VOL 03

FALL 2022

HOMESTEAD
LIVING

HEARTH & HOME

FALL EDITION

From the Editor

Growing up I read the *Little House on the Prairie* series many times over. One scene, from *The Long Winter*, had Pa and Laura twisting hay into bundles to burn for heat because they ran out of coal (and the prairie didn't provide many trees for firewood). Laura stated she and Pa worked in the little room off the side to make the bundles, but their hands would get cold.

I never could figure out why they didn't just take a big bundle of hay into the room and make the bundles where the fire was burning to stay warm (and thirty years later still ponder this).

Once you begin homesteading and see the fruits of your labor come to life, you consider the site of a full wood shed with seasoned, dry, and split firewood stacked to the rafters a work of art. It makes all the hot work of firewood in summer worth it. Little else signifies fall's arrival more than the woodstove's first fire of the season.

While chilly foggy mornings, crisp air, and falling leaves all signal winter isn't far off, fall still remains a bustle of activity on the homestead.

Crops need to be harvested, garlic planted, compost piles constructed, garden beds prepped and put to rest, and the shortening of daylight hours warns that you shouldn't delay.

Yet with those shorter daylight hours, there are opportunities to sip a hot cup of tea in the evening while the fire snaps and pops—a lovely time to wind down as the sun slips beyond the horizon earlier each day.

This edition's theme is **Hearth and Home**. Very fitting as we transition to more time spent indoors. While we're featuring topics around fall, we'd be remiss if we didn't address the two major holiday's that fall in November and December.

My father grew up during the Great Depression and the years shortly following it. For his family, the "end" of the depression didn't change their way of life. They'd always lived close to the land for food and survival. There were years when my father was little that there weren't any presents. While we've gone through tough economic times, I've never been to a point where we couldn't afford to purchase or make a gift for our children or immediate family members. Unlike my father, neither I nor my children have experienced a Christmas without a single present.

Ten years ago he told me, "We didn't have presents but it was always a very

special day when we came down and Mom was making chocolate gravy. I can still remember the way it tasted, I haven't had it since I was a kid."

I'd never heard of chocolate gravy at that time and my grandmother passed away many years ago. But I was determined to recreate one of his fond childhood memories. With a close friend, we tinkered until we nailed the "perfect" chocolate gravy.

I made it Christmas morning, not telling my dad until we all sat down and I could put the dish in front of him. Sometimes it's the simple things that have the biggest impact. We were both a little choked up that day.

Of course, you'll find my rendition of chocolate gravy in this edition, but my biggest hope is you will create memories around the food you serve your family that will reach across generations and even past death.

Blessings and Mason jars,
Melissa

Homestead Tried & True Tips

My sharpie became my favorite marking tool when I learned that alcohol will easily remove it from plastics, vinyl, and glass. Now I use a sharpie to mark all of my bins, mason jars, labels, etc. Simple and easy!

— Susan Cranford

Storing your produce: Let me introduce you to what I affectionately call the redneck's root cellar. I dug a 4-foot hole behind my garage (our frost line is 3-4 feet), took some empty 3-gallon buckets, and stored some cool-tolerant produce. First I placed some straw or mulch inside the bottom of the bucket, placed a good layer of produce, applied more straw, repeated a second layer then finished off with an extra thick layer of straw. Gently place a cover on top, level the ground hole with a thick layer of your chosen material, and cover it with some sort of waterproof item. (Tarp, large plastic lid, etc) Make sure there's an option for some air to get inside without getting soaked inside. You can even store foods in a shed, garage, or other covered area using milk crates or storage boxes and plenty of straw. No digging required. I've had potatoes and apples last over a month outside using this technique.

— Britany Nelson

To use up leftovers, I use ice cream buckets in my freezer. I put veggies, broth, and scraps of chicken in a bucket. When full I use this to make leftover chicken soup.

— Kristina D. McGuire

Bread baking can be as simple and easy as you want it to be. Just remember these simple tips: proof your yeast (active or instant), know your true oven temperature, follow the "poke test"

for rising and lastly, practice makes perfect! there's no "failed" bread, just unplanned. There's always something you could do to a bread that doesn't go as planned (bread crumbs, croutons, dressing, etc.)

— Annie Cremeans

I make breadcrumbs from the leftover stale bread whenever I bake a new loaf. Seems there's always a slice or two. I just tear them up into chunks (or cut them if really hard), grind them up in the blender until it reaches the texture you like, and spread them out on a rimmed tray. Bake at 250 for around 15 minutes until lightly toasted, then set out to cool, and place in a lidded container in the freezer until you need some for casserole topping, coating chicken or veggies, or for any time breadcrumbs are needed. So easy and so good! Way better than the store-bought that looks like and tastes like sawdust.

— Cheryl Snow

Stockpiling Forage

By Joel Salatin

Besides laying in human food for the winter, you need to think about laying in animal food if you have livestock. While grains for the chickens and pigs are fairly straightforward, the herbivores pose a different challenge due to hay bulkiness.

Many homesteads rock along well until the logistics of acquiring, storing, and then paying for the hay hits home. Suddenly those cows, sheep, and goats look like a land yacht rather than the meat and milk provision we envisioned. I'll get to hay later in this column, but first I'm going to do all I can to explain how to minimize hay.

It starts with what's known as stockpiling. Actually, it starts with a grazing plan, but let's deal with the concept of stockpiling first. Too many homesteads have a small pasture dedicated to their handful of herbivores and when the grass runs out the hay comes in. The biggest economic game changer on a homestead with herbivores is going from grazing on available forage to eating hay.

The fewer days we feed hay, the cheaper herbivore keeping becomes. Hay is the single biggest cost in keeping herbivores. The key to reducing hay consumption is to stockpile forage going into winter. Believe it or not, brown, frosted, frozen grass is plenty nutritious to keep the animals satisfied. You wouldn't want to have babies on that forage, but to maintain through the dormant season, it's quite acceptable.

Every blade of forage the animals can harvest themselves is a blade you don't have to buy, haul, store, and carry to them. In North America, nearly all forage growth curves have two humps. One in the spring and another smaller one in the fall. The dip between the two humps is called the summer slump.

The key to stockpiling dormant season forage is to pull the animals off designated areas to let that grass accumulate in the fall. Excluding animals from that area allows the forage its full expression late in the season. The cold winter tends to preserve the forage kind of like freezing vegetables. It may look brown and unappetizing, but it's actually quite palatable and nutritious.

More discoveries about historical bison grazing patterns indicate that rather than migrating from north to south to winter in warm areas and summer in colder areas, the herds actually wintered in the north. They enjoyed the comfort of cold with no flies. The prairie grasses essentially freeze-dried and fed the herds during the cold winters.

Creating an exclusion obviously requires a fencing subdivision. The most common response I receive when introducing planned intensive grazing to homesteaders is "I don't have enough acreage for that." Ecological grazing and deferred stockpiling have nothing to do with size; they have everything to do with management. These principles are completely size-neutral.

Grass grows in an S curve, meaning it starts slow, gains leaf area (an expanded solar panel) and accelerates, then slows down again as it reaches senescence. On most forage species, that entire growth cycle happens in fewer than 70 days. Obviously many things can affect the growth rate: heat, cold, drought, and flood. Any extreme changes in the start-to-finish timing of that growth cycle.

The goal of any herbivore caretaker is to prune the forage prior to senescence but well after that initial immature growth period, making sure the plant and animal do not meet until after that accelerating period of growth. We do this with an electric fence. Some of the fencing is permanent and some is mobile. Each species has a different fencing requirement. Cows are the easiest and goats are the most difficult. Cows respect a single wire quite well whereas goats generally need at least three wires or an electrified netting.

In this column I'm not going to dive into the fencing infrastructure; just realize that controlling the animal is the key to being able to place the right number on the right area for the right reason for the right time. Whether you're running 2 cows or 1,000, the key to forage production is strategically timed pruning at the front end, and then not allowing the animals to stay long enough to nip the new regrowth on the back end. In most cases, this is anywhere from one to four days.

Yes, that means moving your animals rapidly, not allowing them to stay in the same spot. Once nipped, the forage sends up regrowth; if that is nipped the plant becomes weaker on the one hand, and on the other hand doesn't experience that accelerated growth period between new shoot and senescence. Electric fencing control, then, becomes a steering wheel, accelerator, and brake on that 4-legged pruner. I like to use the word prune rather than graze because I think it better captures the essence of what the animals do.

Yes, they graze, but the whole point is pruning. Grazing tends to concentrate our thinking on the benefit to the animal. Pruning tends to move our thinking to the entire plant community, soil, and how the animal benefits the ecology. Nobody would go out willy-nilly with pruning shears and start whacking apple trees or grape vines, and yet that is exactly the way most people use their livestock on the forages.

