

# HOW TO LIVE OFF THE LAND

Even If You've Never Left The City



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## Introduction

Prepping for a disaster or sudden lack of resources is an excellent precaution, one that all would benefit from practicing. But nothing can prepare you for the hardships of personal, regional or national emergency the way that gardening can.

The lifestyles of survivalists and gardeners are perfectly complementary. The first group stockpiles supplies and food stores, which offers excellent security but for a limited time. Survival gardening offers less protection before you have fully developed your skills, but once you can grow and maintain a garden, it expands the survival time frame into the infinite future.

Where would the world be today if so many people had not known how to garden efficiently throughout the seasons during the Great Depression or World War II? Rationing was not enough; home-growers and volunteer farmers played a tremendous part in supplying food, both on national and personal levels.

But there are other reasons begin survival gardening: it has a satisfying outcome, the food quality is higher, you know exactly what you're eating, and your grocery costs shrink. For city slickers and country bumpkins alike, growing your own food is a viable option that will teach you invaluable skills while putting delicious, nutrient-rich food on your plate.

This e-book will guide you through the crucial steps of evaluating your situation and setting goals that are not only highly realistic but also in line with your personal values. You'll be introduced to a variety of gardening techniques, tools and steps of growing a garden. You will also learn basic skills for becoming a more self-sufficient survival gardener, such as composting, seed saving and ensuring a food supply throughout the winter.

**Before you read any further**, watch the following free video that shows the secrets of building pro-level chicken coops in your own backyard for next to nothing:

### **Important Video: How to Build a Professional Chicken Coop**

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## [How To Build a Chicken Coop](#)

### **Chapter 1: Setting Goals, Understanding Limitations**

Before you begin to design your new self-sufficient lifestyle, you should fully consider and define your goals. Some gardeners fly by the seat of their pants, but as with all things in life, it is much easier to get where you want to be if you know where you are going. This is especially true for anyone who isn't gardening simply for the pleasure of it but for self-sufficiency, or even survival.

It may seem counter-intuitive, but studies show that when faced with too many possibilities, humans tend to experience more indecision and less happiness. In a few moments, you will stand face to face with what might seem like a tremendous amount of choices, but rest assured that while you may still experience some indecision, your happiness will be guarded by a simple ground rule: work with what you have. Nothing brings a gardener as much misery and disappointment as working against this, whether that means growing as if in another climate, or pining away for plants you can't cultivate in the space available to you.

#### **Working with What You Have**

Let's begin by defining exactly what it is you have to work with. This will immediately tell you what choices you have and what you don't have. As you go through this chapter, you may benefit from keeping a notepad at your side for taking down details about your situation.

We will start with the most obvious question: **How much land do you have?** Your ambitions to feed yourself will always have to be checked against how much land you have access to. Estimates range from a quarter acre to two acres to fully feed one person, and if you want to grow wood for heating, you will need another acre per house. If you want dairy in your diet, you may need to add several acres, lest you want to harvest food

for your livestock. But, that doesn't mean that you can't make a huge difference with much less land, or even without land in the traditional sense.

If you have very little or no land to work with and want more, you might not have to grow everything that you need; instead, create a network of people who share what they grow. You could also acquire more land by renting, joining a landshare community, negotiating the use of public or shared land or doing a little guerrilla gardening.

If you have no garden space at all and still want to feed yourself, consider balconies, window sills, window boxes, hanging baskets, rooftops and indoor growing with artificial light. Take your time to think long and hard about what space is really available to you. Did you know you can even grow food under your kitchen sink?

Assuming that you have some land: **What are you allowed to do with it?** Finding your limitations is not just about what you can and cannot do; it's also about what you may and may not do. If you live in a national park or under the rule of a homeowner association or strict city council, you may have restrictions on front yard usage, trees and livestock. Make sure to know your rights and obligations.

**What's your budget?** Self-sufficient gardening does not have to be expensive and might one day even supplement your income, but the money you have available today and in the near future is going to affect what you can and do and when. Less money means going about things at a slower pace, doing more for yourself and maybe skipping that dreamy heated greenhouse all together. And budgeting isn't just about finances but time: Your schedule will affect the type of growing techniques you use and how much you can hope to achieve per year.

**What is your soil like?** Are you basically living on bedrock, in which case you'll need to add soil, or is your backyard gorgeously deep and fertile? Is it so compact and full of stones that might ruin a rototiller and preclude ever growing a straight carrot? How does it differ across your land? This will impact your plant choices later on, but for now make yourself aware of these things so that you know where you can and cannot grow as things stand today.

