

The magazine of modern homesteading

# COUNTRYSIDE

*& Small Stock Journal*

SPECIAL SUBSCRIBER ISSUE  
FALL/WINTER 2020

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SPECIAL ISSUE

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## HANDS-ON HOMESTEADING

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## ON THE COVER

Homemade soap by Crystal Schmidt of Wisconsin on Instagram @wholefedhomestead. See more hands-on homesteading photos from Crystal on page 7.

“The greatest fine art of the future will be the making of a comfortable living from a small piece of land.”

— ABRAHAM LINCOLN





**L**IVING THE HOMESTEADING LIFE OFTEN involves making things on your own not only to save money, but also to save time from running to the nearest town, or you may simply have all of the materials right at home to create whatever it is you need. It may just take some planning and imagination to put it all together.

To help with some of the planning, we've composed this special issue with DIY in mind. There are even some holiday projects you can do with the kids. For instance, in the Soapmaking section, there are fun arts and crafts for the holidays that will get the kids involved in the gift-giving season or perhaps they will want to keep them for their own use. Also, creating homemade pasta angels is a simple, fun, and money-saving way to decorate your tree or home, and they make great gifts, too!

In the kitchen, you will learn how to make ginger beer, corn cob jelly, squeaky cheese curds, and several homemade goodies for the holidays or any time!

Let's not forget about our feathered friends. Learn how to raise mealworms and superworms for your flock as well as ideas for other tasty treats. After their bellies are filled, they'll need a place to show their appreciation by laying fresh eggs. Learn how to make cozy nest boxes out of items you most likely already have.

In the days of yore, the blacksmith was essential for every day life. In today's world, not so much, however, there are still blacksmiths around, although few and far between. John G. Moore was told by his grandfather, "Never buy something that you can make. If you don't know how to make it, you can learn." John tells his story of going back to school to see how much knowledge he retained and to learn as many new things in the blacksmithing field as he could. There is money to be made as a blacksmith or you can learn it for a fun hobby.

I will now let you page through this issue and read all of the other great DIY projects and ideas that are in store for you. If you have other ideas/plans up your sleeve, please let me know!



Ann Tom  
Editor, *Countryside*

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

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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 practioners.

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

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# I AM COUNTRYSIDE

FEATURING CRYSTAL SCHMIDT FROM THE WHOLE FED HOMESTEAD







## I've always thought I was born in the wrong time period ...

Give me a wood-burning oven, a butter churn, and a spinning wheel; this is the stuff that dreams are made of. Mine anyway...

One of my earliest memories is from when I was just a little girl, sitting in the dirt in my grandma's garden unwrapping and eating ground cherries while she weeded. She taught my dad to garden and he taught me. Wanting to grow food has always come from a deep place, it's in my blood. From a very young age I learned about raising honey bees and meat rabbits, foraging for wild mushrooms, and picking wildflowers. It's safe to say that it stuck with me!

My fiancé Karl was raised in the city but spent summers on his grandparents' farm where he learned everything from how to feed cows and pick rocks in the hay fields, to canning peaches and digging potatoes. Karl's grandma used to tell us how she'd bring home the used tallow from the fryer at the local diner and turn it into soap for the family.

Karl and I both feel fortunate that we learned to live close to the land, to value hard work, resourcefulness, old-fashioned skills, and providing for yourself, which is ultimately how we became modern-day homesteaders.

Besides that, I just really love to eat amazing food. Once you've tasted food that you've raised yourself with a whole lotta heart and soul and love ... well, nothing else even comes close!

We bought our homestead seven years ago after a three-year search for a property that we could shape into what we wanted. We've put most of our time into really learning our land and reclaiming

it from the overgrow wilderness, and establishing gardens and orchards. We keep honey bees, and we raise chickens for eggs and meat. I dream of raising our own hogs one day, and I can't help but picture a majestic herd of sheep on our rolling pasture, which we'll raise for meat, dairy, and fiber. Slowly but surely we're getting there. Our homestead didn't come with any fencing or usable buildings for animals, so adding that infrastructure is our next big project, and we want to do those things thoughtfully.

In the meantime, we focus on growing fruits and veggies, and cultivating old-fashioned skills. We're in growing Zone 4 in Wisconsin, so we pack gardening into a few months, preserve all we can, and then ride out the winter. We have a large fruit orchard with everything from raspberries and elderberries to antique apple varieties, and more uncommon fruits like Aronia and sea berries. We grow mushrooms, nuts, herbs, medicinal plants, and even make our own maple syrup.

We grow fresh produce to eat throughout the warm months, and staple crops to last us through the winter. I love growing rare and uncommon varieties and long-lost heirlooms, things that no one else is growing, and I love to save seeds and pass them on to others.

For me, growing food is grounding, it makes me feel connected and whole. I love sharing our lives on Instagram and through my blog, and I love inspiring people with what we're growing, eating, and preserving. I wish that more people could experience raising their own food; I truly think it could change the world!

---

Follow Crystal Schmidt at Instagram:  
**@wholefedhomestead**









Backhoe thumbs come in handy for all sorts of jobs.

# DIY Weld-On Backhoe Thumbs

BY JEREMY CHARTIER

**A** BACKHOE THUMB is something I've always wanted. Unfortunately, just like it took me years to add tractor bucket hooks to my John Deere, it's a project that was lost to the depths of time, endlessly delayed by, "I'll get around to it," just like my snowplow tractor bucket attachment I have yet to build. But finally, the stars have aligned, and I've found one of those rare "round-to-it" things I needed.

## BACKHOE THUMBS

But why a backhoe thumb? We've had a three-point backhoe for our John Deere 5105 for over 20 years, and it does its job, but nothing else. A regular backhoe is excellent for digging holes, but that's about it. What if you could use it to process wood, rip up brush, or stack rocks? That's where a backhoe thumb makes the difference.

## OEM VS. AFTERMARKET

Some manufactures offer their backhoes with integrated thumbs or sell upgrade kits to add a backhoe thumb. Since these kits are product specific, they provide better integration, operability, and easier installation. Of course, convenience is expensive. If you're on a budget, the aftermarket has a slew of "universal" fit backhoe thumbs for less. These require more fitting work on your part, but the price is right.

## HYDRAULIC THUMBS

If you want the most from your backhoe thumb, you'll want to consider a hydraulically operated thumb. A hydraulically operated thumb gives you immediate fine adjustment of the thumb position from the operator's platform and adds a degree of speed and ease. The downside to these units is the cost because they include parts like a piston and controls.





Be sure to measure your bucket while it sits at a 90-degree position, like pictured, when sizing a thumb for your machine. Also, be sure to test fit your thumb before permanently attaching it.

Additionally, added components also mean added weight. On large excavators, this may be trivial, but a hefty thumb on three-point attached backhoes can significantly reduce your lifting capacity.

### CHALLENGES

If you're buying a backhoe or excavator with a hydraulic thumb already installed, you'll love the added functionality. If you're adding a hydraulic thumb to an existing machine, be prepared to invest more time and effort. Adding new hydraulic lines and controls is also seldom a quick project.

### MECHANICAL THUMBS

Mechanical thumbs are the simplest and cheapest thumb you'll find on the market. Manual backhoe thumbs are simple pin-in-place devices. If you want to change the angle of your thumb or deploy it, you need to exit your operator's platform and engage it manually, which can make it cumbersome.

### ATTACHMENT METHOD

Both hydraulic and mechanical thumbs come in bolt-on and weld-on configurations. Some can be modified to be either, but most are one or the other. Bolt-on kits simplify the installation for those who don't have a welder, but welding

offers the sturdier, more permanent attachment. Weld-on thumbs may also save you on weight, which is a consideration for compact tractors.

### SIZING

Beware that not all backhoe thumbs are right for your machine. Purchase the correctly sized thumb for your application, or you risk damaging your machinery. To find out what size thumb is right for your use, move your bucket to the 90-degree position. Measure from the inside of your backhoe arm to the tips of your bucket's tines, or to where they roughly used to reach if they're worn. That measurement is the minimum thumb length for your machine. A thumb shorter than that runs the risk of bending and damaging your backhoe arm.

Purchase the correctly sized thumb for your application, or you risk damaging your machinery.

### MY SCENARIO

I couldn't justify the time or expense of a hydraulic thumb, nor was I interested in paying for a brand name, so I looked to the aftermarket to find the right mechanical thumb for me. Our backhoe is a three-point attachment, but it is a category two unit with plenty of force and a 48-horsepower tractor behind it, so I wanted a stable, well-built thumb. Since I have the equipment, I opted to weld this thumb to my backhoe for simplicity. I ultimately bought my thumb from Linville Industries, opting for an



American-made product that's a bit more robust than some cheaper imports I was finding on the web.

### PREP WORK

I removed the paint from my working surfaces, ground the welded seam on my backhoe so my new thumb attachment plate would sit flush, and cleaned all welding surfaces with alcohol to remove any contaminants. However, I did not grind down to bright steel on my backhoe, which I now regret.

### WELDING

I used my Millermatic 220 MIG welder to attach my new thumb, which might not have been the best welding type to use. The thick steel was a bit much for my machine, and it took three passes to weld it up. Looking back, I think I should have used my old tombstone ARC welder, and it would appear that the visual quality of my welds suffered greatly from residual mill scale I didn't grind off. Regardless of my errors, the thumb is stuck on there for good.

### FUNCTIONALITY

So far, I've put over 50 hours on this thumb, and I have yet to feel the need to fold it away or reposition it. I have found the need to upgrade my pins to

The new addition has undoubtedly changed the way I use my tractor, made short work of otherwise tiring jobs, and has made a significant impact around the homestead.



I found that a lynchpin (the snap-ring style to the left) hangs on better than the hairpin style to the right.





Not my finest welding, but my backhoe thumb is stuck on with no signs of giving up.

lynch-style pins, so every other day doesn't turn into a search party. It's taken a little getting used to, and it's not the same as using an actual excavator, but it's undoubtedly a useful tool to have.

### REAL WORLD USE

I find my lack of reach with my particular machine, and the fact that I can't move like a tracked excavator is a disadvantage. However, I won't be buying a real excavator anytime soon, so this arrangement will suffice. If it's shrubbery you're after, I've found you'll have to go for the roots, since small branches slip through the tines.

### THE VERDICT

Aside from the welding not being my best work, I'm pleased with the addition of a mechanical backhoe thumb to my tractor. The new addition has undoubtedly changed the way I use my tractor, made

short work of otherwise tiring jobs, and has made a significant impact around the homestead. If you own a backhoe attachment or excavator that does not have a backhoe thumb, I suggest you invest in one. For a small farm or homestead, the price paid for the functionality gained is on point, but for a commercial user, a mechanical thumb may not fit the bill. 🌱

At 12 years old, **JEREMY CHARTIER** became involved with his local 4-H group, later joined the local FFA chapter, and showed livestock until his college years. After graduating from the Ratcliffe Hicks School of Agriculture at UConn, he joined University of Maine's Poultry Service Provider training program. Today Jeremy sells started pullets to local backyard farmers, is still involved with 4-H as a poultry showmanship judge, and writes about his passion for farming.

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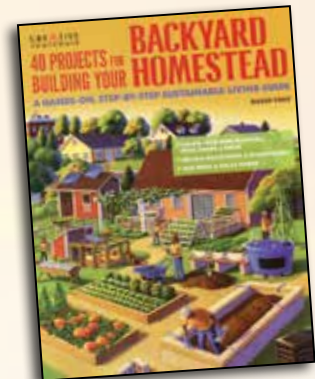
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By David Toht

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# Hammer Time

Saving Money  
Through  
Blacksmithing

BY JOHN G. MOORE

**S**OME OF THE BEST ADVICE on self-reliance I've received was given to me by my grandfather while we worked in his blacksmith shop.

"Never buy something that you can make," he told me. "If you don't know how to make it, you can learn."

He was right. Learning how to make things through blacksmithing not only saves you money, it can also provide a way to make money if you choose to pursue it.

My grandfather's name was Parmer and he was born in 1918. He learned to be a blacksmith from his father. Through brains and brawn and an anvil, forge, and hammer, he sustained his family's acreage and built a business in my hometown of Ashdown, Arkansas.

I watched him tackle jobs large and small. He could do everything from make and repair metal straps on an old wagon, to fabricate a tiny part that mended a man's vintage rifle. He even built what today we would call an ATV — from scratch. Using sheet metal and car parts, he made a vehicle that would haul two people around our family deer camp. He called it his "Mud Buggy."

Moore's Blacksmith Shop was the last blacksmith shop still in operation in Little River County when my grandfather died in 1978. It was the end of an era. Decades later, what he taught me would be remembered, enhanced, and bring great value to my wife and me.

In the early 2000s, we had lived in East Texas for 20 years. We had a typical house in the city — a split-level on a corner lot in Tyler, Texas. But, our interest in homesteading was beginning to grow.

After reading about those who lived lives of self-reliance, we were bitten by the bug and decided to give it a try. In 2003, we bought a 5-acre place in southern Smith County. We now grow much of our own food, power our home and shop with solar, enjoy a stocked pond, and generally try to be as independent as possible.

I grew up in my grandfather's shop, but my interest in blacksmithing lay dormant for many years following his death. I hadn't thought about including blacksmithing, but a gift I received changed that.

Shortly after our move, my father gave me my grandfather's anvil to put in my shop. I was able to track down his original forge and buy it back from the family of the man who had purchased it at my grandfather's estate sale.