The livestock should be seen as a precision pruning mechanism that we wield with the same care and attention as a zero-turn mower on a golf course. By moving the stock across the pasture in these little blocks called paddocks, we create a forage maturity mosaic. What's more, we develop mastery at being able to inventory the standing forage. On our farm, we measure it in cow-days per acre since we have cows. About 7 sheep equal one cow, just for reference. By keeping some rudimentary records of your cow-days per acre, very quickly you'll learn how to read the available forage.

If you have two cow equivalents and you have 30 cow-day per acre of grass, you'll need 1/15th of an acre per day. If you move them every other day, you'll need about a seventh of an acre for the two days. An acre is about 5,000 square yards, so a seventh of 5,000 is about 700 (round is plenty exact for these off-the-cuff calculations). So what do 700 square yards look like? It could be 35 X 20 or 10 X 70 or 30 X 23 or 26 X 27. The more square the more even the pruning.

By knowing the animal units you have and the area you give them each time, you'll quickly be able to look at a spot and say "that's 30 cow-day forage" or "that's 45 cow-day forage." You can inventory the standing forage just like you would inventory bales of hay in the barn. You know a cow will eat about 28 pounds of hay per day if she weighs around 1,000 pounds. If she weighs a lot more, she'll eat a lot more. I like small cows. You can figure with quite a bit of accuracy how much hay you need per day or per week to feed your herd or flock.

That same precision can be applied to standing forage as you manage your pruners through your pasture. When the fall rains come and you get that bump in the fall, you can exclude a portion of pasture and let it grow as tall as it can going into winter. In our area, the average farm feeds hay 120 days per year. On our farm, even though we're running twice as many animals per acre as the norm, we only feed on average 40 days per year. That's the beauty and potential of this stockpiling and controlled pruning technique.

The higher your rainfall and more temperate your climate, the more rotations you can make on the same area each season. In extremely dry areas like Utah or Nevada, or places with extremely short growing seasons like Wyoming or Montana, you may only graze a given spot 2 times a year or maybe even once. Irrigation changes that, of course.

You don't have to be a big outfit to do this. Our cows routinely eat through nearly a foot of snow. If the snow gets deeper than that, then we feed hay. But animals are extremely resourceful if they have access to their own groceries. Nobody brought hay to the bison, elk, and other herbivores on the great American plains. They figured out how to get through the winters before they knew December 25th was Christmas.

Our livestock are close cousins and if we don't coddle them too much, they'll be extremely content on stockpiled forage. In inclement weather, certainly bringing them in is a good thing to do. But animals can handle substantial cold going into winter. Think about how eager the animals are, even on a cold day, to go outside. If they go outside to forage rather than tromp around on an overgrazed moonscape, they'll be much happier. And our pocketbook will be in better shape as well.

We homesteaders often engage in vilifying beef feedlots, confinement livestock operations, overgrazing, and other ills as if *the big guys* have a lock on mismanagement. In general, many of the worst cases of overgrazing I've ever seen have been on micro-farms and homesteads. Our growing season grazing program sets the stage for how long we can let the animals graze into the winter. That, in turn, determines how much time we'll spend hauling hay and how much we'll spend on acquiring that hay. Not only does this short-term controlled grazing approach yield more forage during the growing season, but it also yields a stockpile going into cold weather. Two-fers are great in any arena.

Joel Salatin and his family own Polyface Farm in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. He has authored 15 books and speaks all over the world about agriculture and culture. To keep up with him and the farm, visit www.polyfacefarms.com.

Growing Rose Hips for Vitamin C

By CeAnne Kosel

Did you know the first roses were most likely cultivated in China around 5,000 years ago? The Romans started using rosehips for medicinal purposes soon after, and the Egyptians for scent.

Filled to the brim with juicy, vitamin-packed flesh, the hips of a rose plant are an incredibly multi-functional and tasty snack. We can use them for teas, jellies, jams, cooked meals, or even eat them raw (as long as we discard the seeds).

With dozens of available species, how do you know which are the best roses for hips? And what can you even do with them? We are going to dive right into that!

Understanding Rose Hips

The rosehip, also known as rose hep or rose haw, is an accessory fruit of the rose plant. The color is usually red or orange, but it can range from dark purple to black in some species.

Every uncut rose will ultimately develop a hip, but some will appear in the summer and others later in the autumn, depending on the species. Shrub roses and elderly garden roses produce the best rose hips.

It is unnecessary to dead-head (remove wasted blossoms) shrubs and wild roses. Modern roses,

on the other hand, (hybrid tea, floribunda, and Grandiflora cultivars) are repeat bloomers and must be dead-headed to keep them blooming. There are plenty of ways to keep a garden going from cuttings, however, so don't be afraid to trim your plants.

The Benefits of Rose Hips

Rose hips have a delicate fruity flavor and are high in vitamins A, B, and C. The fruit and seeds are both edible. However, we should avoid eating them whole because they grow with prickly little hair inside the fruit. You can filter them out either before or after the drying process.

Besides their flavor, they say rose hips are a high-quality, natural source of vitamin C, with 50% more vitamin C than oranges! It's even been suggested in several studies that a 5-gram dose of rose hip supplements can help treat and relieve the symptoms of arthritis.

Some other potential benefits of rose hips:

- Help boost the immune system
- High in antioxidants
- Help lower cholesterol and blood pressure
- Reduce inflammation
- Treat diarrhea and stomach ulcers

Best Roses for Hips

Most modern roses don't have huge or showy hips like old garden roses do. However, plenty of other shrubs and old garden roses grow beautiful and edible hips.

The thing is, some hips are just going to be better for one task than another. That's not to say that you only have one species around that you can't use for tea and cooking, but it's always good to know which types of rose hips will work best.

Best Hips for Tea

The Rose Filipes, or Rambling Rose, produce hips that are the best herb for tea since their fragrance is so lovely and strong. While most regular roses will produce hips, wild roses are more commonly used for making tea. Aside from the Rose Filipes, we can also use:

- Rosa Rugosa
- Rosa Rubignosa
- Rosa Arvensis
- Rosa Virginiana

We'll likely get more fresh vitamins and antioxidants from fresh rose hips, rather than dry ones, so it's best to choose hips that don't have lots of fibers. With that in mind, however, the drying process will not undermine the benefits of tea.

Best Rose Hips for Vitamin C

Interestingly, plants that grow in higher altitudes are said to have higher antioxidant levels, making them ideal for anyone looking to get an extra boost. There is no shortage of immune-boosting goodness, with about 1700-2000 mg of Vitamin C in every 100g dried product.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter which rose hips you use if your goal is to increase your vitamin and antioxidant intake. Still, we recommend Rosa Canina, simply because it's functional as a tea and great for jams, jellies, and other culinary treats.

Best Hips for Cooking

The hips produced by the common wild rose, the dog rose, or Rosa Canina, are the best for eating. They produce firm, deep crimson hips with a lovely strong flavor. They're also easy to find and pick.

They're typically ripe throughout fall, but the best time to pick them is right after the first frost. Another typical rose that yields tasty and gigantic hips is the *Rosa Rugosa* or the *Japanese Rose*. These hips can often become four or five times the size of a dog rose hip! We should also note that though Japanese Roses are great for jams, jellies, and vinegar because they have a higher water content, they're not ideal for making syrups.

Other hips for cooking with are:

- Sweetbrier Rose (tastes like apple)
- The Burnet Rose has dark purple and black hips (great for a liqueur)

With bigger hips, it's best to err on the side of caution and remove as many hairs from the inside as possible before setting them aside to dry.

Rose Hips to Avoid

While every type of rose hip is technically edible, it's best to avoid a select few. This is not because they're poisonous, but simply because they won't taste good and, with rotten hips, will make us ill.

If the hips are still green, they will probably have an unpleasant, bitter taste, so it's best to avoid them or leave them to ripen. On the same note, hips with dark spots or a squishy texture should be avoided, too, as that could show that they have a disease or are just well beyond their "best before."

We always want to choose hips that are bright in color and have firm (but not solid) bodies.

Also, make sure that any rose hips that you are consuming are not coming from rose plants that have been sprayed with chemicals. Those chemicals were not meant to be ingested.

Why a Rose Plant May Not Develop Hips

If the roses weren't pollinated, then it's unlikely they would develop hips. Where there is no pollination, there are no seeds, and where there are no seeds, there is no need for hips. This often happens with hybrid roses because they tend to have a lot more petals, and so the bees have trouble making it to the middle of the rose.

Some roses are not fertile, like some GMO roses, so they can't reproduce, which also, unfortunately, means no hips. Remember, not all GMO roses or plants are sterile; it's simply best to be aware of it when planting roses.

Finally, dead-headed roses won't produce hips, which is why wild shrubs and rose species

are better for foraging and growing, as they don't benefit as much from deadheading as garden cultivars.

