new situations, and are destined to repeat the old results – at best.

The infilling for a raised bed should be compost mixed with good organic material like well-rotted horse manure or something similar. Personally if I add soil at all, then I make sure that it is good quality and accounts for no more than 20% of the total mixture. This can of course be adapted according to your own wishes and with regard to any particular crop you wish to grow; for instance you may wish to have a soft

loamy or sandy mixture for deep root crops like carrots or parsnips. The beauty of a raised bed is that you are not stuck with what you have in the ground, and the material is not losing its efficacy by mixing with poor quality soil.

Before filling in the structure it is advisable to lay one inch galvanized wire mesh on a bed of weed fabric on the bottom. This will totally prevent vermin such as moles, gophers, rats etc from digging up through the bed to get to your crop. If you are not bothered with these critters then you can of course miss this step out.

Cover this area with about 2-3 inches of crushed rock for drainage then simply fill in using your pre-mixed compost. Before this however you can line the inside of your timber structure with a polythene barrier. This will prevent the timber soaking in the moisture from the bed, and will help protect against rot.

Planting Out The Bed

This is fairly easy as the raised bed will grow everything that you would normally grow – so take your pick! The main advantages here have already been mentioned, and so the vegetable choice is yours. One of the more obvious things to note however is to make sure that the taller plants are placed to the rear of the bed, if you are growing a range of vegetables.

This is more important perhaps than would be the case where you have a large garden area to deal with, and so the crops are set further apart.

A raised bed is a way to grow vegetables effectively in a crowded environment, and as mentioned, placing according to growth height is perhaps more important. As an example, tall plants such as Tomatoes or Corn, are a popular choice for the back of the raised bed; with ground hugging vegetables such as cucumber or gherkins to the front. If your raised bed arrangement however has full exposure to the sunlight, then placing the taller plants down the center length of the bed is perhaps a better idea.

When considering planting out your raised bed, you are able to place your plants closer together, as the bed itself is easier to maintain and the growing medium richer (if you have in-filled it properly) and not so prone to nutrient loss via weeds.

Summary

As you may have guessed by now – I really do think that the raised bed system is one that is well worth considering, in fact it is difficult to think up any disadvantages of a raised bed. Probably the only one that carries any weight, is simply the effort and expense to set it up in the first place. I do hope however that you are able to see the advantages of such a system, and appreciate that the time and expense needed at the beginning will in fact pay dividends for years to come.

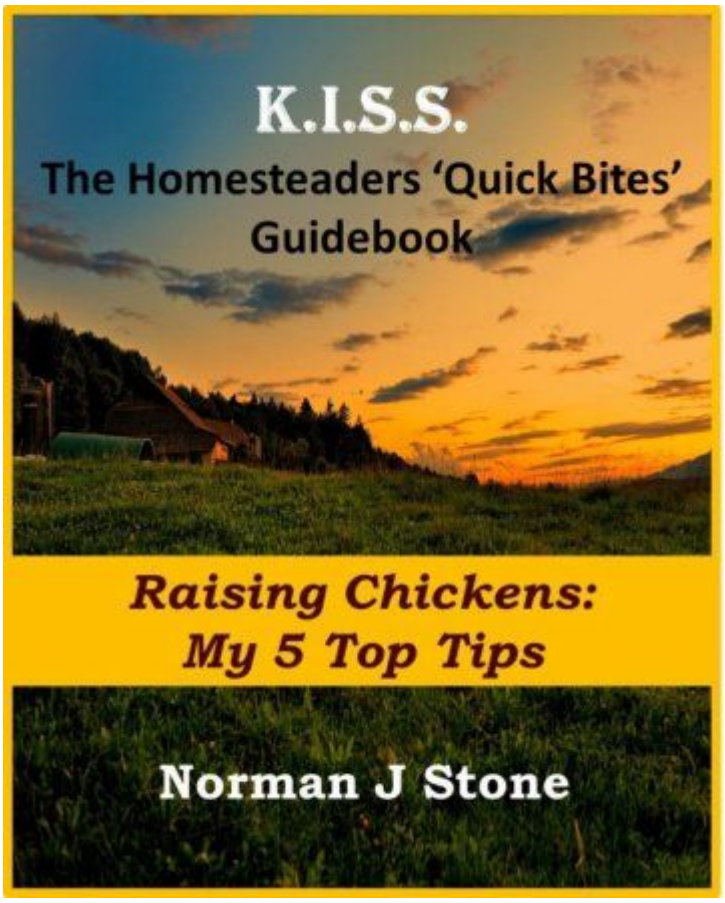
Even if you have a large steading or smallholding, a system of raised beds can still prove to be economically beneficial by increasing the amount of food you can grow and at the same time reduce the man-hours required to grow it.

I trust that you have found this introduction to raised bed gardening to be beneficial and of interest, whether you have a steading to operate or simply want to know more about raised bed gardening in general.

If you have enjoyed this article then a review on Amazon would be very much appreciated.

Volume 3:

Raising Chickens: My 5 Top Tips



Introduction

It has to be said that if you are not already keeping chickens on your steading – then you are in the minority! A small farm or steading without chickens is a bit like bread without butter or jam; it tastes fine but just lacks something to enhance the flavour. The sight of chickens roaming around the yard is so natural that it just gladdens the heart, so to speak.

Chickens have a very important role to play in the whole ‘sustainable lifestyle’ system that surrounds the steading. Not only do they produce fresh eggs and meat, but they also help recycle your kitchen waste – they will eat just about anything! They provide great manure for the garden vegetables, and they also provide a real living example for the children regarding the importance of animal welfare. They can also make great pets, and are easy to look after with minimal fuss – perhaps only 15 minutes per day to feed and water, and another 15 minutes once a week to clean out the coop.

Chickens are without doubt one of the easiest of the farm animals to keep, and one of the most productive in terms of daily produce. As such there have been innumerable long-winded books written on raising chickens that go into minute detail on the rearing of this humble bird. This publication is not one of them! Nor is it intended to be. In my opinion unless you are intending to become the world’s leading expert on chickens, knowing all the breeds and their habits; then there is no real need for ‘information overload’. In my own view, if you follow these main tips for looking after your birds, then all the rest is surplus to requirements – unless as mentioned, you desire to become an expert in the field of rearing chickens? Most of us however just want to get on with it, and get the eggs on the kitchen table with a minimal of fuss.

When it comes to buying the chickens themselves I always prefer to get point-of-lay pullets. These are birds that are about 3-4 months old and have just started or about to start laying. These tend to be a lot more expensive than getting day-old chicks certainly; but unless you have experience in raising chickens to this point from chicks, the point-of-lay pullets are a much more guaranteed and instant answer to your egg production questions.

With that in mind there-fore here are my top 5 no-nonsense tips for raising happy productive chickens.

1. Choose the proper breed

Before going out to purchase your chickens, you must consider whether you are raising them for eggs, meat or both. This is not hugely important as they will all lay eggs, and they can all be eaten! However if you want to get the best results for either egg or meat production or both, then it is better to start off with the right birds to begin with. Here is a short list of my top 3 chickens in their respective fields.

Chickens for eggs

Buff Orpington:

This is a very popular bird that produces around 250 medium brown eggs per annum. It has a good temperament and can lay most of the year round if kept out of the severe cold. Although kept mainly for the eggs, this bird weighs in at around 7 lbs and so is a good size for the table also.

White Leghorn:

This bird produces up to 300 decent sized white eggs per year, and is one that is favoured by the egg producers, mainly because they prefer white eggs.
Tends to be a bit flighty and nervous around people, and a little light in weight for the table at around 4.5 lbs.

Rhode Island Red:

This again is a very popular bird, easy to rear and very productive when it comes to egg laying, producing up to 300 large brown eggs per year. A hardy bird, it can withstand cold conditions better than most. Still a reasonable size for ‘the pot’ the hen weighs in at around 6.5 lbs.

Chickens for meat

Black Jersey Giants:

This is a huge bird that is raised predominantly for its meat – as you may well imagine! As far as egg laying is concerned it is a late developer taking a little while

longer to reach maturity. The average mature weight for the hen is 8 – 10 lbs. They also come as ‘white and blue’ breeds.

White Plymouth Rock:

This is a large bird that is predominantly produced for its meat, but nevertheless can lay around 200 large brown eggs per annum. This bird is known to be very friendly with other pets and children, making it an excellent back-yard choice.

Mature hen weighs in at around 9lb, with a broad back and deep chest and are known for their tender tasty meat.

Dark Cornish Chickens:

These are favoured for their flavour and their full breasts, producing excellent meat. Only laying around 170 eggs per annum, they are preferred for their meat with a mature hen weighing in at around 8 lbs. They do tend to be nervous around people, but make excellent free range birds as they will defend themselves against some predators.

Dual Purpose Chickens

Barred Plymouth Rock:

Like the White Plymouth Rock, this can be a dual purpose bird in that it does produce a decent quantity of eggs, but at the same time is a good plump bird that is ideal for the table. This is a hardy bird that will produce eggs year round and weighs in at around 7 lbs.

New Hampshire:

This is a popular chicken for both table and eggs, producing around 4 eggs per week and weighing in at around 6.5 lbs. Known to be friendly and sociable they are an excellent choice for the backyard or chicken coop.

Delaware:

This is one of the fastest growing heritage breeds and can produce in the region of 200 brown eggs per annum. The hen reaches about 7lbs in weight, thus making it great for the table or for egg laying.