After inspecting the forge closely, I discovered something I hadn't noticed as a young man. My grandfather practiced what





**Left:** Hand-forged decorative elements on a gate.  
**Above:** Anvil and hammer.

he preached. He had made the forge himself. The outer metal ring that held the coal in place was from a wagon wheel. The bottom was an old porcelain oil company sign. The blower had been converted from hand-crank to being driven by an electric motor.

After reuniting the anvil and forge, I decided to see how much I remembered. I knew that I'd also need a hammer, post vice (some call it a leg vice), and tongs.

I had the anvil, forge, and post vice. Instead of buying tongs, I remembered what my grandfather had said about making what you need. I couldn't make a vise, but I had watched him make a set of tongs. I could make them myself.

Before I jumped back into blacksmithing, an opportunity came along. After I mentioned my plans to a friend, he told me that there was a blacksmith a few miles from where I live whom, through continuing education classes at the junior college, accepted students. I signed up for a week of classes.

My goal was to see how much knowledge I'd retained, and learn as many new things as I could.

It was worth the investment.

The first thing the instructor showed me was how to select the right hammer. There are as many hammer preferences as there are blacksmiths. But, the instructor

recommended the same hammer my grandfather had used most often — the cross-peen hammer.

The instructor also showed me how to customize the hammer handle for the person using it. You insert and secure the wooden handle, then hold the head of the hammer in the palm of your hand and let the handle rest on the inside of your arm. Make a mark on the wood where the handle meets the bend in your

arm and then cut the handle off there using a band saw.

Once you've done these steps, throw the hammer and handle into the fire of your coal forge and burn off the varnish. Varnish can cause blisters. A handle that's been in a low fire just long enough to remove the varnish will retain its integrity.

During my week in class, I relearned the names of the different parts of the anvil and their uses. The additional knowledge helped me to better understand the instructions in books and videos, both of which

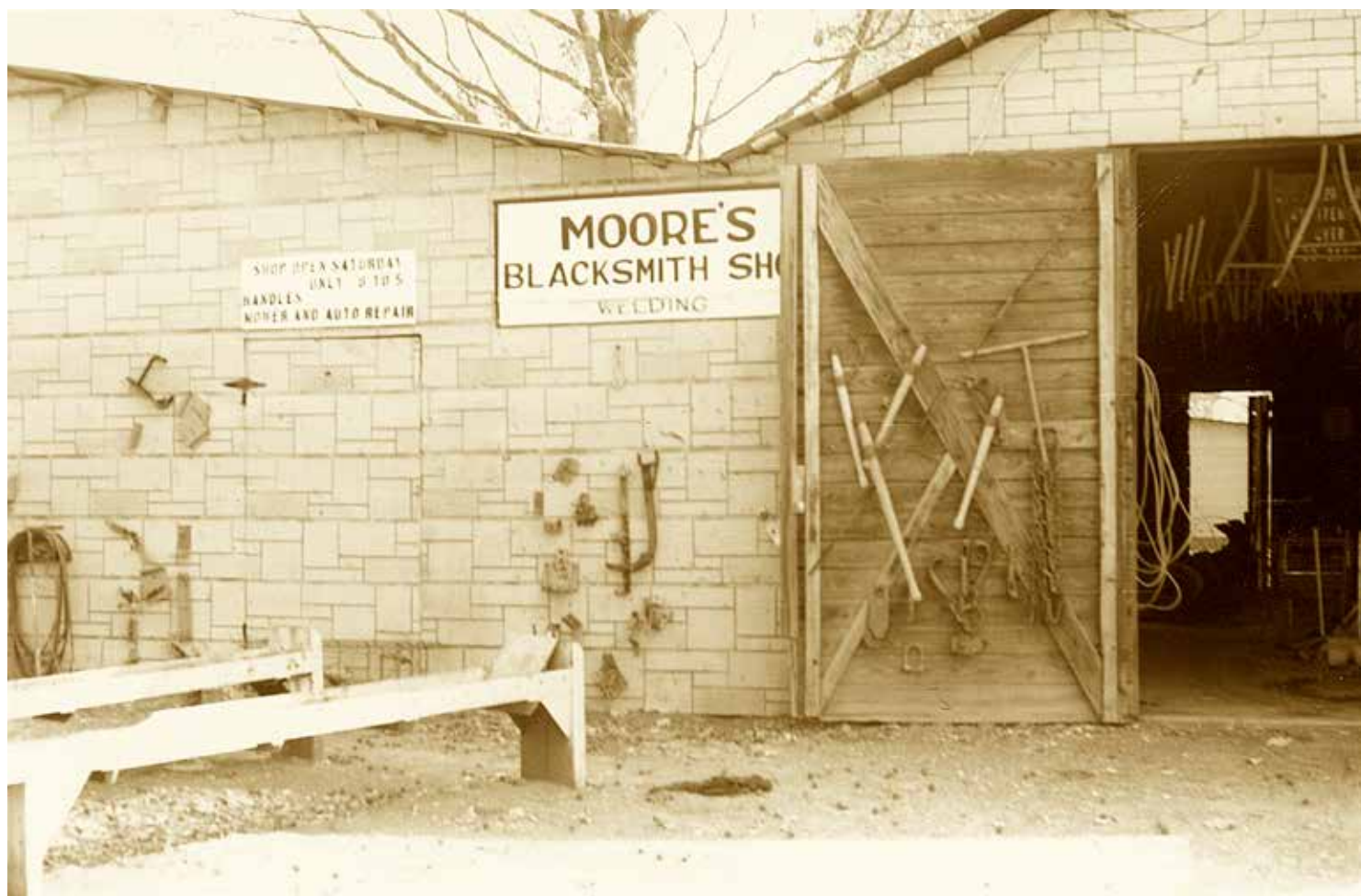
can be very helpful. I also made my own tongs.

Every person who develops an interest in blacksmithing has either a need or an interest.

When we moved to our homestead, my nearest neighbor told me that anyone with more than five acres who didn't own a tractor and know

“Never buy something that you can make,” he told me. “If you don't know how to make it, you can learn.”





**Above:** Ashdown Moore's Blacksmith Shop.  
**Bottom:** Forge.

Blacksmithing is not only helpful on the homestead, it can also be profitable.

how to weld wasn't going to fare very well.

Taking two pieces of metal, heating them, and then hammering them together is the original way to weld.

I use a coal forge because you have better control of the temperature, but good coal can be expensive and hard

to find. Consequently, many people now use propane forges. The latter are more compact and don't require a ventilation system. However, you have less control over the heat and if it gets too hot, you can melt the metal.

Blacksmithing is not only helpful on the homestead, it can also be profitable. Some items are simple to make and have very little cost in them. A small key fob made in the shape of a leaf can be sold for \$5 or \$10, with the stock material costing just a few cents. A used railroad spike can be turned into a knife with a twisted handle and be sold for \$30 to \$40. A round or square piece of metal costing a couple of dollars





**Above:** Forged items.  
**Bottom:** Forge, no coal.



can be hammered into a steak turner for the BBQ grill, a fireplace poker, or a wood stove implement and each can sell for \$20 or \$25.

You can make and sell these items from your shop or you can acquire a portable set up for the arts and crafts fair circuit. A hand-crank blower is necessary for this enterprise. Some people make their own forge and blower out of anything from a wheelbarrow to a metal box. You can also buy what you need. Small forge and manual blower combinations are available for as little as \$150. Of course, you can secure a vintage setup if you prefer.

I've given away most of what I've done. Hammering items from simple pieces of metal into something useful is gratifying, and people are always glad to receive them.

Items made in the blacksmith shop can be passed down for

generations. The man who owns the vintage rifle my grandfather repaired half a century ago recently contacted me to express his gratitude and said the gun still fires perfectly.

Working over a forge and anvil is hot, hard work. But, whether you are a do-it-yourselfer or you want to make money, the results you see and the satisfaction you receive make blacksmithing worthy of consideration. 🌱

**JOHN G. MOORE** is a native of Arkansas, but he has called East Texas home for over 30 years. He is the owner of One Moore Production, a recording studio where he voices books for Audible. His weekly column, Moore Thoughts, appears in a dozen newspapers in Arkansas, Texas, and Louisiana. John is the author of two books - *Write of Passage: A Southerner's View of Then and Now* - Volumes 1 and 2.

You can reach him at [John@TheCountryWriter.com](mailto:John@TheCountryWriter.com).

## BLACKSMITHING TODAY

Blacksmiths of years gone by made items such as horseshoes, pots, pans, axes, plowshares, cowbells, hoes, nails, and many other indispensable items.

It's more common in today's world to see blacksmiths make items such as gates, fencing, railings, plant hangers, hooks, camping supplies, and more.

While blacksmithing is a fun hobby, after a lot of practice and know-how, there is money to be made from the forged items.

If you're interested in learning more about becoming a blacksmith, here are some great resources to help you get started:

**[abana.org](http://abana.org)**

**[steampoweredfamily.com/education/be-a-blacksmith](http://steampoweredfamily.com/education/be-a-blacksmith)**

**[blacksmithsjournal.com](http://blacksmithsjournal.com)**

**[blacksmithsdepot.com](http://blacksmithsdepot.com)**



# DIY Hive Top Feeder Plan

BY KRISTI COOK



**B**EES ARE HUNGRY LITTLE CREATURES that occasionally require supplemental feeding. Fortunately, feeding honey bees during the warmer months requires little more than selecting a feeder and filling it with syrup. For a simple, inexpensive feeder that holds up to a gallon of sugar syrup, is easy to refill, and requires no opening of the hive, look no further than the hive top feeder. While preassembled top feeders are available, for about \$10 each, anyone with basic carpentry skills can make several in a single afternoon following a few simple tips that work for both eight- and 10-frame Langstroth hives.

Before we dig into the nitty-gritty of building a hive top feeder, a few words on how it works and the pros and cons of this style are in order. A hive top feeder doubles as the outer cover and requires no inner cover. This unique feature means the feeder does not sit inside the hive and, therefore, does not require the opening of the hive to replenish the syrup. Rather, a jar is filled with syrup and fitted with a lid containing a few small feeding holes. The jar is then inverted into a hole in the top feeder, allowing bees to feed in the safety of their hive. Once the syrup runs out, a freshly filled jar replaces the empty one. As a bonus, because the feeding holes are fully enclosed within the top of the hive and no other entrance is near the feeder, hive robbing is avoided — an important feature during extreme nectar dearths. The only downside is the tendency of the jars to mildew. However, the addition of one of the essential-oil-based feed supplements does wonders to keep the jars mildew-free.



## MATERIALS LIST

- OUTER COVER
- GLASS OR PLASTIC JAR (GLASS FOR LONGEVITY. CHOOSE PINT, QUART, OR GALLON SIZE)
- METAL LID





While preassembled top feeders are available, for about \$10 each, anyone with basic carpentry skills can make several in a single afternoon.



Leave the inside of the cover unpainted as bees tend to dislike stains and paints inside their living area.

## SELECT A MATERIAL

The beauty of most hive top feeder plans is the ease of selecting materials based on what is readily available. For instance, many beekeepers who've had hives for more than a couple of years tend to have extra outer covers hidden in their stash of equipment. These extra outer covers make the best top feeders and require no additional cost. Any outer cover will work, whether it's a telescoping outer cover or a migratory cover. Just remember to remove any protective sheathing before modifying. Alternatively, a 2' x 4' sheet of 3/4" exterior grade non-treated plywood works perfectly, provided the finished feeder is painted and sealed well against the elements and will yield one or two complete 10-frame hive top feeders.

If using plywood, measure your hive box — most are standard sized, but oddballs are definitely floating around — and allow around 1 1/2" additional wood space around each side of the hive body unless you'd prefer the feeder to sit flush with the edges of the hive as when using a migratory cover. For our DIY top feeders, we make a one-size-fits-all feeder of 19" x 22 1/2" for both eight- and 10-frame bodies which allows ample room to fit a hive tool underneath to pop the lid while still providing a little extra protection from rain. For our nucs, we



If adding sides, a nail gun works best to tightly nail the corners together.





Multiple hive top feeders can be built in a single afternoon following these simple tips.



Use a small penny nail to knock a few feeder holes into the center of the lid.



Hive top feeders allow the beekeeper to quickly replace jars when they are empty. Note the one-size-fits all feeders that work for both eight- and 10-frame hives.

follow the fashion of the migratory cover to make moving the tiny boxes around less cumbersome.

As for the sides of the feeder, either leave them naked and cut the cover to be flush with the hive body like a migratory cover, allow the edges to extend an inch or two past the hive body with no sides added, or cut sides from a 1" x 2" x 8' piece of pine and add to the edges like a telescoping cover. All of these versions work just fine and are more a matter of personal preference than any major differences in functionality. We've used all three versions and personally prefer to add a bit of siding to help with tool leverage when popping covers, but others I know strongly advocate the naked sides of the other two styles.

### SELECT A JAR

Any glass or plastic jar can work, with glass being the better option for both longevity and fit. Select which size jar you'd like to use — pint, quart, or gallon — and locate the lid that fits best. The two key points to remember are to make certain the lids are tight-fitting and allow for the puncture of a few holes with a penny-sized nail in the center of the lid. Metal lids work best and don't warp in extreme summer heat while plastic can soften and allow leaks from time to time.


