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*& Small Stock Journal*

Volume 110 • Number 3  
MAY/JUNE 2026

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# SOUTHEASTERLY FARMS

BY SHAWNA LETZ



I AM COUNTRYSIDE



**M**OST DAYS AT SOUTHEASTERLY FARMS begin in a blur. We're juggling school schedules, our 9-to-5 jobs, errands, and the never-ending list of chores waiting for us when we get home. There are animals to feed, kids to chauffeur, and dinner to cook. Some days, things move way faster than we'd like to admit. It's easy to just keep your head down and go from one task to the next without stopping to look up.

But somewhere between the rushed mornings and late evenings, the farm has a way of slowing us down. A quiet moment always shows up right when we need it most. It reminds me to breathe, to notice what's right in front of me, and to romanticize the ordinary little things that make life beautiful. I've learned that romanticizing life isn't about pretending things are perfect. It's about choosing to see the good tucked into the hard parts.

I didn't grow up in a long line of farmers, but little pieces of farm life were always around. We had a few animals, enough to teach me responsibility and give my days some purpose. And I had a grandma who could grow just about anything she touched. Those two pieces of my childhood stuck with me. I loved the feeling of growing something and caring for animals. I loved the steadiness of a life that felt slow and grounded.

When my husband and I started our life together, that old dream came along, too. We added things slowly: a few animals, a small garden, a fruit tree here and there. We learned a lot along the way. We failed often, but we were always willing to try again. Each new season brought a little more growth and a lot

more confidence, and now that childhood dream has turned into a real place with fences, muddy boots, and a life built around the things we love most.

One gift our farm has given us is that our kids understand that life is something you participate in, not something that just happens around you. They've grown up bottle-feeding babies before breakfast, collecting warm eggs from the coop, and planting seeds like it's the most exciting thing in the world. They've learned that animals depend on us and that hard work is a part of life.

They've also experienced the magic of it all. Building forts in hay bales, running barefoot through the garden rows, laughing as lambs chase them for treats. When they're grown, I hope they'll remember the wonder just as much as the work.

One of my favorite things about our farm is that the life we're building at home flows naturally into our small business, our garden center, and our farm market. Everything we grow and raise has a purpose beyond our own family. Fresh produce, eggs, and meat from the farm make their way to our neighbors' tables, along with jars of pickles, jellies, seeds, fresh flowers, and other little homemade trinkets. Sharing what we love with our community like this makes all the hard work feel even more meaningful.

The small joys are what keep us going. Watching someone pick out a hanging basket or a bundle of fresh flowers for a special person, or seeing our kids proudly hand a jar of jam they helped make to a loved one or teacher, reminds us why we do what we do.

Our farm is still very much a work in progress, and honestly, I love that. There's always something being built or fixed or planted or dreamed up for "someday." Each year, we add a little more. A new garden bed, a different animal, another fruit tree. Right now, we're working on expanding our meat production. This year, we'll start processing our own meat chickens. We've also added a pumpkin patch to

grow all our own pumpkins for the garden center, and expanded into even more flower rows. We've made mistakes and changed plans a dozen times, but every bit of it has moved us forward.

At the end of the day, when the chores are finally wrapped up and the sun is setting, I usually stop for just a second and look around. It would be easy to see only what still needs fixing or finishing. But in those quiet moments, I'm

reminded how lucky we are to do something we love, even when it's hard. The real beauty of this life is in the little wins: a basket of eggs, a jar of jelly cooling on the counter, pumpkins growing in the pasture, tired kids with dirty feet and happy faces.

Romanticizing life doesn't mean ignoring the work; it just means noticing the good in it. The small victories, the ordinary days, the moments that mean more than they look like they should. Those are the things that turn regular life into something really special.

If you'd like to follow along with our farm adventures, see what we're growing, and catch a glimpse of life at Southeasterly Farms, you can find us on Instagram, TikTok, and our blog at [SoutheasterlyFarms.com](http://SoutheasterlyFarms.com). We love sharing this life with our community, and we hope it inspires you to find joy in the small, beautiful moments around you, too. ©





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## Our Philosophy

At *Countryside*, our purpose is to inspire self-reliant living on any level.

We acknowledge that the path to self-sufficiency is as unique as the person who accepts the journey.

We strive to strengthen the homesteading movement by sharing the diverse voices and knowledge of today's practitioners.

We teach our readers how to grow and raise their own food; build, fix, and craft with their own hands; and walk as gently on this planet as possible.

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# FROM THE EDITOR

**“In joy and in sadness, flowers are our constant friends.” – Unknown**

I GREW UP SURROUNDED BY VEGETABLE gardens and brightly colored flower gardens that my mother planted and cared for each day of the growing season. She often cut several of her beautiful blooms and added them to a vase for a stunning centerpiece on our dinner table. Some of her favorites were cosmos, sunflowers, dahlias, zinnias, and hibiscus, among others. I followed in her footsteps and also enjoy the sights and smells of a carefully planned flower garden.

If you're interested in growing a low-maintenance flower garden full of fragrant, colorful, cuttable blooms, turn to page 24 for Wren Everett's "No-Fuss Cutting Garden." In this piece, Wren describes the flowers that work well for her living in Zone 6b, including corn poppies, cosmos, zinnias, sunflowers, and more!

If you're interested in edible flowers, check out Rita Heikenfeld's "Preserving Edible Flowers and Sweet Herbs" on page 28. You'll discover how to naturally dry petals and leaves for edible flower sprinkles and how to crystallize them using egg white and sugar. Preserved this way, edible flowers and herbs are easy to make, economical, and fun projects for kids.

Maybe you and the kids would rather head to the lake and cast a line. Gina Stack has some tips to share in her article on page 50, "Musky Fishing with Dad." Not only does she describe the musky's habitat and behavior, but she also adds tried-and-true musky fishing tactics that've been used for many years. Although it's tough to be successful each time you head to your musky fishing hot spots, anticipating the thrill of the catch is enough to keep trying again and again.

Perhaps a peaceful walk is more your style. Walking through the woods on any given day is something I enjoy immensely. What's even better is a groomed trail to walk along to avoid falling, as I tend to be a bit clumsy at times. Even if you don't have a lot of acreage, you can still make a nature trail on your property, and Michael Brown shows you how on page 12. He explains how to engage all the senses when designing your nature trail. For example, using "touch" from different types of bark, "slimy" mushrooms, and soft new growth of ferns, or "taste," which may include adding wild plum trees or lowbush blueberries to your trail, which can provide a healthy snack as you walk. A nature trail isn't only beneficial to humans, but you'll also attract several species of wildlife that will appreciate the snacks and a cozy place to take a rest.

Find yourself a cozy place to rest your bones while reading this latest issue. I always appreciate any feedback and ideas for future articles. Feel free to drop me a line at either address below.



*Ann Tom*

Ann Tom  
Editor, *Countryside*

**HAVE AN IDEA OR STORY TO SHARE, A QUESTION TO ASK, OR PERHAPS AN ANSWER TO A QUESTION? WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!**

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**In Response to March/April 2026  
 Question of the Month (What's your  
 favorite farm or household chore?)**

Mine would be working on the farm. I always enjoyed helping my father-in-law. He'd call needing help with things on the farm, such as: backing the hopper wagons in the barn, picking up big rocks in the fields before he plowed them, cleaning corn stalks out of the combine when he was harvesting corn, or opening up the hopper wagon to remove old soybeans, then using the shaker to remove the old debris. I really enjoyed helping him out and he knew that. He's gone now and I sure miss that call to come help.

*Diana Johnson Lima, Ohio*

**Save Money and Do It Yourself**

I always look for odd or unique tools at yard sales, thrift shops, and antique shops.

I found an old extended C-clamp at a yard sale, along with a bunch of other tools. Not only was it unique and wider than the ones I'd inherited from my dad's cabinet shop, but it was cheap at \$3 or \$5, I don't remember which.

My wife looked at my purchase and said, "Don't you have a bunch of those out in the shop?" I said, "Yes, but not this wide."

Last year, while in a hurry, I backed my motorhome out of the shop and turned too quickly, and the motorhome caught the tongue of my horse trailer. You can see the damage in the picture.

I took the motorhome to a local dealer, expecting to pay \$200 to \$500 for repairs. He said two. I was elated. It wasn't \$200, but \$2,000 and eight hours to fix.

I was starting to recover from that when he said there was about a one-month waiting list.



I went home and called a shop 35 miles away. I then sent them some pictures. They called back and said it would probably be about \$2,500 or more.

I moved the motorhome back into the shop and started looking at it. I'd built my own home, including foundation, blocks, framing, roof, wiring, plumbing, cabinets, etc., so why couldn't I fix this motorhome?



I walked around the front of the motorhome, and there was my collection of C-clamps. That extended clamp I bought at the yard sale might work.

I was able to pull apart and unscrew the external trim and carefully use the "old tool" to squeeze the pieces back together, using long screws to hold it.

I had a piece of leftover composite bathtub surround that was big enough to cover the damaged exterior. I found an exterior caulking that dried hard, and I rebuilt the plastic bumper end piece. The composite surround sealed, and, wow, it looks great.

Cost:

Old extended C-clamp: \$3 to \$5

Caulking: \$6.95

Consultant time: free

Labor, two hours: free

Think outside the box (or motorhome) and look what you can do.

*Dennis Young*

**We want to hear from you!**

**May/June Question of the Month:**

The folks who own tractors have their favorite brands and won't shy away from them, no matter what.

**In your mind, what's the number one tractor brand and what do you like about it over others? What tractor attachments are must-haves on your homestead?**

**Send your responses to:**

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# Create a Nature Trail on Your Property

BY MICHAEL BROWN

**G**ROWING UP, I frequently hung out at a friend's house down the block. They lived on a typical quarter-acre suburban lot. While most of the neighbors focused on immaculate lawns and perfect specimen trees, this neighbor decided to do something else. In his backyard, where he'd planted a number of trees and shrubs, he planned a small walking trail — not more than a five-minute walk. I still remember walking that small path and the wonder of the constantly changing world before me.

You, too, can create a simple nature trail for yourself, your children, or your grandchildren. You don't need a lot of acreage, just a desire to go a bit outside the norms of suburbia's perfect lawn and tree fascination.

To start, take a good look at the area you want to use for your trail. Are there any prominent features you want to highlight? What's a good start and end point? Lay out the course with some string or twine so you can more easily picture the path. I found it useful

to put down a layer of wood chips along the proposed path. This has the benefit of keeping down weeds (or smothering grass) and giving a clean walking surface after a rain.

Now comes the fun part — creating your own magical space!

Use all your senses. Make your trail a full sensory experience with taste, touch, smell, sight, and even sound.

## Touch

The opportunities for adding this to your trail are extensive, from different types of bark, "slimy" mushrooms, to soft new growth of ferns. Don't forget inanimate objects, such as smooth rocks, perhaps with scratchy lichen, crumpled dead leaves, and soft pine needles.

## Taste

Walking your nature trail can also be an exercise in healthy and interesting eating. However, always emphasize to children that they should only eat from plants along the nature trail that an adult has

told them are safe to eat or come up with some kind of sign indicating the plant has edible parts. Of course, remove all poisonous look-alikes from the area. Conveniently locate your trail close to edible plants or add them at suitable locations. For the most authentic experience, focus on native species. Many of these plants produce flowers and food that are attractive to pollinators, birds, and other wildlife, and, therefore, add an additional item of interest to the trail.

**Pawpaw** (*Asimina triloba*) — A beautiful understory tree that does well in full sun or partial shade, growing about 15 to 20 feet tall. You'll need to plant two pawpaws so they can cross pollinate to produce fruit that will ripen in late summer into fall.

**Serviceberry** (*Amelanchier arborea*) — These large shrubs or small trees grow well in partial shade or full sun and produce tasty berries that are also attractive to birds. Plant either *A. laevis* or *A. canadensis*.

**Lowbush blueberry** (*Vaccinium angustifolium*) — A low-growing bush with tasty berries and good fall foliage. Does well in sun or partial shade but needs acidic soil to thrive. It benefits from cross-pollination with additional plants for maximum berry production.

**Wild plum** (*Prunus americana*) — These small trees produce an abundant crop of little plums that can be eaten fresh but are at their best when made into jam. They also offer a stunning display of white flowers in spring. Unlike cultivated plums, they don’t suffer from many diseases. Two or more trees need to be planted for fruit production.

### Smell

Most parts of the trail will necessitate some active intervention in order to experience the fragrances around them. Bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*), spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), and bee balm (*Monarda didyma*) are all native species with very fragrant leaves. Enjoy the fragrance by picking a leaf and crumbling it in your hand.

### Sight

On a nature path, there should always be something new to see. With a little bit of planning, this shouldn’t be hard to do.

**Ephemerals** — These are plants that emerge early in spring to take advantage of sunlight before deciduous trees’ leaves fully develop. They do well in partial and even moderate shade. By mid-summer, they disappear, ready to emerge again the following season. Some plants to consider are: Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*), mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*), and Dutchman’s Breeches (*Dicentra cucularilla*).



Flower of mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*) growing on the forest floor.

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**Flowering perennials** — Plant native flowering perennials throughout the trail so you always have some color. For flowering plants, consider fringed bleeding heart (*Dicentra eximia*), Eastern red

columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*), coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), and bee balm (*Monarda didyma*). In addition to these, many of the fruiting shrubs and trees have impressive displays of flowers.



