

Top 15 Tips

For New
Homesteaders

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Top 15 Tips for New Homesteaders

So you've decided to try homesteading. You have some land and some gardening experience, but what else do you need to know? Often people assume that because our predecessors did it, it must be fairly simple. Hard work, sure, but simple. The truth is, those older generations were pretty smart. If you're starting with no experience, it can take years to learn everything you need to know. This short guide will barely scratch the surface of that. But, it will give you some key tips and should help you determine what you need to research further. Homesteading can be tough. But it's a good life and richly rewarding. So, without further delay, here are the top 15 tips.

#1 - Canning is king. Even if you don't plan to homestead until sometime in the future, learn how to can now! Even with a root cellar, many foods will not last very long unless canned. Canning properly is a skill and takes practice. If not done properly, jars that seem sealed, may not be. This will lead to spoiled food and could make for a very difficult winter. Gain experience in canning as soon as possible. There are many modern devices you can buy for use in canning. Some are better than others, but they can be fairly expensive. The traditional method is cheap and works just as well or better than store bought contraptions. Different foods require different canning "recipes". There are hundreds of good cookbooks and websites for these recipes. Well worth a small investment. One of the most important things to remember when canning is to pre-measure all your ingredients. The stages of canning are all time sensitive and stopping to measure ingredients can cause problems.

#2 - You can never have enough seeds. You never want to have "just enough" of your crop seeds. While it is common practice to use part of your crop for next years seeds, if you have a poor harvest one year, you might not produce enough to eat, and set some aside for next year. If for some reason you are unable to purchase more seeds the following year, this can lead to starvation. You always want to have at least a few years worth of seeds in stock. Space permitting, you may also want to have your seeds split up and stored in more than one location. Seed stock is crucial to your survival, but could be eaten by pests, or ruined by a flood or leaky roof. Keeping your seeds in multiple locations can provide some insurance against this. Diversity among your seed stock is important too. You will want a variety of vegetables, berries and grains. However, in most climates wheat, corn and potatoes will be your primary crops. Dedicating roughly two thirds of your land to these crops, and one third to everything else will give you a good balance of filling food (grains and starches) to nutrition (vegetables and berries). Another crop you should be sure to grow (climate permitting), is tomatoes. They are easily canned and an excellent source of vitamins. In the winter months when fruits and berries are hard to come by, tomatoes can be your only source of vitamin C.

#3 - Get a dog. The homesteader's number one enemy is rodents. Not only can they eat a surprising amount of your food supply, but their droppings will contaminate what they don't eat. A dog is just as good, or better, than a cat when it comes to hunting mice and rats. And, bigger dogs are much better than cats at keeping away bigger rodents such as rabbits and racoons, which can destroy entire crops in a single night. Dogs can also be useful in a variety of other ways such as tracking game and keeping your family safe. They can deter predators and provide warning that someone or something is near. Though they are an extra mouth to feed, it is well worth it. Also note that though small breeds may eat less, they are far less useful. Some good breeds to have are labradors, golden retrievers and german shepards.

#4 - Keep a generous supply of nutmeg. Nutmeg has antibacterial properties and may help to fight E. Coli, Salmonella, and Listeria. Cinnamon is also said to have these properties as well as the ability to stabilize blood sugar and prevent clots. Nutmeg (not cinnamon) also contains an ingredient called Myristicin which has been shown to prevent the enzyme believed to cause Alzheimers. Both nutmeg and cinnamon can be used in a variety of recipes and make tasty additions to many baked goods.

#5 – Water isn't just for drinking. If your land is near a stream or river, a water wheel is a much better source of energy than wind or solar. They work in all weather. The flow of water though sometimes seasonal, is generally constant, unlike the wind or sunshine. Water wheels produce greater torque than windmills, and can therefore produce higher amperage with the right gear ratio. And, water wheels are more rugged, as well as more easily repaired, than windmills or solar panels. The mechanical parts, aside from the bearings, can be made out of wood. In a pinch, the bearings too could be made of wood, though they would be less efficient. Windmills and solar panels, on the other hand, require special parts and materials. Whether water, wind, or solar, energy production is one area where you will likely want to invest some money. Good quality deep-cycle batteries, charge controllers and power inverters are crucial. Using the cheapest units you can find, or taking a DIY approach can lead to disaster. Furthermore, because of the steep learning curve, the trial and error of a DIY approach, can often cost more than simply buying professional grade components. The reliability gained by investing a little more money, will give you much more peace of mind and more comfortable living.

#6 - Keep a supply of cumin. Cumin is a powerful anti-inflammatory and has similar affects on the body as ibuprofin. It is quite tasty as a seasoning for meats. Cayenne pepper also has these properties and can be used to treat arthritis, and muscle pain as well as the common cold.

#7 - Learn how to make cob. Cob can be used to make efficient, safe, and durable wood stoves/ovens for heat and cooking. Unlike cast iron or other stove materials, cob can easily be repaired with materials found around the yard. Additionally, with enough man power, cob can be used to make entire buildings that are durable, well insulated and environmentally friendly. Though it is recommended that you study some detailed instructions and building plans, the basic concept is quite simple. It is a mixture of 50-70% sand, 15-30% clay, and 10-40% straw. The actual amounts will

vary depending on the type of clay in your area. Therefore, it is recommended that you make a few small test batches to get the right mix. After mixing the sand, clay and straw, add a small amount of water and begin kneeding the mixture like dough. Generally, for larger amounts of cob, this is done by laying out the ingredients on a tarp and kneeding with your feet. Similar to stomping grapes for wine. Continue kneeding and adding small amounts of water until the mixture is able to hold its shape when rolled into a ball or cylinder. While still wet, begin stacking, forming and shaping your stove, house or other building project. When the mixture dries it will produce a material similar to cement. To prevent erosion from rain, the outer surface can be treated with natural oils such as linseed oil.