### SELECT A HOLE SAW

This is the most important tool needed to create a good top feeder. The hole saw must be sized to allow

a snug, but not too tight hole in which the jar lid rests. If the jar wobbles or you can see daylight between the lid and the feeder, the hole is too large. Practice first with a scrap piece of wood to determine the correct size. Once the selection is made, create a hole directly in the center of the cover and, if needed, sand the edges to create a smooth hole to allow the jar to slip in easily. Perfectly sized hole saws may be difficult to find as lid brands tend to vary on outside dimensions. Enough to drive a DIYer crazy, so you may find you need to sand or otherwise remove just a tad more wood than your selected hole saw can manage. (Keep this variance in mind and know that you're not imagining things if your jars suddenly don't fit when you change lid brands!) If you'd prefer to not purchase a new hole saw, a simple jigsaw also works well. It just takes a bit more time and effort, and may be a little less precise.

### WRAP IT UP

Once the cover is assembled, give the outside portions a base coat of primer and a couple of coats of exterior latex paint or seal with weatherproof sealant to help your cover last as long as possible. Once dry, your DIY top feeder is ready to go to the bee yard and get to work.

Beekeeping often requires a bit of experimenting to determine what works best in your particular apiary, so don't be afraid to look at various hive top feeder plans. 

**KRISTI COOK** lives in Arkansas where every year brings something new to her family's journey for a more sustainable lifestyle. She keeps a flock of laying hens, dairy goats, a rapidly growing apiary, a large garden, and more. When she's not busy with the critters and veggies, you can find her sharing sustainable living skills through her workshops, articles, and blog at [tenderheartshomestead.com](http://tenderheartshomestead.com).

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# Selling Homestead Honey

What You Need to Know About  
Labeling, Marketing, and Pricing

BY ANGI SCHNEIDER

**W**HEN WE FIRST STARTED KEEPING BEES, many friends and family wanted to buy honey from us. In the beginning, we didn't have any extra, but after a while, we had more than our family could use and we decided to sell some. But we needed to make sure we were selling the honey legally and had a competitive honey price.

The first thing we talked about was if we really wanted to be in the honey business. The Internal Revenue Service has very specific guidelines about what constitutes a business and what is just a hobby. However, a hobby that earns income still has to report the income, just like a business.

We decided that we're not interested in becoming a large honey business; we just want to keep some hives and sell our excess to friends, neighbors, and co-workers. In most states, this is called small-scale beekeeping and has fewer regulations than commercial beekeeping. But there are still some regulations.

Each state has its own definition of what makes a small-scale honey business. You can find out your state's regulations by contacting your state health department or your county extension agent. In Texas, a small-scale beekeeper is one that produces less than 2500 pounds of honey, sells directly to the consumer, does not sell wholesale or online, and the honey is from hives that the beekeeper owns and manages.

## HONEY LABELS

Because honey is a food, it must be labeled correctly. The FDA requires these four things on a honey label.

First, the label must have the word "honey" on it, you can use "pure honey" or "raw honey." If the bees are foraging, you can put "wildflower honey" on the label. If the bees are pollinating a crop, you can put that crop name on it, such as "clover honey" or "peach honey."

If you add anything to the honey, corn syrup for instance, then you have to label the honey as "honey product," "honey food," or "honey flavored syrup" but not just "honey."

The weight of the honey must be on the lower third of the label and in both ounces and grams.

Your name, address, email, and phone number should also be on the label. This helps customers contact you when they need more honey.

In addition to these four things, a small-scale beekeeper will need to disclose that



**Above:** Labels have rules they adhere to.

**Right:** Some consumers will pay a premium for cut comb honey. Test the market in your area because on average, for every 10 pounds of honey a colony produces, they are only able to produce one pound of beeswax. Photo courtesy of Smiley Honey of Wewahitchka, Florida.



the honey was packaged in a facility that isn't inspected according to state guidelines.

Although it's not required, most beekeepers will add a label stating that honey should not be given to children under 12 months of age. It's a prudent thing to add.

If you are going to sell honey online or wholesale, you need to register with your state health department, your local health department, and the FDA as a food facility. If you want to talk to someone face-to-face and have them help you navigate these government agencies, it's a good idea to make an appointment with your local county extension agent.

### HARVESTING HONEY

In order to sell honey, it must be harvested first. Honey can be sold as "comb" honey which is honeycomb that's cut into chunks and still has the honey in the comb instead of being extracted. If you don't have an extractor, or if you have top bar beehives, this is a good option.

Another option is to build a

honey extractor to extract the honey so you can jar it. You can still put a bit of honeycomb in the jar for decoration or to help differentiate your honey from other honey.

After extracting the honey, you'll have beeswax that will need to be processed. Filtering beeswax doesn't have to happen right away, but don't neglect it as it can be another source of income.

Even if your state doesn't require you to process your honey in an inspected, dedicated area, you should follow good health practices while processing the honey. Keep the area clean, wash your hands before handling the honeycomb, wash the extractor and jars in hot water and let them completely dry before using them.

### HONEY PRICES

Setting honey prices is one of the hardest parts of having a homestead business. You want to charge enough that you can recoup some of your time and financial investment but not so much that no one will buy your product.

This is where a little market



## HONEY LABELING 101

Because honey is a food, it must be labeled correctly. The FDA requires these four things on a honey label.

### 1. Must contain the word

**honey.** The label must have the word "honey" on it, you can use "pure honey" or "raw honey." If the bees are foraging, you can put "wildflower honey" on the label. If the bees are pollinating a crop, you can put that crop name on it, such as "clover honey" or "peach honey."

**2. List any additives.** If you add anything to the honey, corn syrup for instance, then you have to label the honey as "honey product," "honey food," or "honey flavored syrup" but not just "honey."

**3. Product weight.** The weight of the honey must be on the lower third of the label and in both ounces and grams.

### 4. Your contact information.

Your name, address, email, and phone number should also be on the label. This helps customers contact you when they need more honey.

### Packaging facility information.

In addition to these four things, a small-scale beekeeper will need to disclose that the honey was packaged in a facility that isn't inspected according to state guidelines.



Go to local festivals and farmers markets and see the honey prices of other beekeepers.



research will come in handy. Go to local festivals and farmers markets and see the honey prices of other beekeepers. There might be a fairly large range of honey prices but it will give you a good starting point.

Price is about quality, quantity, and perceived value. If you're using organic practices in your apiary and not heating the honey to help it filter faster, you can price your honey on the high end of the range. Using organic practices and keeping the honey unpasteurized make your honey higher quality than honey that has been heated and treated with chemicals.

If there are many beekeepers selling honey in your area or if it's just been a really good year for the bees, the surplus will mean lower honey prices. If your area doesn't have many beekeepers or you're experiencing a drought, prices will probably be a bit higher.

Perceived value is a real thing, but it's hard to define. It's basically the value of a product in the mind of the consumer. Some of this is based on what the consumer values and some is based on the product's presentation. For instance, if the consumer believes that plastic is harmful to the environment, he'll be willing to pay more for honey in glass bottles. For this consumer,

the perceived value of honey in a glass container is higher than the perceived value of honey in plastic — even if it's the exact same honey.

#### HONEY MARKETING

The best way to market your homestead products is to be excited about them. We've found that when people find out that we keep bees, they are full of questions. When we take time to answer their questions, they walk away with a positive opinion of us and our bees. This adds to the perceived value of our honey.

Once you're ready to expand beyond friends and family, farmers markets and festivals are good venues. Many towns in our area have something called "market days" which are a cross between a craft fair, a junkies market, and a farmers market. These are fun because they have a diverse customer base.

Whenever you're selling at one of these fairs or markets, you want to be sure your booth is nice-looking and that it looks full. If you don't have enough honey to make your booth look interesting, you could consider selling eggs or other homestead products in your booth.

You also want to be sure that you can conduct business. This

means you need change for cash customers, a way for people to pay with a debit or credit card, business cards, pens and paper, receipt book, and shopping bags. It's also good to have a sign-up list where potential customers can sign up to receive emails from you.

Every market has its own set of rules. If you want to be allowed to have a booth in the future, you need to be sure that you're following all the rules.

Selling honey and beeswax products is a great way to supplement your income by doing what you love. It can also be a step toward a full-time homestead income. The important things to remember are that you need to be sure you're selling legally, setting a good honey price, and giving customers the service and value they expect. 🍯

**ANGI SCHNEIDER** lives with her family along the Texas Gulf Coast on 1.5 acres where they keep chickens and bees along with gardens and an orchard. Angi shares her simple living journey at:

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## Can I Eliminate Hive Beetles by Moving to a Sunnier Location?

Devon Stronach from North Carolina writes:

*My son has a new hive in our backyard in North Carolina. He is seeing a good amount of hive beetles despite putting beetle traps in the hive. A local beekeeper told us the hive wasn't getting enough sunlight. Unfortunately, our yard is very shady, and there really isn't a good sunny spot for the hive. Can a hive survive in a shady yard? Is there anything we can do to stop the beetles? Thanks so much!*

### Ask the Bee Expert!

Visit **backyardbeekeeping.iamcountryside.com** and get answers to your beekeeping challenges through our live interactive chat. You can also email us at **editor@countrysidemag.com** or mail your inquiries to **P.O. Box 566, Medford, WI 54451**.

#### RESIDENT BEE EXPERT: RUSTY BURLEW

Rusty is a master beekeeper in Washington state with an undergraduate degree in agronomic crops and a master's degree in environmental studies with an emphasis on pollination ecology. Rusty owns a website, [honeybeesuite.com](http://honeybeesuite.com), and is the director of a small non-profit, The Native Bee Conservancy of Washington State.

Rusty responds:

I don't believe sun vs shade has anything to do with hive beetles. Yes, you hear that claim quite often, but when you talk to commercial beekeepers and large-scale hobby beekeepers, they will tell you that sun or shade, the beetles are happy to take over their hives. The beetles can fly long distances, and they follow the scent of honey bee hives and locate them that way, so it's nearly impossible to prevent an infestation if anyone in the area has them.

How well hive beetles do once they move in has a lot to do with the soil type. At a certain point, the larvae leave the hive and drop to the soil beneath the hive. Here, they burrow into the soil and pupate before becoming adults. Some soil is more conducive to burrowing than others, so good soil usually means lots of beetles. Some people treat the soil under and around the hives with diatomaceous earth, which can destroy the beetle larvae, and

they manage to keep the number in control that way. Other people salt the soil and have good results with that. In either case, you need to cover an area of at least three feet out from the hive in order to get most of the larvae.

I would definitely recommend you keep using traps. Try putting them in different locations. Some people have better luck in the top box, but others think the bottom box is better. Or try both. In addition, you can put Swiffer pads in the corners of the hive. The beetles get their legs tangled in these and can't get free. Most people roll them up and put them in the corners of the top box, but some people like the corners of the bottom box or the bottom board. It depends on where the bees try to corral the beetles, and that probably changes from hive to hive.

Small hive beetles are a tough problem for a new beekeeper. Try a few different things, but don't worry about the shade.



## Should I Perform Beehive Inspections with Supers On?

David Curtis writes:

*Once I have my honey supers on, how often should I be checking my brood boxes?*

Rusty responds:

As a general rule, I try not to go into the brood boxes when the honey supers are on. There are a few reasons for this. For one thing, disruption to the colony causes nectar collection to drop, sometimes for several days, while the bees calm down, regroup, and repair any damage. Secondly, it's best not to use a lot of smoke around open honey cells because particles and odors may contaminate the honey. Smoke contamination is not common, but occasionally it does happen. A third reason is honey

As a general rule, I try not to go into the brood boxes when the honey supers are on.

supers can be extremely heavy, so lifting them may be a chore.

In most places, the nectar flow doesn't last very long. In those cases, you can treat for mites and do your inspections before adding your supers. Then, when the flow is over, you can remove the supers and do more inspections. If the colony is healthy and mites are controlled, it should easily get through the nectar flow without any additional inspections. On the other hand, if the colony is not strong, it shouldn't be given a honey super at all.

The dates will vary with your locality, but where I live in Washington, I check the bees and treat in April, add the honey supers for the months of May and June, and then take them off around July 4. In those areas where you also have a fall flow, you can check and treat the bees in August and then replace the supers for September, although many beekeepers leave the fall flow on the hives for the bees to overwinter.

If you don't know the timing of the nectar flows in your area, try asking some local beekeepers. Then you can easily schedule inspections around the placement and removal of honey supers. In any case, if you think something is amiss with your colony, then an inspection is always appropriate, regardless of the honey supers.





## Why Did My Bees Remove the Frame Foundation?

David D. writes:

*Four of my frames had 90% of the wax removed, three on the sunnier side, and one on the other side. The hive was in a place protected from the noon sun and the super wasn't added until the others were about 70% full of nectar. Any idea what was going on?*



Rusty responds:

Based on the photograph, it appears to be foundation rather than newly secreted wax that the bees removed. This is fairly typical, although some colonies do it often while others don't seem to do it at all.

Only bees of a certain age secrete wax, and sometimes a colony has a tremendous need for wax but lacks bees of wax-secreting age to produce it. So instead of going without, they find a source and simply use that. Honey bees are excellent recyclers, and they re-use many things inside a hive, including wax combs, cappings wax, and propolis.

The bees simply bite off a chunk of wax, mix it with

their own saliva, chew it into the right consistency, and then build new comb with it somewhere else in the hive. If later in the season they want to use the frames they borrowed from, they will repair the entire thing such that you can barely see what they did.

In your case, they probably preferred the sunny side frames because the heat would have made the wax more pliable and easier to work with. In any case, it's normal and not something to worry about.