**Fall foliage** — Most of us are familiar with the maple (sugar or red) and oak (pin, red, scarlet) trees that showcase beautiful fall colors. However, these are all large trees, and you can fit only so many along a nature trail. Consider also some of the smaller perennial natives such as Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*) which also has showy flowers in spring, and winterberry holly (*Ilex verticillata*). Winterberry holly plants are either male or female. The female trees produce beautiful red berries that hang on the branches throughout much of the winter, adding vibrant color to an otherwise drab winter landscape.

If you have enough space, play with light intensity also as a visual, allowing the participant to traverse heavy shade, as well as open sunlit areas.

**Sound**

The audio component of your nature path will encompass wildlife that calls this area home. Encourage a variety of birds by planting food they need, as well as shelter from predators and the elements.

Lastly, give your nature trail a chance to grow and develop. Plants that seem small when you plant them might eventually grow to a substantial size. Stagger your plantings over a period of a few years. As you get to know the trail and understand the seasonal changes, you'll be able to add new plants. 🌱

**MICHAEL BROWN** is a retired school librarian and enjoys hanging out with his five grandchildren. He enjoys growing and learning about native species and teaching his next generation about the joys of growing food.

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# Teach Your Children Self-Reliance Skills

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY JENNY UNDERWOOD

ONE OF MY FAVORITE THINGS ABOUT OUR lifestyle of homesteading and homeschooling is the ability to teach our kids how to live a life of self-reliance. First off, I'd like to clarify exactly what I mean by self-reliance. I don't mean a life where you have no interactions with others or where you provide 100% of everything you wear, eat, and consume. I don't really think that can be attained and, honestly, I'm not sure I'd want to. Instead, I mean a life where you have a mindset of "I'm responsible for providing for myself. I can't depend on others to do that nor do I want to. I'll use skills daily, such as cooking, growing food, preserving food, repairing items, building, and creating. I'll also use skills to earn a living or supplement another job. I'll be as prepared as possible to meet my needs during regular life or an emergency. I'll also be prepared with skills or supplies that can help others."

Many people grow up without a firm foundation in real-life skills. I can't count the number of people who've told me they want me to teach them how to cook — and these aren't young people. There are adults who don't know how to budget, sew on a button, or do basic home maintenance. This is a huge barrier for living a self-sufficient life; in fact, I'd say it's impossible. So, one of my main objectives is to teach our children a wide range of skills that allow them to be as self-sufficient as possible.

This can start at a young age. When our kids were starting to eat solid foods, I'd only give them tiny pieces, so they'd be capable of feeding themselves. This may seem silly, but we all naturally crave independence. If we fail to nurture this in our children, they'll become quite content to have us do basically everything for them. So it's a little messier when they brush their hair or fill their plate. That's



okay. Allow them to gain a healthy independence early on and you'll be thankful later.

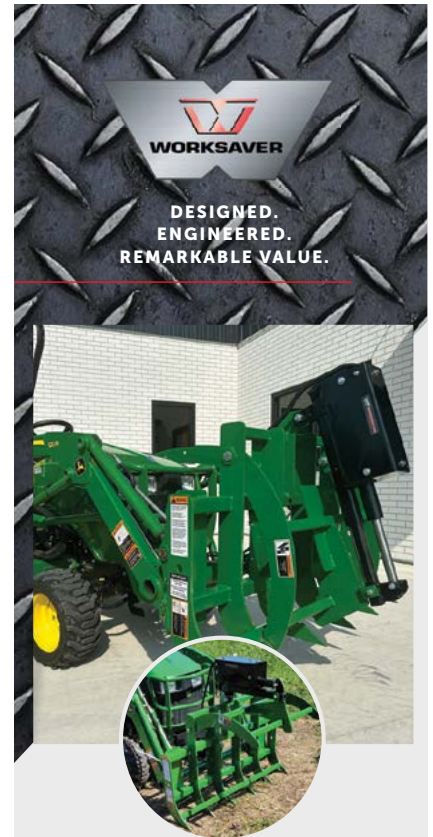
Even the tiniest child can often be involved in learning kitchen and gardening skills. Mine learned how to crack eggs by their first birthdays. They'd stand in a chair at the counter as I made bread or biscuits and "help" by adding water or flour, turning on a mixer, or spreading toppings on a pizza. By the time they were four, they could follow all my directions and make cookies by themselves. You've never seen true healthy pride until you watch a child's face light up when a sibling tells them that's the best cookie they've ever eaten!

Our children all learned to help in the garden by dropping seeds or seed potatoes into the planting furrows. It's been amazing how accurate my little girls have been at judging distances for planting. Yes, you may get some extra seeds planted but that's all right — you can always go back and thin them. Like adults, children enjoy being needed, so make it a point to need them for necessary jobs. Give them jobs that challenge them, but don't stress them. For example, all our

children enjoy helping with the wood, however, we emphasize that they shouldn't lift anything that hurts. As a result, our 12- and 15-year-old boys have taken on a huge portion of our wood work. They can run the wood splitter and stack and haul wood with the tractor. Our 7- and 9-year-old daughters are already excellent at stacking wood and can unload a trailer full of wood faster than I can.

To me, the important part of this is to see my children capable of providing for themselves, no matter the circumstances. There's a push these days in certain circles to learn how to do many "old-fashioned" skills, but many of these people are learning as adults. Just think how far advanced your children would be if they'd learned them from the start. We often think our children should focus on "book learning" in their younger years and, while I'm certainly not suggesting that formal learning is bad, I'd counter that it stops short of what's necessary to live successfully as a self-reliant individual.

Another way to do this is when you teach your children about money, make sure it's in a real-



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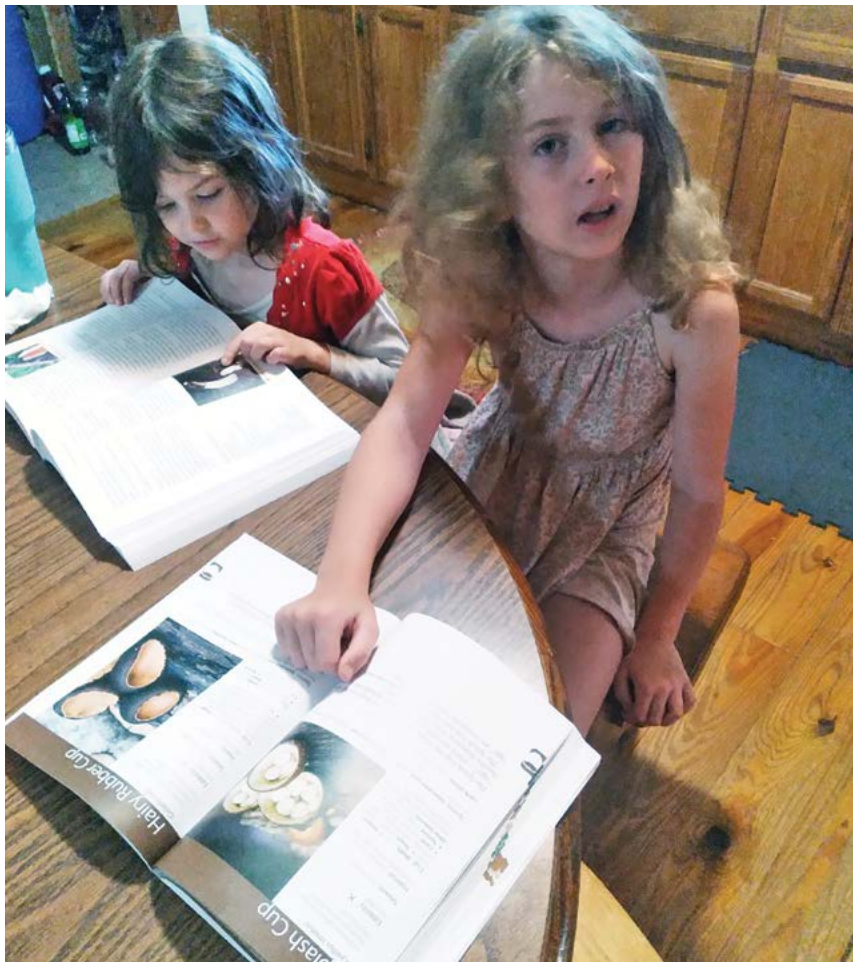
world scenario. For example, show them how to make it on one income or a home business. Show them real expenses from your life. Let them figure how much a splurge on a fast-food restaurant meal costs and how many groceries they could've purchased with that money instead.

Children are like sponges, so make sure they're soaking up things that will improve their lives.

Children are like sponges, so make sure they're soaking up things that will improve their lives. And I don't mean improve as providing more "things," but instead, more freedom. Teach them about debt and how to avoid it. If you have the ability, buy tools such as sawmills, welders, a forge, and a lathe, and teach them how to use those. Help them build a treehouse with lumber you milled yourselves, and you may ignite a desire in them to build their own sustainable house in the future. Teach them every step in those skills and turn them loose.

A word on safety here: We all want our children to be safe, and often we can err on the side of too much caution when it comes to letting them learn. The best way I've found to handle this is to first be honest with them about the risks. Yes, it'd be foolish to allow a 3-year-old to handle a chainsaw, however, a mature 12-year-old, with proper safety gear and guidance, may be able to handle a smaller one. Remember, we don't do our children any favors when we "protect" them from everything. Stress safety, such as eye and ear protection, chainsaw chaps, power tool respect, and not rushing!

Start implementing these steps today by having your children learn one new skill a month. It can be simple (doing laundry or dishes) or more complex (canning or woodworking), but just start. Both your children and you will be thankful you did. 🌱



**JENNY UNDERWOOD** is a homeschooling mama to four lively blessings. She makes her home in the rural foothills of the Ozark Mountains with her husband of 20 years. You can find her reading a good book, drinking coffee, and gardening on their little fifth-generation homestead.



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# THE WILD GRAPE

## An Exceptionally Versatile Vine

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY MARK HALL

**D**O YOU REMEMBER walking through the woods as a youngster, and coming across a huge vine hanging from a tree high over your head? “Guys! Over here!” you called to your friends. “It’s an old grapevine!”

“Awesome! I have first dibs!” said one of them as he began to work up a running start.

“Wait a minute,” you cautioned as you wisely inspected the 3-inch-thick vine. You knew that it could

be entwined with poison ivy or poison oak vines. Fortunately, it displayed only the rough, shredding bark of the wild grape.

Then, after you looked high overhead to inspect the vine’s attachment to the tree, you slowly applied your weight to test its sturdiness. Ever since that vine broke underneath you a few years prior, you’ve been much more careful about swinging.

“Are you done yet?” he asked impatiently.

“I will be as soon as I check the area for rocks and stumps,” you said, as he rolled his eyes. You had landed on a huge rock when the vine broke, and you certainly didn’t want to repeat that mishap. Soon you’re done, and one at a time, you and your friends safely enjoyed the fun pastime of grapevine swinging.

I suppose, in retrospect, that swinging on grapevines wasn’t the greatest idea, but neither was drinking water from a garden hose! Still, we lived through it, and the experience remains a memory of childhood we hold dear to this day. Just the sight of a wild grapevine transports us to a more carefree time in our lives. It’s a vehicle for the mind.

However, the wild grape is so much more. First of all, it’s food, and you’re likely thinking, “Well, that’s obvious.” But I’m not referring to the domesticated varieties that produce the large, succulent grapes that appear in the produce section of your local grocery store. Instead, I’m

discussing the wild grape, the tree-climbing vine with large, lobed leaves and small grapes that possess a thick skin and an overly strong, tart flavor. Fortunately, the flavor improves after the first frost, and eating its grapes fresh, or dried into raisins, becomes a more enjoyable option.

When cooking, juice from the wild grape is a suitable replacement for red wine. It can also be cooked into a syrup for use in various dishes, sodas, vinegar, and even in gummies. It also provides a rich flavor for jams and jellies. Wild grape leaves can add an excellent tart flavor to sauces and braised meats, while the vines' young tendrils complement various salads.

The wild grape is food for animals as well. Its fruit is eaten by grouse, ring-necked pheasants, wild turkeys, and songbirds, such as robins, cardinals, catbirds, and woodpeckers of several varieties. Black bears, opossums, raccoons, and skunks possess an affinity for this naturally grown, dark-blue produce, too. Rabbits and deer nibble the leaves and vines.

An important wildlife habitat, the wild grape is shelter. Small mammals and birds find protective cover, as well as nesting materials, in its dense jumble of foliage. Humans can find shade under it and can make a temporary shelter in the form of a lean-to by tying poles together with this natural rope.

The wild grape plant provides highly effective erosion control. With a deep network of roots, it tightly binds and stabilizes soil on slopes and stream banks. This reduces water runoff and slows the resulting decrease in sediment lost in the water flow.

All parts of the wild grape provide a natural source for making dyes. Various colors can be extracted, many of which need a mineral salt solution for better colorfastness and baking soda

for a change in tone. Yellows and other earth tones are derived from the leaves; pinks, purples, and some shades of blue from the fruit. The seeds provide pinkish-beige, orange, and gray.

Wild grape vines are commonly used in rustic crafts. Soaked for pliability, vines are woven and coiled to form highly creative items such as baskets, wreaths, plant hangers, frames, and various forms of wall art. This versatile plant can even be used to create walking sticks and furniture legs.

However, the wild grape is also a problematic plant. It's a rapid grower that can aggressively leap more than 10 feet in one year. Together, its large leaves often cover trees completely, blocking sunlight critical for photosynthesis, which reduces the growth and quality of trees substantially. The heavy vines break tree branches, especially those under snow and ice. If the

abuse continues long enough, the entire tree may fall.