Stop and Smell the Roses. Or Eat Them!

Growing a rose plant can be extremely fulfilling, and not only because they look good (and give you the best garden for foraging). They're an incredibly versatile plant with so much to give, from juicy rose hips to decadent petals.

If you want to take a deep dive study into roses or any medicinal plant, download our free Dog Wood Rose Monograph to get you headed in the right direction. From how and what to plant to how to harvest and dehydrate rose hips. Along with companion planting and flavor pairing tips.

Once you have your dried rose hips, there are so many things that you can do with them. Of course, rose hip jelly is very popular, but here at Farmhouse Teas, we like to use them as tea. Bulgaria is famous for its rose hip tea, as we saw when we adopted our oldest daughter from there. Here is our favorite way to use rose hips in tea.

High C's Rose Hip Tea

This tea blend is not only extremely flavorful, but it is also very high in vitamin c. Hibiscus and orange peel, along with the cranberries, give it an excellent tart flavor that pairs well with some raw honey for sweetener. It serves up greatly iced but is fabulous warm as well. Rose hips and alma berries are packed full of vitamin c.

Ingredients:

- 1 part Hibiscus Petals
- ½ part dried cranberries (no sugar/no oil)
- 1 part orange peel
- 1 part rose hips
- 1/16 part ginger
- 1 part alma berry

Directions:

1. In a large bowl, add all of your dried ingredients.
2. Mix well and ensure that your dried herbs are blended consistently to ensure that every cup has the same flavor. Remember that smaller bits and dust will like to fall to the bottom while larger bits tend to stay on the top.
3. Steep 1 tsp of your blended tea in 6-8 oz of boiling water for 4-5 minutes, then strain.
4. Use more or less tea for a bolder or lighter flavor.

Testing and Experimentation

We are working on a test patch of roses specifically for rose hips at our farm at the foothills of the Cascade Mountains in Oregon. We are excited to share our journey in finding the best rose bush for production on the homestead with all of those who want to get the most out of their garden space. We invite you to join our family's journey not only growing roses but also other herbs, food, and all things homestead over on our YouTube Channel.

CeAnne Kosel is co-owner of Farmhouse Teas with her husband, whom she affectionately refers to as the Farmer. CeAnne and Paul have four adopted children from around the world who participate in their small family-owned business in Oregon. They homeschool, homestead, do home business, and practice herbal medicine at home on their just under 2-acre homestead. CeAnne is passionate about helping others succeed in learning Christian herbalism and achieving wellness through God's herbs, especially those that can be grown right in your own yard. Find CeAnne and her family blogging at www.GrowCreateSip.com *and their families' fabulous herbal products at* www.FarmhouseTeas.com

Home Grown Pumpkin Pie from Scratch

By Carolyn Thomas

Pumpkin pie is my favorite pie, hands down. Fruit pies are delicious, but for me, there is just no competition for the creamy, sweet, and spicy joy of a pumpkin pie. In the autumn, pumpkin items are everywhere, both for food and decor, and ready-made pumpkin pies offer a convenient way to bring fall flavors to your table. However, the only pumpkin pie for me is the real deal: a pumpkin grown and cured in our garden, cooked and pureed in our kitchen, and then transformed into that beloved fall dessert.

A pumpkin pie completely from scratch is a big accomplishment, but don't let that scare you away! Making homemade pumpkin pie isn't hard at all, and I'll walk you through all the steps right here. There are lots of reasons to make your own pumpkin pie rather than purchasing one from the grocery store. The taste of homemade can't be matched and making it yourself also guarantees that you will have complete control over the ingredients you use. The cost of homemade pumpkin puree is

only pennies per jar, which makes your from-scratch pumpkin goodies extremely cost-effective. Add to all of this the satisfaction of creating your own food, from scratch, with ingredients from your own garden, and the choice to bake a pumpkin pie yourself becomes a given!

Types of Pumpkins

Your perfect homemade pie begins with selecting the perfect pumpkin. There are hundreds (even thousands!) of varieties of pumpkins, and choosing the right variety for your purposes is important. When selecting pumpkins to puree and cook in your kitchen, your best options are varieties that are considered “pie pumpkins” or “sugar pumpkins.” Other varieties, like the larger field pumpkins sold in stores, are great for carving and decor, but they don’t have a high enough sugar content to taste very good.

It is essential to choose a fully ripe pumpkin for cooking. Otherwise, your puree may end up bitter and disappointing, no matter how much sugar you add to your recipe. Many pumpkins appear ripe before they are ready to harvest, so rely on more than appearance before you pick them. Ripe pumpkins will be fully colored in their final color, and a ripe rind will be very firm. It should be almost impossible to dent with your fingernail. Stems of ripe pumpkins turn tan and almost cork-like and the leaves and vine near the pumpkin will also begin to dry out and brown. When they are ready for harvest, pumpkins will feel heavy for their size and give a nice hollow sound when you thump them on the side. If the pumpkins in your garden meet these criteria, they are ready to start curing! As an important note, winter squash (including pumpkins) are damaged by freezing temperatures, so if frost threatens, it is better to harvest early.

How to Cure Pumpkins from Your Garden

After pumpkins and other squash are harvested, they need to be cured. Curing is simply allowing the skins of squash to harden to better protect them for storage, but it has the added benefit of making pumpkins taste sweeter (perfect for pie!). To cure your pumpkin in the field (or garden), just leave them in a dry, sunny place outdoors after cutting them from the vines. After 7 days, your pumpkins are ready to store somewhere cool and dry and should last up to 3 months.

Outdoor curing is our preferred method, but of course, the weather does not always cooperate. If your weather is too wet or the temperatures are more extreme (above 80°F/27°C or below 45°F/7°C), it is better to cure your pumpkins indoors. You can cure squash in a shed, greenhouse, grow tunnel, attic, bedroom, or anywhere else where the temperature is in the right range. As an added benefit, you can even use pumpkins and squash as decorations inside your house while they are curing! Within ten days to two weeks indoors, your squash will have developed an even harder, tougher rind, and some of the starches inside will have been converted to sugar. They are ready for storage or to become delicious pies.

How to Cook and Puree a Pumpkin

The pumpkin you intend to make into a pie can be cooked a few weeks in advance, making your actual baking day much faster. Simply roast your pumpkins, puree the cooked squash, and store in the freezer until you're ready to make a pie! Begin with a pie pumpkin, as described above, or you can substitute a different winter squash of comparable size, like a butternut or acorn squash.

To prepare your pumpkin, wash and dry it with a clean dish towel. Remove the stem by breaking it off on the edge of your kitchen counter or on the floor. Then, cut one vent hole in the pumpkin. I typically do this in the spot where the stem was since it's thinner and offers less resistance.

Once the pumpkin is prepared, place it whole on a baking sheet and bake at 350° F (175° C) for 20-60 minutes, depending on its size. The larger the pumpkin, the longer it will take to cook all the way through. To check the pumpkin's doneness, poke a sharp knife into its wall. If the blade goes right through the side without resistance, the pumpkin is done.

After removing the pumpkin from the oven, allow it to cool until you can handle it easily, then remove the skin. It should slip right off. Carefully open the pumpkin and use a spoon to scoop the seeds out. Then, puree the remaining meat from the cooked pumpkin in a blender or food processor until it is completely smooth. If your puree seems especially watery or loose, you can set it to drain in a strainer lined with cheesecloth for half an hour. This prevents extra moisture from keeping your pie from setting. Use the liquid you strain in smoothies or to feed your garden.

Pumpkin puree prepared this way can be used immediately or you can transfer it to freezer containers or wide-mouth jars (leaving 2 inches (5 cm) empty space at the top, called headspace)

and freeze it for up to a year. Don't forget to label your jars with the contents and date! Unfortunately, pumpkin puree is not safe to can, so freezing is the best method to preserve it for future use.

Turning Pumpkin Puree into Pies

To use your homemade pumpkin puree to make two from-scratch pies, you will need the following ingredients:

- 6 cups (1400 ml) pumpkin puree
- 12 whole eggs
- 2 cups (470 ml) milk, cream, or heavy whipping cream
- 2 cups (425 g) brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons pumpkin pie spice mix
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 homemade pie crusts

In a large bowl, blend the pumpkin puree, eggs, milk, brown sugar, pumpkin pie spice, vanilla, and salt. You can use a variety of methods for this step. I use an immersion blender, but you can also use a stand mixer, food processor, or even mix it by hand. Your end goal is a custard mixture that is well-blended, silky, and smooth.

Once your filling is well blended, roll the pie crusts into two pie pans. Pour the prepared filling evenly into the crusts and tap the pans gently on the counter to get any bubbles out of the custard. Bake the pies at 350° F (175° C) for 45 – 55 minutes or until the custard is set and the very center of the pie is only slightly jiggly when lightly shaken. Be careful not to overbake as overbaked custard tends to crack. Your pie will continue to bake for a brief time after you take it out of the oven.