I hope this helps! Good luck with your bees! 🍀

# HERBES DE PROVENCE HONEY RECIPE

BACKYARD BEEKEEPING  
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BY RITA HEIKENFELD

Expensive to buy and sometimes hard to find, you can make your own Herbes de Provence recipe blend. It's basically a blend of dried herbs that thrive in the sunny Mediterranean climate of Provence in the South of France. All of the herbs in the blend are easy to grow, and are available at your neighborhood grocery store, except perhaps the lavender.

## HERBES DE PROVENCE RECIPE

### Lavender

*(Lavandula augustifolia)*

The sweet, intoxicating flavor of lavender is essential and it alleviates anxiety.

### Thyme (Thymus vulgaris)

Like a medicine chest in a plant, the thyme plant has a peppery flavor. It relieves congestion.

### Oregano (*Origanum vulgare*) and Marjoram (*Origanum majorana*)

Culinary cousins, oregano has a distinctive spicy, somewhat sweet taste and is stronger in flavor than marjoram. Marjoram has a grassy, sort of lemony taste. Both herbs are good for joints.

### Rosemary (*Rosemarinus officinalis*)

You'll recognize the strong pine-like fragrance and flavor of the rosemary plant. Rosemary is good for your memory.

### Savory (*Satureja hortensis*)

Like thyme, savory has a peppery flavor and is a great digestive herb.

### Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*)

Licorice-like in flavor, fennel eases a jittery tummy.

### Bay (*Laurus nobilis*)

Tear a fresh bay leaf in two and you'll be surprised — a little sweet and yet complex. Bay helps control blood sugar.



### INGREDIENTS:

- 4 tablespoons dried thyme leaves
- 2 tablespoons dried marjoram **or**
- 1 tablespoon oregano
- 1 tablespoon dried rosemary, minced
- 1 tablespoon dried savory leaves
- 1 tablespoon dried lavender flowers
- 1 teaspoon fennel seeds
- 1 dried bay leaf, crumbled

**DIRECTIONS:** Stir together and store in airtight container in dry place away from heat and light.

## HERBES DE PROVENCE HONEY RECIPE

The herbs, as they infuse the honey, lend a haunting fragrance and delicate flavor. I love this on scones, biscuits, and stirred into yogurt.

- 1 cup honey, preferably organic and raw
- 1 tablespoon dried Herbes de Provence recipe

Place honey and herbs in a double boiler. Keep the water at a simmer, not a hard boil. Stir occasionally, letting the herbs infuse for 30 minutes. Strain in very fine strainer. Cool and place in glass jar. Store in pantry for up to a year.







A DIY wine barrel herb garden is a fun and cost-effective addition to any garden.

was much thicker than the ones you can buy at the store. I knew I wanted the planter to be a dark color to collect and keep the heat from the sun, which will allow the herbs to grow longer in the fall and start earlier in the spring.

When the barrels were being stained, I tried to get as little stain on the inside as possible. If I had to do it over again, the barrel would have been stained before it was cut in half. The reason for this is, I want to grow food in these barrels (herbs to be exact), and I am not sure the stain is food-grade.

The color I chose was called dark walnut. After each coat, I waited an hour before applying the next, until three coats were applied. The next day, when the planter was dry, all the metal bands were sanded back down to bare metal in preparation for painting the metal bands.

Because spray paint would be used to paint the metal bands, I placed a full roll of painter tape over the stained wood and the metal bands were sanded down again one last time.

Since the wood is dark, the metal band color should be light and be a complimentary color. The paint that I chose was metallic copper spray paint. I started off with a light coat on the first planter and by the time the second planter had a light coat on, the first planter was dry enough for a second coat. By

# DIY Wine Barrel Herb Garden

BY ROMIE HOLL

**H**AVE YOU EVER SEEN wine barrel planters in the store? I have admired them for years, admired but not bought because the price was more than I was willing to spend. One day while looking thru Craigslist, I came across an ad for a full-sized solid oak wine barrel. The guy was moving and wanted it gone. So, \$60 later it was mine.

## BUILDING THE BARREL

After cutting the barrel in half, I saw how thick the barrel was. This





**Left:** I wanted the planter to be a dark color to collect and keep the heat from the sun, which will allow the herbs to grow longer in the fall and start earlier in the spring.

then, the second planter was ready. I kept going back and forth until the first can was empty.

The next day, the paint was dry so I wet-sanded the bands with 320-grit sandpaper. I then used the second can of paint like the first can, going back and forth, putting on a light coat on each pass.

Because the planter will need to drain extra water (either from rain or when watered with the hose), several one-inch holes were drilled into the bottom of each planter. The holes needed to be covered to hold the dirt in place. So, using some leftover copper screen from the windows of the house (stronger than fiberglass and will last my lifetime), I stapled the copper screen into place.

To protect the bare wood from the wet soil, I used a pool liner that I ordered from Amazon. This should make the planter last a lot longer. After the liner was laid inside the barrel, the planter was placed on its side. I pushed up through the holes on the screen and my son cut the liner around the drain holes.

At this point, the liner was not attached to the planter. To promote good drainage, three inches of pea gravel was laid on top of the liner. The weight of the gravel held the liner down nicely.

### PLANTING THE BARREL

It was now time to mix up the soil mixture for the planters. Now, I don't eat just one type of food, so why should my plants get to eat just one type of food? The more nutrients the plants



**Top:** Because spray paint will be used to paint the metal bands, a full roll of painter tape was placed over the stained wood and the metal bands were sanded down again one last time.

**Bottom:** Painting the bands.





**Top Left:** Several one-inch drainage holes were drilled into the bottom of each planter. The holes needed to be covered to hold the dirt in place. Using some leftover copper screen from the windows of the house (stronger than fiberglass and will last my lifetime), I stapled the copper screen into place.

**Top Right:** To protect the bare wood from the wet ground, I used a pool liner.

**Left:** Pea gravel is added to help with soil drainage.

**Bottom Left:** A potting soil mix was used for optimum growth for the herbs. Bricks are added underneath to avoid wood rot.



**Above:** The finished barrel! Happy herbs are planted and ready to go.

absorb, the better. The following are the ingredients I use in all my gardens, planters, etc. They work very well.

- Good premium topsoil (no added fertilizers)
- Mushroom compost (from a local nursery)
- Leaf compost (from the compost that my trees give me)
- Aged dried cow manure (from a local organic dairy farmer)
- Rabbit manure (my rabbits provide this)
- Peat moss (keeps the ground very loose and easy to work, plus it does both while letting the soil drain but keeping enough water for the plants)

To mix this up, all the ingredients were put into a big mixing bowl (wheelbarrow) and a small blender was used (small rototiller). It takes about 20 seconds per wheelbarrow to make this mixture that has never failed to grow great plants.

Before you put the dirt in the planter, you must think about drainage. If the planter is right on the ground, there is a chance that water could build up and start rotting out the planter from underneath, not to mention that the dirt will be a lot wetter than it should be. To fix this, I placed six bricks in a circle and the planter was centered on them. (I should have done this before the pea gravel was added, would have been easier.)

Once I was happy with the arrangement, both barrels were filled with the soil mixture. Then the liner was pulled over the top of the planter, stapled to the side of the planter, and the extra liner was cut off. When I have time, I will add decorative trim around the liner and staples.

Once both planters were done, it was time to plant the herbs from the greenhouse into them. After two months, the planters are doing very well. 🌱

**ROMIE HOLL** helped his father with the pigs, chickens, and bees while growing up, and was taught to use two hands while weeding the gardens. Currently he works in engineering, designing items for MRI machines. When at home, Romie works in the yard, balancing his life between physical and mental health. His two children were raised the same way.

MAKING  
*Herb Salts  
 &  
 Garlic Oil*

RECIPES FOR  
 IMPERFECT HARVESTS

BY MARISSA AMES

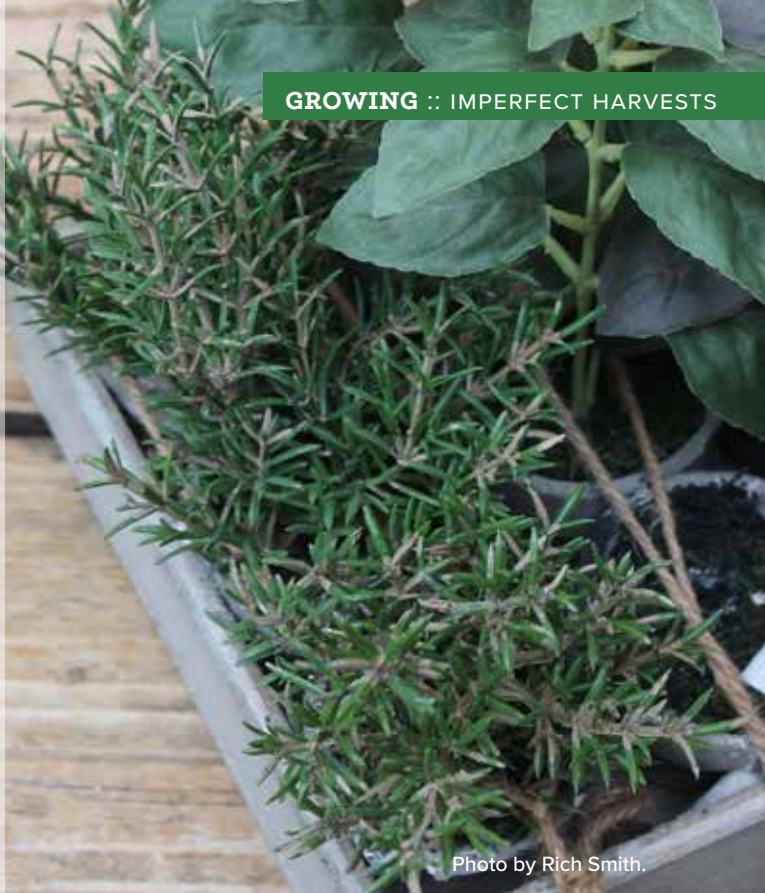


Photo by Rich Smith.

**W**HEN INSECTS attack your growing basil or your garlic doesn't grow to a desired size, don't worry, you can still make delicious infused garlic oil and salts with your imperfect herbs.

Last July, flash floods coursed through the area, turning pastures into lakes. Hail shredded leaves that had previously been pristine. My dreams of a beautiful Caprese salad tattered with the hail. In addition to that, I harvested heads of garlic smaller in diameter than a half-dollar. What was I going to do with garlic so tiny it wouldn't sell? Simple: Make garlic oil and herb-infused salts. The completed basil-garlic oil recipe made an especially delectable ingredient for homemade tortillas while the salts stored all year, running out just in time for the next garlic harvest.

**HOW TO MAKE INFUSED OILS**

A product that sells for top dollar in culinary shops is surprisingly easy and cost-efficient to make. You only need oil, clean herbs,

and containers to heat and/or store your finished product.

**THE RIGHT OIL TO USE**

Though olive oil is healthiest and more accepted among foodies, canola is less expensive and lighter in flavor. Fractionated coconut oil (the kind that stays liquid below 76 degrees F) is costly but very stable for heating and cooling, so it works well for garlic oil. Choose whichever oil works best for your palette, health, and budget.

For cold infusion, mix dry herbs with oil. Allow to steep three to six weeks, shaking every few days. Since heating allows the herbs to infuse better, place in a warm area, such as a windowsill, and enjoy the beauty as the sun filters through.

Fresh herbs, or any spice that

still contains moisture, should be heated within the oil to deter mold or bacterial growth.

Bruise or crush fresh herbs, or toast spices, to bring out the flavor. Mix with oil and heat in a saucepan until it bubbles. Allow to bubble for about five minutes, but don't overcook. Cool completely and strain out the herbs with a

cheesecloth or fine-mesh sieve. Store in a clean, airtight container in the fridge.

For an easier oven method, place canning jars within a roasting pan or high-sided cookie sheet to contain spills. Be sure to use actual canning jars, as they can withstand the heat.

Stuff herbs and spices into the jars then fill the rest of the way with oil. Heat in the oven, at 300 degrees F, for about half an hour. Either remove the pan from the oven or

Don't let herbs go to waste. Infused oils are easy and cost-efficient to make.



turn the heat off, allowing the oil to cool. Completely strain out the herbs and store in the fridge.

Since dried herbs don't introduce moisture to the oil, the finished product can stay good for months in an airtight container at room temperature.

Oils made with fresh herbs or garlic should be stored in the refrigerator and be used within a few weeks. If you made a large batch and worry that it'll go rancid before you can use it all, freeze in ice cube trays then store the cubes in a freezer-safe container or bag for several months. Allow the cubes to thaw and return to room temperature before cooking, for best flavor.

Many different herbs can be used, including a harvest from your rosemary plant, cloves, cinnamon sticks, basil, oregano, garlic, sage, thyme, peppercorns, hot chilies, tarragon, citrus peel, and coriander. Create your own mixes.

## CREATIVE OIL COMBINATIONS

### ROASTED GARLIC

First, roast a head or two of garlic. To save resources, use the garlic for bread or salt (see garlic salt recipe) and use the peels for the garlic oil recipe. Or use the entire clove of roasted garlic.

Additional herbs, such as basil and oregano, give this a Mediterranean flavor perfect for pizzas and pastas.



### LEMON-SAGE-TARRAGON

Remove lemon zest with a vegetable peeler and infuse with fresh sage and tarragon.

Use for roasted vegetables or to sauté meats.