So, keep an eye on the wild grape growing along that unused section of fence. Don't let this beneficial vine spread to that stand of stately trees you planted nearby years ago. Instead, identify new strands that are looping down and growing into the soil. Keep them in check by cleaving them 1 to 2 inches above the ground. If not, your dream of a perpetually healthy forest may die on the vine. ©

**MARK M. HALL** lives with his wife, their three daughters, and numerous pets on a four-acre slice of paradise in rural Ohio. Mark is a veteran small-scale chicken farmer and an avid observer of nature. As a freelance writer, he endeavors to share his life experiences in a manner that is both informative and entertaining.

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# Cooking with What's in Season

## Late Spring and Early Summer

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY DANA BENNER



**I**LIVE IN NORTH-CENTRAL New Hampshire, where snow covers the ground the day after Thanksgiving and stays with us through probably May. What does that mean? Well, it means that the seasonal resources I can find aren't the same as those available in some other parts of the country. For that reason, all who read this must take what I'm saying with a grain of salt. Things may be different, and probably are, where you live.

This piece is about what happens when the snow is gone, the trees begin to bud, and new life shows itself. It's a time of awakening. At this time of year, there's a great deal going on. New growth is well on the way. Many plants, while in full leaf, haven't started to bear fruit. I'm a person who cooks year-round with what's in season, and that's what this article is about. The ingredients listed in the recipes found here don't use anything from exotic

places. I use what's found at local farms and farmers markets, grown in my own garden, or what I've foraged from the woods and fields near my home.

### Bounty from the Garden

As soon as the soil can be worked in spring, I plant peas, lettuce, spinach, and radishes. In some other areas of the country, these crops have been up for some time — but not here. May is our April, and the end of our growing season could be as soon as September, so what we plant and when, is dependent on the environment. As the changing climate throws everything out of whack, it's hard to plan anything. One thing I do know is that fresh salad is in the works.

### Bounty from the Waters, Fields, and Forest

May and June for me are the time for trout fishing, turkey hunting, and harvesting wild edibles. Turkey and trout will help fill my nearly empty freezer, as well as put food on the table now. Wild edibles, such as fiddleheads and strawberries, will grace our table. Early blackberries and raspberries will be frozen for later use in pies and muffins. Blueberries are still a month or so away.

Trout aren't the only fish I'll pursue. Because I live near the coast, others on the list are ocean fish such as flounder and striped bass, along with lobsters and Jonah crabs. The lobsters and crabs are the result of working on a lobster boat part-time. My pay takes the form of shellfish. The finfish come from barbers I make with a couple of boat captains. Bartering is a great way to get what you need. Everyone wins in a successful barter.

Whether from the garden, hunting, fishing, or foraging,



Black and blue cornbread is something I make with the early season berries, mainly strawberries, blackberries, and raspberries.



Shrimp with citrus marinade, cooked on the grill. Seafood season is always open, though it can be a bit chilly to harvest.

late spring and early summer are the times to begin reaping the benefits. Sure, the squash, tomatoes, and peppers are still to come, but there's more than enough to get you started now. What follows is one of my recipes to enjoy the early harvest and dream of things to yet come.

### Seafood Cakes

There's always leftover crab, lobster, and fish from any seafood feast and, as I hate to waste food, those bits of goodness all go into containers and are put in the freezer. While they'll last up to three months, they rarely stay there that long. Once I have enough, I usually prepare what I call "seafood cakes," which are just my take on traditional Maryland crab cakes. This recipe will make about six cakes, more or less, depending on size. The ingredients will change a bit as the season progresses, but the basics are the same. As with any recipe, please feel free to change things up to suit your needs.

### INGREDIENTS

- 2½ tablespoons of mayonnaise
- 1½ teaspoon of spicy brown mustard
- 1 teaspoon of Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon of Cajun spices
- ¼ cup chopped chives (if they're ready)
- 1 pound (or so) of crab, lobster, and ocean fish meat
- ½ cup of bread or cracker crumbs
- Olive oil for cooking

### COOKING INSTRUCTIONS

- 1) Mix everything, except the meat and breadcrumbs, together in a large bowl.
- 2) Fold meat and breadcrumbs into the mixture using a rubber or wooden spatula.

- 3) Shape the mixture into cakes. The size is up to you.
- 4) Cover the cakes and place in refrigerator for about 1 hour. This helps them firm up.
- 5) Put enough oil in pan to brown the cakes. Don't overdo it with oil, and be careful of splatter.
- 6) Cook about 3 minutes per side or until golden brown.

Enjoy with a salad of fresh, early lettuce, spinach, and radishes from your garden. 🌱

**DANA BENNER** has been writing about all aspects of the outdoors, homesteading, gardening, and history for over 35 years with his work appearing in regional, national, and international publications, both in print and online.

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Zinnias growing in the garden.

# No-Fuss CUTTING GARDEN

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY WREN EVERETT

**W**HEN I FIRST STARTED homesteading, I didn't think I had time for flowers. I wanted to grow food, and taking up valuable garden space for something as frivolous as mere blooms seemed a pointless

waste. Nowadays, I laugh and shake my head at my former, ascetic line of thinking, because the flowers that I eventually "deigned" to allow into my garden became some of my most enjoyable plants. I absolutely love

watching them bloom, attract pollinators, beautify my hill, perfume the air, and fill the vases I bring indoors.

I still retain a bit of my practical mindset, however, because while I now have time for my flowers, I don't want to deal with coddling or fussing over them. The flowers I now plant every year are the winners that have run the gauntlet of my hot, dry hill and still come out blooming. I had to plant quite a few wimpy species before I found my champions, and so I'd like to share those with you (and save you a bit of bother).

If you want to plant an easy-breezy garden that doesn't require much pampering and will give you buckets of blooms to cut, here's my shortlist of tried-and-true greats. Please keep in mind — these are the flowers that have done well in a Zone 6b

garden plagued with summer temperatures that routinely pass 100 degrees Fahrenheit and weeks of drought. Gardeners in drastically different zones may have far different results.

### *Papaver rhoeas*

Corn poppies are first on my list because they’re always the first in my garden. Unlike some of the more summery blooms later in this article, poppies like to be planted what seems insanely early in the year. I plant mine in February, though some folks even plant them in the late fall! The stalwart plants happily persist through frost and thaw until they break out in their fluttery, crepe-paper-like blooms well before anything else in the garden is stirring.

If spaced at least 2 feet apart, these plants will grow large and generously — a single *P.*

*rhoeas* plant, growing in ideal circumstances, may produce hundreds of blooms.

Cut fresh and put immediately into a vase, these cheery blooms will fade after a day. But if cut when just at the verge of opening (when the colorful petals are beginning to emerge from the two halves of the shell-like bud) and with the cut end singed over a flame (really!) they’ll last longer.

### *Cosmo sulphureus*

Every summer that I grow my “Bright Lights” cosmos, I refer to them as my happiness flower. It’s nearly impossible to frown when their armloads of flame-bright, bumblebee-covered blossoms are waving in a summer breeze.

All you need to do is direct sow them after the last frost and let them do their thing. They prefer full sun, but will tolerate shade,

poor soil, and drought, once established. I never watered my cosmos, and they rewarded my neglect with seemingly endless blooms through the early summer and all the way until frost. My plants grow more than 7 feet tall, and they seemed to be daylight sensitive — they take a break from blooming during the worst of summer, and begin to burst into bloom again as the days shorten.



“Bright Lights” cosmos.

The advertisement features a central image of a white Sun-Mar composting toilet. The background is a gradient of green. Text is presented in various styles and colors: large green letters for the brand name, white text in bubbles for key benefits, and blue/white text for contact information and certifications. Icons of a leaf and a water drop are used to represent 'No Septic' and 'Save Water' respectively.

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Cut these blooms as soon as they've opened, if possible — then you'll get a few days of life in a vase. They look particularly spectacular bunched in a narrow vase with their thin green stems topped with a blaze of petals.

*Zinnia haageana*  
and *Z. elegans*

If I could only choose to grow one flower, zinnias would be my choice every time. These easy-to-grow, easy-to-enjoy plants produce happy flowers that delight pollinators and people alike. Haageana zinnias produce smaller, often multicolored blooms on sturdy stems. Elegans zinnias make the bigger blooms that you might imagine when you think "zinnia."

Culture for zinnias is simple: direct sow in full sun during early spring and enjoy. Depending on the variety you grow, they can reach anywhere from 18 to 48 inches tall — bigger varieties may flop over under the weight of their



Torch Tithonia, also known as "Mexican sunflower."



*Z. elegans* with painted lady butterfly.

blooms if not supported (though the resulting wonderland-like chaos does have its charm).

Vase life for zinnias is wonderfully long — sometimes more than two weeks, during which they fade to lovely pastel shades. Check your vases after the first week and top up their water to keep them as long as possible.

*Tithonia rotundifolia*

Sometimes called "Mexican sunflower," the variety I've photographed here is called "Torch," which is a fitting name for its fiery orange-red flowers. This thing grows big, true to its sunflower family ties, and abounds with blooms that attract more butterflies than any other flower in this list. Plant seeds as soon as the soil warms and be sure to space plants at least 2 feet apart. Like the cosmos also listed here, I never needed to water my tithonia plants — they just grew and grew no matter what the weather threw at them. Their flowers seem even brighter when brought indoors, and since they're so abundant, I really enjoy filling an entire vase with their flames.

*Monarda fistulosa*

Commonly called wild bergamot, this perennial can be found in seed catalogs and growing wild in most of North America. It may be one of the most useful plants in this list, as it can be used as a tea, a seasoning herb, and a medicine, and is beloved by hummingbirds, insects, and gardeners alike. It blooms in the earlier spring, and its messy, daisy-lavender flowers are held on nice, strong stems, making arrangements in a vase easy.

I'd give advice on how to grow it in your own garden from seed, but the truth is, I've never done it. Instead, I merely dug up and relocated some of the many plants that grow wild on my hill. They

transplant easily, and while they spread somewhat aggressively, I just see that as an excuse to cut more flowers and tea.

**Wild Grasses**

Alright, so this isn't a flower that you'd ever order from a seed catalog, but don't let your familiarity of the flowers of wild grasses blind you to their beautiful decorative potentials. The truth is, I sometimes make entire bouquets of showy grass flowers — and we delight in them as much as the ones I've personally planted! We try to leave as much of our land to its natural prairie state as possible, enjoying the benefits of providing wildlife habitat, plants to forage for food and tea, and the beauty of seeing the colorful sweep of uncultivated wildflowers as they bloom through the seasons. Particularly showy wild grasses include purple lovegrass (*Eragrostis spectabilis*), side-oats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*), big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), green foxtail (*Setaria viridis*), and, one of my favorites, river oats (*Chasmathium latifolium*). You don't need to know these specific species, however, to find beauty in whatever's growing around you!

To harvest wild grasses, simply cut their flowers or seed heads when they're attractive to you. Many grasses pleasantly change color through the season. Even winter plants, bleached yellow or orange by the weather, can sit attractively in vases as dried flowers, helping you bide your time until the spring brings your flowerbeds back to life again. ©

**WREN EVERETT** and her husband quit their teaching jobs in the city and moved back to the land on 12 acres in the Ozarks. There, they're learning to live as modern peasants: off-grid, as self-sufficient as possible, and quite happily.



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# Preserving Edible Flowers and Sweet Herbs

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY RITA HEIKENFELD

**H**AVE YOU EMBRACED the latest edible flower trend? It's all about preserving fresh, fragrant, colorful flowers and leaves in a variety of ways.

I'm going to show you how to naturally dry petals and leaves for sprinkles — probably the hottest trend out now.

Go one step further with the dried petals and leaves and stir them into granulated sugar — perfect for pastries, teas, salads, drinks, and more.

You'll also learn how to crystallize petals and leaves with egg white and sugar. Lovely for a tea party.

Edible flowers and herbs preserved this way are simple to make and budget-friendly. Check prices at specialty stores or online and you'll get my point. The bonus? You've probably got everything you need out in the garden and in the pantry.

Oh, and let the little ones help. Their small hands are perfect for plucking petals from stems, and they're fascinated with the process.

Plus, these creations make lovely gifts from the kitchen and you're teaching important lessons in food preservation and being good stewards of our environment.

Let's get started!

## Source Matters

Use only pesticide-free, clean flowers and leaves grown for culinary purposes, not those from florists, nurseries, garden centers,

or any grown by the roadside. Your best bet is to use those you grow yourself.

## Positive ID

Be certain of identity, as there are toxic look-alikes. Use only the edible parts. Check to see if pistils, stems, etc. should be removed. Some are edible, some aren't. You're safe if you simply use petals.



Crystallized calendula, rose, borage, and mint.

## Don't Overindulge

As with all foods, don't eat too many at once.

## Favorite Edible Flowers, Leaves, and Herbs

There are many to choose from! Think about color and flavor.

Here are a few of what we use that are easy to grow:

**Butterfly blue pea:** Have you heard of this super-nutritious flower that has a beautiful indigo blue hue in water? It's a vining plant that grows well in the ground or in a container. Dry the pods that form with seeds for growing.

**Calendula:** This member of the marigold family comes in bright yellow, orange, or variegated.

**Chamomile:** Unique fragrance for teas. Tiny white flowers.

**Dandelions:** Who doesn't have dandelions popping up in unexpected places? These have a bitter taste, so take that into consideration.

**Lavender:** Pale blue to dusky purple with a haunting fragrance.

**Lilacs:** Purple-pink flowers. The aroma wafts through the air.

**Nasturtiums:** The colors are like sunsets: yellow, pinkish, orange, red. Leaves are edible, too. Take note that both have a peppery flavor.