Once done, remove the pies from the oven and set them to cool on a cooling rack. Pumpkin pie should cool for at least 4 hours before slicing. Serve with home-whipped cream and store any leftovers in the refrigerator.

Whether I'm preparing for a big Thanksgiving spread or just cooking a simple, nourishing dinner for our family, it brings me such joy to include a homegrown, from-scratch pumpkin pie. It's an involved process, but not a complicated one, and there just isn't anything that can match the flavor, cost-effectiveness, or satisfaction of crafting it in your own kitchen. I hope you will take this encouragement to do it yourself! Once you try, you'll see what I mean and I'm guessing you'll never look back. Happy baking!

Carolyn Thomas and her husband, Josh live on a 40-acre homestead in Idaho surrounded by gardens, livestock, and children. She spends her days rocking babies, homeschooling her children, and preserving food for the coming winter. As part of her passion, she also teaches homesteading skills at www.homesteadingfamily.com *to encourage other families to live simply and focus on the things that really matter... faith, family, and really good food!*

Cold Climate Gardening

By Esther Munroe

Gardening in the Northern regions is challenging to say the least. It isn't just the long snowy winters or cold wet springs. It's the temperature fluctuations that really get you. Some years it may be cold and snowy, other years wet and icy. Some years offer little to no moisture at all!

And then there is spring. Idaho is known for the saying: "*If you don't like the weather, just wait for five minutes*." Things change quickly, and you will experience something entirely different before you know it.

I am convinced that March is the month that inspired this phrase. All four seasons can make an appearance in one day – heck even in a single hour! As spring progresses, our cold climate really shows itself. Any given day can fluctuate 40 degrees F. Night temperatures can still be down in the teens and twenties while day temps can get up to mid-60s or higher.

Winters in Idaho can be bitterly cold while summers can be over 100 degrees F. There have been summers where we get almost no rainfall for weeks or even months! If that's not enough some summers don't warm up until it's almost too late to get a harvest of warm-loving crops (shhh, don't tell anyone, but these summers are actually my favorite).

You might begin to wonder how and why anyone would even choose to garden in this climate at all. Yet I assure you that a stunning and lush garden can be attained in this crazy climate that we live in. So, how do you do it? What do you need in your garden journey armory in order to succeed?

First, you need **resilience**. Picture this with me: after months of babying your precious vegetable starts — yes the ones you started back in February — it is now late May and you are itching to get them into the ground. Your mouth waters as you think about that first sun-warmed juicy tomato that you pluck right from the vine and pop into your mouth. You just can't wait.

You check the forecast and plant your starts because the forecast doesn't show any frost warnings for the next 10 days. You've been fooled before, so it takes a minute to convince yourself that everything will be fine. You decide to plant and everything is going well for a couple of days, and then BAM!

Facebook and your weather app explode with warnings of a late spring frost!

Your tomatoes are at stake here! You rush out in your night attire and cover them up. Or worse, you didn't get the warnings and wake up to black plants that just won't recover.

Time after time this happens to us hardy gardeners. So what can be done to stop this? If you are resilient then you won't be discouraged. You may have heard a little old timer's secret that if you spray cold water on frozen plants before the sun hits them they can be revived. Guess what? This actually does work!

Resilience means that you will continue to try no matter what. Resilience means you will have saved back a few starts (or maybe even half of them) and you will now replant. If you didn't save any starts you will invent some other way of getting tomatoes in the ground. Regardless, you will carry on. You don't let the lack of water dry up your plants.

Nope, not you. You have mulched deeply and are ready for the dry spells. You won't let a

potentially long, cold summer rob you of delicious fresh produce. You have selected the short and quick-growing varieties that can handle this. These plants thrive. You have become weather resilient.

The second thing you will need is **consistency**. Plants love consistency. Consistent water. Consistent light. Consistent temperatures….wait a minute. Didn't I just tell us about how inconsistent the weather is in the North? Yes. Yes. I did.

So what are we going to do about that? The answer is, we will make our own consistency using a few of the following ideas:

- greenhouse plastic
- 6ml thickness
- Greenhouses
- hoop houses
- cold frames
- frost blankets

And anything else we can do to protect our precious plant babies from the cold and temperature fluctuations of our climate.

Spreading deep mulch protects growing plants from heavy rains or from a lack of moisture. Black woven agricultural fabric can be used to warm the soil in spring and to keep it warm in the fall. You'll need to remove it as temperatures rise and it becomes too hot for the plants. Devoting time to learn about the ever-expanding varieties of plants we can grow that enjoy and thrive in our exciting climate is a great way to beat the elements. (For example, the Haskap, aka Honeyberry, can bloom and survive 20-degree Fahrenheit temperatures.)

Scheduling planting around the worst of the weather extremes and harvesting either before or after the heat and cold cycles is yet another way of providing consistency. Our gardens have become resilient and we have cultivated our own consistency techniques. So what's next?

The third trait you need to be a gardener in the North is **creativity**.

With all these wild temperature fluctuations in the North, you may be asking yourself if you can actually garden here. The answer is a resounding YES, especially if you are creative. Gardening and creativity go hand in hand. Whether you are designing an herb garden, plotting out a large vegetable garden, or picturing a beautiful permaculture-style landscape, you need to get creative.

Imagine the space you are creating, either on paper or in your mind, lay it out, and then go to work. The Northern gardener has to apply creativity to more areas of their garden. You must find creative solutions to shade your precious greens from the scorching July and August heat, perhaps using shade cloths or other plants as sun blockers. You must find a creative yet aesthetically pleasing way of protecting your tomatoes and squash from both late and early frosts. What creative ways are available for extending the growing season and pushing the limits of the weather as it comes? You must be creative with the lists of plants you grow, exploring the numerous varieties that grow very well in cool climates like ours, like root vegetables.

Now, no judging. I know you're thinking I'm talking about potatoes since I'm from North Idaho. But wait! There are so many more roots than just potatoes! Carrots, turnips, rutabaga, kohlrabi (kohlrabi isn't a root per se — but close enough), and radishes grow so well you will be begging your friends to take some home with them when they visit.

This leads me to the fourth requirement for the Northern gardener - you must be **adventurous**.

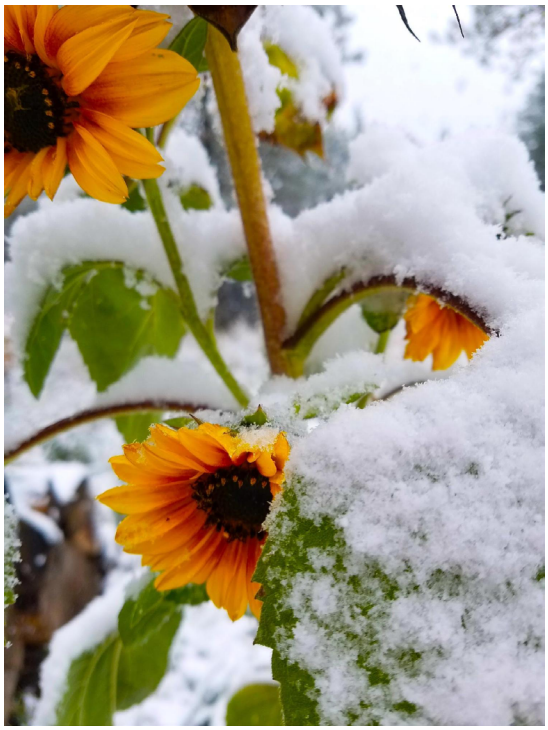
It takes a mighty adventurous spirit to leave behind the familiar tastes of the grocery store produce and the typical handful of vegetable varieties, which most of us are used to eating. If you are going to grow here in the North, you must desire to broaden your palate and try new foods. Not once, not twice, but as many times as it takes for you to retrain your tastebuds to like these homegrown goodies.

Some things like carrots taste nothing like their store-bought counterparts. Your tastebuds will jump for joy at the first bite of your delicious homegrown, nutrition-packed carrot. Other things like turnips and kohlrabi take a little more getting used to. You must be adventurous enough to swap au gratin potatoes for au gratin turnips. Just add a little extra cheese, and it'll be fine. Kohlrabi fritters anyone? Remember, I told you you've got to be adventurous!

So we've managed to develop resilience to the weather extremes and hold back some of our plants so that we have backups. We are ready with shade cloths, frost cloths, and even bedsheets just in case. We've become consistent in our techniques and are ready for anything the North might throw in the way of our gardening efforts. We have learned to utilize the many unique varieties that are perfect for this cold climate we call home. We have learned to think outside the box and be creative when it comes to these special gardens that are so dear to our hearts. We have become adventurous chefs in our home kitchens who are ready to try new recipes. Maybe we'll even serve these meals to our families without them even knowing…

There is just one more ingredient that the Northern gardener needs to add to this wonderful concoction of traits — and that is **determination**.