This is obviously not a complete list of the chicken breeds available; however it is enough to get started with. If these breeds are unavailable in your area then I would suggest a call to your local chicken breeders to find out what is available, and also to get their local opinion of the best breeds for your region.

2. Keep Your Chickens Active

OK, so we're not talking about a keep fit regime here – nevertheless in order for your chickens to be productive they have to be kept active. Chickens are natural scrapers and scavengers, and love nothing better than to be scratching around for food. This makes for a happy chicken, and happy chickens are productive chickens. The simple fact is that if a chicken is not happy for whatever reason, then it will cease to be productive.
The way to keep chickens happy and active is simple – food and water and somewhere to scrape around in. This is all a chicken needs, and as a result you will have productive hens.

You may see an easy example of this in chickens that are over-wintered outside in the cold. Hens for the most part are quite tough creatures and can withstand a whole range of weather conditions, however if you keep chickens outside in the cold winter then they will just stand around unhappy on one leg – and they will not lay.

Take this same bunch of chickens and put them inside a large barn with straw on the ground; scatter some grain amongst the straw and within days your egg production will increase dramatically. Your hens are kept warm, active and happy by scraping around in the straw; and they will reward you with good egg production.

3. Proper Accommodation

In line with the previous chapter, proper accommodation in the form of a chicken coop is essential. This will give your chickens shelter from the weather, as well as protection from predators.

The coop should have sufficient roosting spars for the birds to roost off the ground. This means about 12 inches for each bird on a spar, to enable them to snuggle up for warmth but still allow enough room for ventilation. I usually make the spars from 2x2 inch timber to enable the bird to get a better grip, and if more than two spars are needed one above the other; be sure to offset them so the lower birds do not get pooped on! The coop should be cleaned out at least once per week to be sure that no germs or disease builds up on dirty spars etc. Also keeping a clean coop will ensure that your eggs do not get contaminated with muck.

Sufficient nest boxes should be provided for the laying hens, approx one box per 3-4 hens is usually sufficient. If not enough boxes are provided you will get a situation where the hens are all fighting to get into the boxes at once – resulting in broken eggs. Another problem is that the hens outside may just lay on the floor, with the same result of broken or mucky eggs.

Make sure that there are enough vents in the coop, particularly if you shut the birds in at night. The coop should of course be watertight and able to withstand the wind

without frightening the birds half to death with bumps and rattles etc. A scared bird will easily be put off laying.

Another aspect of a chicken coop is one with a mobile run attached, called a chicken tractor. These are usually quite small to allow for lifting and moving; typically housing 6 or so hens. They are very effective if you want or need to keep your hens protected from predators such as foxes or racoons for instance; and also if you just do not want them wandering all over your flower bed or digging amongst your vegetable patch!

The run is made from timber framework covered with 1” chicken wire, which is in turn attached to the coop itself. Sometimes the wire actually covers the base of the run as well to stop any predators undermining it and getting access to the chickens. I had this unfortunate experience once when I was a lad, and as you can imagine it ended in disaster.

Finally – and this should be obvious – make sure that your birds have access to adequate food and water. There are many automatic feeders on the market today that will keep the food bin supplied for many days; as there are water containers also. This means that there is no real excuse for your birds not having adequate food and water on a regular basis.

4. Inspect Regularly

Your chicken flock must be inspected regularly in order to catch any potential minor problems, before they become major ones. This is done quite simply by watching their behaviour whilst feeding or just scraping around. You will soon get to know your flock,

and will become aware if their behaviour is out of the ordinary. There are some general things to look out for though that may indicate problems.

A chicken will soon show you if it is unhealthy or otherwise hindered, by its general demeanour. It may be standing lethargic on one leg, while its friends are scraping around happily. Or perhaps it is clawing itself a lot more than it should. Check the colour of the cheeks and the comb, this will often go very pale if the chicken is in distress.

If anything is suspected then pick up the chicken and inspect for any signs of scaly leg mite or body mites. Some of the more common parasites are listed as follows:

- **Chicken lice:** Unlike human lice, chicken lice do not feed on blood, but rather on the feathers or shed skin of the bird. This will result in a general down-trodden look for the chicken, with a corresponding drop in egg production. The parasite is easily spotted running around under the feathers, and treatment such as Permethrin, natural pyrethrum, and carbaryl dust are the usual remedies; however a vet may have to be consulted to advise the proper dosage to give.
- **Chicken Mites:** Unlike the chicken lice, chicken mites can only be seen under a microscope, and are therefore just that bit harder to identify perhaps. However if the above symptoms of poor egg laying, poor feather condition accompanied by excessive clawing persist, and yet there is nothing to be seen; then it is most probably chicken mites. This means that both the chickens and the nest boxes, spars etc have to be treated with a powder such as Permethrin.
- **For scaly leg mite**, then treating the leg with petroleum jelly will kill the mites and treat the dry skin. The jelly acts by suffocating the mites and killing them. Treating with Linseed oil or mineral oil should have the same effect of killing the mites and allowing the hen to recover without any further damage.
- **Fowl Tick:** Ticks are very difficult to control especially if you have not spotted the problem soon enough. The symptoms of tick infestation is a general lack of appetite, lethargy and overall weakness in the bird. The best way to find out if it is ticks that are the problem is to go out into the coop several hours after dark and inspect the chicken in the light of a strong torch. The ticks which will have been feeding during these after-dark hours, will become bloated with blood and easily identifiable in the light. If ticks prove to be the problem then the surrounding environment and not the chicken, has to be treated in order to bring the infestation under control. Visit your local vet and get advice on appropriate treatment; alternatively many chicken keepers swear by Jeyes fluid to kill lice and ticks of all kinds. It’s certainly worth a try at least.

Sicknesses such as Avian Pox or bird flu can also cause a lot of the above symptoms amongst your chickens, and a corresponding loss of egg production. If you have inspected your sick bird and it is showing no signs of the above mite and tick infestation, then a trip to the vet is advisable to get a proper diagnosis and treatment of any disease or virus it may prove to be.

5. Protection

Chickens are very vulnerable to predators of many types, and you can be sure that we are not the only ones that like a little chicken in our diet! Depending on their stage in life, chickens (or their eggs) are open to the predations of foxes, racoons, snakes, rats, weasels, stoats, mink, etc etc. The list goes on and on. It is your duty as carer there-fore to keep them safe from these critters, if only to protect your investment and future egg production.

If you are fortunate enough not to be troubled with any of these or other chicken predators, then that is great. However for most of us, keeping chicken on a free-range basis, means that there is going to be trouble with critters of some sort or other. The chicken tractor method is very good for chicken security and generally will keep the predators away, especially if you keep the chicken wire across the bottom of the run as well.

If you are free range, then the only ideal solution is to completely enclose the area with a wire fence made with 1 inch mash and supports. This may have to be a minimum 4 foot high and topped with an electric fence to prevent foxes which can easily top a six foot fire fence in order to get to your chickens. The mesh should be sunk into the ground just like a rabbit fence for about 6 inches at least.

Vermin have to be kept under control, especially rats. These will attack your young chicks and spread disease, as well as contaminate your feedstuff.

To keep vermin-free then cleanliness is essential, meaning that your feedstuff especially must be kept in tough containers with a secure lid in place. One pair of rats can multiply to several hundred in the year if conditions are suitable – i.e. food, water and a cosy place to stay!

Summary

It was mentioned at the start that chickens will eat almost any kitchen scraps that you have available, and this is true. In fact about the only thing they won’t/can’t eat is bones! There are many chicken feed pellets on the market that should form the staple diet however, as these have all the necessary nutrients needed for a healthy chicken, especially if they are kept inside and cannot browse in order to get the needed grit etc.

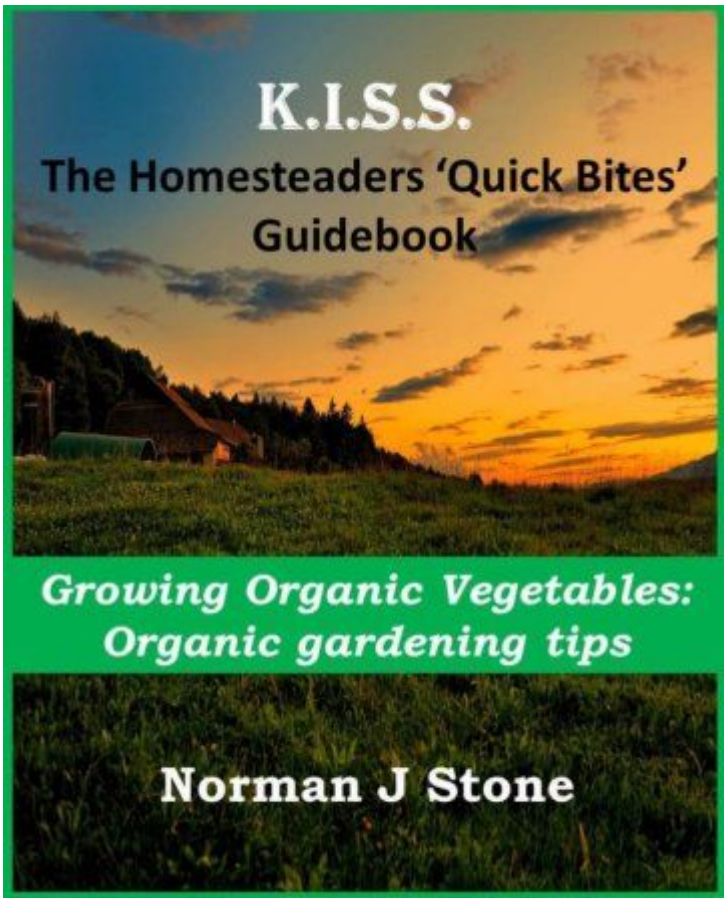
One thing never to feed your chickens is raw eggs; cooked is fine and they will eat them with relish. However if a chicken gets in the habit of eating raw egg then it will soon resort to breaking and eating the eggs in the nest boxes – this is a very difficult habit to stop. Sometimes the only solution is a chicken dinner – if you get my drift! Any eggs that get broken in the chicken run or boxes should be cleaned up and removed immediately to prevent them getting a taste for the raw egg.