**Pansies/Violets/Violas:** These flower "cousins" come in a medley of colors. Purple violets grow wild in our yard. One caveat: African violets are *not* edible.

**Petunias:** Pick and choose by color. It's one of our favorites to crystallize.

**Roses:** Give them a sniff. Fragrant roses preserve with the aroma intact. Miniature roses are



Crystallized peppermint.

especially nice for the little ones to work with.

**Snapdragons:** Pink ones are my favorite.

**Zinnias:** Like vibrant colors? These are for you.

**Mint leaves:** Peppermint leaves hold up incredibly well and, of course, the mint flavor stays intact.

**Lemon Verbena leaves:** A clean, citrus aroma, and they dry gray-green.

**Rose Geranium leaves:** Choose your favorite fragrance, except for citronella.

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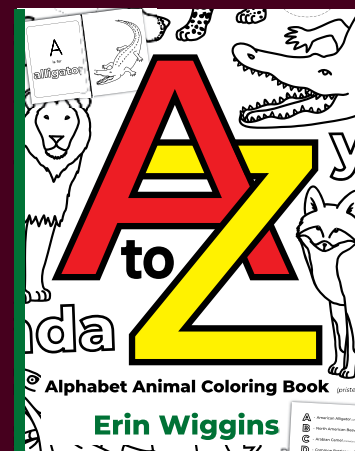
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### Simple Dried Flower Sprinkles

It's really easy, and a calming way to spend an afternoon. If necessary, give the flowers a spray of water the day before you use them to ensure they're clean. That way, they'll be dry for picking. We like to pick them a little before noon, before the sun's heat gets too intense and drives some of the flavor from the flowers.

#### INSTRUCTIONS

- Shake flowers gently to check for hitchhikers, such as tiny insects.
- Remove petals gently. Some are fragile.
- Dry each variety of petal separately, since some have more moisture than others.
- Place in single layers on a screen, rack, or paper towels. Let

dry naturally away from sunlight, which may bleach the colors.

- Check after a couple of days. When petals crinkle between your palms and are completely dry, you're good to go.

#### Mix it Up

After drying, combine several varieties, if you like, taking into account flavor profiles. For example, we don't put mint or nasturtiums into our petal mix since both have distinct flavors. It's best to do those as separate sprinkles and add to blends as needed.

#### Leave whole or crush

That's up to you. Either works well. Store away from heat and light in an airtight container, just like herbs and spices. Sprinkles

will last at least a year or until colors and aromas fade.

#### Use!

Honestly, let your creative juices flow here. Depending on the blend, sprinkles can be used to add flavor, color, or texture to baked goods, puddings, salads, drinks, etc.

#### Mint tea bags

One of our favorite gifts from the kitchen is homemade mint tea bags. Crush a tablespoon of dried mint and seal in tea bags. The best gift for mint tea drinkers.

How about going a step further and taking those colorful sprinkles and making a lovely herbal sugar with them?

### DRIED PETAL FLOWER SUGAR

This is so much fun, and you decide proportions. Here's what we like:

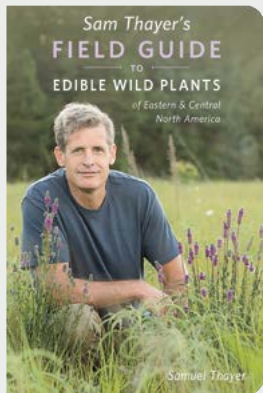
- Two parts granulated sugar to one part petal blend.
- Either leave as-is and stir to mix, or grind as fine as you'd like.
- Cool and store in airtight containers, away from heat and light, for up to a year.

### FRESH FLOWER PETAL SUGAR

- Mix equal amounts of fresh petals or leaves with granulated sugar.
- Grind as fine as you like.
- Pour in single layer on parchment-lined baking sheet. Let dry naturally away from heat and light. Stir a couple of times if you like. Mixture may get a bit clumpy after drying, so just smooch it up fine.
- Store airtight, away from heat and light, for up to a year.



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## CRYSTALLIZED FLOWER PETALS AND LEAVES

Again, no specific recipe amounts.

### INGREDIENTS

Egg white

Granulated sugar on a plate, either regular or fine ground

Fresh petals or leaves

### INSTRUCTIONS

- Whip egg white until foamy. (To help prevent it going on too thick.)
- With a small brush, coat each side of petal or leaf with a thin, thorough coating. (Sugar won't stick to uncoated area.)
- Place flat on sugar to coat underside.
- Sprinkle top lightly and thoroughly. Check underside to make sure it's

coated well, then gently shake off excess sugar.

- Carefully lay on wire rack to dry. Drying may take several days. They're ready when you can break off a piece cleanly, without it bending.
- Store airtight, away from humidity, in single layers at room temperature. 🌱

**RITA HEIKENFELD** comes from a family of wise women in tune with nature. She's a certified modern herbalist, culinary educator, author, and national media personality. Most importantly, she's a wife, mom, and grandma. Rita lives on a little patch of heaven overlooking the East Fork River in Clermont County, Ohio. She's a former adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati, where she developed a comprehensive herbal course. *AboutEating.com* column: [rita@communitypress.com](mailto:rita@communitypress.com)

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# CONTROL VARROA MITES WITH HEAT THERAPY

BY PATRICE LEWIS



**I**N 1987, VARROA MITES were discovered in the United States and caused panic among beekeepers and researchers. Their fears were well-founded. Eradication proved ineffective and the mites inexorably spread across the continent. Without any innate resistance among honeybees, even the most organic-minded beekeepers were forced into using chemical solutions to save their hives, as these mites aren't succumbing to extermination. The best a beekeeper can hope for is to keep the mites to a level that won't decimate the hive.

Varroa mites are, unfortunately, increasing their resistance to treatments, and chemical residues are finding their way into the

hive structure, including the wax and honey.

But a new type of beehive developed in the Czech Republic is taking the beekeeping world by storm — it eradicates varroa mites with a staggering 100% success rate. Named the "Thermosolar Hive," it exploits a simple principle: Honeybees and varroa mites have different heat tolerances. Essentially, the new hive creates a condition of hyperthermia, which kills the mites but leaves the bees and brood unharmed.

## Life Cycle of Varroa Mites

To understand how heat kills varroa mites, a brief explanation of their life cycle is necessary.

Varroa mites reproduce only on bee brood. A female mite will enter the brood cell before it's capped and burrow into the larval food at the bottom of the cell. She emerges once the cell is capped to feed on the developing bee's body fat.

The mother mite lays up to six eggs at intervals of about 30 hours. The first egg develops into a male, and the rest develop into females. Mite development from egg to adult takes 8 to 10 days. The male mates with the female mites as they mature. The male mite and any undeveloped daughter mites die within the brood cell.

The mother mite and her mature daughters then climb onto nurse bees (which attend the brood) and are transferred to adjoining brood cells to begin the reproductive cycle again. During heavier mite infestations, several mites might infest one brood cell. As long as bee brood is present, mites can have between 24 and 30 breeding cycles per year, with each female breeding up to three times each. The result is an exponential growth curve.

Because varroa mites prefer drone brood over worker brood, during the times when bees are raising large numbers of drones, varroa mite infestations can explode.

Research reveals that 80% to 85% of mites are found in capped brood, with most (but not all) of the remaining number on nurse bees. A few mites are found on forager bees, which are used as a means of transport to colonize new hives.

## Thermotherapy at Work

Thermosolar hives are a modification on the classic Langstroth system, with a lid, supers, brood boxes, etc. The difference is that the hive is engineered to passively

capture solar radiation and raise the temperature to a state of hyperthermia. The hives use thermosolar panels on the ceiling and sides to transfer heat inside. The hives are thermally insulated in the honey chambers and bottom, so heat accumulates and is retained for the amount of time necessary to kill the varroa mites.

By transforming solar radiation into thermal energy, hive temperature is raised to between 104 degrees Fahrenheit and 116 degrees F (40 degrees Celsius and 47 degrees C) over a period of 2 to 3 hours — a level lethal to mites but harmless to bees or brood. Temperatures above 98.6 degrees F (38 C) for two hours will damage the mites’ reproductive organs, which makes further reproduction impossible. Above 104 degrees F, the mites’ physiological metabolism is disrupted and they

die. The careful use of intense short-term blasts of heat is being called “thermotherapy.”

Since female varroa mites parasitize the capped bee brood, the brood boxes are placed highest in the hive during thermotherapy sessions. Nurse bees have less chitinized bodies than older worker bees, so they’re able to cool down faster and tolerate higher temperatures. Any mites on the nurse bees are killed by the heat while leaving the bees unharmed.

Honeybees famously can warm or cool their hive environment as needed. The Thermosolar Hive is built to overcome the bees’ cooling ability. The bees can ventilate hot air, but not the heat waves emitted into the brood chamber by the thermosolar panel. Once above 104 degrees F, the less heat-tolerant worker bees move to the bottom of the hive, while the nurse bees remain

to take care of the brood. The nurse bees also maintain the necessary humidity in the brood chamber during a thermotherapy session.

The hive is supplied with thermometers so the beekeeper can monitor the temperature. Too little heat, and the mites won’t be killed off. Too much heat, and the honeybees will die as well. The 104 degrees F to 116 degrees F window is crucial.

Thermotherapy shouldn’t be performed with a queen excluder or caged queen in the hive. The queen must be present in the hive during the thermotherapy.

The only varroa mites that survive the initial treatment are the ones already attached to foraging bees that are outside the hive. For complete effectiveness, the thermotherapy session should be repeated a second time, 10 to 12 days later. After that, maintenance

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treatments 2 to 3 times per season are sufficient to keep varroa mites eradicated. Not controlled, but eradicated.


Because Thermosolar Hives use sunlight, they need to be placed in a sunny south or southeast-facing location. Thermo-therapy sessions should be done on days with a minimum temperature of 68 degrees F and a maximum of 30% cloud cover. For purposes of even temperature distribution, sessions should be done in the mornings (not afternoon).

### Beekeeping Revolution

The development of a passive solar radiation technique to control varroa mites is nothing short of revolutionary. This technique requires no chemical applications, leaves no contaminating residues, requires no external power source, and allows beekeepers to obtain organic certification. Additionally, it's physiologically impossible for the mites to develop resistance to high temperatures, as happens with chemical controls.

Of course, no system is perfect. Thermosolar Hives are pricey, somewhere on the order of \$750 apiece (depending on the components requested, such as number and size of hive boxes, etc.). They're heavier than standard hives and have parts that are

breakable. Because thermo-therapy sessions must be carefully monitored, they're more suited to small-scale beekeepers than massive commercial enterprises with thousands of hives scattered in multiple locations. Standard hives can't be retrofitted with thermosolar components.

The use of Thermosolar Hives is a compromise in the search for varroa mite control, balancing cost with results. One thing is certain: It's a promising new weapon for a very serious problem. 

**PATRICE LEWIS** is a wife, mother, homesteader, homeschooler, author, blogger, columnist, and speaker. An advocate of simple living and self-sufficiency, she's practiced and written about self-reliance and preparedness for almost 30 years. She's experienced in homestead animal husbandry and small-scale dairy production, food preservation and canning, country relocation, home-based businesses, homeschooling, personal money management, and food self-sufficiency. Follow her website [www.patricelewis.com](http://www.patricelewis.com) or blog [www.rural-revolution.com](http://www.rural-revolution.com).

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# “AMERICAN” HORSES

## *Three of Many*

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY DANA BENNER

**H**ISTORY TELLS US THAT the common ancestor of all horses originated here in the Americas; but the horses we know today were brought here by Europeans, starting with the Spanish. From those horses were born some that are uniquely American. This piece will look at three of them: American Cream, Morgan, and Newfoundland pony. The word “horse” is used broadly, as the Newfoundland pony is clearly not a horse.

All three of these equines are considered heritage draft breeds, and they’re all breeds of concern. This means the bloodlines of these animals are in danger of being lost due to crossbreeding. Of the three, the Newfoundland pony has the distinction of being classified as a landrace breed as well. A landrace

breed is one that has evolved in response to its environment.

### American Cream

To learn about the American Cream, I headed north to Portland, Maine, to MerEquus Equine Rescue, where I spoke to Kerri Beckett. Kerri has devoted her life to these horses. At the time of my visit, the sanctuary had eight American Creams under their care. The American Cream was developed in Iowa and is the only true draft horse developed in the United States that’s still in existence.

The American Cream was once considered a color phase of other draft horses, but based on its genetics, it’s been determined to be a distinct breed found only in the United States in its pure state. Among draft horses, the American

Cream is considered medium-sized, weighing between 1,800 to 2,000 pounds, and standing 15 to 16.3 hands high.

After interacting with the horses and speaking to Kerri, I found that American Creams are extremely docile and calm. Kerri told me, “They’re adaptable and love to work and stay active.” All these traits make them perfect for small farms and the numerous chores found there.

According to information from The Livestock Conservancy, the American Cream population is considered to be at the “critical” level — the most serious of the organization’s levels.

### Morgan

The Morgan is one of the most versatile breeds: strong enough to



American Cream — friendly, beautiful, and love to work.



Morgan — Stout, strong, and nimble enough to ride.

*"When you're on a great horse, you have the best seat you'll ever have." – Winston Churchill*

work the fields and pull logs, yet quick and nimble enough to ride. These traits made the Morgan a top choice for cavalry mounts during the American Civil War. They also made the Morgan the foundation for other breeds, such as the Quarter Horse, American Walker, and American Saddlebred — which was the Morgan's undoing.