**What is your climate like?** Find out when your earliest and latest frost dates are. How cold does it get during an average winter? How long is your frost-free period, and how high does the temperature get in the summer? You may be able to extend the warm season and protect fragile plants with glass or plastic, but unless you are growing your food indoors under grow lights, you will be limited by your climate. Don't despair: Unless your climate is quite extreme, there is still much that you can grow.

**What other limitations do you have?** Are you alone in your gardening, or will you have help? Do you suffer from a chronic pain, causing a stiff back or inability to bend your knees? Don't be tempted to ignore your limitations; they will come back to haunt you.

### **Philosophies of the Kitchen Garden**

Now that you have considered what you have, it is time to consider your preferences and how they will affect your planning process.

**Do you aim to survive or to live well?** Some people come into self-sufficient gardening because they want to eat more nutritious, tastier and more sustainable food. Others come into it because they like to be prepared and want the tools to survive hardship. Are you one or the other—or somewhere in between? If you only aim to survive, you can get away with using less land that's dedicated to growing calorie-dense crops like potatoes, sweet potatoes and parsnips. You will not get a lot of variation and in the long run may get deficiencies, but you will survive. Living well takes more land, more work and much more variety.

**Do you want to save your food or savor it in the moment?** Do you have the storage capabilities, the time and energy, and the inclination to cure, to freeze, to can, to pickle, to ferment and to dry? Do you want to create your own prepping supplies? Or would you rather grow a continuous supply of seasonal food year-round, always eating what is fresh? Then again, maybe your goals fall somewhere in the middle.

**Do you prefer to be land or work efficient?** Few gardening methods are both, but many can be combined in different parts of your new survival garden. Whether you have quite

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little land or a lot, a land-efficient method enables you to grow much more food than is conventionally done in a limited space, but you will often have to put in more work. A work-efficient method, however, is a gardening philosophy that aims to make your garden as self-sustaining as possible. Be honest with yourself. Be ambitious, but know you'll only disappoint yourself if you plan to put in more work than you are really willing to do.

Land-efficient methods include *square-foot gardening*, *double digging*, *intercropping*, *succession planting* and *vertical stacking*.

*Square-foot gardening* is a method popularized by Mel Bartholomew, who felt that conventional farming methods wasted far too much space in the home garden. Instead of long rows of produce, square-foot gardening uses a grid system, often made out of wood. Each square is very densely planted and can be continuously harvested and resown. It's a popular method for small-scale gardens and beginner gardeners, and one of its finer aspects is that it promotes variety and claims to save up towards 80% more space than conventional growing. However, it is poorly adapted to creating large surpluses of nutrient-dense food for storage.

*Double digging* is sometimes known as the French market garden technique. It requires deep soil and a lot of manpower in the beginning, but it creates a great growing environment that allows for dense planting. When converting a lawn, the top layer (one spade blade deep) is removed and put aside. Then another layer of the same depth is removed, and the top layer is placed on the bottom, grass facing down, with the bottom layer on top. As long as you avoid walking on this soil, it will be beautifully adapted for growing deep, straight roots, meaning plants can be kept closer together.

*Intercropping* is the process of planting fast-growing crops with slow-growing crops. When you harvest the early plants, that gives the newly sprouting late plants the sunlight necessary to finish growing.

*Succession planting* is a technique that is easily combined with other methods of growing. Simply sow, or plant out, new plants when you harvest. The moment a square inch opens up, it is filled.

Work-efficient methods include *permaculture*, *growing local varieties*, *mulching* and *no tilling*.

*Permaculture* is a gardening philosophy aimed at creating largely self-sustaining systems that mimic the natural world. In addition to a kitchen garden, a permaculturist may have a *food forest* where fruit trees, shrubs, perennial plants and self-sowing annuals mix in guilds designed so that the neighboring plants give each other the nutrients they most desire. In this method, landscaping work ensures a continuous supply of water. It's difficult to design, but eventually a permaculture garden cares largely for itself.

*Growing local varieties* is not a method in itself, just a small trick to save you some work! Plants that are adapted to your climate and soil will flourish without your constant attention.

*Mulching* is the process of adding a layer on top of the soil to protect the plants. It could be wood chips, paper, grass clippings or just about anything that insulates. The mulch helps by making it harder for weeds to get light, but it also keeps the sun from killing the top layers of beneficial organisms in the soil, acts as a temperature regulator, and maintains moisture. A great mulch also breaks down over time, adding nutrients to condition the soil.

*No till* is a technique in which the soil is not dug once the patch or field has been established. It increases the beneficial organic matter in the soil and promotes water retention, meaning that you do not have to water your plants as often. And, of course, you never have to break your back digging!

