

6 Pitfalls in a Homesteading Life



Homesteading is simple right? So what could possibly be the pitfalls in a homesteading life? Merriam Webster defines [pitfalls](#) as a trap or snare, specifically something that is partially hidden so the danger is hard to recognize.

Starting a new homestead can be an overwhelming experience. We start out full of hopes and vision. We look for a better quality of life through homesteading. Then the reality of bad weather, escaping animals and loss sets in. There is so much homesteading advice on the internet but how do we boil it all down to what we really need to focus on as we start the journey? What homesteading advice will help us avoid the pitfalls in a homesteading life? Let me share some basic advice that is often overlooked by homesteaders trying hard to

get to a simpler way of life.

How to Avoid the Pitfalls in a Homesteading Life

First, this life may not really be simpler. It may be more rewarding, better for your health, lots of hard work, and bring you back in touch with the meaning of life. But, simple isn't always the word that comes to mind when I think of my life on our farm, It's hard work and unless you have the money to hire lots of man hours (kid hours, farm help etc) the work will be exhausting at first. Especially if you are not used to doing a lot of heavy physical work, carrying even five gallon buckets full of water will seem very taxing.

The advice- Keep at it and slowly build up your stamina and strength. Trying to clean a barn full of stalls, a chicken coop, and then tend a vegetable garden all in one day is possible but you need to work towards that goal or you might hurt your back! Our bodies are remarkable machines when treated right and we can rebuild muscle and strength!

Get to know your neighbors – Don't be a Hermit

Even if the nearest human lives a few miles away, build a good relationship with them. They will be the first person to offer help when your milk cow wanders off, or your pigs break through the fencing. You may not get to the point of having barbecues together but you do need to be there for each other on many occasions. Also, if you are new to homesteading, growing vegetables and raising animals, there is no greater resource than an experienced farmer or homesteading old timer to guide you with tips that actually work. There are many groups online these days too. Many offer helpful advice regarding all things homesteading. It may take time and a few hits or misses to find the right group for you, but it is worth the effort to connect to this growing community of

online homesteaders.

Fences – Oh No! The Goats are Out!

Nothing can derail a homestead dream like animals escaping their pens and damaging a neighbor's property. Not everyone is going to be understanding. Some will go to the extreme of bring a lawsuit against you. Just the thing to cause pitfalls in a homesteading life. The old saying that your fence should be horse high, pig tight, and bull strong, is a good way to start this discussion. I would add my own. IF you raise animals, they will always be trying to escape and will succeed from time to time.



Lessen the risk as much as possible by building the right

fences for the job. Learning to build proper fencing is very important. We currently use our old cow field to graze the sheep. The problem is that the cows could not fit through the gaps in the three board fence. However, the smaller sheep can and often do. They jump right through the opening because the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. We are in the process of adding more boards to keep them contained. Until that is completed someone needs to be shepherding them when they are in that field.

Pigs require an electric line surrounding the inside of the fence line. It should be placed down low to the ground because pigs root their way out of a fenced area. Goats will jump low fences. These are just some examples of the differences that each species requires in the topic of fencing.



Fire Safety – Serious Important Info

Can you purchase fire insurance for the buildings on your

homestead? What about the old farmhouse? Is it insurable? I never even considered this question until recently a friend lost her barn from an accidental fire while burning leaves on the property. They did not have insurance because the home was very old and in their state, the insurance companies have limits on how old of a structure they will insure. Be sure you investigate this before you buy. Luckily no animals were hurt in the fire and they will be able to rebuild the barn but this could have led to a much more tragic ending.

Cob webs accumulating near wires and electric light bulbs is also a fire hazard. Many people each year lose their chickens and the coop to a fire from hanging a light bulb in the coop.

I won't get into the whole discussion about whether or not chickens need heat in the coop in this discussion, but please make sure that you use utmost care when mixing electricity with wood and dry straw in a building with animals.

Clothing – Wearing the Right Look

Needless to say your clothing style will change a good bit after you spend time building up your homestead. Dressing in layers is always good advice as you spend time throughout the day tending to the chores. Chilly mornings lead to warm afternoons and then back to the chill of evenings as the sun goes down. Dressing in layers enables you to stay comfortable throughout the day. I recommend natural fiber fabrics for clothing. Cotton and wool are my choice in clothing because they breath, and wick away moisture so I don't end up wearing damp clothing as the day cools down. Trying to always look fashionable while taking care of the homestead is a pitfall in a homesteading life. Not wearing sturdy shoes is an invitation for a nail to go right into your foot. (yup, been there done that). Forget the fashion wear and dress for the job.



Canning and Cleanliness

As you start to harvest your own food from your homestead you will want to process it and preserve it for later. There is no one standing watch in the kitchen as we prepare our foods and jars for canning. We have to be accountable to ourselves on the topic of food cleanliness and safety. There is nothing hard about the process of canning and preserving food.

However, following the recommended guidelines is very important to your health! The main pitfall I have encountered in canning for the winter is too much all at once.



If you grow a large garden that may be unavoidable. If you are purchasing produce from a local farm or market, you can pace yourself. Don't buy two bushels of tomatoes at once. They probably won't run out of tomatoes. Some of the early vegetables are a bigger risk but they also keep a little longer before being canned or cooked. Peas and lima beans and beets aren't that plentiful at the markets around me, but beets will wait patiently for a week in the refrigerator while I process and freeze the peas and lima beans. If you aren't sure what vegetables to buy that have a shorter season, ask the farmer at the market.

Save, Reuse, Repurpose but Don't be a Hoarder

Being a hoarder to some extent can save the day on the homestead

This may seem like odd advice but really it has saved the day on more than one occasion. Saving what might be thought of as debris in some situations may give you the materials you need to fix a fence (boards, pallets), make a lead line for an animal (baling twine), prepare a place for a rejected baby

animal or a make shift infirmary (dog crates, old towels). One pound coffee cans are great for storage and for feeding scoops.

[Self sustaining living](#) has saved the day on our farm on more than one occasion. We have reused baling twine to repair a broken board, reused feed bags to insulate animal housing from drafts, reused feed bags to sit on next to an ill or injured animal, reused nails, pallets, wire fencing and many other items.

Many homesteaders have learned the art of seed saving. When you plant heirloom varieties of vegetables, the seeds are viable for replanting. This is not true of hybrid varieties. Harvesting tomato seeds, from your delicious [Black Krim tomatoes](#) will enable you to enjoy them year after year with no additional cost. Harvesting seeds from cucumbers, squash, peppers and more, will save you money!

Saving and storing items can also be pitfalls in a homesteading life. When the amount of stuff accumulated “just in case” becomes a haven for rodents, and the danger of things falling on your head is a real threat, it’s time to re-evaluate how much stuff you need to save.



My advice is always to start small, enjoy the journey and seek help when you have a problem. The path to a life of rural living is full of pitfalls in a homesteading life. Take each one as it comes and learn from it. Soon you will be encouraging a friend in their new journey through the pitfalls.