After the war, the Morgan was bred with larger draft horses, as well as with Thoroughbreds, to enhance both working and riding horses. Slowly, the true Morgan breed was disappearing. The terms "true" and "pure" are hard to use with the Morgan, as historically, there was only one Morgan. All Morgan horses are descendants of one stallion, "Figure," which was born in Vermont and owned by Justin Morgan. This means the Morgan breed comes from that one stallion being bred to other

horses, thus, raising an ongoing controversy over the older, foundation-type animals and others bred for showing.

The original Morgan breed was developed as a medium-sized work

horse, weighing between 800 and 1,000 pounds and standing 14.1 and 15.2 hands tall. They have a large chest and muscled legs, which made them ideal for working the hilly, rocky farmland of Vermont.



Kerri with American Cream horses at MerEquus in Maine.

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There are small groups of original Morgan horses, mostly in rural western Vermont. The University of Vermont has a Morgan breeding program based on the original Morgan. The horses here can all trace their lineage to the early Morgans, and while their numbers are increasing, they're still considered endangered.

Today, there are two separate groups of Morgan horses: Foundation and Non-Foundation. Foundation horses have little to no non-Morgan blood. Non-Foundation horses have a higher percentage of non-Morgan blood. If



This Newfoundland pony just wanted to be with me.

you're looking for a work horse, go with a Foundation horse. If you're looking for a horse that rides well and looks good in the ring, go with a non-Foundation Morgan.

### Newfoundland Pony

Of the three equines covered in this article, the Newfoundland pony is the most unique. This breed developed less from the hand of humans than it did from the environment it originated in. Maritime Canada, particularly Newfoundland, where these ponies hail from, is a hard place to live. The winters are brutally cold, the terrain is rocky, and natural forage can be scarce. Only the strong and hardy, both human and pony, could survive these conditions.

Around 400 years ago, this section of Canada was settled by the English. These early settlers brought with them ponies, including Welch Mountain, Exmoor, Dartmoor, New Forest, Scottish Galloway, Connemara, and Highland ponies — all sturdy animals in their own right. When not in use, the ponies were turned loose to fend for themselves. On their own, these ponies began crossbreeding, thus starting the

genetic line that was to become the Newfoundland pony.

Over time, the ponies grew hardier and developed traits that allowed them to survive in this harsh environment. Those traits included stockier bodies; strong, thick legs; and larger hooves — which allowed them to traverse the rocky terrain. Those that couldn't adapt, died. With no "new" blood being introduced, these ponies continued to develop into a genetically separate animal. Newfoundland ponies have built up resistance to many equine diseases.

Newfoundland ponies can weigh anywhere from 400 to 800 pounds and measure from 11.2 to 14.2 hands tall. Traditionally, they were used for everything on the small farms of the area. Despite their harsh environment, or because of it, these ponies are extremely intelligent and have a good temperament. When I visited the Newfoundland Pony Conservation Center, I was introduced to the Newfoundland pony by Emily Aho. What I found was a pony that was extremely curious and friendly.

With the coming of industry and tractors, the ponies were no longer needed. Some were bred to other ponies and even small horses; many more were sent to slaughterhouses in Quebec, where they supplied the European market. Today, only about 400 pure Newfoundland ponies are left. Many of these animals are gelded males or mares too old to breed. That leaves an estimated 200 to 250 breeding animals capable of keeping the Newfoundland pony around.

America was the birthplace of the equine breeds featured here, and today is home to some truly outstanding "American" breeds. There's something about the pure spirit of the horse that makes life worth living. ©



Newfoundland ponies going out for the day.



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# EGGS AND CHOLESTEROL

BY KENNY COOGAN



**H**AVE YOU NOTICED THAT butter oscillates between being healthy and unhealthy every few years? The same thing applies to eggs. The nutritional content of an egg goes between “part of a healthy diet” to “an unacceptable level.” While looking at the FDA, USDA, and other scientific organizations, it’s important to note that it’s okay for scientists to change their understanding. We do want them to change their proclamations based on new evidence. It would be far worse for them to stick to their original statements despite new facts. We shouldn’t call it flip-flopping; we should consider it an evolution in understanding.

In the August 2018 issue of the scientific journal *Nutrients*, a paper was titled “Dietary Cholesterol Contained in Whole Eggs is Not Well Absorbed and Does Not Acutely Affect Plasma Total Cholesterol Concentration in Men and Women.” Then, in July 2020, the same journal published a paper titled “Association between Egg Consumption and Cholesterol Concentration: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials.” This review of 28 studies on the impact of egg consumption on LDL-C/HDL-C ratio among healthy subjects showed that more eggs consumed per day may influence cardiovascular disease

risks by increasing LDL-C and the LDL-C/HDL-C ratio.

So, what’s going on with eggs and cholesterol?

## Good and Bad Cholesterol

High-density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL-C) helps take excess cholesterol away from the arteries and is the “good” cholesterol that’s created in the human body. Low-density-lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C) is also created by the human body and is considered “bad” because it can build up and cause artery walls to narrow.

The World Health Organization (WHO) identifies elevated cholesterol levels as a major risk factor for heart attacks and strokes. Reducing LDL-C is important for health.

## How Does Saturated Fat Increase Cholesterol?

“Most of the cholesterol in the body is made by the liver, not from diet,” according to the Mayo Clinic. On their website, they write, “While diet does matter, research has found that cholesterol levels have more to do with the fat you eat, namely saturated and trans fats, than cholesterol.”

According to the American Heart Association, “Saturated fats are found in animal-based foods such as beef, pork, poultry, full-fat dairy products, eggs, and tropical oils, such as coconut and



palm. Because they're typically solid at room temperature, they're sometimes called solid fats."

"When it comes to biologically, both the saturated fat and the cholesterol in the egg can increase the blood cholesterol level," Dr. Teresa Fung, Professor of Nutrition at Simmons University, explains. Dr. Fung is also an Adjunct Professor of Nutrition at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. "However," she adds, "there's a difference in how much they can increase the cholesterol. Saturated fat can increase cholesterol so much more than the cholesterol that we eat. So, the effect of saturated fat is much greater. Basically, it's a low-hanging fruit that we need to work on. Control the saturated fat and we can get a much better health benefit than trying to control the cholesterol that we eat."

Saturated fats can cause problems with your blood cholesterol levels, which can increase your risk of heart disease. With the increased consumption of saturated fats in developed countries, the cholesterol threat to health from dietary changes has increased.

### Egg Nutrition

A USDA spokesperson told *Backyard Poultry*, "Eggs provide important nutrients as well as saturated fat and dietary cholesterol, so it's important to think about how they fit into a healthy eating pattern."

Eggs contain beneficial nutrients like proteins, lipids, and minerals. According to a paper titled "The Impact of Egg Nutrient Composition and Its Consumption on Cholesterol Homeostasis," in 2018, a boiled egg (50 grams) provides 6.29 grams of protein, 0.56 grams of carbohydrate, 1.6 grams of saturated fat, 2.0 grams monounsaturated fat, and 0.7 grams of polyunsaturated fat. Eggs also contain various minerals (calcium, iron, magnesium, and phosphorus) and many vitamins, including A and D, but lack vitamin C. Long-term population studies show that eating an egg daily hasn't been linked to higher heart attack or stroke rates.

*The Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020–2025 (Dietary Guidelines)* provides advice on what to eat and drink to promote health, reduce the risks of disease, and meet nutrient needs. "Healthy



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eating patterns include vegetables, fruits, grains, protein foods, and dairy and fortified soy alternatives and are limited in saturated fat, added sugars, and sodium. Eggs are part of the Protein Foods group, which also includes lean meats and poultry; seafood; beans, peas, and lentils; and nuts, seeds and soy products,” the USDA spokesperson says.

They add, “While eggs are a nutrient-dense food, they do contain saturated fat, and their saturated fat content should be considered when planning a healthy dietary pattern that doesn’t exceed the saturated fat limit.”

### Cholesterol by the Numbers

While different breeds of chickens produce eggs with the same nutritional content, poultry species differ. (See chart below.) There’s no evidence that organic or pastured-raised chicken eggs differ from “conventional” eggs in cholesterol numbers. The American Heart Association recommends that total dietary cholesterol consumption should be less than 300 milligrams/day.

While dietary cholesterol may not be the actual measurement, we should be concerned about the correlation between foods with a higher dietary cholesterol number and higher saturated

fat. In many non-U.S. countries, cholesterol isn’t even included on nutritional packaging.

“The nutrition facts label is already so packed with stuff that I actually agree that it should fall to the bottom of the priority list,” Dr. Fung says. “There’s more important stuff to put on that nutrition facts label.”

*Dietary Guidelines* recommends limiting saturated fat to less than 10% of calories per day, starting at age two, by replacing it with unsaturated fats, particularly polyunsaturated fats. *Dietary Guidelines* also carries forward the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine recommendation that dietary cholesterol consumption be as low as possible without compromising the nutritional adequacy of the diet. These recommendations are based on evidence reviewed by the 2020 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee on types of dietary fat consumed, including dietary cholesterol, and risk of cardiovascular disease.

### Data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA’s)

FoodData Central show that one egg yolk contains 1.62 grams of saturated fat and 184 milligrams of cholesterol. One egg white contains 0 grams of saturated fat and 0 milligrams of cholesterol.

### How does cooking an egg affect the cholesterol levels?

“How you prepare eggs can help you limit your intake of saturated fat,” the USDA spokesperson says. “*Dietary Guidelines* recommends cooking with vegetable oil in place of options higher in saturated fat, including butter, shortening, lard, or coconut oil.” Eating an egg per day is healthy for most people, but watch what you eat with your eggs and how you prepare them.

“Some people love eggs, and every morning they’ll have an egg, and some people will occasionally get an omelet with three eggs. If that isn’t an everyday happening, I wouldn’t worry about it. Once in a while, three eggs are fine,” Dr. Fung says. “Yeah, it’s a lot of dietary cholesterol, but in the big scheme of things, it’s not like, ‘Oh, today I ate a lot of cholesterol and boom, my bad cholesterol level is going to shoot up.’”

She explains that it takes 4 to 6 weeks to see the impact on blood cholesterol. “I do worry about what they put in the omelet. If it’s bacon or sausage, then it’s really not the eggs that are doing the harm,” she adds. “It’s what else they eat with the eggs. If they’re putting it into a quiche, the pie crust is a little bit worrisome because to make a flaky pie crust, you need saturated fat.”

Egg Cholesterol Comparison			
Item		Cholesterol per 100g (mg)	Saturated Fat per 100g (g)
Chicken	Egg, fresh, raw, whole	372	3.1
	Egg, hard-boiled, cooked, whole	373	3.3
	Egg, scrambled, cooked, whole	277	3.3
	Egg, fried, cooked, whole	401	4.3
	Egg, poached, cooked, whole	370	3.1
Duck	Egg, raw, fresh, whole	884	3.7
	Egg, cooked	828	5.1
Goose	Egg, cooked	798	5
	Egg, raw, fresh, whole	852	3.6
Quail	Egg, raw, fresh, whole	844	3.6
Turkey	Egg, raw, fresh, whole	933	3.6

Source: USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference Legacy

Note: These measurements are per 100g and not per egg, as this is a better comparison between a tiny quail egg and a large goose egg. A duck egg is usually 70g so the chart above is providing a measurement for 100g which is more than one duck egg. The yolk to albumen ratio is larger than a chicken egg and is why the cholesterol in a duck egg is much higher.

**KENNY COOGAN** earned a master’s degree in Global Sustainability and co-hosts the Mother Earth News and Friends podcast, which can be enjoyed at [MotherEarthNews.com/podcast](http://MotherEarthNews.com/podcast). He also hosts and created the television show Florida’s Flora and Fauna with Conservationist Kenny Coogan. To learn more about that program, visit [www.FloridasFloraAndFauna.com](http://www.FloridasFloraAndFauna.com).



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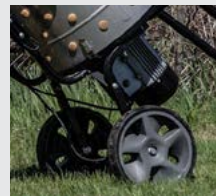
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# Mosquito-Borne Diseases in Goats

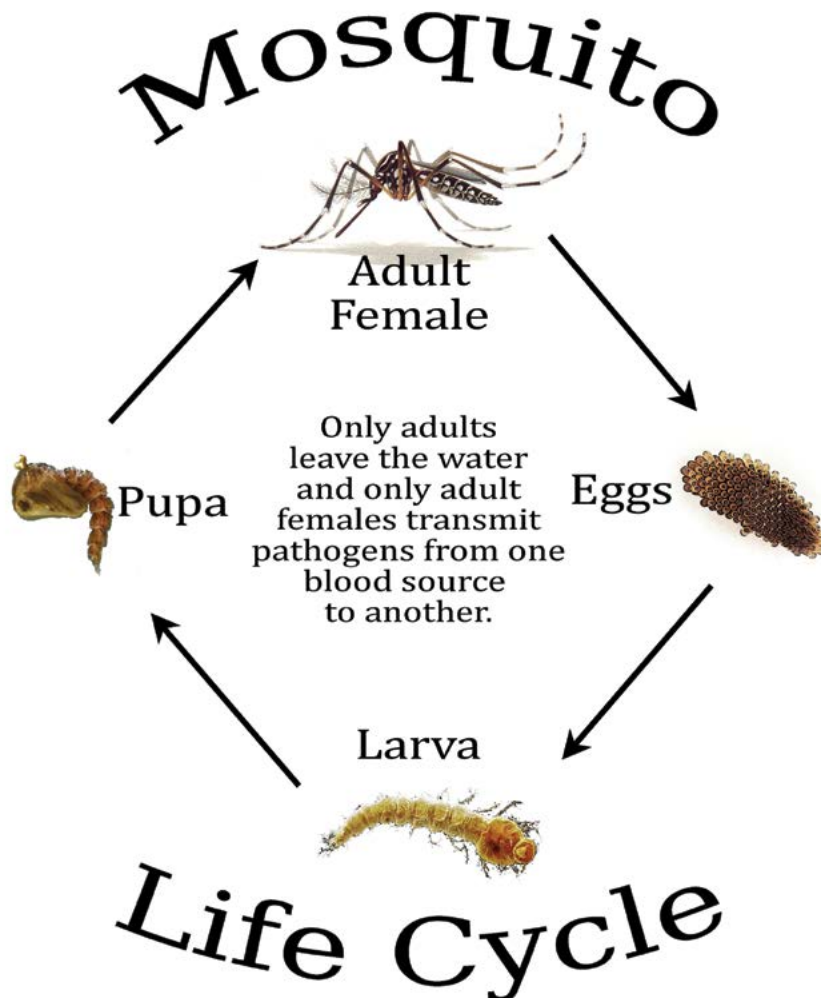
BY DON LEWIS

**T**HERE ARE ROUGHLY 3,500 species of mosquito on Earth. For most of us, that's 3,500 too many. To be fair, many of these species don't preferentially make a blood buffet of us humans, and of those that do, blame the females of the species.