#8 - Garlic and onions are some of the greatest plants on Earth. Despite its aroma, garlic has a wide variety of health benefits. It can dramatically lower cholesterol, reducing the chance of heart disease or blood clots. It is believed to ward off stomach and colorectal cancer. It is a strong antibacterial and antifungal that can treat yeast infections, sinus infections and colds. Combine it with chicken soup and you have the mother of all cold remedies. And, if you eat enough of it, it can even repel ticks. Onions have similar benefits for your heart health and cholesterol levels. There is also an old remedy using onions for preventing colds and flus. A fresh onion cut in half and left on the table is said to remove germs from the surrounding air. Additionally, onion soup can help alleviate the symptoms of colds and flus. Onion is also a natural antihistamine and when sliced and placed on the affected area, can relieve insect stings and bites. Both garlic and onions are easy to grow in most climates and require little space.

#9 - Abundant hot water takes no additional energy. A discarded hot water tank can be stripped of unnecessary parts such as insulation and electrical parts, and positioned against the side of your wood stove. This will provide you with all the hot water you need with no additional energy needed. The important thing to remember with this, is not to let the tank actually touch the stove. Leave a small gap in between them. This will keep the water hot but won't bring it to a boil. If the water starts boiling inside the tank, the tank can rupture. If the water is not getting hot enough, painting the tank black can raise the temperature inside. Another method for hot water is to use a copper coil on or in the stove. This does work, but can be dangerous. It is very hard to control the temperature using this method and one extra piece of wood in the fire is all it takes to make the water boil.

#10 - Ginger is also a good herb to keep on hand. It can aid in digestion, as well as the treatment of arthritis and migraines. A popular method of using ginger is to make a tea out of it. In addition to treating arthritis and migraines, ginger is a powerful anti-inflammatory and can treat many ailments. Ginger has also been shown to provide an excellent boost to the immune system in general.

#11 - Root cellars are crucial. Done properly, they can prevent produce from spoiling better than a standard refrigerator and require no energy. Root cellars are generally located under the house, but they don't have to be. A root cellar is simply a dry, dark hole in the ground. Best made from brick or cement, because root cellars are dug into the ground, they naturally stay cool with less temperature fluctuations

than a refrigerator. Keeping your root cellar dry and dark is equally important. If you notice water on the floor or walls, locate where the water is coming in and stop it as quickly as possible. Moisture will lead to rotten food. Likewise, stand inside your root cellar with the door closed and make sure that no light is coming in. Even in cool, dry conditions, light can make many vegetables try to root which often makes them unedible.

#12 - Mint leaves have many uses. Made into a tea, mint leaves can aid in digestion and in treating sinus congestion and sore throats. Fresh mint leaves, crushed into a paste, is also a very effective way to get rid of mice and rats. The smell drives them crazy and leaving small amounts of this paste around your home will generally keep them out. Alternatively, soaking fresh mint leaves in an oil such as olive oil, for about three days will produce “mint oil”. Mint oil is even more effective at driving away pests. An added benefit to using mint paste or mint oil around the house, is that just the smell can relieve sinus congestion.

#13 - Rabbits and chickens are priceless sources of protein. A couple pairs of rabbits can produce enough offspring to provide fresh meat all year round. With chickens, the eggs are not only good eating, but are quite useful in baking and cooking. If you want to eat the chickens as well, get a rooster with your egg layers. Uncollected eggs will produce chicks. While it would take a great many chickens and chicks to keep you eating chicken all year, you can easily start a cycle of eggs for eating and eggs for hatching. That way you will have eggs to eat most of the year and be able to eat chicken from time to time. Both rabbits and chickens require a small amount of space and when compared to what they consume, give a good return on investment. Though rabbits are more picky, both animals will eat the scraps you would normally compost which helps to reduce the amount of feed you need to provide. They also produce manure which can be used on your crops.

#14 - If you have many acres of land at your disposal, a young milk cow can be a godsend. Don't kid yourself. Cows are a lot of work. They also require a significant amount of grazing land. But, if you have the land and you're up to the challenge, having one or two good milk cows opens up all kinds of possibilities. With just a little bit of practice, you can make your own butter, cream, and cheese as well as having a steady supply of fresh milk. The milk alone is indispensable in cooking and baking. Additionally, milk from your own cows won't contain steroids. These dairy products are all excellent sources of nutrition. Cows will also produce much more manure than other farm animals and can bring significant benefits to your crops.

#15 – Get to know your neighbors. Though it is technically possible, being able to produce everything you need, all on your own, is no easy task. The amount of work required is extreme. Being able to exchange some of the things you produce, for some of the things your neighbors produce is mutually beneficial and makes life easier for everybody. In tough times especially, banding together with your neighbors doesn't just mean less work. It can mean safety, diversified skills and knowledge, as well as emergency help. Lastly, being on good terms with your neighbors has social benefits. They can offer companionship outside of your own household. The benefits of this should not be overlooked. We as humans are very social creatures. Limiting

our human interaction to just a few people can take it's toll on us mentally. Socailizing with other people is healthy and raises morale. Morale is not often considered by new homesteaders. Especially in more remote locations. We can get so focused on chores and work that we forget about fun things. Over time, that can not only have an impact on our ability and willingness to work, but can lead to depression and all the bad things that come with it.

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