**Are you doing this for you or for the planet?** Your politics are no one's business but yours, but you need to consider them. How do you feel about conventional pesticides and herbicides? What about fertilizers: conventional or organic? Are you willing to use chemicals, as long as they aren't applied directly to the edible parts of plants? If you are going to keep livestock, how far are you willing to go for the welfare of your animals? Your perspective will always inform your choices, and if you are actively aware of your standpoint, you will be better prepared to set goals that you will be inclined to live up to.

*Gnothi seauton*, the oracle at Delphi advised: *know thyself*. If you feel that you do, you are ready to move on to planning your new self-sufficient garden.

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## Chapter 2: Planning Your Survival Garden

The planning stage is often the most exhilarating and the most overwhelming part of creating your survival garden. There is just so much that you could do! If you find yourself getting stuck, go back to the basics and remind yourself of your limitations, but also your overall goal. If in the future you are feeling there's too much to do, it's a good time to return to this chapter. Look over your mission statement again, reformulate it if need be, consider your long-term plan, and adjust it if it is turning out to be more work than you originally expected.

### Your Mission Statement

Now have a good idea about what you have to work with and what kind of gardener you want to be, maybe even *need* to be, in order to achieve your goals. It is time to take that information and turn it into a commitment.

A survival garden is a long-term project, and long term-projects tend to fail with undefined goals and no accountability. A mission statement solves both problems.

Your mission statement shouldn't be more than a paragraph or two long, but what it should do is to state clearly what your purpose with this project is, whether that is to supplement your supermarket purchases with calorie-dense foods in case of prolonged food or income shortage, or to live a gourmet, off-the-grid homesteader life.

You should be walking the line between not too specific and specific enough. Overarching categories of plants and animals might be mentioned, but there is no need to name species. That sort of information may change along the way, rendering your mission statement useless. Keep it broad enough to be flexible.

Feel free to make your values shine! The more conviction there is behind your mission statement, the more inclined you will feel to live up to it, and the easier it will be to make decisions accordingly. If you want to only grow organically and with minimal reliance on outside water or fertilizer, put that in there. If you only want to raise animals that you can

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legally and in good conscience slaughter yourself, write it down. This is a commitment to yourself and your self-sustaining future.

## **Developing Your Vision**

Once you have a mission in mind, you can let your imagination roam free and explore dreams and possibilities to your heart's content. Just remember that the ideas you end up putting into practice should be in line with the goals in your statement.

If it helps you to visualize, make a rough sketch of your space. Study it. Are there different zones that pop out at you? What about how you use your space today; are there some areas that seem to belong together? Are some spaces are heavily trafficked, whether by foot or vehicle, whereas others you rarely seem to visit at all?

Do you want an herb garden? If you want to grow your own medicinal herbs, they needn't be near your kitchen, but herbs for cooking probably should be close at hand. Many gardeners have the best of intentions but balk at running a hundred yards in the dark of night to hail some sprigs of parsley for a garnish, or fresh mint for a cocktail.

Do you have a nice little patch of land that you pass by on your way to the garage every day? That's a great place for growing things that require extra attention or daily maintenance.

Are there any natural borders tying together sections of your space? How might you use hedges or pathways to your advantage?

Try to envision an objective for each of your spaces, but don't be afraid to combine different functions in one space if they could be mutually beneficial. Your chickens might live in the orchard, where the trees and shrubs would help to protect them from large predator birds and the chicken droppings feed the fruits and berries. If you aren't allowed to ruin the suburban look of your neighborhood by pulling up the front lawn, think about how your herb foliage and berry shrubs may look ornamental in your flower beds.

As you start to get a feel for what different spaces might be used for, how will things like water access affect your plan? If you have animals, you need to be able to get fresh water to them, and if you live in a dry climate you may need water close to your food plants. Will you need to adding more water access to the area? Carrying watering cans gets very heavy when your area hits a dry spell.

## **Drawing Your Plan**

Some people are a bit intimidated by the idea of drawing a garden plan. There is this idea that it's something that experts do, landscapers and farmers who, unlike most home-growers, have training. In reality, there is absolutely nothing to be intimidated by. Even the simplest sketch is a great tool that anyone can use to start growing food.

If you already have a surveyor's map of your property, you can use that. If not, you will need to decide on a scale (e.g., one inch on paper equals ten feet in real life). Take a piece of paper and a pencil, and go outside with a yardstick to start measuring the border of your land, drawing it to scale as you go along. If you don't have a yard, draw up the spaces that you do have available, including room on floors and counters. Next, draw in buildings and features such as fences. If you are drawing a small space, like a yard or balcony, make sure to shade in areas that must not be blocked. Lastly, add natural features such as slopes, ponds or large trees. During this drawing process, online map and satellite picture services can prove very useful.