But while itchy bumps caused by an allergic reaction to the mosquito saliva left behind at each feeding are bad enough, mosquitoes are a major vector for pathogens like viruses, bacteria, and parasites.

Although mosquito-borne pathogens cause more human

deaths annually than any other animal, people aren't the only ones suffering from these disease-transmitting scourges. Practically every member of the animal kingdom has one or more mosquito varieties that prey upon it ... including goats.



## Life Cycle of a Mosquito

After collecting a blood meal, the female mosquito lays her eggs in any available still water. If still water isn't available, the female may lay eggs on soil or at the base of vegetation in areas susceptible to flooding. The eggs can survive for several months without being immersed in water but must be in water to continue the cycle.

The larvae hatch in water and feed on water-borne microorganisms. The larvae molt several times during this stage. Eventually, the larvae develop into pupae, which no longer feed but must remain in the water. Finally, an adult mosquito emerges and takes flight, leaving the water behind. A mosquito's life cycle typically takes a couple of weeks, but it may last for as long as a month in certain conditions.

As a rule, mosquitoes don't carry any pathogens during the egg, larval, or pupal stages of life, and any pathogens carried during the adult stage are acquired while feeding on an infected source.

## Mosquito-Borne Diseases Affecting Goats

Like many other mammals, goats are prey to hungry mosquitoes. These insects can be vectors of pathogens that cause illness in goats, other livestock, and occasionally humans. Some of these pathogens are present in the United States, while others haven't made it here ... yet.

The mosquito-borne pathogens that can infect goats fall into three categories: viruses, bacteria, and parasites. This article can't list all mosquito-borne pathogens that can affect goats, and so will discuss only the most detrimental.

### Viruses

- *Cache Valley virus* (Orthobunyavirus) – Cache Valley “fever” is endemic to many parts of the U.S. and can cause abortions, abnormal fetuses, and congenital abnormalities in goats. Currently, there are no available vaccines or treatments for the disease. Infected does don't display symptoms of the disease. Rarely, humans have contracted Cache Valley Fever by mosquito bites, with the most serious infections leading to encephalitis and multi-organ failure.

In one herd study where Cache Valley Fever was present, insect control and a delayed breeding season relative to mosquito activity resulted in no further kid abnormalities over the two years following these steps.

- *Rift Valley fever* (Phlebovirus) – Africa. First identified in 1931 in the Rift Valley of Kenya, Rift Valley fever induces abortions in goats at a rate of nearly 100%. Spread by mosquitoes, the virus is zoonotic (meaning it can also infect humans). Since its original discovery, Rift Valley fever has spread to most of Africa and Madagascar and, in a few cases, to Saudi Arabia and Yemen. An

attenuated live virus vaccine has been developed for veterinary use and can provide long-term immunity but must not be used on pregnant animals.

- *Wesselsbron virus* (Flavivirus) – Africa. A mosquito-borne virus that can cause high mortality (up to approximately 25%) among kids, as well as spontaneous abortions. Like the Rift Valley fever virus, the Wesselsbron virus is zoonotic and, in humans, causes headaches, muscle aches, and joint pain. Treatment of goats consists of immunization with an attenuated vaccine, often combined with the Rift Valley fever virus vaccine.

### Bacteria

- *Eperythrozoonosis* (Mycoplasma ovis) — worldwide. Eperythrozoonosis is a disease in sheep and goats caused by the bacterium *M. ovis*. Mosquitoes are

one of the known vectors. Goats infected with eperythrozoonosis can suffer from anemia, jaundice, and (in rare cases) death. Older, previously infected animals develop immunity. No specific treatment is recommended, but the antibiotic oxytetracycline is occasionally prescribed.



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## Parasites

• *Goat malaria* (Plasmodium) – Africa/East Asia. Mosquitoes are the primary vector for malaria parasites in all susceptible species. Goat malaria was first identified in Angola in 1923. Goat malaria isn't considered to be zoonotic. Genetic studies of the parasite suggest the spread from Africa to Asia was related to domestic goat exportation.

Clinical signs of infection in goats are fever, pale mucous membranes, lymph node enlargement, and jaundice. Treatment for infected animals is mainly based on vector and parasite suppression and endectocide drugs such as injectable ivermectin and topical Fipronil.

• *Setaria digitata* – East Asia, India, Thailand. *Setaria digitata* is a species of parasitic roundworms that infect domesticated mammals and can cause fatal cerebrospinal nematodiasis in cattle, goats, sheep, and horses. While *S. digitata* is most common in cattle, when mosquitoes introduce it to abnormal hosts such as sheep or goats, the larval forms can migrate to the central nervous system, causing lumbar paralysis, or *Kumri*, which can lead to death. Adult filarid worms can invade the eyes of livestock, causing blindness. Typical clinical treatments include DEC (diethylcarbamazine) or ivermectin.

The common factor in the pathogens outlined above is the delivery by mosquitoes. While many of these diseases have no effective clinical treatments, the most effective treatment is to limit animal and human contact with mosquitoes through environmental control of local still-water reservoirs and effective pesticide and repellent use. ©

**DON LEWIS** lives on a small homestead in North Idaho. He's a husband, father, writer, and all-around handyman. He has practiced and written about rural subjects for over 20 years. He has experience in animal husbandry, carpentry, construction, science, and theology. He and his wife have been married since 1990 and have two homeschooled daughters, both now adults.

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# North American Babydoll Southdown Sheep Association and Registry



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The NABSSAR offers a yearly calendar highlighting photos submitted for a photo contest. This is just one of the advantages of being a NABSSAR member. These photos are in our 2026 calendar available on Zazzle.



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Michelle Schubert, Begunarcos' Babydoll Brigade, Frankfort, KY

# MAXIMIZE PASTURE QUALITY WITH PIGS

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY JODI CRONAUER



**R**AISING PIGS ON PASTURE can enhance their well-being while decreasing your feed costs. While any pig can be managed outdoors, their performance on grass will vary, depending on the breed.

The first step in successfully raising green-pastured pigs is to do your research and determine what breed will best maximize your pastureland and grass quality. Beyond breed selection, thoughtful planning is crucial to developing a pasture system where pigs can flourish. Carefully evaluate your available space, soil type, and the range of forages present, to help you tailor your management approach for optimal results.

Assessing your long-term goals — whether for sustainable meat production, land regeneration, or heritage breed conservation — can guide your decisions on stocking rates and infrastructure investments. By combining knowledge of your land's unique attributes with a commitment to sustainable

practices, you lay the foundation for a productive and harmonious relationship between your pigs and the pasture ecosystem.

Some breeds, such as Kunekune and Idaho Pasture Pigs, thrive on eating grass and do exceptionally well on pasture. Other breeds, such as Large Blacks, American Guinea Hogs, and Berkshires, are decent on pasture and, although they aren't as efficient at grazing, they do a fairly good job. These breeds are also exceptionally good in wooded areas, as they're excellent foragers.

On the other hand, if your desired breed is something along the lines of a Yorkshire or a landrace pig, then it may be more realistic to raise them on dirt areas to start. Breeds that don't graze well are going to dig and root the pastureland, and inevitably will turn it into dirt instead of a green pasture. Raising a breed that isn't good at grazing isn't going to be the best way to maximize your pasture quality.

Having the correct breed is important to the health of your



pasture, but that isn't the only thing to consider when looking to get the most out of your pastures. Other factors to consider include:

1. Accurately determining the carry capacity of your pasture. This will ensure that the appropriate amount of grasses and legumes are consumed, while also leaving enough for regeneration.

2. Preventing overgrazing and allowing for regrowth through rotational grazing. This not only maximizes productivity but also promotes overall land health. Investing in fencing that allows for controlled movement between paddocks not only eases rotational grazing but also protects sensitive areas from overuse.

3. Controlling grass height within a pasture — something people tend to overlook. A pig's neck isn't built to turn or rotate like other grazing animals, such as horses, cows, goats, etc., so they must eat from the top down. Having pasture grasses that are too tall for pigs to properly graze is a huge problem, as it'll teach the pigs to nose over the grasses in order to be able to eat them. Unfortunately, this teaches them to root and is the opposite of the goal when raising pasture pigs. Mowing the pasture to keep the grasses at a manageable height will maximize the quality of the pastures year after year.

4. Placing shelters, drinking water, and wallows strategically within a pasture system can encourage the pigs to use all available land.

5. Providing the correct nutrition for your pigs is one of the most important aspects not only of the health of your pigs, but also the health of your land. Minerals are located in dirt, so if a pig becomes deficient in a certain mineral, it'll dig in the ground to find more. Having a



properly balanced diet that contains all the essential vitamins, minerals, and nutrients will allow pigs to graze contentedly, as compared to tearing up your fields looking for what's missing in their diet.


6. Maintaining a parasite management program will prevent setbacks in pasture productivity and keep the overall health of your pig at their prime.

Time of year, weather, climate, topography, and growing season are also factors in how well your pigs will graze. Keeping a close eye on your pigs to evaluate if anything is wrong or has changed will ensure that you're able to locate a problem as it begins and make the necessary changes. It's also beneficial to observe the social dynamics and behavior of your pigs, as certain breeds may be more prone to aggression or stress

— which can impact their grazing habits and overall health.

Pigs are great at eating many different varieties of grasses and legumes. In fact, there isn't a whole lot a pig won't eat. For this reason, we routinely use our pigs to graze our horse and bison pastures, thereby promoting better quality in all our pastures.

Thoughtful pasture management integrates animal welfare, land stewardship, and practical husbandry. By taking a holistic approach, you lay the groundwork for a thriving farm ecosystem where both land and livestock flourish together.

All these factors can enhance the productivity and welfare of your pastured pigs, which in turn can lead to better meat quality and better farm sustainability. 

**JODI CRONAUER** lives in Wisconsin with her husband and her three sons. They raise Idaho Pasture pigs, Kunekune pigs, and American bison, as well as Gypsy Vanner horses. The meat from their pigs and bison is rich in essential nutrients because they eat grass as their primary diet. Jodi is the author of *Raising Pigs on Green Pastures* (Dorrance Publishing, 2021). <https://shop.iamcountryside.com/products/raising-pigs-on-green-pastures>.

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# MUSKY FISHING WITH DAD

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY GINA STACK

**I**N THE MID 1960S, MY father loved to fish the fish of 10,000 casts: the musky. This name is short for muskellunge (*Esox masquinongy*), a large North American native fish that hunts the Northwoods' fresh waters. The name comes from the Ojibwe word *mashkinonge*, *maashkinoozhe*, or *maskinoše*, which means "ugly pike," "bad pike," or "big pike." The musky is the largest of the pike family.

The musky is a cool-water fish that's very watchful and obscure. It takes its prey by surprise, lying in wait in the cool, deep waters among logs and tall weeds, striking unsuspecting targets such as invertebrates, small perch, frogs, snakes, or even ducklings. They start eating tiny fish as soon as they're able. Adults feed by sight in the daytime, choosing carp, trout, suckers, sunfish, perch, and minnows. Larger ones will strike

muskrats and anything else that's up to half their length, to fill their large stomachs. They monitor our lakes, helping keep the fish population at a healthy level. They can commonly reach 37 inches long, although the world record in 1949,

from Hayward, Wisconsin, was 60¼ inches long and weighed a whopping 67 pounds 8 ounces. The 2025 catch-and-release program in Wisconsin recorded some muskies as big as 57 inches long. No wonder it's Wisconsin's state fish!



Its body is slightly flattened and elongated, being either brown, light silver, or green with dark vertical stripes that break into spots. Sometimes they have no markings. Their mouth is full of doglike teeth on the lower jaw and roof of the mouth. The tongue has sharp, short teeth like a brush. They can swim in a burst speed of 30 mph, which is kind of scary for a little kid swimming at the lake we fished.

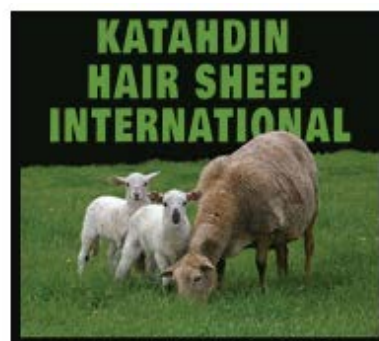
They can live in their native surroundings for 30 years, but the average is 12 to 18 years. They're found in the north and northeast part of the U.S. and into Canada. In North America, they're native to the Great Lakes region, as well as the Hudson Bay and St. Lawrence rivers. The river basins of the Mississippi have them too, along with some in Tennessee and the Carolinas.