Determination will see you through even the hardest gardening years. Determination to beat the weather. Determination to keep growing year after year — even if a year was a complete failure. Determination will keep you growing through the cold, long spring, late frosts, heat waves, too much rainfall or not enough, the plagues of voracious voles, the choking weeds and creeping grasses, the early frosts of fall, and the short growing season. At this point, you may still be wondering how does one cultivate these things with such adversity? We have a secret weapon. Ready to know what it is?



WINTER!

At the end of every garden season comes winter. As those shimmery white flakes fall from the sky and cover everything in a blanket of pure white, something magical happens. Peace falls on the land. The garden of last year fades under the thick covering and you forget the weeds. The planting that took place amongst the cold spring frosts and the harvest that was reaped in the smoky airs of late summer disappear as a faded memory. Your mailbox is filled with those beautiful seed catalogs as your strength is renewed. Before you know it you are ordering more cold-tolerant items, trying turnips for the first time, and planning out your garden paths to accommodate more row covers.

By the time your seed order arrives, you are feeling revived and ready to plant all over again. Planting is still months away. Remember, these are just the first flurries of winter. By the time you are back to thinking about that first juicy, ripe tomato you will be *so ready* to take on the new growing season that *NOTHING* will stop you.

Congratulations, you have joined the ranks of resilient, consistent, creative, adventurous, and determined cold-climate gardeners!

My name is Esther Munroe, but I'm more commonly known as "The Crazy Plant Lady". I am a North Idaho girl that loves to help others on their gardening and homesteading journey - especially in cold climate areas. I am a mama who enjoys a stay-at-home lifestyle which enables me to homeschool my three amazing children. I am a wife to a husband who lets me have all the plants. I am an herbalist, plant and gardening enthusiast, homesteader, and prepper in denial.

Comforting Fall Recipes for the Homestead

Merissa Alink

When the weather begins to cool and we find ourselves having to turn on the stove to heat our home in the mornings, fall has finally arrived at our little house in the woods.

Since we don't have the modern convenience of air conditioning in our home, baked meals are a rarity in the summer and most things have to be eaten cold or cooked outside.

But when the weather finally turns, it's time to dust off my cookbooks and pull out the recipes for all of our favorite warming comfort foods. I'm going to share a few of those with you today.

Spaghetti Squash and Meatball Soup

This simple recipe is perfect for this time of year, especially if you harvest spaghetti squash from your garden. For the picky eaters, it's hard to tell exactly what the spaghetti squash is in this recipe, it just seems like a thin noodle, so they might not mind it as much! This is also a perfect way to use up those end-of-the-season tomatoes or any home-canned tomato sauce that you might have made. Here's how to put it together.

What You Need:

- 2 cups cooked Spaghetti Squash
- 3 cups diced Tomatoes or Tomato Sauce
- 1 pound cooked Meatballs (about 10 to 15 meatballs, we use our Make Ahead Meatballs)
- 1 teaspoon minced Garlic
- 1 medium Onion, chopped
- 6 cups Beef Stock

Directions:

Place all of the above ingredients together in your slow cooker in the morning. Cook on low for 6 to 8 hours. You could cook this on high in the afternoon if you forget to put it together in the morning.

If you have to cook up a whole spaghetti squash for this recipe and aren't sure how to use the rest, you might really enjoy our super simple Cheesy Spaghetti Squash recipe as well!

BBQ Meatballs

I know, I know, another meatball recipe! But our family really loves meatballs. They can be made inexpensively, they fill everyone up with a smaller amount of meat, and they can be frozen and used later. It's a win-win in my book! I love to make my Make Ahead Meatballs to always have meatballs for recipes when I need them. Here's how to make this delicious recipe.

What You Need:

- 20 Meatballs
- 2 cups Strained Tomatoes
- 1/4 cup Onion, chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon Garlic Powder
- 1/4 teaspoon Salt
- 1/3 cup Brown or Raw Sugar

Directions:

If you aren't using pre-made meatballs, make sure your meatballs are cooked. Place the cooked meatballs in the crock pot. Add in all the other ingredients.

Cook on low for 6 hours, stirring occasionally. Turn the crock pot off or on warm when the meatballs start to look like they are getting too done. These meatballs can burn since they have a limited amount of liquid so be sure and keep an eye on them.

Serve the BBQ meatballs over pasta or rice. These go great with a can of home-canned green beans on the side and maybe a Peach Cobbler using home-canned peaches for dessert!

Cheesy Breakfast Hashbrown Casserole Recipe

I couldn't end this article without including a deliciously warm breakfast recipe. You could make this for supper as well if you were looking for something inexpensive and easy. We love this recipe in the fall because potatoes are in abundance and so fresh. You could buy sausage to go with this or you could use Homemade Sausage as well.

What You Need:

- 6 medium Potatoes, washed, peeled, and shredded
- 1 cup Cheddar Cheese
- 1 medium Onion, chopped
- 1 tablespoon Butter
- 1 tablespoon Potato Starch (you can use cornstarch or arrowroot)
- 1 cup Milk
- 1/2 pound ground Sausage
- Salt, to taste

Directions:

In a frying pan on the stovetop, cook up the sausage until cooked through. Place the sausage in the bottom of a non-greased 8×8 baking dish.

In the same frying pan, fry the onion in the butter or in oil. (Cooking it in the same pan will

help it soak up the sausage leftovers and give it even more flavor.) When the onion turns transparent, turn the burner down to low and add in the milk and starch. Make sure you are continually stirring at this point so the milk doesn't scald. Cook until the sauce starts to thicken.

In a large bowl, mix your shredded potato with the onion/milk sauce. Stir well so it's all mixed together. Pour the mixture over the top of the sausage layer into the baking dish.

Finally, sprinkle your dish with shredded cheddar cheese. Bake at 400 degrees for 30 – 40 minutes until the Breakfast Hashbrown Casserole is bubbly and slightly brown on the top.

I hope that your family will be able to enjoy one of these recipes soon and they will help you embrace and enjoy the change in the seasons. I always love when summer comes and there is so much to see and do around the homestead. But fall is like a welcome friend that gets to come and tell you it's time to take a little break from all of the hard work of the busy season.

Grab your mug of apple cider and your notebook and add these recipes to your fall meal plans today.

Merissa Alink is the writer of the blog, Little House Living*, and the author of the books "Little House Living and "Living Slower". She and her family live in the beautiful Black Hills of South Dakota. When she's not busy writing or homeschooling her children, Merissa and her family are always out adventuring and exploring nature.*

Your Farm and Future: Raising a Sustainable Meat Bird Flock

By Tom Watkins

There is something about the pioneering spirit that leads us to think, "I want to do that myself." We go through trial and error, experience great frustration and joy, and then figure out a way because that's just what we do. Many of us have been raising Cornish Cross for at least a few years now, if not longer, and I hear the complaints all the time. "*I'm just tired of having to rely on someone else. The hatchery never has them when I want them. Why can't I just breed my own?*"

I'm going to try to be as nice as I can with this one. The truth is: you can't. And I get it. For someone who has made it their life's work to figure out how to do hard things for themselves, that can be really hard to hear. There is no way to replicate the meaty, broad-breasted bird that dominates as the most-consumed meat in the U.S. that you are used to. And no, there are no genomic CRISPR-gene-editing mutant chickens responsible for the most common food source in the world. The truth of it is that in order to reproduce the meat bird that graces every grocery store, restaurant, and kitchen in all of North America, you would have to have thousands and thousands of chickens that you don't eat. You have to have a hen to get an egg, and an egg to get a chick. Today's modern broiler is the result of generations upon generations of selectively bred lines and parent stock.

Commercialization in the Meat Industry

So, what does that mean for you modern pioneers, homesteaders, and backyard farmers? Well,

you know your family tree? Chickens have the same. Instead of your Grandpa picking out your Grandma from all the other gals because she was the best dancer at the county fair, these chickens are selected for putting on weight as fast as possible.

In 1951, 60% of broiler breeders in the US were crosses of a Cornish (hence the name, Cornish Cross) and a New Hampshire. They weren't white yet, they were actually red. This was the first market shift from dual-purpose birds to strictly broiler breeding. With the rise in popularity of grocery stores, which is a story for a different time, people were no longer raising their own meat and eggs. This allowed for an industry solely dedicated to the specialization of meat chickens. Big corporations flocked to be a part of this new opportunity, and have controlled the breeding lines ever since. These major corporations at the top of the industry have about a 60-year head start on your passion for creating a Cornish Cross-type breeding program.