Another problem can arise if a chicken gets a wound that results in a spot of blood. This is where chickens can have a cannibalistic nature and will peck this wound mercilessly until the minor wound turns into a major one. Remove the injured bird immediately and only return to the flock when the wound has healed up.

These are the basic requirements to get you started on the right track to keeping chickens, and many other types of fowl for that matter. Is there more to learn? Sure there is, however this will enable you to ‘get the show on the road’, everything else can easily be picked up as you go along. The learning never ceases, but sometimes the easiest way to learn anything is to ‘just do it’. There is no substitute for real life experience.

Volume 4:

Growing Organic vegetables: Organic gardening tips



Introduction

It used to be true that the whole idea of organic gardening, was firmly the lair of the 'tree huggers' and environmentalists. So much so in fact, that any self-respecting gardener would give the whole idea the 'raised eyebrows' look if the subject was mentioned in polite company!

Thankfully common sense and the credit crunch, along with other 'austerity measures'; have caused most people to think again when it comes to growing vegetables organically. We are all much more aware for instance of the potential damage we are causing ourselves and our families, by feeding them produce filled with more chemicals than the local drug store! Bread that does not go mouldy-ever! And vegetables that have been irradiated to give them a longer shelf life; the same vegetables that have been pumped with growth enhancers and chemical fertilizers all through the growing season; are just some of the legitimate concerns that are causing sensible people to look again at organic food.

To grow your own totally organic produce, all you need is the inclination, the time and the space (which can be surprisingly small) to do it. The financial commitment also need not be more than you would otherwise spend on chemical fertilizers; indeed it should be considerably less. So what exactly does it mean to grow your vegetables organically, and does it really make any difference to anything at all? Hopefully these next pages will go some way to introducing you to the benefits both physical and financial, of Organic gardening.

What Exactly Is Organic Gardening?

What it is not:

Before answering that question, let me state what it is **NOT.**

- Organic gardening is not a new concept – It's been around since the beginning of time. It only seems new to us, because for decades now we have been allowing the scientists and chemical manufacturers to rob both our brains and our pockets, to lure us into a dependence on modern farming techniques without asking too many questions about sustainability or health costs.
- It is not something that is acceptable only to the 'new age' hippies or 'tree huggers', and it certainly has no spiritual connotations as some would have you believe.
- It is not prohibitably expensive as some manufacturers would claim; although admittedly it is more expensive to operate on a large scale than traditional farming. However what are the costs to the health system because of the wholesale use of chemicals in the food chain?

- It is not a quick fix to your immediate good health and the health of your family; however it is a step in the right direction.

Ok, this is by no means an exhaustive list, but I think it covers the main points. So now that's out of the way let's look at what we mean by 'Organic gardening'.

What it is:

Organic gardening should be considered as just a part of your overall lifestyle, and not just limited to growing your vegetables. This is because the idea incorporates a lifestyle of holistic or environmentally friendly living, that does you and your family the most good with a limited impact on the environment as a whole.

The use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides is a 'no go' and instead emphasis is placed on bio-diversity and the use of natural products. Does this make it all 'new agey?' certainly not; however it does mean that you are more environmentally aware and as such much more in tune with what is happening around you.

As with most concepts or ideas, there are many different levels on which you may participate. For instance not all vegetarians want to become vegans, or many vegetarians will still eat fish or shellfish. It depends on your own convictions just how far down the 'Organic' route you want to go in your own lifestyle. As mentioned, growing your own food organically is just one step on the ladder to an overall 'green' lifestyle; and there can be many reasons for doing so whether financial or health related. Sometimes a mere conviction to do your bit for the planet, is all that it takes for a plunge into the world of the environmentally aware individual.

Whatever the reasons behind the move to grow organic vegetables, the fact is that it is good for you, and the planet, if it is approached sensibly and with some understanding of what you aim to achieve.

As this is only an introduction to organic gardening, I will not attempt to explain in detail all the aspects of an eco-friendly lifestyle – maybe in a later book! There is of course some cross-over between the two as suggested earlier, and I hope to cover that as it comes up. At its foundation, organic growing simply means to grow

vegetables (or anything else you fancy), without the use of artificial fertilizers or pesticides, or indeed anything else that would harm the environment.

Remember the vegetarian example? A classic case here is the organic gardener that will still use chemical slug pellets to control slugs – different levels of commitment remember!

Feed The Soil

The fundamental thing that differentiates organic gardening from chemical gardening principles, is that with organic farming you are feeding the soil, which in turn will feed the plants. With chemical fertilizers you are fundamentally feeding the plants directly – bypassing the soil which suffers as a result of the chemicals. This creates a dependence on the use of these chemicals year in year out, as the soil itself is left barren and unproductive due to the lack of feeding. This is why they term organic farming as ‘sustainable’ amongst other things.

When you grow vegetables organically and are applying proper methods of fertilizing, rotational growing etc; then the soil is kept healthy and able to grow great crops without the use of any chemicals – now that has to be a result!

Composting:

This is something that you must think about long before you need the compost, in most cases a year at least. Your vegetable plot or raised bed (even better), needs compost that is well rotted and crumbly to the feel. If it is still smelly then it is probably not ready for the garden yet. The process of making your own compost is simple enough, as it is basically a load of organic material such as vegetable trimmings, grass cuttings, fallen leaves etc, that are dumped into a bin or wooden framework and left to decompose. That’s the simple answer; however there are certain things that you **should not add** to a compost heap such as..

- **Inorganic material:** Plastic and polythene will not break down to form compost. Obvious I know, but it had to be said!
- **Pet Poop:** Never add dog or cat droppings to the compost heap, as this can add several disease organisms that can turn your compost toxic.

- **Fish, fats, meat, bones and dairy**: These should not be added as they can just attract vermin, and cause your compost to smell badly.
- **Coal ash**: timber ash is fine for compost, but coal ash is not as it can add high levels of sulphur to your compost.
- **Coloured paper**: Coloured paper can contain heavy metals and other toxic materials. These should not be added to your compost.
- **Diseased plants**: Any diseased or infested plants that you have to lift up should be burned or otherwise disposed of. Do not add to the compost as they will most likely end up back in your garden to repeat the cycle all over again!

Preparing the bed

Preparation for organic farming means multiple things, depending on the nature of the plants being grown. However a uniting fact is that they have to be grown IN something; and that means the growing medium has to be prepared properly, especially if you do not intend to feed with chemical fertilizers!

Once you have a source of good quality compost at your disposal, you can prepare the ground for the plants. Crop rotation must be taken into account at this point also as this is fundamental to organic vegetable growing; but more on that later.

There are many different mixes of compost that will suit certain plants more than others, and this is great if you are specializing in a specific area like growing giant pumpkins! However for the sake of this introductory work, I will presume to say that the growing medium should be a mixture of soil, store bought compost and a goodly mixture of organic fibrous compost – either your own or sourced from elsewhere.

If you have a source of well-rotted manure, then this is ideal for crops such as tomatoes, beans, peas, leeks - in fact just about anything, as rotted manure is a great source of nitrogen which every plant needs in different quantities.

The use of green manure, or manure that is not well rotted should be avoided if you are growing plants that lay on the ground like melons, cucumbers, strawberries etc as there may be a danger of contamination from the manure.

Growing your vegetables in a raised bed is ideal for organic gardening, as it is so much easier to control the immediate environment and to be sure of a good mixture for your growing medium. The soil does not get compacted in a raised bed and so enables the plants to soak up the nutrients easier with a better developed root system.

Crop rotation:

This aspect of organic gardening is crucial, if you want good crops without having to worry too much about a feeding regime. In days long past crop rotation techniques were a fundamental part of any farmers life, as it was understood that to grow the same crop year in year out in the same field would result in a poor crop after just two years or so.

Hence a field would be left fallow for 1 year every five or seven years, to help the ground recover. The entrance of chemical fertilizers done away with this accepted routine and the ground can be sown with the same crop for years on end – it destroys the goodness of the soil, making it sterile and unproductive without the introduction of the chemicals.

Organic gardening seeks to bring back the natural balance of things, and crop rotation is again brought into play to produce excellent quality vegetables with the minimum of fuss. It’s all about feeding the ground, so that in turn the plants can feed of the ground and feed into it.

Growing peas and beans for instance (legumes) is great for other plants as they release much needed nitrogen back into the soil through their root systems. When the harvest is in then be sure to use the plants in the compost heap and to leave the roots in the ground to rot until preparing for the next crop.

Vegetables such as onions or leeks should not be grown in the same bed for more than two years in succession, if you are to get the best out of the crop. In fact by following a four year rotation plan, you can grow vegetables in such a way as to need very little in the way of liquid fertilizers; whilst at the same time enjoying the benefits of good healthy vegetables.