Make several copies of this map so that you can sketch freely. As a final step, try adding in everything you visualized in your garden. You might find that some of your previous ideas won't work with the space, or that your ideas so far have tended to respond to only one part of your mission statement. If so, go back and develop a new vision for what is missing, taking that into account as you make a new sketch.

If you feel uncertain about how to divvy up the space for planting, wait to complete your plan until you have finished reading this e-book. That way you will better know what is feasible and what amount of space you might need.

## Writing Your Plan

If you find that your project is going to take more than a season or two to finish, you may benefit from writing down your plan in prose form or a list.

Divide your long-term goals into manageable annual or seasonal benchmarks, and remember to take your experience level and abilities into consideration. If you are entirely new to vegetable gardening, or are very busy, turning 10,000 square feet of grass into vegetable production is not going to be a one-year project.

Beginner gardeners who bite off more than they can chew tend to find that the weeds take over before they have even finished planting their new space. Maybe your plan for success will take four years, converting 2,500 square feet per year.

## Chapter 3: Getting Started

With your plan in hand, it's time to get started!

If you are a little bit familiar with conventional gardening, the natural time to get started is spring, when you can sow seeds or plant out store-bought seedling for a single summer harvest. But when you are gardening for survival, this is not the case. If you are gardening indoors, there are no seasons to worry about, and if you are gardening outdoors, there are actions to take all year round.

If you start gardening in the **spring**, you will focus immediately on preparing your space, whether digging; building; or setting up containers, sourcing seeds and plants, and starting to raise plants for a summer harvest. If it is already **summer** when you are reading this, it is high time to source seeds and plants for an autumn or winter crop. If it is **autumn** and it feels like the growing season just ended, it is time to plant fruit trees and onions and to sow early spring vegetables and protected winter salad leaves. If it is **winter**, start preparing your growing spaces, sourcing and caring for tools, focusing on architectural changes to your growing space, and sourcing seeds for the earliest sowing before the last frost date.

### Tools of the Trade

The tools that you will need for your survival garden depend greatly on your budget, the size of your land and your ideals. How do your ideals come into play? Well, if you want to minimize your grid dependency or live more sustainably, that will affect your choices, especially when it comes to petrol- and electricity-driven tools.

There are nearly as many gardening tools as there are gardening chores, but all those specialized tools are entirely optional. The tools that all gardeners need, regardless of whether they are growing food on a balcony or on several acres, are a hand trowel, a watering can and a hand cultivator. If your growing space is larger than a balcony, you will need a spade, a shovel, a fork, a rake, a hoe, a weeder, such as a dandelion digger, and

a wheelbarrow. If you plan on having trees or shrubs, you will also need pruning shears and a branch saw.

If you have a large plot of land, you may consider a tractor, a garden tractor, a rototiller, a hedge trimmer or a chainsaw. These are, of course, major investments, but can be rented or shared. They can also be replaced by hand tools and sweat, such as scythes and bagging hooks for grasses, slashers for brambles and weeds, bill hooks for dense vegetation, etc.

Just as important as choosing the right tools is the chore of caring for them. Brush off all tools before storing, and never store them wet. Oil your metal tools twice per year, and disinfect your cutting blades between each individual tree or shrub to avoid spreading diseases from plant to plant.

### **Sourcing Seeds & Plants**

When it comes to vegetable plants, you can buy seeds or seedlings. Buying seedlings, or young plants, is more expensive and gives you less choice in terms of variety, but it saves time and can be especially rewarding for the beginner. You will find seedlings primarily at supermarkets in the late spring, and a wider variety is available throughout the planting season at garden centers. For more interesting varieties, you may want to visit garden shows or even farmers' markets. Always choose plants that look sturdy, perky and green.

If you would rather start with seeds, you need to decide whether you are going to buy conventionally grown or organic seeds. You also need to decide on whether or not you want to buy hybrid plants, marked *F1* on the seed packets, or open-pollinated varieties. Hybrids are often fast-growing and bountiful; open-pollinated heirloom varieties are often better adapted to regional soils and weather, and seeds can be saved from them for next year.

If you prefer conventionally grown hybrids, the supermarket and local garden centers will probably have a decent selection for you, but if you want more unconventional seeds, your best bet is a seed catalogue, whether online or in print.

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When sourcing bushes and trees, you can often order them by catalogue and have them delivered on bare root. The downside to this, and to going into many major garden center chains, is that the plants come from far away and are not adapted to your local environment. Consider also visiting local nurseries that grow trees and bushes near you. They will be able to tell you which varieties do well there and provide you with seedlings or full-grown plants that are already adapted to your garden conditions.