I brought it up earlier, but it bears repeating: it takes a hen to get an egg, and it takes an egg to get a chick. In the case of commercial broilers, it actually takes about 14 hens and 14 roosters (at least) to get a broiler. And for an extra layer of complication, only one sex is used from each specific line to produce the next generation. So, at best, half of the birds in each line are unusable within any given breeding program. For each broiler you dream of hatching at home and raising to butcher, you would have to raise 14-20 chicks to perpetuate each line, plus some for crossing for the next generation. The math gets pretty daunting when you talk about just how many birds are needed to avoid massive inbreeding within each line.

What does any of this have to do with why you can't reproduce these particular broilers on your farm? You absolutely can, but only if you temper your expectations. At the end of the day, the Cornish Cross broiler is a four-way cross between eight breeding lines that are all heavily selected for growth rate. If you only want to replicate that grocery store slab of 10 oz. breast

meat, don't read anymore. Cut your losses here, enjoy the fun fact that broilers used to be red, and order some Cornish Cross chicks to raise up for your table. There's no shame in it.

But What Can We Do?

The answer is pretty obvious when you think about it. Do what your pioneering and homesteading ancestors did before commercialization defined every priority. You need to selectively raise a dual-purpose flock that provides both meat and eggs. No, you won't get chicken breasts that you have to split in half to cook. Again, temper your expectations. The trade-off is creating a program that is better for you, the birds, and the environment. If you are determined, a sustainable flock that meets your family or community's needs for delicious chicken tenders and Sunday roast spreads requires nothing but a little time and a lot of bookkeeping.

Start with good Heritage stock. Do what they did in 1951. Select two different breeds for different things. You've got your Cornish for breast size and easy plucking. There is a reason they used Cornish breeds in the past. There's a reason we still use them today. They have, by far, the largest proportion of breast meat compared to any other breed. And their beautiful, tight feathers pluck well. We sell both Dark and White Laced Red Cornish, which will help you throw some rotund gals into the mix. Now, pick a large breed to pump up your lines. New Hampshires, Delawares, and Rhode Island Reds all have really nice-sized roosters. Now, let those two breeds dance to create some hybrid vigor, and you're on your way to raising your own sustainable flock.

Records

All breeders need to keep records, more than you might imagine. With cows and pigs, it might be a notebook. With chickens, you are going to need spreadsheets. So much data is involved in breeding chickens. The more data you have, the more successful you are going to be in the

long run. Records need to be kept for each individual chick. No, I am not joking. I would never joke about chicken record-keeping.

Records to keep for each individual chick:

- Weight at 1 week
- Weight at 3 weeks
- Weight at 6 weeks
- Weight at 16 weeks (whoa…we are way off broiler specs here)
- Start of lay (normally 20-24-ish weeks depending on the time of year)
- Records to keep for the whole flock:
- Hatchability for hens
- Fertility for roosters
- Number of eggs

Get Really Good at Building Breeding Pens

Focusing on weight is the fastest way to progress a breeding program for broilers. It's not the only consideration, but it is priority number one if you want a decent meat bird on the table at the end of the day. At every weigh-in, you need to cull the smallest birds. That doesn't mean you have to off them immediately unless you are particularly hungry that day. Just move the pipsqueaks to a non-breeding pen, and eat them when they are bigger. I don't recommend keeping small hens for layers unless you're only adding a handful of favorites back into a separate layer coop that you already happened to have.

You are going to have multiple pens for chickens throughout this endeavor, and you won't have space to keep all the unusable breeders. Yes, you are going to need to keep multiple pens.

Those strapping New Hampshires you started with? They need their own pen. Those ever-so-handsome White Laced Red Cornish you took my advice about? They need their own pen. The offspring from those two lines? You guessed it.

You see where I'm going with this … you'll need a lot of pens to house a lot of birds, so it doesn't make a lot of sense to hang on to birds that don't enhance your program.

Within each breeding pen, you need at least 50 hens and 6 roosters. That is the minimum number of birds I recommend for close breeding while keeping enough genetic diversity to not cause problems for about 10-20 years. You should be selecting for weight in each of these pens when you replace these flocks. Now, switch your roosters. Put the White Laced Cornish in with the New Hampshire ladies, and vice versa. Now those eggs are producing your hybrid cross.

You are going to need a pen for the offspring of those lines. The chicks from the two parent lines are going to have what is called heterosis, a fancy term for what some call hybrid vigor. This is a natural increase in size and growth rate, egg laying, and/or fertility that wasn't present in the parent stock. This type of cross is known as an F1 cross. Two pure genetic lines mated to create a hybrid. You need to keep all the same records for this group as your parent group. But here's the tricky part. What do you do with this group? Breed them together? No, hybrids mated together don't have the same characteristics, or pumped-up genes, that the first cross did. They don't breed true. So, this group can be your table birds and egg layers. The increased size and growth rate of your hybrids make them a better option than either line of parent stock alone.

Let's recap a little bit. You have two parent breed pens with 50-60 birds each, and just hatched

an incubator full of their little adorable peeps. Now you have another 100 birds that are going to need a home for at least 20 weeks. This is probably a good time to ask how much chicken your family eats. Maybe we should have started with that…oh well, too late now! My family eats about 60-70 chickens a year, so that incubator could set us up nicely. You can butcher when males are roughly 16 weeks, and at about 20 weeks for females. Or, butcher the males and keep the females for egg layers until you need more BBQ tenders. The better you are at selecting your breeders for size and growth rate, the sooner you'll see their lines increase in size, and the sooner you can butcher them. This is the whole reason you are here.

Keep the Eggs Coming

Do you need 200 birds a year? Easy, just hatch another batch in the incubator. If you are producing for your community, you can keep that baby pumping. The most realistic way to pay to support hundreds of chickens is to have a constant output. Find a market for your birds so they support themselves. You'll go broke if you try to feed this many birds just for your own consumption.

When the time comes, you are going to need to replace your parent stock. Switch your roosters back so the New Hampshires are back with the New Hampshires, and so forth. This is called pure line mode. It takes about 2-3 weeks for the semen to dissipate from a hen from a previous mating (fun party fact). Once that time has passed, you are back in business.

Now, to replace a breeding flock of 50 hens and at least 6 roosters, you are going to need about 400 eggs from each pure line. Whoa there Timmy, that's a lot of eggs to hatch! Let me explain. If you set 400 eggs and have a 75% hatch rate, you are now at 300 chicks. We can assume half of those are males, so you are at 150 hen chicks. And while that may seem like a lot, the number one rule in breeding chickens is to give yourself enough birds to cull. You are looking to retain

only exceptional birds for your breeding program. Keeping 1 in 3 is actually kind of low. If it was show birds, you should be keeping 1 in 25, or 50. This part is really important. Really. If you are not culling and keeping only the best and fastest growing, you are never ever going to do more than have backyard chickens.

If all of this sounds too daunting to begin with, you can keep just one flock of chickens. I would suggest a large-bodied bird that lays well, like a Delaware (I know a guy with a few good lines.) All the record-keeping still applies, no matter what scale you are working on. I suggest you keep 100 hens and at least 20 roosters in a single flock setup. This is the smallest I like to go because it keeps the inbreeding stress off a little longer, for more like 20-25 years.

There are a couple of tricks you can do that will help birds put weight on faster in any scenario for any breed. First, leave the lights on longer. Longer daylight hours mean your birds will be eating more. Even just having a light on a timer that turns on for an hour in the middle of the night will spur them to eat. More food means more weight. The next tip is to keep your birds comfortable. No, I'm not suggesting that you air condition your chicken coop, but keeping their temperature regulated helps them grow out quicker. Less energy expenditure to keep them warm means more weight gain. Less heat stress means they will eat more. I don't like to eat when I'm sweating either.

And that's it. That's the whole deal. Keep records and cull really hard. Be relentless, and select for size. Easier than calculating the half-life of radioactive isotopes.

Build Your Farm and Future

At the end of the day, you can't have that giant broiler chicken as a sustainable homestead alternative. But when you really think about it — why would you want to? It was never sustainable,

for the bird or the meat industry as a whole. I think you will find that even though your birds aren't several meals within themselves, they are better tasting, and far better for you when raised under your own attention and care. I don't think my grandma ever cooked a chicken breast on its own. But her chicken soup was glorious, and I remember it still. The chickens of the past aren't gone. They are as persevered in time as Heritage birds can be. It's our expectations that have changed, and what we gave up in the name of size is both health and taste. Convenience is nice sometimes, but it should not be the standard on which we build a farm and a future.

Tom Watkins is the President and co-owner of Murray McMurray Hatchery in Webster City, Iowa. Tom and his father-in-law, Bud Wood, are building on the company's 105 year-old legacy of hatching the highest quality baby poultry in the U.S. Tom manages day-to-day operations of the hatchery which offers more than 120 varieties of chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys, and many other types of poultry and fowl. Tom, his wife Ashley, and their four children have a 5-acre homestead in central Iowa where raised and keep their own flock of chickens, turkeys, hogs, and highland cattle.