Organic fertilizer:

Even though you have prepared your compost with all the needed organic material, there is usually still a need to feed the plants during their peak growing times, if you want to get the best crop available; this is where organic fertilizer of some sort is required. There are many kinds of organic fertilizers available to purchase from the stores, however you can also mix your own for next to zero cost. Here are a few examples.

Manure Tea: This can be made in a large bucket or drum - over 5 gallons is best – simply fill to three-quarters with water and then add the manure from chickens, horses, sheep or even rabbits to the mix. More manure means a stronger mix. Cover with a lid then leave for about a week to mature, then add to the base of the plants maybe once per week during peak growing times.

This should not be added to plants that grow their fruit on the surface such as strawberries, cucumbers and the like. This is to avoid the risk of contamination.

Weed Tea: It is well known that you can add weeds to the compost heap to improve your composting, however these same weeds can be chopped up and added to a water mix in much the same way as the manure tea. This will result in all the nutrients that the weeds have soaked up being released into the water, making a very potent feed for your vegetables. Grass cuttings can also be added to the mix, which should be left for around 3 weeks to mature before use.

Comfrey Tea: Comfrey is well known to make a powerful liquid fertilizer as it is one of the few plants that are rich in vitamin b12, used to stimulate root growth in young plants especially. Mix and use as per the instructions for weed tea.

Seaweed tea: If you stay near the coast or indeed can travel down for a few hours, then seaweed makes a good fertilizer tea, as it is rich in the nitrogen that plants need to thrive. Wash the seaweed thoroughly to remove any salt, then chop up and mix with water as per the previous instructions for the weed tea.

Organic Pest Control

Controlling garden pests using organic methods does require a bit of ‘thinking outside the box’ and forward planning. It has as much to do with prevention or distraction, as

with anything else. Again there are organic pest control sprays that you can purchase if necessary, however a good recipe for your own spray is simply to get some insecticidal soap and add about a half cup to one bucket of water.

Mix thoroughly and add to your hand sprayer to apply to your plants. This is very effective against aphids, greenfly, blackfly leafhoppers and others. If you cannot get your hands on insecticidal soap, then try good old liquid washing up liquid in an emergency.

Another way of controlling pests, is to use the rotational crop growing method described in the previous chapter. This works by simply not allowing the pests and diseases that would build up in the soil, if you grow the same crops every year in the same place. By changing the growing pattern you also stop the chance of infestation from the same sources.

Deterring slugs:

Slugs can be deterred from getting near your vegetables, by the use of copper tape or even paint. They cannot cross copper as it reacts with their slime, so stopping them in their tracts. Scattering salt around your pots or raised bed can also be a great deterrent, as this acts like acid to slugs – unpleasant but effective.

Do let the salt get near your plants though! Slugs can also be collected by sinking a jam-jar into the ground and half filling with beer. This is called a beer trap, and is something that has been used quite effectively for centuries. Slugs love beer and will head for the jar, drowning in the beer. Traps have to be cleaned out regularly though – which is not the most pleasant of jobs admittedly!

Carrot fly:

Carrot fly can be deterred by a mixture of companion planting and creating barriers. By planting garlic or onions around your carrots, you are effectively masking the scent of the carrot from the dreaded carrot fly, which is attracted by the smell from the foliage. Covering the carrots with a fine insect mesh or gardeners fleese can prevent them from gaining entry to the plants. Finally, as the carrot fly is known to be a low flyer then it is possible to keep it away by simply growing your carrots in a raised situation such as a raised bed. Either that or surround your carrots with a two foot high plywood fence to stop the fly.

Aphid control:

As mentioned in the earlier paragraph, aphids can be sprayed with your insecticidal mix or they can be controlled by the introduction of ladybugs if your vegetables are growing in an enclosed situation such as a greenhouse. Ladybugs love to snack on aphids and so are ideal for the purpose of organic pest control.

There is however a downside – if they eat all the aphids, then they will go hungry, and so you cannot effectively get rid of all the aphids as you would hope to do with spraying.

Companion planting with marigolds around your tomato plants for instance is known to be quite effective against green and blackfly, as they hate the strong smell of them apparently.

Cabbage looper:

Again the cabbage looper caterpillar can be treated by spraying with you insecticidal soap mixture. However it is probably easier to cover all your cabbage plants with gardeners fleece. This still lets through the water and about 85% of the suns rays, and so is very effective against any flying moths, butterflies etc.

Summary

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, Organic gardening is more than just throwing some manure on the vegetable patch! However neither should it be overly complicated, and a whole load of hassle. The basics of organic gardening is simplicity itself, and starts just with an awareness that keeping chemicals away from the food chain, and your children's dinner plates must be a good thing.

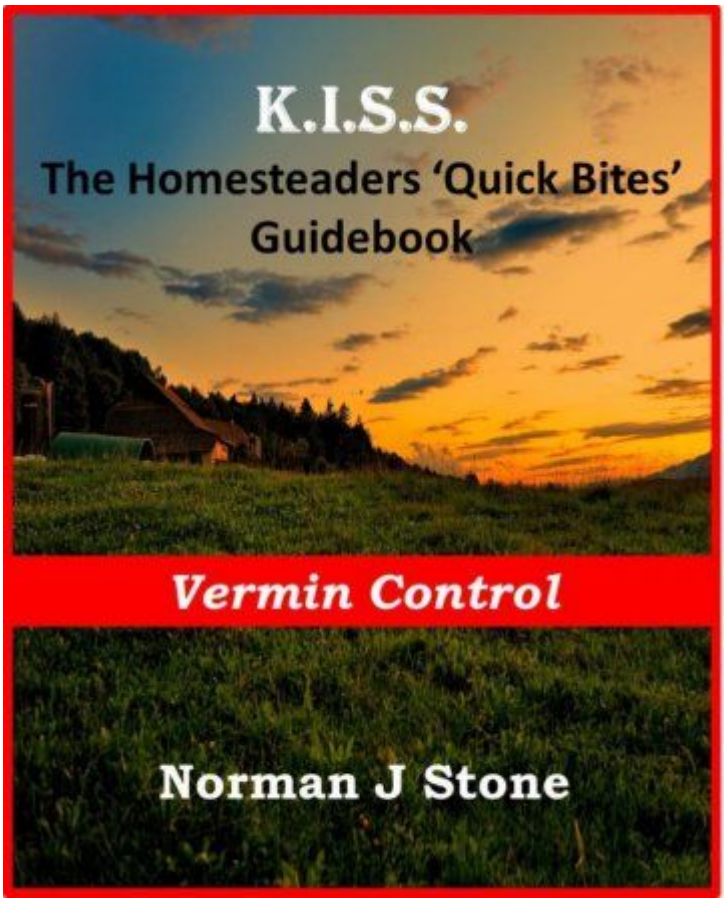
You may have chosen to 'go organic' for any number of reasons, be it economical, physical or environmental; but whatever the reason, the fact is that like all most things it can be employed one step at a time according to how urgent you personally feel the situation is.

There is much more of course can be said about the whole organic lifestyle, however that is not the purpose of this simple article. I trust though that you have found it informative and a good introduction to the world of organic gardening.

If you have enjoyed this book, please recommend it to a friend; or a review on Amazon would be much appreciated.

Volume 5:

Vermin Control



Introduction

My first experience of dealing with rats, was when the family moved on to an old steading. The house as well as the steading buildings, were over 100 years old and so as you may imagine, the doors were worn along with the threshold's and the roofing etc. In fact the whole steading was in a sorry state. To make matters worse, the previous occupants had kept greyhounds in the kennels outside, in deplorable conditions. This was ideal territory for rats, as I was soon to discover!

The main thing to remember about Rats, is that they are opportunists. If they find a reliable source of food, and a good place to stay, then they will set up home and breed like crazy. Bearing in mind that a single pair of rats can breed to over 100 in a matter of only a few months, it is easily seen why they can be a major problem for the homesteader.

In the steading that my father took over, there was a colossal colony of rats; in fact if you went out for the evening just before dusk, you would find them grazing all over the place. The first task we had to do there-for was get rid of the rats and clean the place up ready for poultry and other farm animals. If not, then the rats would simply get even more out of control, spreading disease and eating the animal feed – contaminating it in the process.

There are of course other types of vermin other than rats, that have to be controlled or eradicated entirely if possible. Mice can be a real pest, and pretty much like the rat, can spoil the feedstuff and spread disease. Foxes are known of course for raiding the chicken house. Magpies, hooded crows, and rabbits can all take their toll on the homesteader in different ways, and so have to be constantly monitored and controlled.

Fortunately none of this is 'rocket science' as they say, and a few basic precautions or changes can soon bring even the most terrible infestation under control – normally! If you stay next to the city dump for instance, then you may have a real problem.

A bad neighbour, who does not care about controlling vermin, may well leave you exposed to their problems and make life very difficult. In fact any source of free food

for the rats or other critters that you have no direct control over, can lead to problems. For now however, let’s just look at the situations that you can control, within your own jurisdiction.

The Main Man

Rats

We'll start with rats because they are perhaps the biggest problem 'down on the farm'. They are very versatile and can withstand all sorts of conditions – and as mentioned - they breed like crazy!

A female rat comes into season every 4-5 days. She is pregnant for 3 weeks, and carries up to 14 of a litter of pups. The female can come back into heat within 48 hours of giving birth, meaning she can be pregnant with a second litter whilst still weaning the first! The young can breed again in approximately 2-3 months, carrying a further 14 pups at a time. You only need one breeding pair to have an infestation in quick time, as rats are incestuous and will breed within the same family readily.