### THAI-SPICE

Combine lemon or lime zest, a chopped fresh or dried hot chili pepper, chopped or pressed garlic, chopped/bruised basil, and grated fresh ginger.

Additional herbs can include lime leaves,

lemongrass, or shallots. Excellent for meats or stir fries.

### SWEET SPICE

Break up a stick of Ceylon cinnamon. Add roasted cloves, ground nutmeg, and grated fresh ginger. For additional indulgence, slice a vanilla bean and add both pod and caviar, or zest an orange with a vegetable peeler. Remember not

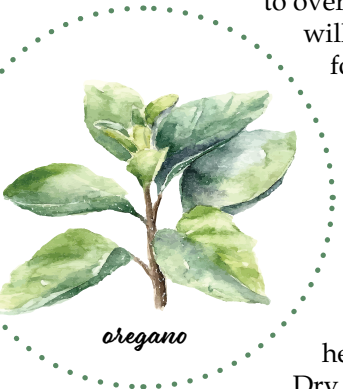
to overcook the oil or you will burn the herbs. Use for Moroccan cooking or for desserts such as sautéed fresh apples.

### HOW TO MAKE HERB SALTS

The basic recipe is incredibly simple: Mix the herb equally with salt.

Dry. Store in an airtight container. Simple, right?

Purée the herb, such as onion or garlic, until fine. Mix equal portions with the salt of your choice: one



tablespoon pressed garlic to one tablespoon salt. Though you can dry it in a windowsill or in your oven, a forced-air food dehydrator is quick and painless to the other occupants of your house.

Using this basic recipe, branch out to other herbs and salts. Simple iodized salt works fine but Himalayan pink salt produces a culinary masterpiece. Hawaiian red or black sea salts provide exceptional beauty when added to the finished product. While grinding the onion or garlic, toss in other herbs such as basil and oregano, remembering that puréed herbs will color the mixture. Juice a lime and grate a little zest.

Don't worry if the salts dissolve; they'll crystallize again when they dry.

Salt has been used for millennia to store food.

If done right, the product will last indefinitely, though quality declines as it ages or is introduced to moisture.



## CREATIVE SALT FLAVOR COMBINATIONS

### CHILI LIME

Purée fresh garlic, lime juice, and a fresh jalapeño with the stem and seeds removed. A dry, ground jalapeño can also be used. Mix with salt and ground cumin. Adjust quantities to your taste for a hotter or milder spice. Use as a pre-made taco or fajita seasoning.

### ROASTED BARBEQUE GARLIC

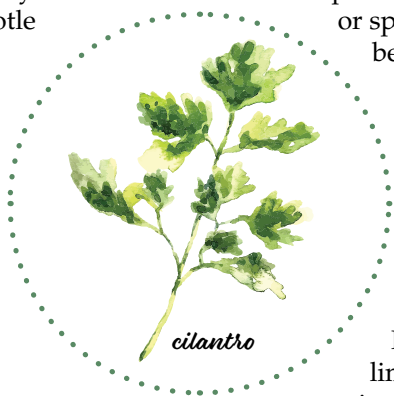
Roast garlic with olive oil. Squeeze garlic from the peelings and use the peelings for infused oil. Combine garlic with a combination of four parts kosher salt and one part

smoked sea salt. Dry completely. Additional ingredients can be roasted red pepper or tomato, puréed with the garlic before mixing with salt. Or try adding ground chipotle pepper or brown sugar to the dried product. Excellent for sprinkling on grilled meats or added to homemade barbecue sauce.

### BRUSCHETTA

Purée fresh garlic and mix equally with salt. To retain the beauty of the individual herbs, dehydrate basil and oregano separately then combine all dry ingredients

together. Additional dried herbs can include onion, roasted red pepper, tomato, hot pepper flakes, or ground black pepper. Use as a component of garlic bread or sprinkle on tomatoes before roasting.



### CILANTRO LIME

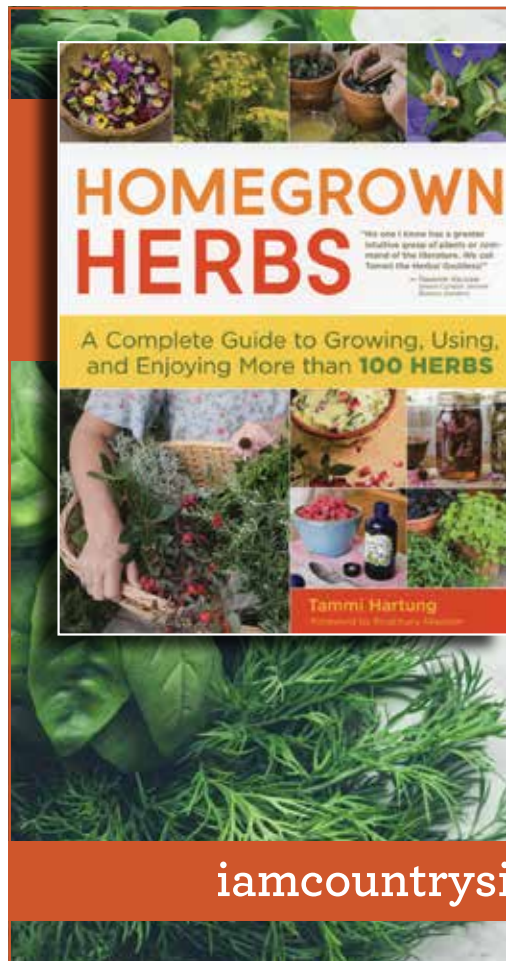
Simply use one tablespoon lime juice to one tablespoon salt. Add fresh cilantro and churn together.

Finely grate the lime zest into the mixture. Spread in the tray insert of your dehydrator then dry completely. Use in mixed drinks or on top of taco meats.

Whether old, wilted, too small, or tattered from a hail storm, imperfect herbs can still make perfectly delicious salts and oils which rival professional culinary products. 🌿

Editor of *Goat Journal* and *Backyard Poultry* magazines, **Marissa Ames** runs a small homestead in Fallon, Nevada, where she focuses on saving and propagating rare breeds of goats and garden vegetables. She and her husband, Russ, travel to Africa where they serve as agricultural advisors for the nonprofit I Am Zambia. She spends her free time eating lunch.

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## A Complete Guide to Growing, Using & Enjoying More Than 100 Herbs

BY TAMMI HARTUNG

This is the definitive guide to planting, growing, harvesting, and using 101 popular herbs. A step-by-step primer for gardeners of every level, it includes in-depth information on seed selection; planting; maintenance and care; harvesting; drying; and uses in the kitchen, home pharmacy, crafting, and body care. Sensational four-color photographs by Saxon Holt bring the information to life. With renowned herbalist Tammi Hartung as a guide, readers will discover that growing their own herbs is one of the easiest ways possible to bring more beauty, flavor, and health to everyday life. **255 pages**

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# Creating Tinctures on the Homestead

BY AMY K. FEWELL

**W**HEN I FIRST STARTED my herbal education, one of the things that intimidated me most was making my own herbal preparations. One of the most common thoughts that runs through a new or aspiring herbalist's mind is, "am I going to do this the wrong way and hurt myself or my family?" Let me assure you, you can do this confidently!

The first herbal preparations I started making were tinctures. They are a quick and easy herbal preparation that you can make from herbs in your garden, or herbs you've bought. Tinctures consist of just two ingredients — herbs and alcohol.

It is best to use an 80-proof to 100-proof (or even higher) alcohol. You shouldn't go below 80-proof alcohol for tinctures. I prefer to use vodka or bourbon. The alcohol extracts the medicinal properties of the herbs that you've used to create your medicinal preparation.

The extraction process takes about six weeks, but it's well worth it. You'll want to be sure to make tinctures well in advance before you need them since they take a while to make. Tinctures have a fabulous shelf life. They can last for several years in your medicine cabinet if kept in the right conditions. Make sure you are storing your homemade tinctures in sterile, amber, glass bottles, in a temperature-controlled environment (like a medicine cabinet or pantry indoors), out of direct sunlight.

While tinctures can be used externally, they are most efficient when taken orally. Simply put the tincture dosage under your tongue (by using an eyedropper), allow it to set under your tongue for 30 to 60 seconds, and then swallow. This allows the tincture to rapidly enter into the bloodstream through

Tinctures have a fabulous shelf life. They can last for several years in your medicine cabinet if kept in the right conditions.



your mouth through the arteries under your tongue. It is then absorbed through your stomach and digestive tract, once swallowed.

If taking an alcohol-based tincture isn't for you, there are other ways to extract the medicine properties of herbs. Using apple cider vinegar or glycerin are two other options. However, not all herbs will release all of their medicinal properties in these two solvents. For some herbs, it takes a strong solvent, like alcohol, to extract the most medicinal value.

This is one of the reasons herbalists recommend keeping tinctures on hand at all times. While herbal teas and other preparations work well, sometimes you just need the hard stuff!

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF WEIGHT TO VOLUME RATIO

Before we dive into some of my favorite tincture recipes, we need

to talk about how to properly make tinctures. Oftentimes, especially in folk herbalism, you'll hear someone say to fill up  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a canning jar with dried herbs, and the rest of the canning jar ( $\frac{3}{4}$  of the jar) with your alcohol or other solvent.

While this may work for some, the end result can often be a non-potent, non-efficient tincture.

Different herbs take up different amounts of space. For example, one ounce of calendula flowers takes up an entire pint jar. But one ounce of thyme barely takes up  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the space in a canning jar. Therefore, if we were just "eyeballing" all of our tinctures, we would be getting

a different amount of herb to liquid ratio for each preparation we make.

This is why using a weight to volume (w:v) ratio is extremely important in tincture making. Most tinctures are a 1:5 ratio. This means one part herb to five parts alcohol.

In weight, this means one ounce of dried herbs to five fluid ounces of alcohol. If you were to use two ounces of dried herbs, you would use 10 fluid ounces of alcohol, and so on.

Not only does this ensure that you are using

the proper amount of herbs every time, it ensures that you're using the proper dosage of the tincture as well. Otherwise, you'll have a very watered down tincture that

Once you know how to properly make a tincture, the combinations are limitless.





### Remember the 1:5 ratio.

When you have multiple herbs, simply use equal parts of the herb to create one full ounce, or up the amount of tincture you're making.

you need to take more of in order to have a full medicinal dose.

#### HOW TO MAKE A TINCTURE

Once you know how to properly make a tincture, the combinations are limitless. Create a tincture with just a singular herb, or with multiple herbs. Using just one herb is most popular, however, you can create different combinations for certain ailments.

Here's how you make a tincture:  
Choose your dried herb(s)

and extraction liquid (normally 80-proof or 100-proof vodka).

Add dried herbs to a jar, cover with vodka (a 1:5 weight to volume ratio is necessary; herb to vodka). Make sure all the dried herbs are submerged in the vodka.

Allow the tincture to rest in a cabinet or pantry (out of sunlight) for four to six weeks. Shake once a day to keep herbs rotating and submerged.

After four to six weeks, strain the tincture (using cheesecloth

or a strainer) and place the strained liquid into amber-colored, glass eyedropper bottles. Store in a cabinet or pantry indoors until ready to use.

Tinctures will store for at least five years, but can oftentimes have no expiration date since the alcohol works as a preservative.

#### TINCTURE RECIPES

There are a lot of different tinctures you can make. I'll share some of my favorite common singular and combination tinctures, not only for humans, but for livestock as well! Yes, you can absolutely utilize tinctures for your barnyard friends. It's one of the best ways to implement herbal medicine on your homestead.

Remember the 1:5 ratio. When you have multiple herbs, simply use equal parts of the herb to create one full ounce, or up the amount of tincture you're making (as you'll see in the livestock tincture recipe).

Remember to have fun with tincture making! There are so many herbal possibilities for different needs. As you grow as an herbalist, your cabinet will naturally fill up more and more with different tinctures for different needs. Enjoy the process!

#### TINCTURE COMBINATIONS

I use one a ounce dose of the following herb combinations.

**Echinacea and Elderberry:** Lessens the affects of the common cold and flu, supports the immune system.

**Burdock:** Aides in liver function, suppresses boils, aides in digestion. High in minerals.

**Dandelion:** Aides in liver function, detoxification, and skin conditions.

**Garlic:** Regulates and lowers blood pressure, supports the immune system.

**Mullein:** Is a natural antiviral, antibacterial, and expectorant; aids

in healing UTIs and is great for migraines and respiratory health.

**Yarrow:** Antiviral, removes excess mucus from the respiratory system, diuretic, aides in digestion.

For the following recipes, I've listed the ingredients. You can then use the tincture-making method in the first part of this article with the ingredients.


### WINTER ANTIVIRAL AND RESPIRATORY TINCTURE

- 1 oz mullein
- ½ oz thyme
- ½ oz yarrow
- ½ oz astragalus
- 12½ fluid oz vodka (80-proof or higher)

### DIGESTIVE BITTER TINCTURE

- ½ oz turmeric
- ½ oz yarrow
- ½ oz ginger
- ½ oz horehound
- 10 fluid oz vodka (80-proof or higher)

### INTERNAL PARASITE TINCTURE FOR LIVESTOCK

- ½ oz clove, ground
- ½ oz black walnut hulls, coarsely ground
- 1 oz thyme
- 1 oz stinging nettle
- 1 oz pumpkin seeds
- 2 garlic cloves, smashed
- 20 fluid oz vodka (80-proof or higher) 

**AMY FEWELL**, along with her family, resides in the foothills of the Blue Ridge mountains in Virginia. She is the founder of the Homesteaders of America conference and organization, and the author of the books, *The Homesteader's Herbal Companion* and *The Homesteader's Natural Chicken Keeping Handbook*.  
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Poster art by Scott Vanderlip.