Do not attempt to save seeds from supermarket produce as a primary source. It can be a fun experiment, but since supermarket produce are usually hybrids, the result will be nothing like the vegetable you collected the seed from. Supermarket fruit varieties are often weaker varieties with nice fruit grafted onto a hardier stocks to survive, and many popular grocery fruits come from trees that do not flourish in home gardens.

If you want to save money and have a look at what is already adapted to your surroundings, all at the same time, consider looking for seed or plant exchanges, and check the ads on websites such as *Craigslist* and *Freecycle*. Beware, though, that trees and bushes from such trades do not come with money-back guarantees and can spread pests to your garden.

## **Growing Plants from Seed**

When starting your first plants from seed, you need a suitable seed-starting medium. It may sound counter-intuitive, but your seed-starting soil should be a light soil with not too many nutrients. Established plants need fertile soil, but seeds don't. The seed is already equipped with most of the nutrients it needs to sprout so overly fertile soil will only be a breeding ground for fungi that will kill your seedlings.

If you are just supplementing your grocery shopping for now, you may start your seedlings in sterilized plastic containers, or homemade paper containers, but if you are aiming to start a lot of seedlings, you may want to invest in the kinds of cellular containers used by plant nurseries, or in a compressed soil block maker. Otherwise, most of your gardening time will be spent sterilizing and filling tiny pots.

Follow the directions on the seed packet, in terms of sowing time and depth. Never let the soil dry out, as it kills the seedling. It is better to place the containers in water than to water from above so that the seedlings are not disturbed and the water is more evenly distributed. Seeds do not require light, but seedlings require a lot of it or they will become tall, thin and weak. If you are growing indoors, especially away from windows, you will need to invest in some serious grow lights.

If you have sown your seeds a bit too closely together, as the little plants pop up, you may have to pinch some off so that the remaining plants have sufficient space to grow. If their roots fill up their containers before they are strong enough to go outside, you will have to replant them in larger ones with room to expand. This is usually done after the first pair of true leaves has developed. The first two leaves of the seedling, sometimes called the heart leaves, are not true leaves; the leaves that stem from the initial growth are. To replant a very small seedling, dig out its roots and lift by the true leaves, never by the stem, or the plant may break.

If you are going to move your plants outside, you may want to start hardening them off a week or two before the final transplanting. This is the process of exposing the plants to increasing amounts of outdoor weather daily until the plants have adjusted.

## **Growing Plants Indoors**

Plants generally need light, and most of them need lots of it. If you are growing your plants entirely indoors or raising a lot of seedlings with artificial light, be aware that light can have many different color frequencies that affect plants differently. Blue light tends to encourage bushy growth, whereas red light triggers blooms.

For the home-grower, fluorescent grow lights are often a good choice as they are blue and do not produce too much heat. Bulbs now also come in full-spectrum versions that provide light in the red spectrum as well. Incandescent lights are cheaper, but they can get extremely hot and must be placed at a good distance from the plants.

Plants also need darkness. The easiest thing to do is to put your grow lights on an automatic timer to ensure that your plants get at least around six hours of darkness per day. Different plants have different needs, though. If you are venturing into more difficult plants, you may have to customize your timing. Perennial plants in particular may need periods with less light.

Plants also need heat, but when you are growing indoors, this is often not a problem. However, be aware that some biannual or perennial plants will not set new blooms or fruit until they have had a winter cycle.

### **A Word on Weeding**

The one thing gardeners hate to do, but which all gardeners must do from time to time, is weeding. In a suburban flower garden, weeding may be mostly about aesthetics, but in the survival garden, it is an important chore for entirely different reasons.

Young plants need light, water, space to grow, and lots of nutrients from the soil. Weeds compete with them for all those resources. The roots of weeds take up the nutrients and water, and the leaves take up space; the weeds grow faster than your vegetables, and they out-compete them for light—that is, if you let them.

If you would rather swallow your trowel than spend your days weeding, know there is eventually an upside: More mature plants can stand some competition. Obviously, you shouldn't let the weeds take over to the point where you have trouble finding your vegetables, but those small weeds popping up while your plants are fruiting are mostly an aesthetic nuisance. If they don't bother you, focus your energy on keeping your seedlings weed-free.

## Chapter 4: Composting

Whether you are a first-time digger or a seasons-deep gardener looking to venture into more practical survival gardening, you'll no doubt know that soil fertility plays a tremendous part in your success in living off the land.

Good soil is brimming with nutrients and tiny organisms that help your plants maintain good hydration and aeration, absorb nutrients, and more. Perhaps the cheapest and most survivalist-friendly way to improve your soil is by adding decomposed organic matter: compost.