Rats carry disease – just think bubonic plague! Believe it or not this plague is still carried in some rats today. However Salmonella and Weils disease are more common. In fact the Olympic rower Andy Holmes – a man in excellent health died in 2010 from suspected Weil's disease that came from rat's urine in the water.

They will also kill young chicks. I once had 24 ducklings killed and carried off to a 'larder' in one night by rats. Interestingly they left alive the two dozen hen chicks that were next to them at the time – maybe leaving them for the next evening's supper. They did not get that supper I can assure you!

Rat removal:

There is only two main things you have to do to rid yourself of rats – Remove the food source, and the habitat.

Yes, it is that simple – in theory at least. As mentioned, rats are the supreme opportunists. Removing the source of food means that you will remove the rats. However just like life's other problems which apparently have simple answers or

solutions; it is rarely as simple as that. Why? Because removing the source of the rats food supply may in some circumstances be virtually impossible.

Maybe your neighbour has an open grain silo next to your property, or their chicken hut is over-run with rats. Perhaps you yourself are struggling to keep the rats from the animal feed? All these things must be taken into consideration and a plan put into action if you are going to be successful at getting rid of this pest.

To start though, let's consider the things that are under your control, and what you can do to improve the situation.

Cleanliness:
It must be mentioned from the outset, that cleaning up areas contaminated with rat droppings or other waste matter, should be done with proper protective gear. Inhalation of infected dust, or contact with infected material can lead to serious contagion – as described earlier. I shudder to think of the risks I took in ignorance as a young man when it came to cleaning out rat infested areas!

Feed Bins: This is a basic, essential first priority when it comes to pest control. Metal bins are preferable, with tight fitting secure lids. On no account must you keep chicken food for instance in canvas or paper sacks – this is just asking for trouble! If you must use plastic containers then be sure to check them regularly, and change them at the first sign of gnawing by rats.

Any foodstuff or meal that spills out of the bins, must be cleaned up. In fact this is a general rule of thumb – cleanliness. Never let foodstuff just lie on the ground of your sheds. Sweep-up regularly and prevent any build-up of pellets or meal. Failing to do so will only encourage the rats to a ready food source.

Feeding Livestock:
When scattering grain or pellets to the chickens for instance, make sure not to over-feed them; thus leaving food for the rats. Never scatter food on the ground late in the evening for the chickens as this is bound to result in food left over for vermin, and never leave automatic feeders where rats can have access to them.

Removing Habitat:
This is perhaps the most difficult task in vermin control, particularly if you are operating from old buildings. Rats just love old broken concrete floors, and will readily and easily set up home there. The answer to this is simple and not usually expensive – replace the floor, or at least patch up the broken parts with a good strong concrete mix. If the floor is timber, then that is another problem.

The instant solution is to repair the timber-work where they are gaining access, thereafter having a more thorough investigation to see if they are gaining access to the floor area via an outside source. If so, then simply block it up.

Check to see that shed doors are closing properly, and are not leaving gaps for vermin to sneak through. A rat will easily get under a door that is more than ½ inch above the floor, so be sure that every door is snug fitting. Rats are also very good climbers so be sure that down pipes for drains etc have a cone or some other barrier fitted to prevent them climbing. The will not usually climb a flat wall, but will usually head for an inside corner where they can get better purchase for climbing.
Rats also need a water source, so be sure to check for broken drain covers where they main gain access for water - or if the drain is suitable – for breeding.
Remove any old rubbish that is lying around, both inside and outside; this will rob the rats of more potential breeding grounds.

All burrows and runs must be filled in. If they are in the soil then just collapse the soil with a spade, making sure to block every entrance and exit. If the rats are living in a pile of broken bricks for instance, then there is no short-cut; have all the bricks removed to be sure you destroy their habitat.

Rat traps:
Only when all the above preventative measures are taken should you deploy rat traps – or at least do not consider this stage until you have started removing habitat**. It is totally pointless trying to rid yourself of rats, while at the same time offering them a comfy place to stay!** You might as well just forget it – seriously. Trapping and poisoning rats will only work as part of an overall strategy for removal. At best, it may stop them from getting out of control; however you will never be rid of them entirely if you do not remove the food source and the habitat.

There are many different types of rat traps on the market – a quick browse through the Amazon store will show you that. Cages are perhaps the best option, as they are unlikely to spring shut on your fingers! However you do have the live rat to dispose of – which may be problematic if you are squeamish about killing them! Placing of rat traps is a fairly simple process, but there are a few things to look out for.

First of all, wear old gloves or make sure your hands have not just been washed in soap or scented cleaner. Sometimes it is best to rub your hands in soil before handling the trap, the reason being that rats will pick up your scent and may avoid the trap entirely.

Place the trap in an area that is not too exposed, and where the rat can feel relatively safe and free from prying eyes. This will encourage a false sense of security in the rat, making it more likely to go for the bait. As for the bait, this can be any number of things – rats are not fussy eaters! Some traps have to be set with food tied on; in this case bacon rind is my favourite. Other traps rely on pressure plates; here I would typically use peanut butter – rats love it! Make sure that the trap lies flat and does not rock or move. Any movement at all will cause the rat to ‘smell a rat’ and run for it.

Rat poison:
Before going any further it has to be said – **Be very careful when handling any kind of rat poison!** Just like slug pellets, rat poison is not only deadly to rats. Make sure that you wear protective gloves and that you wash your hands thoroughly after using poison. The most popular rat poison used to be based on Warfarin, but this is largely been taken over by the more effective Brodifacoum the active ingredient in brand names such as Ratak+, Rodend, Volak and a host of others.

Bait should be placed where other animals – or children – cannot gain access to it. I like to place inside an old length of clay pipe for instance, or under a slab raised up off the ground with a couple of bricks. Rats like to feel secure when eating, so try and think like a rat when placing the bait! Alternatively you can use bait boxes specially made to distribute the poison.
Generally speaking, you should check the bait every few days and replenish where necessary. Any dead rats should of course be removed and disposed off immediately.

Once all signs of rat infestation have gone, then it is a simple matter of keeping alert to their coming back. Keep the place clean and tidy, with no food available; and you will generally keep it rat-free.

MICE

This is a short section – because everything that applies to rats really just applies to mice also – but on a smaller scale. Mice too, carry and spread disease as well as cause damage to equipment. They are not a problem with regards to carrying off your young chicks for example! However mouse infestation can happen just as suddenly if you allow it to, so all the procedures regarding cleanliness and lack of spaces for them to hide or breed; as well as denying them ready access to food, must be put it place.

The simplest trap for catching mice that I have used to great effect is a milk bottle! Simply place a bit of chocolate or other bait in the bottom, then lay the bottle flat with the head raised up on something like a stack of books. You want the angle to be about 40% or so. The mice will slide down the bottle neck to get the bait, but cannot get back up again as the side of the glass is too slippy, and they cannot jump properly to get out. I've caught over 10 mice in one evening with this simple trap.

Another simple deterrent for mice and rats, is the humble cat. One of the best predators against rats and mice, it can also be trained not to attack your chickens quite easily.

Rabbits

Although rabbits are generally thought of more as a pest than vermin – they still fall under the classification of vermin in many countries! Although not great spreaders of disease as are rats for instance; rabbits can do a tremendous damage to crops, and are capable of undermining substantial buildings with their borrowing habits. Rabbits

can soon get out of control – look at Australia for instance – and so rabbit hunting plays an important part in any land management.
Rabbits can produce 4 – 6 litters per year easily especially if there is a mild winter and early spring. Each litter can hold up to six young that are ready to breed themselves after only about 4 months old.
For the homesteader rabbits can cause major damage if they get into the vegetable patch, causing wholesale destruction in one night. For this reason they can be the gardeners no 1 enemy.

Rabbit control:
When it comes to controlling rabbits in or around the homestead or small-holding; there is really only one guaranteed way and that is fencing. This does not need to be difficult as the fence itself has only to be around 30 inches high and made with a 1 inch galvanized rabbit-mesh hung on a top line of 1.5 wire.
The base of the wire mesh should be dug into the ground for at least 6 inches, to prevent them burrowing under – 12 inches if this is a real problem.

There are many different methods of rabbit control available, including sonic chasers, water sprays even fox urine, that will not do the creature any harm. However I have found most of them to be completely ineffective, and in these later years prefer just to build the fence and that's an end to the problem. Similar to the rat situation, it's no use trying to get rid of them if they are still attracted to the premises and have easy access. Once the fence is built then I will take steps to remove them using ferrets, dogs and guns if necessary.

The only positive thing about having rabbits in the area, is that they do make a good stew – if you catch them outside the breeding season.

Magpies & Crows

If you are a keeper of poultry then you will be aware of the problems that Magpies and Crows can cause, mainly to the eggs of the chickens. Magpies are particularly pernicious as they will actively hunt out a nest and eat young chicks or eggs. Crows tend to be more opportunistic and will snatch what they can if the opportunity arises. Both will of course tear open meal bags if they have access; and both will cause an awful mess with droppings etc.

Another particularly nasty habit with these creatures is during the lambing season, when they will peck out the eyes of a young lamb as soon as it is born and the mother may be too weak to stop them – this is truly an awful sight to behold.

Controlling Magpies:
This is sometimes done with scarers, basically loud firecrackers tied in intervals into a length of hemp. When it is lit then the spark slowly works its way down the hemp, setting of each firework in turn.