Delicious Fall Recipes and Food Preservation Tips

Somes excerpts from Everything Worth Preserving

By Melissa K. Norris

Fall may be the best time for food preservation tips and recipes. And this fall, I have the joy of sharing a little preview of my new book that will be coming to print in early January 2023 (at the latest!)

The book is called *Everything Worth Preserving* and it has been a wonderful, challenging, labor of love. From paper supply chain shortages to multiple rounds of editing and sorting out thousands of additional details — I have learned so much and I am will be so proud when this book is officially in my hands.

Root Cellaring Tips for Success

Make sure to check routinely for any soft spots or rot. During storage, ensure garlic, onions, potatoes, and sweet potatoes have adequate air flow and aren't exposed to light.

I hang up my braids of onions and garlic and store potatoes in mesh bags in our pantry closet. Any containers used to hold potatoes or onions should be breathable; cardboard boxes and paper bags also work well. If using plastic containers, make sure they're not sealed and have a way to breathe or vent.

There is much debate if onions and apples should be stored near potatoes. Many studies show the ethylene gas produced by apples helps to prevent sprouting of potatoes (I know, I know, I've read the opposite advice for years too).

Onions should not be stored near potatoes (due to moisture), but if your potatoes start to sprout, putting an apple in with them can prevent or stop further sprouting.

Make sure you check the apple and replace it if it starts to go bad.

Canning Pears

- Wash, peel, core, and slice. Pretreat if desired.
- Syrup pack: heat pears in boiling 40% syrup for 1 to 2 minutes.
- Drain and cool. Pack pears in cold 40% syrup.

Potatoes

Potatoes, both sweet and regular, require curing. To help toughen the skins, stop watering a few weeks before harvest. Don't wash, but brush off dirt before curing. If you must wash your potatoes, make sure they dry thoroughly before laying them out to cure.

All varieties of potatoes, except sweet potatoes, are best cured at 45-60°F/7-16°C with 85-95% humidity for two weeks. You'll notice that small nicks and cuts will harden up. Potatoes should be stored in the dark (or they'll turn green due to chlorophyll, which can mean the presence of solanine, a toxic alkaloid in large amounts) at 40–45°F/4–7°C with 90% humidity. They'll shrivel up in drier conditions and sprout in warmer conditions.

We tried storing ours in our unheated camper trailer, but the fluctuating temperatures and

lower humidity resulted in shriveled and sprouted potatoes after three months, with several turned bad.

My favorite way to store potatoes is by leaving them in the ground. The key is making sure they're deep enough that they don't freeze. I put six inches of straw on top. We've had temperatures down to 5°F with no ill effects to the potatoes. Snow is insulating but makes it difficult to harvest.

They store beautifully until soil temperatures reach 60°F consistently, then they'll begin to sprout. Ours keep from summer clear through until mid-April.

Long-term potato storage varieties:

- German Butterball
- Fingerling
- Russet
- Russian Blu

Pressure canning chart

Pressure Canning Processing Time (in minutes)			
	8 oz	**Pint**	**Quart**
Potatoes, sweet	-	65	90
Potatoes, white	-	35	40
Pumpkin	-	55	90

Pressure Canning Processing Time (in minutes)			
	8 oz	Pint	Quart
Root vegetables	-	30	35
Sauerkraut	-	10	15
Squash, winter	-	55	90

Dehydrating Chart

Vegetable	Preparation	Drying Time in a Dehydrator (hours)**
Potatoes	Peel. Cut into strips ¼-inch thick or slices ⅛-inch thick.	8-12
Spinach	Use only young tender leaves.	8-10
Squash, winter	Cut into pieces and remove seeds and cavity pulp. Cut into 1-inch strips. Peel rind. Then cut strips into pieces about ⅛-inch thick.	10-16
Squash, summer	Cut into ¼-inch slices or shred (shredded does fine without blanching).	10-12
Tomatoes	Remove skins. Cut into slices ¾-inch thick. Pear and plum tomatoes cut in half.	10-18

Chart — Freezing, Boiling, Blanching

Vegetable	Boiling Water Blanching (minutes)	Steam Blanching (minutes)
Sweet potatoes	Cook	-
Squash, summer (zucchini)	3	5
Squash, winter (including pumpkin)	Cook	-
Tomatoes	2	4
Turnips, ½-inch cubes	3	5

Vegetables That Must Be Fully Cooked Before Freezing

- Beets
- Pumpkin
- Sweet potatoes
- Winter squash

Root Cellaring Chart

Food	Temperature	Humidity	How Long It Will Last	Tips
Potatoes	36–40°F ideal (2–4°C)	80–90% humidity	4–6 months	Store at least 6 feet (1.8 m) away from apples to prevent premature sprouting. Store in complete darkness. They should be cured before putting in storage. The easiest way to keep them is right in the garden if you're in a location that doesn't have many hard freezes. Simply cover with a heavy layer of mulch. Indoors, store in a portable bin, sand can, wooden box with lid, or paper bag. Bins can be stacked as long as there's good airflow between them.
Pumpkin	50–55°F (10–13°C)	70–75% humidity	5-6 months	High storage temperatures make them stringy. Use pumpkins that no longer have their stem first as they will go bad the quickest. Store on shelves or hang in mesh bags.
Squash, Acorn	40–50°F (4–10°C)	60–70% humidity	2–4 months	Pick before first frost. Do NOT cure. Acorn squash does not last as long as other squash, so use them up first. Store on shelves, not touching.

Food	Temperature	Humidity	How Long It Will Last	Tips
Squash, Winter	50–55°F (10–13°C)	60–75% humidity	4–6 months	Pick before first frost. Cure before storing. Store on shelves, not touching. You may find that the root cellar is too cold. A side room, attic, heated basement, under the bed, etc., may be a better storage place.
Sweet Potatoes	50–60°F (10–15°C)	80–90% humidity	2–3 months	Must be cured before storing. Temperatures below 50 °F (10°C) promote rot. Avoid handling too much; movement promotes rot. Use bruised and small potatoes first. Wrap individually in paper and place on shelves or shallow crates.

If you've ever wanted one book that describes all of the relevant food preservation methods that you can use at home — this is it.

You can pre-order your copy at: https://melissaknorris.com/book/everything-worth-preserving/ —and once the books are ready (in early January, 2023), we'll send one your way!

The following delicious recipe is one of many recipes you'll find in *Everything Worth Preserving.* Enjoy!

Low-Sugar Apple Pie Jam

Yield: 3 pints

INGREDIENTS

8 cups peeled, chopped, and cored apples

¾ cup dried cranberries (optional)

8 tablespoons bottled lemon juice

1 cup water

4 teaspoons calcium water*

4 teaspoons powder pectin*

1 teaspoon cinnamon

½ teaspoon nutmeg

2 cups sugar

1. Prepare jars and water-bath canner.
2. Peel, core, and chop apples.
3. Place apples in a big stainless-steel pot and add lemon juice and water. Bring to a boil and cook for 10 minutes until the apples are soft.
4. Meanwhile, mix sugar, spices, and powdered pectin together. Set aside.
5. Add calcium water (comes in the Pomona Pectin and activates the pectin) to the apples. Boil for 1 more minute.
6. Add the sugar mixture and return to a boil, stirring constantly (you don't want burnt sugar) for 2 minutes. You'll see and feel the mixture thicken up. Remove from heat.
7. Pour into clean canning jars to a ¼-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles and add more jam if needed to meet the required headspace.
8. Place in a water-bath canner, making sure the water level is 1 inch above the surface of the jars, and process for 10 minutes. Don't start the timer until the water is at a full boil.
9. Turn off heat and remove the canner lid; wait 5 minutes, and then remove the jars to a towel-covered counter. Let cool, checking seals after 24 hours. Remove bands, wipe down the surface of the jars, and store in the pantry.

You can use ¾ cup of finely chopped dried cranberries. Add them with the calcium water and spices.

**Comes with Pomona's Pectin. For a no-sugar version, follow instructions with the pectin box.*

Altitude adjustments*: if you're 1,001 to 3,000 feet increase by 5 minutes processing time, 3,001 to 6,000 feet increase processing time by 10 minutes, if above 6,001 feet increase 15 minutes processing time.*

What Is Tallow?

By Emilie Toups

The crazy, incredible skincare product that's about to change your life? Or the best cooking fat you've ever used? It just might be both.

Tallow is actually rendered beef fat.

But don't judge a book by its cover. Tallow, when made correctly, is a soft and supple skincare luxury. It's packed full of vitamins and minerals that conform to your skin's natural makeup to create a powerful healing environment.