# Host Your Own Tour de Coop

BY KENNY COOGAN

**A**N UNDERAPPRECIATED aspect of our backyard chicken hobby is the people we befriend. The community aspect of homesteading and raising chickens is vital to keeping up with best practices and growing our body of knowledge. Having chicken comrades that we can learn from and bounce ideas off is immeasurable. Whether it is through blogs, magazines, or our Facebook group Backyard Poultry Chat, fanciers helping fanciers is awesome. One way of meeting local chicken coop connoisseurs is by starting or partaking in a Tour de Coop.

Tour de Coops and Tour de Clucks have been happening

Having chicken comrades that we can learn from and bounce ideas off is immeasurable.

around the U.S. for about 15 years. They attract people researching practical and gorgeous coop designs that will result in happy backyard hens and fresh frittatas. Unfortunately, many of the early coop tours have gone kaput. I interviewed two long withstanding coop tours to find out their success.

M'Liss Koopman, Tour D'Coop Chair and Jordan Hewitt, Communications and Marketing Coordinator, of Urban Ministries of Wake County in Raleigh, N.C. recently hosted the area's 14th annual coop tour. The tour started in 2005 as a way for a few neighbors to show off their hens and coops. This year it has grown to a one-day garden tour that encompasses 20 coops and thousands of visitors. Tour D'Coop raises funding to support Urban Ministries of Wake County. Urban Ministries supports nearly 30,000 low-income neighbors who are hungry, homeless, and in need of medical care. Coop owners and the tour organizers volunteer their time to promote backyard poultry and urban farming.

Koopman says their accomplishment is because "It's fun and makes you feel good to offer back to your own community. Tour D'Coop raises awareness about the benefits of backyard chicken keeping, beekeeping, and gardening. We promote humane animal care, and our visitors see first-hand how engaging and interesting chickens are in a natural setting, versus high-density flocks



and cages. " The tour also highlights local and sustainable food sources and community engagement.

### START A TOUR

When starting your town's coop tour, Koopman suggests to first think about your goals. "Is your primary goal to educate about backyard chickens? Local food? Ethical animal care? To raise funds? Just have fun? That will drive decisions about how large an initial core group of interested people you need to actually plan and conduct the event."

The second consideration is manpower. Aside from coop owners themselves, you will need coop and traffic docents and registration volunteers.

"For us, the need for a larger day-of volunteer pool eventually made the decision to partner with a local non-profit, a win-win. Beneficial partnerships can be key in planning and conducting a tour, as each brings knowledge, ideas, volunteers, funds or whatever, to the event," Koopman explains.

Her final advice is: just start! Host it, and they will come.

Originally their tour was mostly built by word of mouth and social media. Koopman says starting small is okay.

"Even if the first year is just a few coops and a single article in the local paper, you can build year after year. Make sure the first event is fun, then spread the word. People will want to come, and you can build on that."

On the other coast, Scott Vanderlip was preparing the 7th annual Silicon Valley Tour De Coop for Saturday, September 14, 2019. This tour is a free, self-guided bicycle tour of chicken coops, gardens, beehives, hoop houses, and the coolest Silicon Valley urban homesteads in the South Bay area of San Francisco Bay.

Vanderlip says that the "SV Tour De Coop has always encouraged other communities to create their own Chicken Coop bike tour and we allow other organizations to use our graphic for free."

On their website ([tourdecoop.org](http://tourdecoop.org)) they offer advice for communities who want to start offering their own tours.

After you have created a tour

## TOUR DE COOP CHECKLIST

- Create coop goals
- Create tour logo and website/event page
- Recruit host coops through social media/local feed stores
- Have hosts complete application
- Select coops based on location, design, and hygiene
- Create a tour de coop route
- Advertise tickets to event
- Send out map and event details three to seven days prior to event
- Create/sell Tour de Coop themed hats and t-shirts
- Invite local politicians and the media to partake and report on the event





One organization requires all visitors to step in a cleansing solution while entering the coop area. That tour delivers the sanitation trays to participating homesteads. This is a well-thought biosecurity measure that other tours should not overlook.

logo and event website, your next step is recruitment. The SV Tour De Coop website says, "As part of your initial outreach and marketing for the event, solicit potential coops for the tour. As part of the coop selection process, we asked potential coop stop owners for this specific information." Looking at several Tour de Coop applications, I saw many had similar questions regarding proper husbandry and environmental conditions.

One organization requires all visitors to step in a cleansing solution while entering the coop area. That tour delivers the sanitation trays to participating homesteads. This is a well-thought biosecurity measure that other tours should not overlook.

Other questions on the application included; coop location, bike/car parking directions, chicken names/breeds/quantity, coop name, design and photos, and the yards sustainable features. Since the goal of the tours is to educate the visitors, hosts are asked to be prepared to share the evolution of their chicken keeping.

Some organizations then have committees that choose the best coops based on location, design, and hygiene. SV Tour De Coop enters all the coop submissions into Google Maps to help configure routes and various



loops as visitors are bicycling. This year they are asking for coop coordinators to configure smaller loops which will highlight specific neighborhoods.

Once you have your coop destinations chosen, your next step is to market the event. SV Tour De Coop used Eventbrite to gather interested participants emails. Since their tour is free, the ticketing and reservation service was also free.

Three to seven days prior to the event, Tour De Coop coordinators send participants route maps and details. This is the time to publish your event's details on your website and social media. If you collected photos from the hosts, you can include them on the map, so visitors can better choose which homesteads to visit.

Chicken owners are not just passionate about their birds, they are avid about their coops too. Capture their excitement and that of the community for backyard poultry by hosting your own Tour de Coop. 🌿

**KENNY COOGAN** is a food, farm, and flower columnist. Coogan leads workshops about owning chickens, vegetable gardening, animal training, and corporate team building on his homestead. His newest gardening book *99 ½ Homesteading Poems: A Backyard Guide to Raising Creatures, Growing Opportunity, and Cultivating Community* is now available at [iamcountryside.com/shop](http://iamcountryside.com/shop).

## COOP NAMES TO INSPIRE AND IMPRESS VISITORS

Banty Barn  
 Casa De Pollo  
 Chick Inn  
 Cluckin' Cottage  
 Cluckingham Palace  
 Cochin Coop  
 Cochin Crib  
 Coop Deville  
 Cozy Coop  
 Fowl Territory  
 Hen Pen  
 Le Cordon Bleu Coop  
 Little Egg Factory  
 Omlet  
 Palais Poulet  
 Silkie Shack  
 Taj De' Koop



# Easy DIY Nest Box Ideas

BY JANET GARMAN

## KEEP YOUR LAYING HENS HAPPY WITH THE RIGHT NEST BOX

THERE ARE PRE-MADE CHICKEN NESTING boxes available for purchase through poultry supply retailers. You can also get creative and come up with some nice chicken nesting boxes from materials you already have on hand. DIY-type nest boxes are fun and easy. Many different containers can be re-purposed for chicken nesting boxes and the hens seem to be happy with many choices. Of course, safety is a primary concern, so let's explore some options.

Every chicken coop design needs a few mandatory features — chicken roosting bars, windows and ventilation, dropping boards, and possibly a fan for air cooling in the summer.

The nesting box is an important feature in any chicken coop. You will need one nesting box for every four chickens, but be warned, the hens will choose a favorite and actually wait in line for that nesting space!

Chicken nesting boxes need to be large enough that

the hens feel comfortable, but not too large where they lose that feeling of being safe and secure. Obviously, if you raise large breed hens, like Brahmas, your chicken nesting boxes will need to accommodate the larger body size. When raising bantam chickens, you will have smaller options available for nest boxes.

Chicken nesting boxes need to be large enough that the hens feel comfortable, but not too large where they lose that feeling of being safe and secure.

### WOODEN BOXES AND SHIPPING CRATES

A simple handmade wooden box can be a chicken nesting box. It consists of a bottom board and sides attached all around. If the sides are high, a cutout in the front can make it easier for the hen to climb into the box. Before lining the box, consider giving the wood a quick coat of paint.

Wood mites and scaly leg mites like to burrow into the wood in chicken coops. The paint helps prevent the mites from burrowing and taking up residence in the coop. Be sure to use a safe, indoor paint. Let the paint dry completely, then line it with a thick layer of dry

straw or pine shavings. I like to add some herbs, like lavender, mint, and parsley, to the nesting boxes too.

Wooden shipping crates are a fun way to add a vintage look to the chicken coop. Shipping crates are similar in size to a plain wooden box but usually made with slats instead of solid sides. These were often originally used for fruit and vegetables. I have found many of these by visiting flea markets and salvage stores. I love the way they look with straw packed in for a nice cushion and a chicken at home laying an egg.

### PLASTIC CONTAINERS FOR NESTING BOXES

Plastic containers are readily available, as most products are now sold in plastic of some sort. Empty cat litter buckets can be re-used as a nest box. These are often square and when tipped on the side, make a nice deep nest box. Laundry baskets, especially with the basket-like weave sides, allow ventilation and are a nice size for nesting. Large flower pots or planters might be another choice if you have some extras lying around the yard.

Round buckets are possible to use as nesting boxes, but you will need to fasten them to something so they don't roll away. Ideas for this include using a rack that holds the buckets on their side and has four to six buckets in the rack.

### LARGE WICKER OR WOVEN BASKETS

These are a picture-perfect addition to the coop. The hens seem to like the material and the basket full of soft straw looks so cozy! But, heed the safety tips below. Wicker baskets are lightweight and can pose a safety problem.

### SAFETY TIPS

When using any of the lightweight plastic containers,



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secure the container to the wall somehow. Plastic containers easily tip over when hens stand on the edge of them. In rare circumstances, the container can tip in just the right way, trapping the chicken underneath.

This is tragic. On a hot day, a chicken trapped under a plastic container is quickly overcome by the heat. I share this sad note because it is something that happened in my coop. Lesson learned. Secure the plastic container to the coop wall using hooks or screws. If you want the nest box to

be removable, using a short chain and snap hooks from the wall to the nest box will allow you to unhook it for cleaning.

Plastic containers are readily available. If using lightweight containers, secure them to the wall for safety.

### WHAT IS THE BEST LINING FOR NESTING BOXES?

After you have the nesting boxes and have secured them to the coop, how should you dress the box? Some common materials are straw and pine shavings. Both of these are

easily available and absorbent materials. The difference between straw and shavings in my coop came down to which the chickens liked best. The hens seemed





Keep the nest boxes and surrounding areas clean for best results.



to try very hard to remove the shavings from the nest boxes. They would kick and scratch until the box was nearly empty!

Now, if I use shavings at all, I cover them with a layer of straw. Since some bales of straw have very long strands, I buy a bale of chopped straw just for the nest boxes. This bale lasts a long time because we only use it for that purpose and for small animal bedding. Long, heavy strands of straw are used for the floor in the coop.

### MORE CHICKEN NESTING BOX TIPS

Keep the nest boxes and surrounding areas clean for best results. If the hens walk through a lot of chicken manure to get to the box, the eggs will be soiled. A quick cleanup each day with a dustpan and scoop is all you need to do. Larger cleanups can be spread out further.

Position your nest boxes away from any perches overhead. Installing a dropping board under the roost and over the nest boxes can make a huge difference! I know that sounds like common sense, but I fully admit to making that mistake with our first coop. Every day I had to clean up the nesting boxes!

Some people have used curtains to add privacy to the nesting boxes. We currently have a length of fabric acting as a curtain for the chicken nesting boxes. It's not a mandatory feature but it does add fun and whimsy to the coop.

Giving your chickens proper-sized, sturdy nesting boxes will lead to lots of fresh eggs! Set your hens up for success with safe, well-lined nest boxes and enjoy the benefits. 🌱

**JANET GARMAN** is a farmer, writer, instructor, and fiber artist living in central Maryland on the family's farm. She loves all subjects related to small farms and homesteading. Raising chickens, ducks, sheep, and fiber goats led her to write her most recent books, *50 Do-It-Yourself Projects for Keeping Chickens*, (Skyhorse Publishing 2018), *The Good Living Guide to Raising Sheep and Other Fiber Animals*, (Skyhorse Publishing 2019), and *50 Do-It-Yourself Projects for Keeping Goats* (Skyhorse Publishing 2020).

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# CHEEP Chicken Treats

BY ASHLEY TABORSKY

## 9 Money-Saving Snacks Your Flock Will Love

**B**ACKYARD CHICKENS CAN be a joy. They offer hours of entertainment, fantastic compost, and better-than-store-bought eggs that will have your friends begging for you to share.

With everything your feathered companions provide you and your family, they deserve a special snack now and then. But treating the entire flock can quickly become expensive — unless you shop savvy or have the skills to make your own.

Here's a list of nine creative, money-saving treats and DIY ideas that will keep your backyard hens happy and clucking for more.

### 1

#### Cabbage Tetherball

Offering your flock a cabbage tetherball is not only an inexpensive snack, but it provides your chickens with exercise and entertainment. All you need is a thin rope (or thick string), a head of fresh cabbage, and a good place to hang it.

You can either drill a hole through the center of the cabbage or just wrap the rope around it tightly a few times. You can hang it at chicken eye-level, or cinch it up a few inches above their head, making them hop for it. (Who doesn't love watching chickens hop for treats?)