Poison bait is sometimes used, but only with great care and usually under licence depending on where you stay.
They can sometimes be trapped also, but to be honest they are usually too smart, and if the trap misses the first time then you will not get a second chance as they are fast learners.
Shooting is the preferred option especially for the farmer in rural areas. My father used to say that they are smart, but they cannot count. He used to go into a hide with a friend and then one of them would leave – then the Magpie or hooded crow would come down for the bait they would set – only after it had seen one of them leave the hide.
Scarecrows just don't work with magpies and crows, they are far too smart!.
If you do have young chicks running around your yard then these critters will kill them, especially if they have chicks of their own to feed. The best thing you can do is keep the chicks in a covered run until they are big enough not to make such a juicy target – or until you have removed the threat.

Foxes

My two sisters recently lost their chickens to predations by the local fox – they are not happy! These creatures, (the foxes not my sisters!) are intelligent enough to present a bit of a problem when it comes to protecting your chickens. The old rule about putting your chickens to bed before dark and locking the coop door, only applies until the fox learns that you do this as a part of a regular routine. Once they know this, then they will come around before bedtime and snaffle your chickens. This is exactly what happened to my sisters chickens. How do you prevent this? – with great difficulty!

Foxes can jump or half jump, half climb – a fair height. I watched a fox jump onto a garage roof that was ten feet tall, from a standing start. This is an indication of how hard it can be to keep a determined fox out of your chicken run.

Controlling Foxes
This can be done in a number of ways, and the first is to remove any 'attractants'. By this I mean make sure that all rubbish bins are securely fastened and there is no food scraps lying around. If you have any poultry then they themselves are an attractant – one that you presumably do not wish to remove though. In this case the only way to protect them is to keep them inside, or under a covered run where the fox cannot gain access to them.

Try not to use fish meal or bone meal in your garden as a fertilizer, as this will attract the attentions of the fox also. Check for places that the fox would nest, like under sheds or underneath thick shrubbery, and make them untenable by whatever means.

Scented deterrents are now available to purchase over the counter that will help remove foxes as they detest strong smells. Electric fencing can also be particularly effective and can be run from a 12volt car battery. Water sprays that activate when an

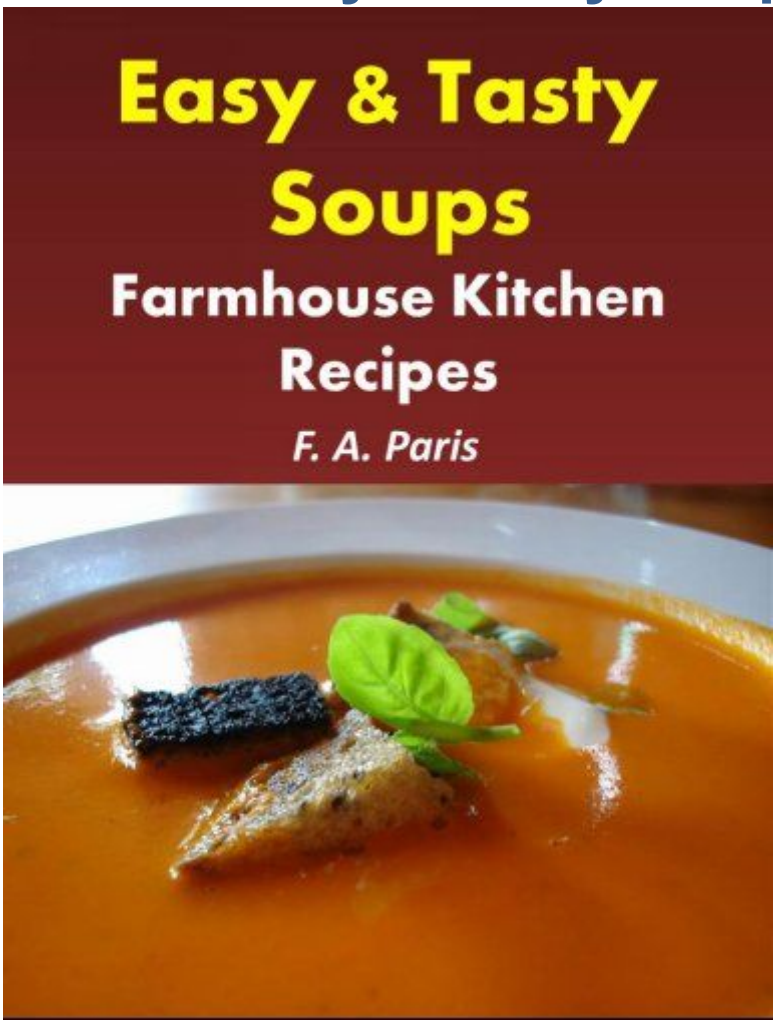
animal approaches can be effective for a while, though the fox soon gets used to them and just ignores the spray.

Summary

Controlling vermin, especially rats is an on-going process and the victory will only be won if you keep at it, and plan every aspect of your homesteading with vermin control in mind always. Of course different areas of the country will produce different critters to be kept under control; rats however are the great survivors and can be found just about everywhere on the planet, especially near human habitation.

Recommended Reading:
Homesteading and surviving without the need for supermarkets and large retailers, is a growing industry in many ways. Alternative energy sources is another ‘Arm’ of the whole self-sufficiency model.
You may find this website www.renergymax.com a good source of alternative power information, with everything from Magnetic energy to Geothermal energy and even mini-hydroelectric systems. Definitely worth checking over if you are looking for new energy ideas.

BOOK 2: Easy & Tasty Soups



Farmhouse Kitchen Recipes:

(Cookbook Updated to include Tasty Slow Cooker Recipes)

By

F A Paris

Introduction

Being a ‘child of the country’ I was brought up on soups, there-fore finding recipes for easy soups to make at home was always a priority, mostly the non-exotic variety as my mother was some-what limited in the choice of vegetables and other ingredients. Today however we are totally spoiled for choice with regard to the varieties of vegetables and the seasonings available.

Let me say from the outset – I just love soup! Generally fairly easy to make, with simple ingredients; soup was and still is a mainstay of our family’s diet. I learned well from my mum that even in financially difficult times, you can make sure the family is well nourished and healthy for minimal cost, by knocking up a quick pot of hot soup.

In my mother’s day, things like red peppers or sweetcorn were just not available to someone living on the East coast of Scotland; and vegetables had to be chosen according to the local growing season and just what was available. The large supermarkets have now made sure we have a massive choice at our fingertips, and there is no excuse at all for not producing tasty soups even on a very tight budget.

The examples listed in this work have all been tried and tested by myself and even friends and family who were more than happy to be the ‘guinea pigs’ in the soup trials. Taste is however a matter of taste – so to speak, so it goes without saying that you will love some of these recipes, and others you could probably do without; Hopefully it is more of the former!

Welcome to Easy Soups To Make At Home!
I do hope you enjoy these recipes and share them with your friends.

Oh, and **none of these recipes contain garlic** – basically because I am allergic to the stuff! However if you like garlic then feel free to add according to your tastes.

Enjoy!

Contents

Table of Contents

Introduction
General Hints & Tips
- Making stock
- Spicy Root Vegetable Soup
- Cream of Mushroom Soup
- Carrot and Sweet Potato Soup
- French Onion Soup
- Potato & Vegetable Soup
- Cream of Celery Soup
- Potato & Leek Soup
- Cucumber Soup
- Farmhouse Cream of Tomato Soup
- Cream of Cauliflower Soup
- Ham & Lentil Soup
- Spicy Chicken & Sweetcorn Soup

Slow Cooker Soups
- Carrot & Red Lentil Soup
- Cod & Haddock Chowder
- Traditional Cock-A-Leekie Soup
- Slow Cooker Chicken Broth
- Smoked Gammon & Sweet Potato
- Traditional Ham & Pea
- Summary

Copyright

While reasonable attempts have been made to assure the accuracy of the information contained within this publication, the author does not assume any responsibility for errors, omissions or contrary interpretation of this information, and any damages incurred by that.

The author does not assume any responsibility or liability whatsoever, for what you choose to do with this information.

The cooking techniques described in this publication are for your general guidance only.

Use your own judgment.

****

Published By

Deanburn Publications

****

General Hints & Tips

It must be said that cooking is generally ‘not an exact science,’ and indeed many recipes can be altered and changed without being detrimental to the dish itself.

Many times - especially when I was starting out – I would be extremely frustrated to find a recipe that I liked, but not having the ‘proper’ ingredients to make the dish – or so I thought!
Don’t be afraid to experiment by substituting something that you do not have – with something that is in the larder, you may be pleasantly surprised with the results!

It is’ taken as read’ that all vegetables and meats have been properly prepared before adding to the recipes.

Making stock

Making stock for your soups is not difficult, and can be done in a couple of ways. Either you can make it by adding stock cubes to water as per the instructions, or you can do it yourself from scratch.
The two main stocks used for soup are vegetable stock and chicken stock; both are easy to make and freeze for future use.

Vegetable stock
To make a good vegetable stock, simply chop a selection of vegetables into a pan of water and boil for 25 minutes or so. Add salt and pepper to taste, Strain out the vegetables, and you have your stock.
Alternatively just keep the water from your vegetables during your everyday cooking, and freeze for when you are making soup at a later date.

Chicken stock
This again is best done by boiling a chicken carcase,(perhaps the remains of a chicken after a meal) along with a chopped up onion and salt/pepper to taste; in a pot of water for approximately 25 minutes, then straining out the water/stock into a bowl. Freeze for later use.

Measurements: These are in US standard measurements at the front with the European equivalent in brackets ( )

Dairy products: Products such as milk or double cream are generally not added to the soups until the last 15-20 minutes of cooking time.