Since it's rendered animal fat, tallow is incredibly similar to the chemistry of our own skin. So, when issues like dryness, acne, or eczema arise, tallow can soothe the skin and provide the exact mineral requirements needed for optimal healing.

Although we love a good plant-based oil, they do not offer the unique vitamins and minerals—including vitamins A, D, E, K, and Conjugated Linoleic Acid—found in animal products like tallow.

Since tallow is such an incredible healing agent and moisturizer, it's an amazing addition to your skincare routine just as it's one of our favorite stable cooking oils!

The History of Tallow Balm

Every pop-culture magazine ever is looking for the secret to healthy and glowing skin.

But what if it was discovered thousands of years ago?

Tallow has been used in skincare for longer than most modern products have existed.

The Romans and ancient Egyptians regularly used tallow as a miracle moisturizing agent and a cure for burns, scrapes, and various other ailments. Whether it was used as a balm, ointment, or salve, tallow was a readily available resource and a healing must-have.

Even 200 years ago, tallow was a common household item—and a regular ingredient in home-made soaps, lotions, and other skincare products.

What Changed?

Well, sustainable farming became rare, and access to healthy tallow slowly declined. Consumers wanted products that were new, exciting, and more industrial. Unfortunately, our skin suffered as a result. But now we're going back to the basics.

These are the skin conditions most often improved by tallow. As you get more familiar with the product, feel free to experiment—and let us know about your favorite tallow skincare tips and tricks.

As always, these suggestions do not take the place of medical advice—so be sure to consult your family doctor.

Your go-to Moisturizer for Dry and Cracked Skin

Do you dread your winter skin? It's so common to feel completely at the mercy of dry and cracking skin. Contrary to popular belief, you don't have to get used to bleeding knuckles or endless toxic lotion applications. With just a little tallow love, your dry skin will be back to normal in no time.

Tallow Balm May Improve Eczema Symptoms

Are you wondering how to heal eczema? This is one of those complicated skin issues that come with few answers—and even fewer cures. Traditional treatments fail to address the root cause of eczema and provide prescriptions that include questionable ingredients. Good news—many people have improved eczema naturally with topical tallow balm!

A Soothing Treatment for Common Redness

Typical skin redness can be brought on by stress or environmental factors. Tallow is naturally supple and melts into your skin without feeling greasy or sticky. With just a few applications of vitamin and mineral-filled tallow, we bet your skin—and confidence—will greatly improve.

Your Medicine Cabinet Remedy for Burns, Cuts, and Scrapes

Yep, tallow really is the remedy that does it all. Since it contains antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties, tallow is an excellent ointment to use for little accidents like cuts, scrapes, bruises, and burns.

Wrinkles and Acne

We throw no shade at wrinkles or acne—they are normal conditions that happen as our skin changes and ages.

But we do know some people prefer to minimize the appearance of skin blemishes. We encourage you to not treat acne or wrinkles with chemical-filled facial products. They may reduce the appearance temporarily, but over time they're wearing on your skin's natural microbiome.

Instead, tallow includes the vitamins and minerals your skin needs to increase its natural collagen production. It also has antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties to help decrease acne and redness.

Navigating the world of natural skincare is getting trickier as "greenwashing" becomes more common. Additionally, grassfed suet is expensive and not easily accessible (it's mostly found between animal organs—specifically the kidneys).

Here are the key elements to watch out for when purchasing your first tallow:

1. Make Sure "Tallow" Is One of the First Ingredients in Your Balm

You don't want to spend hard-earned dollars on a tallow balm that's mostly coconut oil. Double check that "Tallow" is one of the first ingredients listed in your tallow balm.

2. Check for Unknown "Fragrances"

When a product lists "Fragrances" on its ingredients label, it's not required to disclose exactly what those fragrances are. Often, they are harmful chemicals that can irritate the skin. Better to be safe than sorry—avoid anything with the term "fragrance".

3. Grass-Fed, Always

Cows are meant to eat grass. But this is inconvenient for industrial meat production. Most cows are fed a heavy diet of corn and grain, which are depleted of nutrients. When you purchase tallow from grass-fed cows, you're investing in a product that includes a lot more vitamins and minerals.

What Makes Our Tallow Different

At Toups and Co, we take tallow very seriously.

Yes, it's a difficult ingredient to source, but we've seen firsthand the incredible difference it's made in our family's skin health. We couldn't imagine a world without tallow! Use the recipe below to make your own!

Tallow Balm Recipe:

- 8 oz of gently rendered kidney fat (suet)
- 1 oz of organic olive oil
- Essential oil of choice

In a bowl mix tallow and olive oil with a mixer until light and fluffy. Add in essential oils of choice and mix again until incorporated. Store in a glass jar with a lid and keep in a cool place. Use your tallow balm on your face, hands, feet, or anywhere that needs moisture!

Emilie Toups began crafting skincare and makeup from her farmhouse kitchen after discovering how organic tallow, high-quality cold-pressed olive oil, and other quality, natural ingredients made a huge difference in her skin and her family's wellness. She runs a husband and wife business and believes it's not good enough for your family until it's good enough for her family. Check out her work at https://toupsandco.com/.

Great Depression Era Christmas Morning Treat

By Melissa K. Norris

As you read in my letter from the editor, this was a special Christmas morning treat my grandmother made when my father was little. This recipe was long lost as my mother had never had it grown up and my grandmother had long left this earth to be with the good Lord.

But inside the pages of my great-grandmother's vintage *Watkins Cook Book*, was a recipe for chocolate sauce. Paired with that base and my friend, Sue Watts, who is an expert cook (she has that uncanny ability to taste food and then go replicate it in the kitchen — I try not to be jealous and just grateful she's willing to share recipes with me), we tweaked the recipe to create a silky and delicious chocolate gravy.

While my grandmother would have had to save to buy the cocoa powder, flour, sugar, and salt, the butter and milk would have been plentiful from their milk cow. I did add a splash of vanilla extract, though I doubt that would have been an ingredient on hand in their humble kitchen during the Depression and the years directly following.

Chocolate Gravy

(shared from Hand Made: the Modern Guide for Made-from-Scratch Living)

Ingredients

- ¼ cup melted butter
- 1 Tablespoon flour
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup cocoa powder
- ¾ cup boiling water
- 1 cup milk
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract (optional)

Instructions

- Melt butter in a medium sauce over medium heat. Blend flour with melted butter until combined.
- Add sugar, salt, and cocoa powder. Whisk in boiling water and milk.
- Let the milk get hot and remove the pot from the stove. Stir in vanilla. If you let it boil, it may thicken up like a pudding (thicker than gravy).
- Serve warm over biscuits.
- If you have any leftovers, it makes a wonderful chocolate sauce for homemade chocolate milk or over ice cream.
- Store extra in a glass jar in the fridge for up to a week.

It wouldn't be very fair of me to share chocolate gravy and then not give you the best-most-flakiest-melt-in-your-mouth biscuit recipe there ever was. This biscuit recipe hails from my mother's kitchen (who is known as one of the best bakers in all of Skagit county).

Easy Flaky Buttermilk Biscuits

Ingredients:

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 and 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup butter one stick
- 2 teaspoons honey
- 1 cup buttermilk

Instructions

- Preheat the oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit
- Mix up your dry ingredients and then bring your butter out from the fridge. Cut it lengthwise in half, then in half again, and then cube it up.
- Use a pastry cutter and work in the butter until it looks like itty bitty pea-size clumps with the dry ingredients.
- Add the honey and 3/4 cup of buttermilk till it sticks together on itself. If you need to add the rest of the 1/4 cup, go ahead, but it should be a shaggy type dough, not smooth.
- Lightly dust the countertop with flour and dump your dough out. Gently pat it into a 1/2 inch rectangle. It should be slightly tacky, if it sticks to your fingers, lightly (and I mean lightly) dust the top with flour.

- Fold into thirds, turn it vertically, and pat back out into a rectangle, fold into thirds and repeat once more (a total of 3 times patting and folding).
- On the final 3rd pat out, cut out your biscuits. You'll get six biscuits and then push the scraps back together for the last two biscuits.
- Place biscuits in a cast iron skillet (or a baking sheet) and bake for 15 minutes or until golden on top.

Notes

You can cut out the biscuits, place them on a cookie sheet, and freeze them for 15 minutes, then place them in a freezer container. To bake, put frozen biscuits in the cast iron skillet or baking sheet and bake from frozen, increasing bake time by 3 to 4 minutes.

Melissa K. Norris is a 5th-generation homesteader, who lives with her husband and two children in the Pacific Northwest of Washington state. They raise over 90% of their own organic pasture-raised meat and over 60% of their own fruits and vegetables. Her popular website MelissaKNorris.com *and Pioneering Today Podcast helps hundreds of thousands of people use simple modern homesteading to live a healthier and more self-sufficient life.*

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