## 2 Raking Fall Leaves

If your neighborhood is covered in deciduous trees, you're in luck. A great treat that's entirely free is piles of raked leaves. Toss a few armfuls of dried



leaves into the chicken run, and watch your birds go crazy as they happily kick around leaves, searching for bits of grass,

bugs, and more. Dried leaves also act as a nice layer of free, all-natural bedding for your chicken run and coop.\*

\*Just make sure you know the source of the leaves and you're confident the trees they came from weren't sprayed in pesticides.

## 3 Wild Bird Seed Mixes

Many stores sell large bags (10lbs+) of wild bird seed mixes at a relatively low price per pound. Even though those bird seed mixes are labeled and marketed toward wild birds like finches



and cardinals, chickens love sunflower seeds and millet, too! Oftentimes you can buy wild bird seed mixes cheaper than you can buy bags of similar products labeled as "chicken treats."

## 4 DIY Suet Blocks

Think about sources of fat you may be throwing away in your kitchen — drippings after browning ground beef on the stove. Chickens love



these natural fats. Start saving grease in a jar in the freezer until you have a cup or two stockpiled. Remove it from the freezer and warm it to liquid temperature.

Line a small tray with wax paper. Fill the tray with sunflower seeds, peanuts, the "dust" from the bottom of the chicken feed bag, or whatever else you have available, then pour the warm grease over top of the mixture of loose chicken goodies. Gently shake the pan, to allow the grease to penetrate the mix and work its way to the bottom. Put the tray in the refrigerator for a few hours or until solid, then pop it out of the wax paper whenever you're ready to treat your chickens.

## 5 Pulling Garden Weeds



If you're a gardener, you know how many uninvited weeds you can yank from the ground by

the end of a season! Chickens love most common garden weeds, like dandelions and chickweed. Instead of tossing your weeds directly in the compost or trash, collect them in a bucket and empty the pail in the chicken run at day's end. Your flock will thank you for the fresh, green snacks.

## 6 Scraping Kitchen Plates for "Chicken Salad"

During mealtimes, depending on what's for dinner, there can be plenty of chicken-worthy scraps leftover. When we have BBQ evenings, we keep a bucket



next to the trash can labeled "chicken salad." Our close friends know the drill as they're scraping the dinner plates: bones and napkins go in the trash, but food the chickens may still enjoy goes in the bucket. By the end of the evening, the bucket contains items like watermelon





rinds, chewed-on corn on the cob, potato salad, dinner rolls, and more — an odd “salad” that your chickens will love.

## 7 Box Cornbread

If you want to give your flock a homemade, warm treat, try baking up a fresh pan of cornbread. Depending on the brand, you can find a box of cornbread mix for one to two dollars. To add extra variety, try adding fun mix-in ingredients, like a cup of peas or corn, or whatever chicken-friendly leftovers you have on-hand.



## 8 Lawn Clippings

After mowing the lawn, dump the bag of grass clippings directly into the chicken run. They’ll have a blast scratching through the pile of fresh lawn cuttings, eating grass and rummaging through for potential bugs and other snacks. Just make sure the grass wasn’t sprayed with pesticides.

## 9 Spent Grains from Local Breweries

“Spent grains” are the grains that have been used in the beer-making process (and contain no alcohol). Many local breweries have

programs to donate their spent grains, which are commonly used as livestock feed and chicken treats. If you have a local brewer in your area, reach out and see if they have a free spent grain pickup site — many do. 🌱



**ASHLEY TABORSKY** is an Anchorage-based digital marketer consultant with a lifelong passion for sustainability and learning. When she’s not hiking, sightseeing, or trying new local beers with her husband/partner in crime, Ashley is a recognized Alaska hobby blogger, known as the ‘Alaska Urban Hippie’, who can talk for days about chickens, composting, honeybees and gardening.

[alaskaurbanhippie.com/](http://alaskaurbanhippie.com/)

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# Chicken Treats

## HOW TO RAISE MEALWORMS AND SUPERWORMS

BY KENNY COOGAN

**I**N MY MIDDLE SCHOOL classroom, my students have learned how to raise mealworms, superworms, and Dubia cockroaches for years to be fed to our pet bearded dragon: Bob Ross. During the summer, I bring the colonies home and they make an excellent treat for my poultry. When searching for what can chickens eat as a treat, many people cringe when the results include black soldier fly larvae, crickets, and beetles. But, molting chickens welcome the extra protein.

Learning how to raise mealworms and other insects for your chickens is cost-effective and ensures their treats are high quality. Mealworms and superworms, compared to raising crickets for chickens, do not smell. Crickets have this horrible habit of going to the bathroom all the time. Mealworms and superworms don't chirp or jump. And if my students can raise them and get over their phobia, so can you!

### HOW TO RAISE MEALWORMS (*Tenebrio molitor*)

A container 20 inches long and 10 inches wide is a good size to start a colony of 1,000 to 5,000 mealworms. I find plastic tubs are perfect as you can easily see the health of the colony and they are easy to clean. Cutting a large hole in the lid and attaching a screen prevents items from falling into the container. The beetles will not be able to crawl up the smooth plastic sides. I prefer plastic tubs over glass aquariums because the surface area is more important than depth. Our containers are four inches tall. Adequate airflow prevents the mealworm's food from spoiling quickly.

Add a few inches of wheat

bran, corn meal, bone meal, crushed bran flake meal, or store-bought mealworm bedding to the bottom of the container. Another option is using chicken feed as the substrate. If using chicken feed, freeze for a few weeks to kill unwanted pests and beetles.

The price for 1,000 mealworms

will be between \$14 and \$20. Mail ordering will be cheaper than shopping at a local pet store.

Mealworms and superworms, compared to raising crickets for chickens, do not smell.

### WHAT DO MEALWORMS EAT AND DRINK?

Part of learning how to raise

mealworms for poultry snacks includes feeding them. Mealworms do well on a diet of root vegetables, vegetable and fruit peels, and other vegetative scraps. The higher





The ideal temperature for breeding the worms is 70 to 80 degrees F.

quality food the beetles receive, the more nutrients for your chickens. This is a great reason to breed your own bugs. Dried mealworms, sold as chicken snacks, are often only fed a diet of white potatoes. The more food you give the beetles the more offspring they will produce.

While the mealworms do best with consistent moisture, many colonies fail because of excess moisture. Do not provide a water bowl. Fresh greens or vegetable scraps will provide enough moisture. Sweet potatoes and kale, for example, provide high water content and often do not promote fungus or mold.

The ideal temperature for breeding the worms is 70 to 80 degrees F. Only feed the larvae (worms) to your chickens, as you will want the pupae to mature and the beetles to lay eggs. Usually, the beetles will stay on the surface of the substrate. When they bury themselves, it can be a sign of egg laying. A female beetle can lay 500 eggs in her lifetime. After the eggs hatch, it may take two to three weeks to see the tiny larvae. Feed them ample food to grow to the desired size before feeding them out.

If you start feeling overwhelmed with a surplus of mealworms, your

chickens or other backyard poultry will happily help you out. A friend of mine, who after one year of feeding wild songbirds mealworms as treats, was able to get a mockingbird to take mealworms from his hand. The mockingbird, who has raised many broods, is still hanging out and landing on his hand after 10 years! If for some reason you want to slow down the breeding, and not feed the worms out as a treat, the mealworms can be kept in refrigeration. This extends their larva stage by a couple of months and stops breeding.

If you are feeling famished as you feed the tasty mealworms to your chickens, snack away! In Southeast Asia, mealworms are baked, deep fried, and added to a stir-fry. And although larva from a moth is usually associated with tequila, mealworms are sometimes added to tequila-flavored novelty candy. Bon appétit!

### RAISING SUPERWORMS

(*Zophobas morio*)

Superworms are super compared to mealworms. Measuring up to 2.25 inches, they are nearly double the size of mealworms. Also a member of the darkling beetle family, they share 20,000 cousins with mealworms. Their housing requirements are similar to mealworms. Allow at least five inches for the height of the enclosure to prevent escapees. Unlike mealworms, superworms

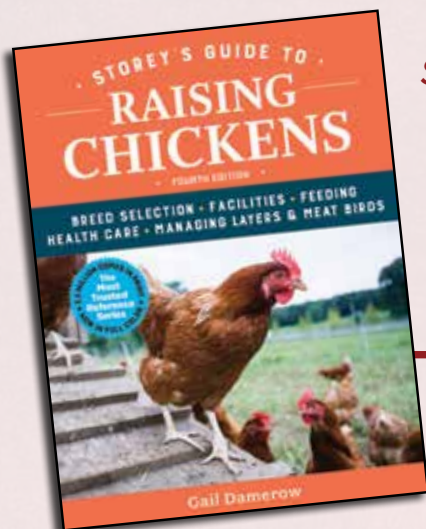
should be separated into containers for pupae, larvae, and beetles. Never put superworms in the fridge. They do best at 80 to 85 degrees, although they will survive and reproduce at room temperature.

Start with 100 superworms for your breeding colony. The price range is around \$5. Superworms naturally take a long time to pupate. You can expedite the process by placing worms individually in film canisters or small drawers from hardware containers. We have had great success with the clear grid jewelry organizer boxes. Add a small breathing hole per cell. Place the containers in a dark area, like a closet, for 10 days. The superworms will curl up and pupate. Once they change into a pupa, place them in a container designated as the nursery. This will prevent the beetles and larvae from eating them. It's a bug-eat-bug world out there. Once the pupae turn into beetles, place them in the breeding container. Feed them as you would mealworms.

Superworms will also lay around 500 eggs in their lifetime. The eggs will attach to the substrate and a week later will hatch. You can then move the baby superworms into the third container. It is easier, however, to remove the adult beetles after a week or two of being in the breeding container to allow the eggs to hatch and the larvae to grow up where they were laid. Adult beetles will eat the eggs and may prey on the baby larvae. 🌱

# Top Chicken Books

from the Countryside Shop

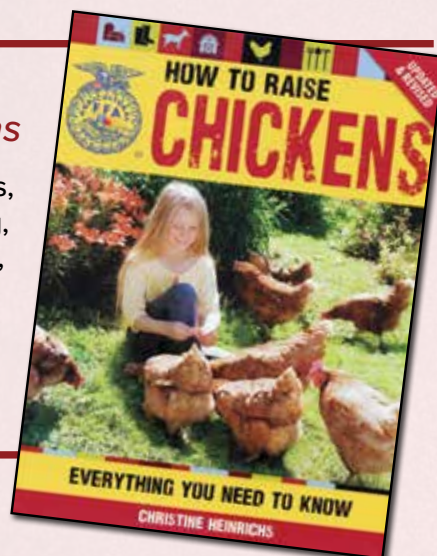


## *Storey's Guide to Raising Chickens, 4th Edition*

Up-to-date details on shelter, food, health care, eggs, chicks, and meat, and recent research into chicken behavior and communication makes the sections on flock management truly authoritative. New color photos and illustrations provide more specificity and information about chicken breeds, anatomy, and health.

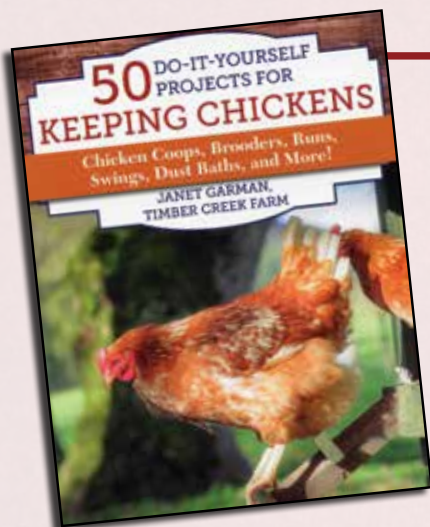
## *How to Raise Chickens*

Information on breed types, obtaining stock, housing, feeding, flock management, breeding programs, incubation and care of chicks, selection and culling, showing, health care, and the legal aspects of raising chickens.



## *50 DIY Projects for Keeping Chickens*

Get ready to jump into the world of chickens, one DIY project at a time. Owning and raising chickens doesn't have to be an expensive hobby. With imagination, simple tools, and salvaged or bargain materials, you can make everything your flock needs for their health and safety. After all the project building, and chores are done, treat your flock to a delicious seasonal recipe with one of the recipes included.



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# DIY Pallet Fence for Pigs

BY JANET GARMAN AND SON, CHRIS GARMAN

**I**F YOU PLAN ON RAISING HOGS FOR THE family table, I hope you are also planning on a sturdy fenced enclosure. We can tell you from experience that our DIY pallet fence is a perfect beginner fence for raising two or three pigs to maturity. This is how we started our pig-raising years.

A pallet fence for pigs is quick to set up. Ask any pork producer and they will tell you how important a good fence is for peace of mind. Pigs can be very destructive while just going about their pig business. It is no fun to wake up and find your pigs have broken loose and are ravaging your neighbor's flower beds. Pigs on the loose can break into your chicken coop and quickly root up all the pricey chicken feed, too. In short, putting effort into a sturdy fence will save you days of heartache and cleanup.

We all know fencing is one of the most expensive parts of animal husbandry infrastructure. Building fences is also a time-consuming task. I say, do it right the first time and save yourself from

fencing the same piece of property over and over. Remember the old farmers' adage, "Build your fences horse high, pig tight, and bull strong."

Pallets are often given away for free, so a business does not have to pay someone to haul them away.