The catch-and-release program helps maintain the population and prevent overfishing by ensuring they're kept around so they can spawn. The live release program was started by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources in 2017 to encourage and support excellent fishing by mindfully returning trophy sport varieties back to the water. There are many programs for raising and stocking muskies to keep the sport alive and well. As a part of these programs, fiberglass trophy fish are made of the fishers' catches. They're every bit as beautiful as the real thing, while letting those big lunkers get even bigger for the next excited fisherman.

Early ways of fishing muskies were with pitchforks, heavy lines tied to low hanging branches, shooting them with a rifle, or using fishing nets. One old fisherman would attach brush to the side of his boat, so when the musky was following a lure, it thought it was safe heading into brush and

striking the lure as it got close to the boat. Not a bad idea. Some tips from this old guy were to fish for them during the day in the shade, at night after a lot of rain, and in fall when there are leaves on the water for minnows to hide in. Other anglers suggest that summer months when the water temperatures rise is the best time to bag the big fish, known for its forceful nature and overpowering strikes, causing an exciting encounter when the lure is hit!

Being the youngest of four girls, I got to be part of this adventure. I guess since my dad didn't have any boys, he thought he may as well see what I could do. At around 10 years old and of small stature, my dad took me musky fishing. He handed me a large, heavy pole on which was attached a hefty lure, complete with a big mass of shiny black hair, silver spoon shapes, and massive hooks.



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I was then instructed to cast it out, reel it in, and repeat. There was no casting out and watching a bobber with this fish. I remember thrusting out that huge pole and lure with my tiny arms. I can still recall the sound of the lure coming out of the water each time I reeled it in and pulled it out with all its spoons, hooks, and hair twirling and clacking together, as the water dripped off, before I cast it again.

Now I knew why dad taught me how to cast in the backyard. I'm thankful he took the time to teach me all this.

My dad was also casting, but he had a live sucker on a line that was used to attract the elusive fish. He caught them too!

After casting what seemed like 10,000 times, he took me bobber fishing for smaller things. It wasn't as exciting as when

I thought I was going to hook a fish as big as myself. When vacationing in the Northwoods of Wisconsin, my dad took me to the fish museum that had glass cases displaying muskies caught in tournaments around the area.

My dad caught several large muskies that we took to a taxidermist and hung on the wall. His 43-inch trophy is in my house now, as a wonderful memory. I also have a picture of my dad holding up a freshly caught musky next to me because I was the same size.

I never ate one, but they're said to have a superb taste, with flesh that's white and flaky. I thought they were just for the wall. There are several recipes for them, and back in the day, according to the old fisherman I read about, they ate a lot of them.

This summer we're going to a well-known musky fishing lake, and I hope to fish for them again. My dad would be so proud if I actually landed one. 🐟



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**GINA STACK** is a freelance writer in southwest Wisconsin. She, along with her husband and son, reside on five acres with 22 laying hens (some as old as 10 years!), a large vegetable garden, perennials, and Lily the pug.

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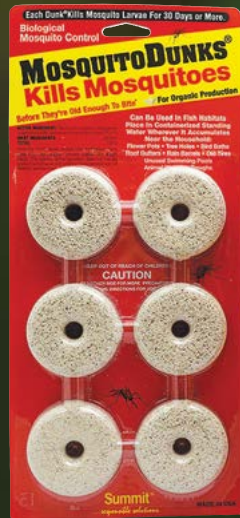
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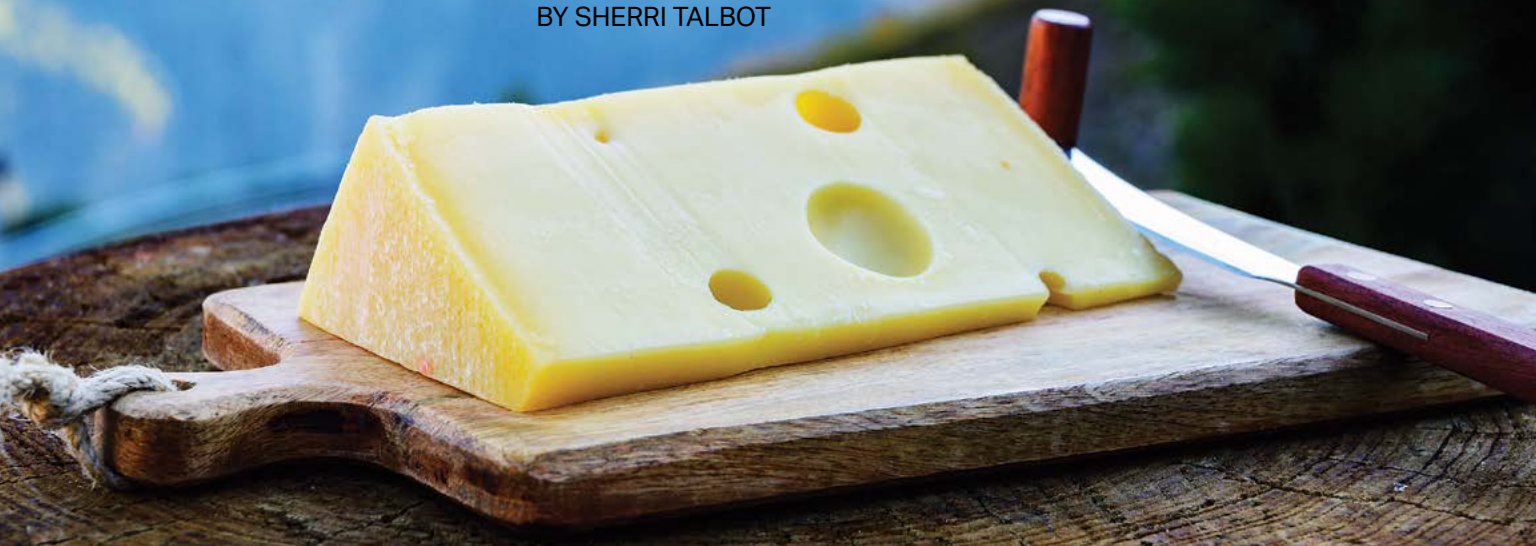
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# Alpine Cheese

## A Dairy Delight

BY SHERRI TALBOT



**C**CHEESE IS NOT ONLY delicious, but it's also one of the oldest processed foods. In fact, cheese predates written history, with milk fats being found inside pottery from the Neolithic Period. Evidence of cheese has been found in 4,000-year-old Egyptian tombs. Greek myths from 3,500 years ago also mention cheesemaking.

### The Family Lineage

One of the older cheese types still commonly eaten is Alpine. This is a category of cheeses, rather than a single variety, and includes Swiss, Gruyere, Comte, and others. Alpine cheeses are firm and smooth, with an “elastic” texture and a hard rind. Holes in the cheese, often called “eyes,” are common, and each batch is formed into large wheels, sometimes weighing more than 100 pounds.

Alpine cheese is aged several months but often not much longer than that. The aging process is mainly done to store the cheeses during the cheesemaking season. They're then eaten over the following year, until the cycle begins again.

### Soil, Grass, and Milk

For the last 3,000 years, dairy cattle in the Alps regions have grazed exclusively on mountain grasses each summer — grass that's located more than 1,000 feet above sea level. Throughout



the season, the cows graze in increasingly higher pastures, leaving the grasses in the lowlands for winter hay.

Often, these cows are cared for by special herders who are hired by farmers for their labor. The herders will keep the cattle in the mountains for the season, milking them daily, making cheese, and retaining some of the great wheels that result as part of their labor.

The cows graze exclusively on mountain grasses with no supplemental feed. The grasses in each area, as well as the nutrients from the mountain soils, flavor the milk — and therefore the cheese — in unique ways.

### The Making of Cheese

The basics of Alpine cheesemaking, as it's practiced today, are about 900 years old. Cauldrons were carried with the herders, and huts were built as the herders moved up the mountain so milk didn't have to be transported far to make the cheeses. Alpine cheese requires raw milk at its freshest, so the cows are milked and the herders make cheese without either party leaving their elevated summer home.

This traditional practice makes Alpine cheese some of the last varieties made exclusively with unpasteurized milk. Alpine cheese tends to be a sweet cheese, and the natural bacteria may lead to a greater depth of flavor. Alpine cheese uses very little salt due to the difficulties with getting it up the mountain, and this, combined with the high pH, results in the eyes these cheeses are often known for.

In order to make the trip back down the mountain at the end of the season, Alpine cheese needs to be durable and have as much whey removed as possible. This calls for the curd to be cut smaller than some other cheese varieties, cooked at high temperatures, and pressed.

Finally, while "Alpine-style" cheeses are usually 30 pounds or less, true, European Alpine cheese wheels often average 75 or 80 pounds. Some, for example the Emmentaler AOP Swiss cheese, can be over 200 pounds.

### Possible Health Benefits


There are often concerns about eating cheese, with claims made about fat content, heart disease, or weight gain. However, while cheese

can be nutrient-dense, more recent studies suggest that, in moderation, the benefits may outweigh the concerns. A Harvard article last year discussed research showing that some cheeses break down into compounds similar to those in some blood pressure medications, or produce vitamin K during fermentation, which is known to potentially lower cardiac risks.

A 2004 study that focused specifically on Alpine cheese showed that it contains high levels of  $\alpha$ -Linolenic acid (ALA). These fatty acids are in the mountain grass the cows eat, pass through into the milk, and then are stored in the cheese. ALA is currently being studied for its ability to be a protective factor against cardiac disease, with favorable results.



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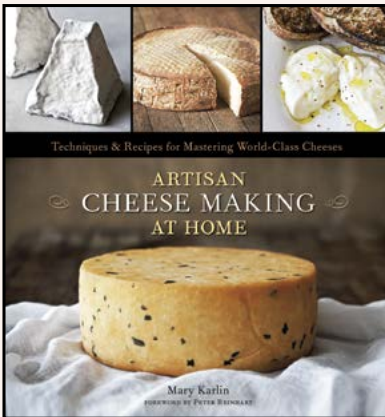


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Just a century ago, cheese was still a relatively regional and European phenomenon, and techniques for making cheese were limited by climate, geography, and equipment. But modern technology, along with the recent artisanal renaissance, has opened up the diverse, time-honored, and dynamic world of cheese to enthusiasts

willing to take its humble fundamentals (milk, starters, coagulants, and salt) and transform them into complex edibles. *Artisan Cheese Making at Home* is the most ambitious and comprehensive guide to making cheese at home, filled with easy-to-follow instructions for making mouthwatering cheese and dairy items. **Item #9579, \$29.99**

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The study showed that Alpine cheese had higher levels of ALA than any cheese tested against it. This included those made from cow milk that the researchers had intentionally fortified with high levels of linseed oil to boost the ALA amounts.

Cardiac support isn't the only potential benefit to including Alpine cheese in your diet. A recent discovery showed that certain kinds of bacteria called *P. freudenreichii* subsp. *Shermanii*, considered probiotic, may be important in preventing colon cancer by helping balance the flora of the colon. These particular bacteria are heat-resistant, and due to the high heat used in Alpine cheesemaking, the strain is prevalent in the cheese.

### The Problem with Alpine Cheese

The traditions behind making true Alpine cheese require small batches, which means less product for sale than with a high production setup. Marketing and shipping are more expensive when moving smaller quantities, and raw milk cheese can often be a niche market. This can lead to competition between suppliers, as one may be tempted to market their cheese as being the "real" Alpine.

In the other direction, the need to sell product might lead to cutting corners in the process, making the product less authentically an "Alpine" cheese. The market is already flooded with "Alpine-style" cheeses, many of which come from the United States and have never even seen the Alps. These cheese wheels are often smaller, making them easier to ship and market, unlike the original, grand wheels that make up a true Alpine cheese.

The emphasis on production-style cheesemaking also results in

the use of numerous milk batches in a single cheese. This changes the flavor and nutritional make up of these cheeses. The fear of raw milk and the push to pasteurize and use chemical starters in cheese means less variety and depth of flavor in the final product.

### Delicious Despite the Challenges

Alpine cheese has a long and rich history, giving us large and tasty cheeses. The work that goes into the wheels is done by hand at each stage, resulting in a unique flavor experience found in no other cheese family. Fear of raw milk, health effects, and difficulties in marketing have pressured some cheesemakers to use a more production-heavy method of creation; but the recent discoveries around possible health benefits may help create new markets for this traditional, dairy delight. ©

**SHERRI TALBOT** is the co-owner and operator of Saffron and Honey Homestead in Windsor, Maine. She raises endangered, heritage-breed livestock and hopes someday to make education and writing on conservation breeding her full-time job. Details can be found at [SaffronandHoneyHomestead.com](http://SaffronandHoneyHomestead.com) or on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/saffronandhoneyhomestead](https://www.facebook.com/saffronandhoneyhomestead).

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# Pass the Peas, Please!

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY RITA HEIKENFELD

**O**UR DEAR FRIENDS AND neighbors, Bert and Bob Villing, live about three miles down the road from us in a historic farmhouse. Each year, they grow long rows of three kinds of peas: snow, sugar snap, and English. They've got early spring all the way through June covered!

As for my family, we grow snow and sugar snaps. It's so fun for the little ones to harvest the peas and open them up on the spot, scraping the peas out with their fingers, and popping them in their mouth.