Spicy Root Vegetable Soup

(Serves 6-8 people)

This is a family favourite, with an oriental spicy flavour.

Ingredients:

- 1 Large butternut squash
- 2 large diced onions
- 1 ¼ lb (567g kg) carrots
- 1 ¼ lb (567g) parsnips
- ½ small swede/turnip
- 2 Large sweet potatoes
- 1 tsp curry powder/paste
- ½ teaspoon garam masala
- ¼ tsp chilli powder
- ¼ tsp ginger powder
- 2oz (56g) butter
- 4 pints (1.89 ltrs) of ham stock (or water with 4 ham stock cubes)
- Splash of cooking oil (prevents butter from burning)

Preparation:

Dice all the vegetables into roughly 1” cubes.

Heat butter and oil in a large pot until melted, add the diced onions and spices. Fry for approx 1 minute stirring constantly.

Add the diced butternut squash and parsnips; fry gently for about 5 minutes.

Add the diced carrots, sweet potato and swede with the liquid stock. Put lid on pot and boil slowly until vegetables are tender which is usually about 25 minutes.

Remove and let cool; season with salt and black pepper then ‘blitz’ with a hand blender until smooth.

Re-heat for use.
Garnish with chives or a sprig of parsley.

This excellent soup freezes well, and ham stock can be replaced with a vegetable stock for vegetarian use.

*****

Cream of Mushroom Soup

(serves 6-8)

Simple yet delicious! Choose an ‘open’ mushroom for more flavour. Small button mushrooms lack flavour for this dish.

Ingredients:

- 3 ¼ lb (1.47kg) mushrooms (sliced)
- 1 ½ large onions
- 1 ¼ pts (0.59 ltrs) chicken or vegetable stock
- 7-10 fl oz. of double cream
- 2 oz (56g) butter
- Splash of cooking oil
- ½ glass of sherry
- Black pepper

Preparation:

Gently melt the butter and oil in a large pot, adding the onion, sweat onions but do not color. Add a liberal dose of black pepper and then add the sliced (or diced) mushrooms.

Stir constantly for approx 5 minutes. Add the stock and boil gently for a further 20 minutes.

Allow to cool.

Blitz with a food processor or hand blender until smooth, add the sherry.

Add salt and pepper to season – taste!

Re-heat to serve - adding the double cream just before serving.

Freezes well, but do so without adding the double cream. This can be added later.

*****

Carrot and Sweet Potato Soup

(Serves 4)

Ingredients:

- 1 lb (454g) of carrots
- 1 lb (454g) sweet potatoes
- 2 pints (0.94 ltrs) ham or lamb stock
- 1 cup orange juice or juice of three oranges
- Black pepper
- ¼ tsp of ginger powder
- 1 diced peeled apple
- 1 oz butter with a little cooking oil to prevent burning
- 1 finely chopped onion

Preparation:

Dice or chop vegetables.
Heat butter, ginger and chopped onion until butter is melted and the onion has taken on an opaque look – do not brown.
Add stock, diced carrots, sweet potato, apple and orange juice to large enough pot.
Add salt and pepper to season and boil for around 20 minutes or until the vegetables are soft.
Remove from heat and allow to cool. Blitz with a food processor or hand blender until smooth.
Re-heat to serve.
Freezes well.

*****

French Onion Soup

(Serves 4-5)

Even without garlic, this is an incredibly tasty dish – and so easy to make!

Ingredients:

- 2.2 lb (1 kg) onions
- 2 oz (56g) butter
- ¼ cup crushed black pepper
- 1 glass white wine (optional)
- 4 Oxo or beef stock cubes
- 1 ¼ pints (0.59 ltrs) of water
- 1 ½ tbl spoon white sugar
- 1 ½ tbl spoon sherry
- Croutons – small cubes toasted bread.
- ¼ cup grated cheese

Preparation:

Heat a large heavy bottomed saucepan with the butter and black pepper.
Peel and half the onions; thinly slice and add to the butter and black pepper; cook for approx 3 minutes stirring constantly.
Add sugar, continuously stirring until the onions are brown and are becoming caramelized.
Add the water, white wine and crumbled up Oxo cubes (or equivalent). Boil for 20 minutes.
Taste and add salt to season according to your tastes. Remove from heat and add sherry just before serving; along with croutons covered with a little cheese (parmesan is usual) to garnish the soup.

Tasty Croutons can be easily made by making a little roasted cheese on toast; leaving to cool, and cutting up into little cubes!

*****

Potato & Vegetable Soup

(Serves 6-8)

Great soup for a cold winters day!

Ingredients:

- 1 lb (454g) carrots
- ¾ lb (340g)parsnips
- 1 leek (chopped)
- ¼ swede/turnip
- 5 large potatoes
- 1 large onion
- ½ tbl spoon dried mixed herbs
- Lamb shank
- 2 pints (0.94 ltrs) water

Preparation:

Clean and dice half of the carrots, parsnips, and turnip. Grate the other half.
Dice the onion and chop the potatoes into reasonable sized cubes.
Fill a large pot with the water, and add the diced onion and the lamb shank along with the herbs; with salt and black pepper to taste.
Add the diced and grated vegetables, including the chopped leek.
Bring to the boil for approx 60 minutes, then remove the lamb shank. Separate the meat from the lamb shank, chopping up into pieces; then return the meat to the soup.

Freezes well.

*****

Cream of Celery Soup

(Serves 6-8)

Ingredients:

- 1 head of celery (about 6 stalks-chopped))
- 1 large onion (diced)
- 2 large potatoes (chopped)
- ½ tsp smoked paprika
- ¼ tsp celery salt
- 2 pints (0.94 ltrs) chicken or vegetable stock
- Small cube butter and a little oil
- 7 fl oz (0.20 ltr) double cream

Preparation:

Into a heavy based pot add the oil and butter, heat till melted. Add the diced onion and chopped celery, stirring constantly. Add the chopped potatoes along with the stock and bring to the boil.

Salt and pepper to season, boil for approx 25 minutes until the vegetables are tender. Remove from heat and allow to cool.

Blitz with a blender or food processor. Re-heat before serving, adding the cream and stirring gently.

Freezes well, but freeze before cream is added. The cream should be added only when about to serve.

*****

Potato & Leek Soup

(Serves 6-8)

Ingredients:

- 3.5 lb (1.58 kg) of potatoes (chopped)
- 2 large leeks (chopped)
- 1 onion (diced)
- 1 large carrot (chopped)
- 2.5 pints (1.18 ltrs) chicken or vegetable stock
- ½ tbl spoon crushed black pepper

Preparation:

Add the chicken stock to a suitable pan, bring to the boil whilst adding the chopped potatoes, carrots, leeks and diced onions.

Add salt and pepper to season and flavour. Boil for approx 25 minutes, or until the potatoes are beginning to soften.

*****

Cream of Cucumber Soup

(Serves 4)

Ingredients:

- 1 large cucumber
- 1 small onion
- 1 large potato
- 1 ½ pints (0.70 ltrs) vegetable stock
- 4 fl oz (0.11) double cream

Preparation:
Peel and dice the onion, cucumber and the potato very finely.
Add to saucepan along with stock and bring to the boil. Add salt to season.
Boil for approx 25 minutes, then allow to cool.
When cooled, blitz with blender or food processor; then re-heat and add the double cream just before serving.

Farmhouse Cream of Tomato Soup

(Serves 4-6)

A fantastic smooth tomato soup, another family favourite that has them clamouring for more!

Ingredients:

- 3.5 lb (1.58kg) of ripe tomatoes (skinned & chopped)
- 1 large onion (fine diced)
- 1 celery stalk (chopped fine)
- 1 small potato (fine diced)
- 1 tbl spoon tomato puree
- 1 ½ pints (0.70 ltrs) chicken stock
- ¼ tbls smoked paprika
- 1 tbls white sugar
- 7 fl oz (0.20) double cream
- ¼ tbls crushed black pepper
- 2 slices of smoked bacon (optional)
- Dollop of butter & splash of cooking oil

Preparation:

Prepare the tomatoes by crossing with a knife lightly along the bottom, then adding to boiling water for about 1 minute. Remove and peel away the skins. Chop ready to add to stock.

In a large heavy bottomed pan, heat the butter and oil then add the diced onion, pepper and paprika. Cook for two minutes, do not allow onion to color.

Add the stock along with the chopped celery, potato, chopped tomatoes and sugar.

Add the bacon rashers (optional) and boil for approx 40 mins.

Remove bacon rashers if added, then leave to cool. When cooled, blitz in a blender and re-heat, adding the cream and mixing thoroughly before serving.

Freezes well, if cream is excluded. This can be added separately before serving.

*****

Cream of Cauliflower Soup

(Serves 6-8)

This is a truly fantastic creamy smooth soup that has proved to be a huge hit with my dinner guests – even those that do not like cauliflower!

Ingredients:

- 2 cauliflower heads
- 2 large potatoes
- 1 large onion
- 2.5 pints (1.18 ltrs) chicken stock
- 10 fl oz (0.29 ltr) double cream
- ¼ tbls black or white pepper
- ½ tbls French mustard
- ½ tbls celery salt
- 1 glass white wine
- Parsley

Preparation:

Into a large pot add the chicken stock, pepper, mustard and celery salt.
Roughly chop cauliflower heads, potatoes and add to the mix. Finely chop the onion and add to the pan. Boil for approx 40 minutes.
Allow to cool, then blitz with a blender or food processor.
Re-heat and add cream before serving, mixing thoroughly.
Garnish with a sprig of parsley.
For a courser soup with more ‘bite’ simply slice the potatoes and do not add to the blender.