Composting can be a science, but the basics are simple: All organic matter will sooner or later rot, and when it breaks down, it releases nutrients. There are things that you can do to ensure that your organic matter rots faster and doesn't release bad odors or attract pests, but there is very little that you can do wrong. Essentially, you could pile together any food scraps and dead plants, and it would one day become compost.

Good compost, however, needs **air**. Otherwise you get a very smelly and slow decomposition. Air flow can either be ensured by turning your pile with a fork, or by making sure not to pack your compost too densely. Make sure to layer your compost with the occasional loose layer, using big or textured pieces to create air pockets.

It also needs **water**. If it dries out, the process slows down. Don't let it be soaking wet for too long, though, or the water will choke out all of the air.

It's also a matter of **temperature**. Some people get very serious about composting temperatures, but here's a secret: When it gets too cold, the compost slows down, but it'll pick back up again when it gets warm again. If you don't want the hassle, you don't have to bother with temperatures.

Good compost consists of a good ratio of high-carbon material to nitrogen-rich material. You can chemically analyze the composition of different materials if you want to be detail-oriented, but a good ground rule is that carbon-rich material is dry or brown, whereas

nitrogen-rich material is green or moist. Layer the two, using three times as much dry or brown material.

A compost can be a simple pile in the garden that you leave to decompose at the end of the season. If you have less space and want your finished compost more quickly, you could invest in a compost tumbler that allows you to aerate your compost and retain heat while keeping rats and flies away. If you have even less space, you can set up a simple worm composting bin by collecting or buying some red composting worms and feeding them your kitchen scraps. They can live a happy and odor-free existence under your kitchen sink.

Unless you have an enclosed, hot composter, do not compost meat scraps, dairy products, fruit pits, or weeds. Animal products and fruit pits tend to attract mice and rats, and weeds need high temperatures to die. If you would like to compost animal products without attracting rodents, you have the option of burying them. Simply dig a hole in a place where the nutrients will be appreciated and the waste won't be disturbed in the near future. Filling the hole back in with soil will mask the animal-attracting odors.

## Chapter 5: Seed Saving

As you may recall, there are two types of plants that reproduce through seeds: hybrids and open-pollinated plants. Hybrids are the offspring of two different varieties of a single plant. Like animal hybrids, their seeds are sometimes sterile, and if they are not sterile, the offspring rarely looks anything like the parent plant. Open-pollinated plants are stable varieties resulting from pollination between genetically similar parents. They are fertile, and their offspring looks like them. If you are saving seeds because you like a particular variety, it's obviously more useful to collect seeds from open-pollinated plants.

Some seeds are significantly more difficult to save than others. Some plants cross-pollinate very easily with similar plants, which is great if you want to play around and create a new variety, but not so great if you want the same variety next year. Other plants are difficult because their seeds are not produced in the first year. This means that you need to give them the space and time to develop flowers in the second year in order to set seeds.

The best plants for a beginner to save seeds from are beans, peas, lettuces, peppers and tomatoes.

**Beans** and **peas** are extremely easy to save seeds from. Leave the pods untouched on a typical and healthy plant until they are brown and dry. If there is a risk of frost, pull the plant out of the ground and hang it upside down in a dry place until the pods are fully dried out. Open the pods, take out the seeds, and save them in a dry place.

**Lettuce** seeds are found in little pods left on the plant after it has finished blooming. That means that you have to leave the plant in the ground when it starts to bloom instead of pulling it up and sowing something else. Aside from that, getting seeds is very simple. Allow the pods to dry out, empty them, and save in a dry place.

With **peppers** and **tomatoes**, collect the seeds from the inside of a fully ripe, fine specimen. Wash the seeds and allow them to dry on a paper towel. Store in a dry place.

You now have free seeds for next year!

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## Chapter 6: Four-Season Gardening

Most conventional gardening is aimed toward producing a variety of foods in the summer. Then autumn comes, the days grow darker and colder, the annual plants die down, and the gardener hibernates until spring.

It is true that most of us living in temperate climates cannot easily grow food all year round, but we can certainly harvest it. That is the key to fresh home-grown produce every day of the year. Instead of sowing merely in the spring, the four-season survival gardener sows year-round, adjusting what is grown with the awareness that even hardy plants won't grow much during winter. However, if plants are grown strong enough before winter hits, they can be overwintered.