When I grew up, the only peas we ate were canned English peas. I was never a fan. But once we started growing our own peas and eating them fresh, we can't get enough of this seasonal legume. That's why I'm excited to share these recipes with you.

The first recipe, with raw sugar snaps, herbs, and a creamy buttermilk dressing, is our "go-to" salad when we have an abundance of peas, along with fresh herbs. You'll notice a choice of herbs here. Go with a short list or long. Mint and dill make a lovely



Snow peas growing in garden.



Left to right: Snow peas, sugar snap peas, English peas.

combo together. I like to include tarragon with its subtle licorice flavor. Basil and onion chives add a bit of a zing to the mix.

Seven-layer salad is enjoying a renaissance of sorts. Put it on the buffet and serve with a long-handled spoon. Folks can dig deep into the bowl, getting tastes of crisp iceberg lettuce, red onions, cauliflower, bacon, tomato, cheddar cheese, and the star of the salad: peas. Topped with a yummy mayo-Parmesan dressing that has a hint of sweetness and you've got a salad that's reached cult status!



Pea sprouts grown in water.

## Snow, sugar snap, English. What's the difference?

- Snow peas are flatter than common garden peas, and since they're not fully opaque, you can usually see the shadows of the flat peas seeds within the pod. You can eat them without shelling.
- Sugar snap peas, a cross between the garden and snow pea, have plump pods with a crisp, snap-py texture. Sometimes you can eat them without shelling, but you might have to remove strings.
- Common garden peas, aka English peas, are what you find frozen, canned, and sometimes fresh. You have to shell them. English peas are seldom found around here at farmers markets, so they're a real treat when our friends, Bob and Bert, gift us with a basket.

## PEAS = NUTRITION

Peas are a great source of lower-calorie, plant-based protein and fiber.

Peas are rich in vitamins and minerals, including iron.

And if it's one of those days when time gets away and supper still needs to be fixed, a simple sauté of peas and shallots cooked in a little butter is just the ticket for a colorful and tasty side to grilled chicken or steak.

Oh, and I almost forgot to mention how this humble orb has reached gourmet plates. Chefs are garnishing their creations with pea tendrils and their beautiful, pink edible flowers. How's that for fancy?

Do try one or all of these recipes, will you? If you have a favorite fresh pea dish that you enjoy, I'd sure love for you to share it with us.

**MUST READ!**

## Food 52 Mighty Salads



Make way for *Mighty Salads*, in which the editors of *Food52* present sixty salads hefty with vegetables, meats, grains, beans, fish, seafood, pasta, and bread. Think shrimp and radicchio tossed in a bacon

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Sugar snap pea salad with buttermilk dressing.

### SUGAR SNAP PEA SALAD WITH CREAMY BUTTERMILK/HERB DRESSING

**INGREDIENTS**

4 cups sugar snap peas, strings removed and cut diagonally into ½-inch pieces

¼ cup buttermilk

¼ cup sour cream

¼ cup mayonnaise

Palmful or so herbs of choice — I used tarragon, dill, mint, basil, and onion chives

Salt and pepper to taste — or add a dash of cayenne

**INSTRUCTIONS**

Chop herbs roughly, then purée with buttermilk in a blender or an immersion blender.

Mix in sour cream and mayonnaise. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Toss peas in dressing.

### SEVEN LAYER SALAD



Feel free to swap out ingredients. Maybe turkey bacon, Romaine lettuce, Mexican-blend cheese, and broccoli for the cauliflower. No wrong way to make this most delicious buffet salad.

## INGREDIENTS

### Salad

1 head iceberg lettuce, cleaned, dried, and chopped into bite-sized pieces

1 red onion, chopped

2 cups or so fresh peas or 10 ounces frozen green peas, thawed

2 cups cauliflower, chopped into bite-sized pieces

A couple of garden tomatoes, chopped, or grape tomatoes, halved (optional)

12 ounces sharp cheddar cheese, shredded

1 pound bacon, cooked and crumbled

### Dressing

1½ cups real mayonnaise

6 to 8 ounces Parmesan cheese, grated

2 tablespoons white sugar or less to taste, or honey (use less honey)

## INSTRUCTIONS

To assemble salad, I like to make a couple layers of most ingredients.

Make a layer of lettuce on the bottom, top with half the onions, all the peas, more lettuce, all the cauliflower, half the cheddar, all the tomatoes, more lettuce, rest of the onions, then the rest of cheddar. Add most or all of the bacon on top.

To make dressing, whisk ingredients together.

Pour dressing over the top of the salad, then garnish with bacon if you like.

Serve. Dig deep!

## SUPER SIMPLE SNOW PEA SAUTÉ

No real recipe and here's how I make this: Blanch snow peas (or sugar snaps, strings removed) in boiling water until bright green but still very crisp.

Immediately plunge into cold water to stop the cooking. Drain and then sauté in a bit of butter or olive oil. If you like, chop a shallot or a handful of onion chives and sauté with the peas. Cook until peas are hot but still crisp. Season with salt and pepper. 🌱

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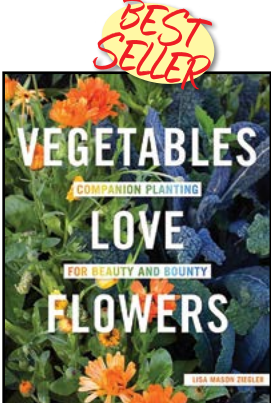
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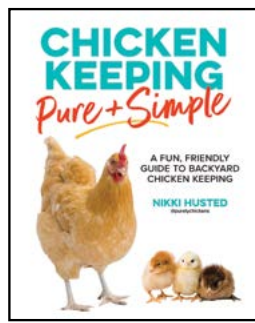


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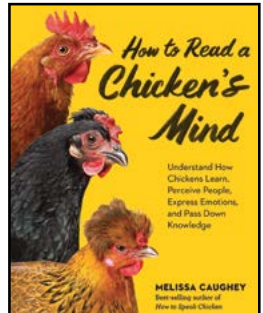


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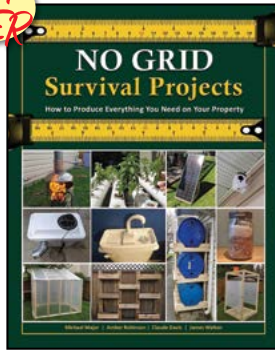
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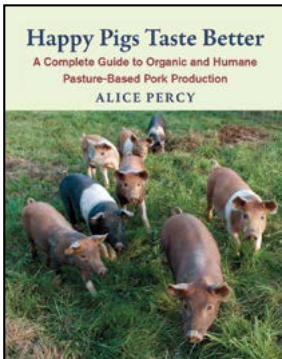
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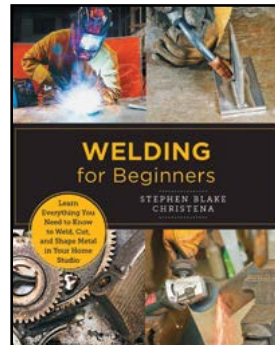
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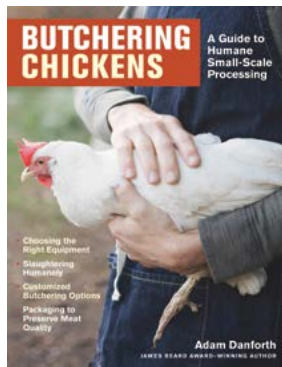
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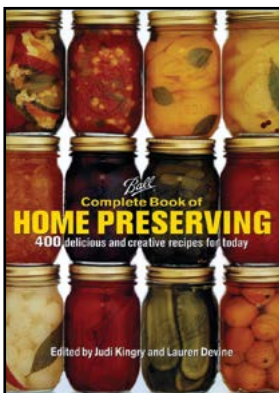
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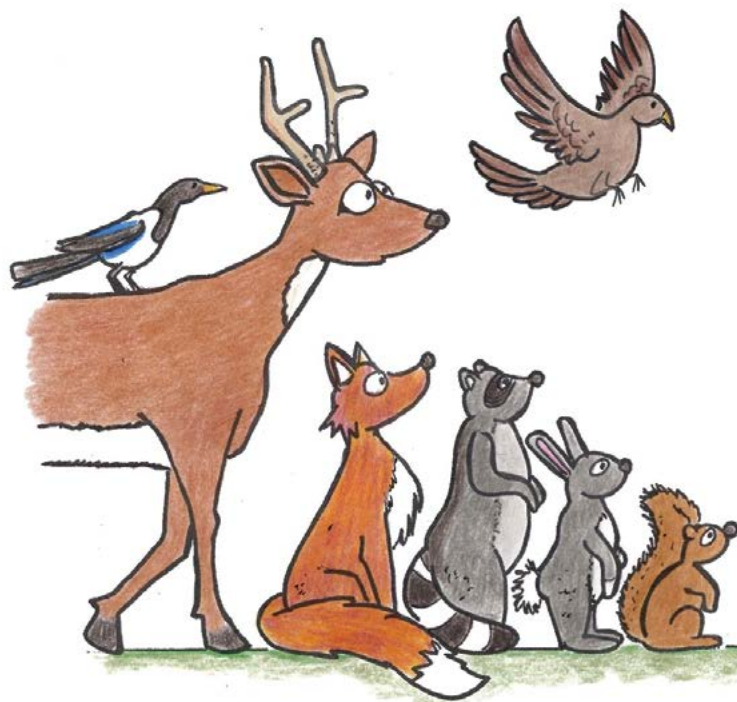


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 O C H O Y P G O G B C X L K A F A V K B N D L N  
 N K N N S A I O T H X O P W X T K M M H Y O I V  
 G S E E S W C A L A L S J A M E M E S L G E N L  
 T E O Y O R E I J D D A Y L W D H I P A W O D C  
 K W D S R R P E N H E M V N Z V V U N S W J F Y  
 N F R U V I C E T T X T W E T C Q Y P T E Q E M  
 I P X C X S W A O P H Q H Z N U L H U Y H Y W M  
 V Y F K T X B N O N E B E E C D L Q J N A E G E  
 I U W L V S T R U H Y A J X W I A I W L Q Z U X  
 C Z O E Y T H Y D R A N G E A Y W R P K R K R G  
 K I S N M Z I N N I A P Y D X J Z B V G Q T I V

- ANEMONE
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- HYDRANGEA
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- MARIGOLD
- PANSY
- PEONY
- PETUNIA
- POPPY
- RHODODENDRON
- ROSE
- SWEET PEA
- TULIP
- VIOLET
- ZINNIA

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Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

The winner will be chosen randomly from all the submissions returned by June 1, 2026. The winner of the January/February Reader Contest was Martha Miller. Congratulations to you, Martha! Enjoy your new camp mug.



**Win a *Countryside* Mug! To submit, either:**

**Print, fill out, and mail to:**  
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 1503 SW 42nd Street, Topeka, KS 66609

**Print, fill out, then take a picture and email to:**  
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**Be sure to include your contact information so we can inform you if you won the *Countryside* mug. Available for purchase at [iamcountryside.com/shop](http://iamcountryside.com/shop)**

## Show us your art skills by coloring this picture!

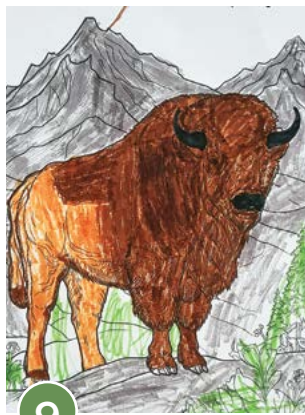
Once you're done, snap a picture and send it to us via email at [editor@countrysidemag.com](mailto:editor@countrysidemag.com) or snail mail at *Countryside*, Attn: Coloring Pages, 1503 SW 42nd St, Topeka, KS 66609.

Watch for your creation to be featured in an upcoming issue!



## A colorful selection of art submitted by our readers!

Color the picture on the previous page and your picture could be published in the next issue!



- 1.** Cynthia Heber; **2.** Deborah Moomaw; **3.** Diana Johnson;  
**4.** Durrell Staffer, age 7; **5.** Gwen Booton, age 10; **6.** Kaiyah Brown;  
**7.** Keziah Brown; **8.** Koralyyn Brown; **9.** Korban Brown; **10.** Mackenzie Gray;  
**11.** Georgette Lisi; **12.** Kami J., age 8

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- 1. Adapt to the ever-changing currents of life. 📷 *April Hanson, Dorchester, WI*
- 2. Farm Silhouette, January, 2026 📷 *Carol Johnson*
- 3. My kitty sitting in my bird feeder. 📷 *Paula Knutson, WI*
- 4. I found a friend while shore fishing. 📷 *Ann Tom, Countryside Editor*



EMAIL PHOTOS in JPG format to [editor@countrysidemag.com](mailto:editor@countrysidemag.com) with "Capture Your Countryside" in the subject line.



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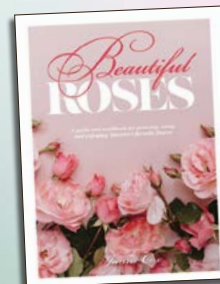
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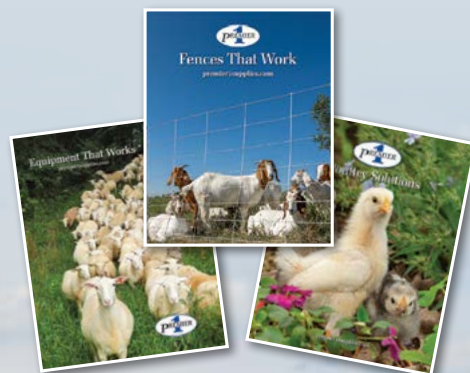
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