Freezes well, but do not add cream before freezing.

*****

Ham & Lentil Soup

(Serves 6-8)

A rich thick soup guaranteed to ‘stick to your ribs’ as my parents used to say – enjoy!

Ingredients:

- 10 oz (283g) lentils
- 2 small onions
- ½ swede or turnip
- 1.5lb (680g) carrots
- ½ tbls black pepper
- 2.5 pints(1.18 ltrs) ham stock (alternatively water plus 1 ham hock)
- Crispy bacon pieces

Preparation:

Wash lentils and soak overnight in cold water. Rinse lentils one more time and place in water with the ham hock, or into the ham stock depending on your chosen method. Peel and dice the carrots, onions and turnip; adding all to the stock. Bring to the boil for approximately 1.5 hours.

Leave to cool, then blitz with blender or food processor. Salt and pepper to season. To garnish, try a little crispy bacon chopped into slices and scattered over the top.

*****

Spicy Chicken & Sweetcorn Soup

(Serves 4-6)

Made from left-over chicken carcase – cooked or raw - this is an ideal starter for your chicken main course.

Ingredients:

- 1 carrot (sliced)
- 1 onion (diced)
- 8 baby sweetcorn (chopped)
- 1 handful barley or rice
- Chicken carcase
- 2 pints (0.94 ltrs) water
- Tsp of chili flakes
- 1 chicken stock cube

Heat up some cooking oil in a heavy bottomed pan, and add the chicken pieces or carcase. Cook for approx 5 minutes stirring regularly, then add the onion. Cook for a further 3-5 mins until onion is soft, then add the water.
Leave for a further 20 minutes or so, then remove the chicken carcase and any pieces. Remove any chicken from the bones, and return the chicken scraps to the water.
Add the chopped sweetcorn, chili flakes and the barley or rice.
Break down the stock cube and add to the soup.
Cook for a further 25 minutes then add salt and pepper to season.
Taste, and add more salt if needed.

*****

Slow Cooker Soups

Here is a selection of delicious Slow Cooker soups, that are bound to impress you with the full-on flavour that only a slow cooker can give you.

If you would like to see more tasty slow cooker Recipes, then please check out my other book:

Cracking Slow Cooker Meals

Available from Amazon ebook store.

Carrot & Red Lentil Soup

(Serves 6)

Ingredients:

- 1 lb (453g) carrots diced
- 3 oz (85g) red lentils
- 1 large onion (diced & chopped)
- 2 tsp dried ginger
- 1 tsp garam masala
- 2 tsp curry powder (or paste)
- 2 pints (0.94 ltr) chicken or vegetable stock
- ½ pint (0.23 ltr) full fat milk
- Parsley to garnish
- 1 table spoon vegetable oil
- ½ oz of butter
- Salt & pepper to taste

Preparation:

Add the onion, oil and butter to a hot saucepan and fry until onions are turning opaque. Add the chicken stock and season with salt & pepper; bring to the boil then pour into the slow cooker.

Add the rest of the ingredients minus the milk, and cook on ‘low’ for 4-5 hours.

At this stage the soup can be blended to make it smooth, or it can be left chunky. Mix through the full cream milk about 15 minutes before the end of cooking.

Serve with a garnish of parsley.

*****

Cod & Haddock Chowder

(Serves 6)

Ingredients:

- 1 large onion (diced)
- 1 spoon rapeseed oil
- ½ oz butter
- 10 oz (283g) diced potatoes
- 5 oz (141g) Cod (boned & chopped bite sized)
- 5 oz haddock (boned & chopped bite sized)
- 2 sticks celery (chopped)
- 1 ½ pints (0.70 ltr) fish stock
- ½ pint (0.23 ltr) full fat milk
- ¼ pint (0.11 ltr) single cream
- Salt & Pepper to taste

Preparation:

Place the onions, oil and butter into a hot saucepan and fry until soft.
Add the chopped potatoes and celery to the pan, and fry for 4-5 minutes, then add the fish stock and bring to the boil.
Add the mix to the slow cooker and cook on 'low' for 3 hours.
Add the milk and the fish to the dish, then cook for a further 30 minutes.
Add the cream and cook for 10-15 minutes.
Season with salt & pepper to taste. Ladle into bowls and
Serve with a crusty loaf of bread.

*****

Traditional Cock-A-Leekie Soup

(Serves 4-6)

Ingredients:

- 2-3 leeks (trimmed and chopped)
- 3 chicken breasts (diced to bite sized)
- 2 potatoes (diced)
- 1 carrot (chopped)
- 1 ½ pints (0.70 ltr) chicken stock
- 1 onion (sliced)
- 2 table spoons vegetable oil
- ½ oz butter
- Salt & pepper to season

Preparation:

Add the oil and butter to a hot saucepan along with the chopped chicken pieces and fry for 5 minutes.

Add the chopped onion, potato and leeks then fry for a further 2-3 minutes, adding salt and pepper to season.

Add the ingredients to the slow cooker, then add the stock to the saucepan and bring to the boil.

Add the mix to the slow cooker, along with the chopped carrot and cook on ‘low’ for 5-6 hours.

*****

Slow Cooker Chicken Broth

(Serves 4-6)

Ingredients:

- 2 chicken thighs
- 1 chopped onion
- 5 oz (141g) dried broth mix
- 2 carrots (chopped)
- 2 pints (0.94 ltr) chicken stock
- 1 tsp mixed herbs
- 1 table spoon olive oil
- Garnish of parsley
- ½ oz butter
- Salt & black pepper to taste

Preparation:

Leave the broth mix to soak overnight in a bowl of water, then drain and add to the slow cooker.

Add the oil, butter and chicken into a hot saucepan. Fry until the chicken begins to brown, then remove and place into the slow cooker with the mix..

Fry the onion in the saucepan (after removing excess oil/fat) until softened, then add the chicken stock and the other ingredients.

Cook on ‘low’ for 6-8 hours, then remove the chicken pieces; place on a chopping board and carefully remove the chicken from the bone.

Chop the boned chicken into bite-sized pieces and place back into the soup; seasoning with plenty salt and pepper to season.

Garnish with a little parsley sprinkled on top.

*****

Smoked Gammon & Sweet Potato

(Serves 4-6)

Ingredients:

- ¾ lb (340g) smoked gammon joint
- 1 lb sweet potato (diced)
- 1 onion (chopped)
- 1 ½ pints (0.70 ltr) vegetable or chicken stock
- 1 tsp French mustard
- 1 garlic clove (fine chopped)
- 1 table spoon honey
- 1 tsp curry powder
- 2 parsnips (chopped)
- ¼ pint (0.11 ltr) double cream
- 1 Table spoon olive oil
- Salt & black pepper to taste

Preparation:

Soak the gammon joint in water overnight to remove excess salt, keep in a cool place.
Fry the onion, garlic & sweet potato in a saucepan for 3-4 minutes, before adding the stock and bring to the boil.
Place the gammon in the slow cooker and pour over the contents of the saucepan.
Add the other ingredients - minus the double cream - then leave to cook on ‘low’ for 7-8 hours.
Carefully remove the gammon joint and place on a chopping board.
Blitz the soup in a blender to make smooth (miss this step if a rougher consistency is required – be careful with hot soup! Cool first if necessary), then return to the slow cooker.
Remove the meat from the gammon joint, and cut into small pieces, then return to the cooker.
Add the double cream, mixing through, and cook for a further 15 minutes.
Salt & pepper to season

Traditional Ham & Pea

(serves 4-6)

Ingredients:

- ¾ lb (340g) ham joint
- 8 oz (226g) dried split peas
- 2 onions (chopped)
- 1 carrot (chopped)
- 1 small turnip or swede (chopped)
- 1 garlic clove (crushed)
- 2 sprigs of mint
- 2 pints (0.94 ltr) ham or chicken stock
- 1 table spoon oil
- Salt & pepper to taste

Preparation:

Soak ham overnight in water to remove excess salt, then add to the slow cooker.
Add the oil to a hot saucepan and fry the onion and garlic until soft, then add the stock.
Simmer for 2-3 minutes then add to the cooker with the rest of the ingredients.
Cook for 6-7 hours then remove the ham and place on a chopping board.
Leave to cool, then add the contents of the slow cooker to a Blitzer or use a handheld device to blitz the mixture until smooth.
Chop or shred the ham, then add to the soup mix.
Re-heat before serving.
Taste then add seasoning as required.

Summary

Making soup is perhaps one of the most satisfying cooking experiences in the kitchen, as it is relatively simple and produces a good tasty dish in quick-time.
Soup can be made from almost anything, so do not be afraid to substitute or chop and change the recipes to suit you or your family's tastes.
Try experimenting with herbs (fresh or dried) to enhance flavours. Fresh hot chilies can also be chopped and added to 'spice things up'.

Tomato soup for instance can be given a boost by adding a couple of spoonful's of tomato relish, and almost any soup will benefit from a level tablespoonful of sugar as this acts as a flavour enhancer.
Also don't be afraid to water down the soup if it is too thick for your tastes, or indeed not add as much stock if you prefer a thicker soup. A little arrow-root or cornflower can be added to thicken if it is required.

I hope you enjoy these soup recipes, my family and friends certainly have! And indeed manage to get many more recipes, by using these ones to trigger your imagination and expand your soup selection choices.

If you have liked these soup recipes, then please let me know by leaving a review/comment on Amazon.