

The Homestead Bulletin

What does the word “homestead” mean to you?

Do you yearn for a simpler, healthier, and regenerative way of life for your family?

Do you relish sharing stories of your grandparents canning fruits or your grandpa hunting and fishing?

Are you inspired by the idea of making your soaps, wines, or medicines?

Do you feel a deep connection to your property, plants, and animals?

Are you moved by the videos of others living off the land, planting their gardens and foraging for wild crops?

If so, know that you are not alone. This bulletin is here to encourage and support your homesteading journey, whether you live in an apartment, an urban-suburban area, or a rural area.

How did homesteading come about?

The Homestead Act of 1862 played an essential role in expanding the western territories of the United States. The act promised 160 acres of land for a minimal registration fee and minimum requirements. This inspired people from across the country to build homes, live on the land, and farm it.

In 1866, Congress amended the act to include Black Americans, although they faced nefarious discrimination. Despite these barriers, many Black Families were able to establish a lifestyle that utilized traditional methods of homesteading while adapting and surviving in a racist and discriminatory society.

Today, homesteading refers to a self-sufficient lifestyle that combines various practices in agriculture, zero-waste living, and the use of renewable resources. This approach creates a closed loop with less reliance on outside influences for the well-being of the household. Some homesteaders work cooperatively with other like-minded homeowners to build a community and share resources.

The homestead can be adapted to different types of locations and scales. For those living in the city, in an apartment a balcony retreat using pots and containers can be a homestead. In suburban areas, yards can be transformed into thriving food-garden spaces. Small-scale homesteading, which usually involves less than 10 acres of land, can comfortably feed an average family and support some small livestock. On the other hand, a large homestead has over 10 acres of land to dedicate to various crops, livestock pens, forest areas, or orchards, providing even greater opportunities for self-sufficiency.

Homestead skills to try

1 Growing and/or Preserving Your Food
Homesteading begins with gardening. It is the foundation of a self-sustaining lifestyle. No matter the space's size, there is always room to grow your food. And once the harvest is in, you can preserve it through canning, pickling, dehydrating, or freezing. Take control of your food supply and enjoy the satisfaction of providing for you and your family.

2 Rainwater Collection
Rainwater collection is a traditional practice that has been in use for centuries. It can be an essential part of homesteading efforts to achieve self-sufficiency. Harvesting rainwater is an excellent way to reduce the amount of irrigation water required from other sources and can help conserve our natural resources, replenishing our dwindling supply.

3 Backyard Chickens
Raising chickens in your backyard is a step toward a homesteading lifestyle, which promotes self-sufficiency. Keeping chickens is an excellent small-scale protein option for both meat and eggs and it doesn't require a significant investment in terms of time or materials to get started.

To explore more homestead skills:

<https://extension.illinois.edu/fjprw/modern-homesteading-series>

“Negro Cabin”

The illustration “Negro Cabin” is a pictorial description of the United States Robert Sears Pub., 1848”

<https://archive.org/details/apictorialdescr00seagoog/page/348/mode/2up>

This painting evokes a complexity of emotional responses because it depicts an encampment of enslaved people in Virginia in the mid-1800s. And yet, it portrays a self-sustaining farm system that includes homesteading activities such as animal husbandry, beekeeping, and a windmill.