As the conventional gardener watches his summer crops start to flourish and bloom, the four-season gardener is busy sowing or planting autumn crops. That includes, of course, autumn specialists such as winter squash, pumpkins and shelling beans, but some plants grown as early summer crops make excellent autumn crops as well:

- Artichokes
- Beets
- Turnips
- Carrots
- Parsnips
- Celeriac
- Potatoes
- Spinach
- Arugula

Other plants only come into their own during autumn, but reward you with a harvest that can last well into the frost nights—sometimes into early spring:

- Cabbage
- Chinese cabbage

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- Lamb's lettuce
- Cauliflower
- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- Kale
- Kohlrabi
- Fennel
- Leeks
- Rutabagas

As autumn draws to a close, the four-season survival gardener is not only still harvesting but still sowing and planting:

- Onions
- Garlic
- Spring onions
- Early cropping broad beans
- Early cropping peas

It is only when spring arrives that the four-season gardener briefly walks hand-in-hand with the conventional gardener.

### **Cold Frames, Row Covers & Plastic Tunnels**

If you live in a snowy climate, be aware that most of the hardy winter plants mentioned above do not mind a little snow. In fact, they probably prefer a bed of insulating snow to a dry, cold, windy winter.

That said, you will be able to get more out of your overwintered plants if they are protected from blizzards and ice to keep as much heat in as possible. Not to mention a covering will make it easier to harvest during snowy days. If you do not have a greenhouse, there are still many things that you could do.

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**Row covers** are the most basic protection that you can offer your plants. This thin fabric will not necessarily keep much heat in, but it will even out the temperature a little and protect your plants from the worst of the wind.

A **cold frame** is an excellent tool, especially for overwintering salad leaves. This simple device is a box with a glass or plastic lid that can be bought at a garden center or built cheaply from an old window. It works like a miniature greenhouse by creating a sheltered micro-climate with a tiny warmer.

**Plastic tunnels** come in many different sizes, from walk-in polytunnels to small row cover tunnels. They are a cheaper, but less sturdy, alternative to the cold frame.

Whatever method you choose, the protective effect is increased by doubling your methods. Placing a plastic tunnel inside a greenhouse or a row cover inside a cold frame will raise the temperature slightly.

## **Four-Season Success**

When you put in a lot of time, energy and money, it is easy to get discouraged by any gardening failure. This is especially true of autumn and winter gardening in temperate climate because of how easy it can be to fail.

The first time you sow your autumn and winter crops, you may be tempted to imitate experts online and in books, but unless they are local to you with the same climate, you may end up failing miserably based on faulty advice. Those experts aren't operating with the same temperature and first frost date as you are. What you need to pay attention to is the length of time estimated for each species and variety that you wish to grow, from sowing until harvest. That is how long before your first frost date that you must, at latest, sow. Otherwise, you may watch your seedlings grow quickly in the warmth of late summer evenings but fail to bloom as the chilly winter nights take hold.

## Chapter 7: Animal Husbandry

While getting a herd of cows or buffalo is probably more difficult than is recommended for the reader of this book, the survival gardener who wants to branch out into the animal kingdom can easily do so with a little guidance ... even when living in the city! Before you buy, make sure to familiarize yourself with the breed you want and their specific needs. If you intend to raise animals for meat, think about how you will process them when the time comes. In many places, it is illegal to slaughter your own animals if they are intended to feed anyone but your family, and it may be illegal for you to slaughter larger animals at home altogether.

### Bees

Bees are busy little producers of honey and beeswax, but they also help to pollinate your garden and thereby increase its productivity. They have an unfair reputation as stingers and are actually quite docile creatures. If you are deathly allergic, though, they are clearly not for you. Bees can even be kept in urban environments, if the council approves. By keeping them you are actually doing the world a favor as there is now a serious bee shortage.

### Egg & Poultry Birds

The next step up is for the birds. **Chickens** in particular tend to be easy to care for and can be kept in quite small spaces. If you don't have the room for a full-sized chicken run, you can build a chicken tractor, a kind of portable pen that keeps your chickens contained but lets you move them around. Chickens do need to be protected against predators by a good fence. Note that, on account of noise, most suburban and urban councils don't approve of roosters.

**Ducks** can be slightly more difficult to raise than chickens, and they do require access to water that is deep enough for dunking their heads. But they don't fight like chickens do and

are less prone to illnesses. Ducks love to forage so they tend to require less feeding. They are often prolific layers, and their eggs are more nutritious than chicken eggs.

**Turkeys** and **geese** are larger birds with greater demands. Geese are the loud guard dogs of the bird kingdom and will both make noise and snap at humans who get too close. Turkeys are not as combative but require much more space than they tend to be given, even at family farms, which makes them little escape artists.

## **Small Animals**

Even the indoor or balcony farmer can often maintain a **rabbit** hutch. Seeing rabbits as meat producers is unpopular in some cultures, but in rural France it's popular to keep rabbit hutches in the backyard. Rabbits are easy to care for, they are incredibly prolific, and if you cross angoras with a meat breed, you can produce rabbits that serve both food and fiber purposes.

**Pigeons** are almost self-sustaining. Once their housing has been built and breeder pairs have been established in their new home, they will to some extent feed themselves, if you let them, and will produce plenty of squab.

**Pigs** are not terribly difficult to keep, as long as their fence is at least three feet tall and tightly woven. They also need a dry and wind-free shelter. Pigs are fairly economical, even if you don't breed your own, and can live to a large extent on foraging and scraps.

## **Meat, Milk & Fiber**

**Sheep** and **goats** are the ultimate multi-purpose animals. Depending on the breeds you choose, they will produce milk, meat and fibers. Goats are escape artists so your best bet is a woven wire fence with barbed wire or electric top. Sheep are much less likely to escape, but are easy targets for predators unless properly fenced in. Neither goats nor sheep need very fancy housing as long as they have access to dry and drought-free quarters.

## Chapter 8: Keeping Produce Year-Round

Waste not, want not. As a survival gardener, you know better than to let perfectly good food go bad, but if you don't yet know what to do with it, your bounty can all too easily spoil. Here are some methods to make the most of your harvest.

### Storing Root Crops, Onions, Fruit & Squash

Certain crops are easy to store how they are. Most winter squash can be kept in sunshine for a few days; once the cut-off stalk dries, store in a fairly cool space for several months. Onions too should be cured in a warm place, then stored somewhere dark and cool.

Some fruit varieties, such as late autumn apples, are listed as savers, in which case you should make sure that the fruit you want to keep is clean and blemish-free. It is better to store fruit lying on racks that permit airflow so that one bad apple doesn't spoil the barrel.

Root crops benefit from being stored in sand or sawdust, somewhere cool and dark, but if the ground does not freeze up in winter you can usually leave them in the ground for continued harvest.

### Freezing

One of the easiest ways of storing home-grown crops is freezing them, but if you are preparing for a day when you can't rely on your freezer, that is not an option. Vegetables tend to fare better from freezing if quickly blanched in boiling water first. Berries do not need that kind of treatment. Some fruits, such as apples, fare better in the freezer if you process them first, for example by making applesauce.

### Drying Produce

There are many ways to dry food. An electric dehydrator is an easy option, but you could simply put your oven on low, leave the door open, and allow the food to dry there for

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several hours. You could also use sunshine, or augment it by building a solar dehydrator. Unlike with freezing, dried produce isn't ruined by an electric outage, and unlike canned goods, when dried goods have gone dangerously bad you can easily tell.

You can dry fruit, berries, vegetables and mushrooms. Simply slice them thinly and dry as mentioned. To reduce the risk of mold, allow dried fruit to condition in room temperature with good airflow for 5–10 days before packing.

## **Canning Food**

There are two ways to can foods: with a hot water bath on the stove and with a special pressure canner. The water bath technique is easier and requires no special equipment, but can only heat jars to 100°C. This is perfectly safe when you're dealing with acidic foods, like fruits or tomatoes. When canning low acidity foods, however, you need to exceed 115°C. That is where a pressure canner comes in.

For water bath canning, you will need sterilized canning jars, lids and a pot that is taller than your tallest canning jar. Simply place your jam, apple sauce, chutney or fruits in jars filled with syrup, then stir with a spoon or knife to remove any air bubbles, and wipe the lid ring clean. Put the lids on, and place the jars into the pot, making sure that they do not touch. Cover with water, and allow to boil for at least ten minutes. After 12–24 hours of cooling in room temperature, there should be a small indent in the middle of your metal lids, showing that a seal has been achieved. If not, try once more, and if it still fails, freeze or eat!

A pressure canner works similarly, but instead of a regular pot, you use a special canner, monitoring the steam and pressure. Your canner will come with instructions specific to your model, as well as instructions on how much pressure and time to apply to various foodstuffs.

## Conclusion

You are now armed with all of the tools necessary to get started on your own survival garden. You know more about what you can and cannot do, you know how to formulate a successful plan, and you know the basics not only of seasonal gardening, but of year-round survival gardening.

Now is the perfect time to branch out into learning about climate-specific tips and methods that either appeal to you or that you feel unclear about. Remember, though, that amassing book knowledge is a very small part of any gardening operation. True gardening success comes from experience and observation. It is about you getting your hands dirty with your land and your growing spaces. A good gardener knows the rules, but a great gardener knows his plot. Get started, go out there, experiment and play, and feed your entire family in the process!

**Check out the free video to learn how to quickly and easily build a backyard chicken coop.** Watch it today to start collecting fresh eggs ASAP!

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