Even so, a courtesy should be followed, asking the business owner if you can have the pallets. While this part of your DIY pallet fence for pigs will be free, the entire project will have a few costs incurred. Keep in mind that this is so your fence will be "pig tight."

Decide how much space you want to enclose. Keep in mind that a shelter needs to be included in the area, water buckets, and a feed trough.

Using a feed trough keeps the feed from being trampled into the mud. Standard pallets have a 4' side. Choosing a space that is divisible by four makes the planning and building easier.

For demonstration reasons, we are showing a corner section of a pallet fence for pigs. For your project, expand the example for the size required. I am providing a materials list for a 16' x 32' enclosure.

Decide how much space you want to enclose. Keep in mind that a shelter needs to be included in the area, water buckets, and a feed trough.

## MATERIALS LIST

Fence posts — 4" x 4" x 8' posts — 12 (You might want to set your posts in cement for added stability).

Fence boards — 2" x 6" x 8' — 24.

Pallets — 24 — Choose standard 4' pallets in good condition.

Insulators — Either the screw-in or nail-in type will work.

Electric fence charger.

Wire — Fence wire, ground wire, positive wire with clamp or attach it directly to the positive post of the charger.

Grounding rod — Copper ones are ideal for larger enclosures. In the case of a small pen described here, a scrap piece of rebar will do the job.

## GATE HINGES (OPTIONAL)

Tools

Post hole digger

Wood screws and drill driver

Hammer

## BUILDING THE FRAMEWORK

You might wonder why you cannot just attach the pallets together at each end. The lumber frame and fence posts add stability and strength to the fence. Using just the pallets or pallets and metal T-posts with pigs is a much less sturdy option. Keep in mind that there are many ways to build a fence. Our method worked very well for us and lasted years. Other pig farmers might have different styles that work well for them.

## SETTING THE FENCE POSTS AND ADDING FENCE BOARDS

Begin by measuring carefully and marking where the fence posts will be set. If you are using cement in the fence post holes, mix that up in small batches while you proceed.

Once the fence posts are set, add the boards to the posts. Screws are a better option than nails for this. (How far apart are the boards on each post?)

If you will use a gate for entering the enclosure, leave off two boards in one four-foot opening.

## INSTALLING THE PALLETS

Add two pallets to the inside of each eight-foot section of fencing. Screw the pallets to the fence boards.

## INSTALLING THE ELECTRIC WIRE

A single strand of electric wire run along the lower



**Top:** A standard pallet that we used for our pig fence.

**Bottom:** A corner section of a pallet fence for pigs.





We all know fencing is one of the most expensive parts of animal husbandry infrastructure. Building fences is also a time-consuming task. I say, do it right the first time and save yourself from fencing the same piece of property over and over.



Install the electric wire between six inches and 12 inches above ground level.



portion of the fenced-in area produces a sharp jolt to the pig that tries to root under the fence. Piglets raised on electric fencing learn quickly. In addition, piglets born to sows raised with electric fencing wire seem to teach their young to stay away from the wire.

Install the electric wire between six inches and 12 inches above ground level. This is the typical pig rooting zone. For very small piglets, start with the wire toward the lower end of this range.

Using a pallet fence for pigs will provide you with a low-cost option to begin raising pigs for meat. A pair of feeder pigs provides a good supply of protein for your family each year. The time commitment is short, and if you do not have to chase escaping pigs, it can be a rewarding experience.

Pallets can be used around the homestead for other enclosures too. We have used pallets to build kidding and lambing pens. Four pallets put together in a square and lined with hardware cloth makes a great brooder for chicks and ducklings. After you set it up, I think you will agree that a pallet fence for pigs is a good way to start raising pigs on your homestead. 🌱





# Wool Knowledge is Power

MORE EARNINGS  
IN SMALL FLOCKS

BY VIRGINIA SCHOLOMITI

**S** MALL NICHE MARKETS for wool are not only well established but growing. This factor can be a great opportunity for smaller flock owners, who have smaller quantities of fiber available, enabling each fleece or group of fleeces to be judged and sold on its individual merits rather than as a large bulk commodity. This isn't a judgment against large scale producers, rather an exploration of the smaller markets they typically don't serve.

The best part is there is great potential to sell some of your

Those seeking our fleeces range from the mainstream, more conservative or “traditional” spinners and knitters, to the more experimental, who seek to push the envelope on fiber arts.

fiber for a greater profit than a wool pool can normally offer. If you are willing to put some thought and planning, perhaps a little more work and a bit of extra time understanding our role as producers, the payoff can be worth it.

This is a huge topic with many interesting twists and turns and it may take several articles to really scratch the surface, giving both newer wool producers and more experienced folks some useful and inspiring information.

As with almost all farming-related endeavors, focusing on and improving the farm's wool sales will probably not land you on the Forbes list of the wealthy, but it can improve your bottom line and may turn something you have thought of as a byproduct into a paying asset.

Shepherds start their flocks with many priorities and goals in mind. For many, the wool produced by their flocks isn't of much consequence. That may make total sense for your farm if your flock goals are already being achieved: Breeders prioritize genetics choices when planning breeding programs.

Sometimes, putting a high emphasis on the type and quality



One of the most exciting and encouraging elements to this is that the market demands an extremely wide variety of fibers, sometimes the more unique, the better.



of fiber produced from our flocks may have been overlooked in pursuing other goals. Perhaps it's time to rethink that strategy.

### ARE SUCH MARKETS SUBSTANTIAL?

Let's look at some facts:

- The National NeedleArts Association, in its 2016 Market Summary, surveyed over 15,000 individual fiber enthusiasts. They found that 98% of spinners indicated wool was their preferred fiber. And the average amount each spinner spent on spinning supplies per year was \$1,200.

- 18% of those spinners spent \$2,000 to \$4,000 or more for one year's supply of spinning materials.

- The textile-crafts-oriented publisher Interweave Press has listed 425 spinning guilds nationwide in their guild directory. Think of how many individual members might be in each guild.

Just for fun, I searched YouTube for "spinning yarn" and it returned 126,000 video titles on this topic. Choosing one, titled "How to Spin Yarn on a Spinning Wheel," I found that one video had been viewed 378,000 times.

Next, let's look at Facebook. (Keep in mind that certainly not all spinners or fiber enthusiasts use Facebook — or may not use a computer at all, for that matter — so this will only be a sample indication of interest in the broader general public.)

Facebook has individual pages, but also has groups you can join that focus on specific topics:

- I chose a group called "Fiber Artists and Yarn Spinners" and it has 24,301 members.
- Another group focused on knitting had 19,000 members.
- One group that focuses only on "Fleece and Fiber" had 2,500 individual members.

Not exactly a scientific way to come to conclusions, but effective nonetheless.

Those may seem like pretty dry statistics and pretty far removed from the daily chores and thoughts involved with shepherding our flocks. But consider:

- We are the source, the producers of wool fibers.
- We have the opportunity to produce what these fiber "addicts" seek.
- We are, in fact, the experts on our flocks (some buyers actually look to the producer to help them decide what to do with the fiber).
- We control the production, type and quality of the fleece. The more we arm ourselves with information, the more likely we are to improve our product and find outlets for our fleeces. I dare say some of us, having done that, may even begin to put a higher priority on the fiber when making breeding choices.

### YES, BUT WHO WOULD BUY MY FLEECES?

One of the most exciting and encouraging aspects to this is



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that the market demands an extremely wide variety of fibers, sometimes the more unique, the better. That means flocks should stay diverse, not trying to all move in the same direction, as that would be self-defeating.

Those seeking our fleeces range from the mainstream, more conservative or “traditional” spinners and knitters, to the more experimental, who seek to push the envelope on fiber arts. But the majority fall somewhere in between.

There are hand spinners (of course), indie dyers (independent, small-scale wool buyers who arrange to have the wool spun into yarn and then dye it themselves), felters (both dry and wet felting, needle felting and machine felting), weavers, folks who knit or crochet, those who do rug hooking, or locker hooking, or macramé, or who create wall hangings, or lampshades, or who stuff pillows and comforters and on and on.

#### WHAT'S THE POINT?

Each of these processes and artists or crafters are looking for very different individual characteristics from the wool fiber they seek. Without a general knowledge of what fiber your sheep produce — and how it is best used — you may be at a disadvantage.

Just as a cook seeks perfect ingredients for that special recipe and carefully examines the type and quality of produce at a local farmers market, fiber folks are equally discriminating when seeking wool fibers for a specific purpose.

Are you aware that the base wool used for socks is quite different than that used for hats? That fiber with great potential for use an infant’s layette is unlikely to be suitable for winter mittens?

Did you know spinners are extremely discerning about what fibers will perform well with various different spinning techniques and projects?





Different fibers take dyes differently, felt more (or less) easily, or have different amounts of lanolin. The wool's crimp and curl characteristics affect how the fiber reacts, as does the staple length, diameter and handle.

Thankfully, the saying "a rose is a rose is a rose" does not apply to wool: The wide palette of fibers produced by widely varying sheep breeds is exactly what makes our fiber so universally coveted.

### WOOL REQUIREMENTS

Durability demands a strong, perhaps longer fiber, to stand up well to abrasion. Rug wool is generally the strongest and most durable and that can include hair fibers that give extra strength to the finished product.

Some folks separate the dual-coated breeds and use the longer, stronger, less fine fibers for things like rugs, where the strength is put to good use.

There are also special ways to prepare and spin yarn for extra durability and strength. You

can imagine that you would not want to do a tremendous amount of work making a rug only to have it wear thin in spots right away.

There are specific ways to spin yarn for strength, and a strong multiply or cabled yarn is helpful here.

Socks demand durability for longevity, but spinners are a flexible bunch and will sometimes blend nylon into the fiber before spinning to give it strength.

Some of the longwools, mainly the luster longwools have a lovely lustrous fleece that falls easily into open curls or ringlets. The fiber grows quickly and tends to produce the longest staple length per year. Little to no kemp in the fibers give many longwools a lovely handle. These fibers are quite versatile. Some like to spin them to produce

a worsted type of yarn, which has a less lofty effect and provides more "drape" to the finished article. The locks of the longwool are frequently in high demand for their outstanding individual character.

Bouncy, elastic fiber (from the medium wools, and

Some of the longwools, mainly the luster longwools have a lovely lustrous fleece that falls easily into open curls or ringlets.



some longwools) is frequently used in warm woolly outerwear. These are very versatile fibers.

The more air spun into the yarn, the warmer it is. The spin used for a woolly project is typically a “woolen” spin, which is a particular technique used by spinners to actually keep as much air in the yarn as possible, giving it a round, buoyant feel. The fleeces are a bit more open than the finewools, but denser than the longwools as a general rule. They grow less length than the longwools per year, but more than the fines.

Finewools are synonymous with next-to-the-skin softness. These breeds produce a tiny, crimped-very-fine and soft fiber. The fleeces are usually very tightly packed

together and grow more slowly, producing a shorter staple length in a year’s clip. Put your hands into a lovely finewool fleece and you will immediately recognize the softness.

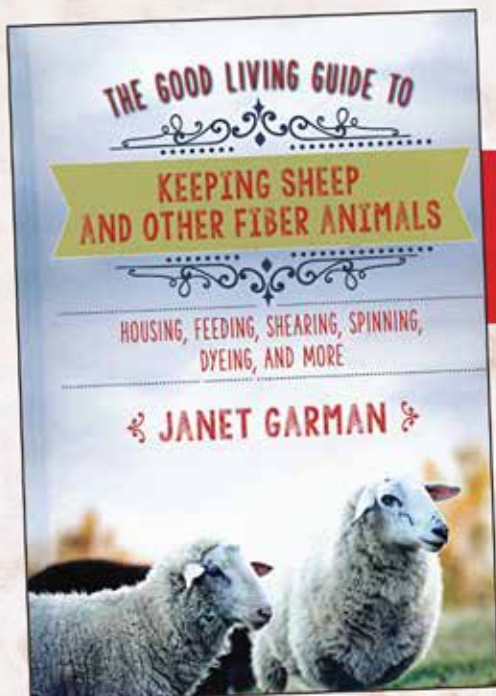
Some of the meat breeds growers may be familiar with are “Down” breeds. They also produce fiber that can be in demand. Generally, these breeds are fine-to-medium wools, but the emphasis has historically not been on the fiber they produce. That is changing in many places, and people are appreciating these fibers. Their shorter staple causes some hand spinners to have difficulty spinning them, but for those who persevere, a lovely yarn is produced.

Hearing from those who desire your fiber, learning what they may

be looking for and knowing how to discuss the attributes, gives you opportunity to step up your game.

Knowledge about what types of fibers are sought after — what purposes and the characteristics folks are seeking — can only help when looking at understanding and improving the quality of the product you produce. It also just may give you the confidence to try marketing your fiber and the tools to be successful. 🌱

**VIRGINIA SCHOLOMITI** is a sheep breeder, hand spinner and her business explores and promotes the unique textures, characteristics and value of fabulous wool fiber.



*A comprehensive and inspiring guide  
small-scale fiber farming and wool crafting.*

## The Good Living Guide to Keeping Sheep and Other Fiber Animals

By Janet Garman

Janet Garman has a small fiber flock (including Pygora fiber goats) and shares her expertise, as well as interviews, tips, and advice from fiber farmers and craftspeople across the country. In these pages, readers will learn the basics of properly raising sheep, goats, llamas, alpacas, and rabbits, with tips on selecting animals, feeding, housing, breeding, and healthcare. From there, instructions are provided for shearing,

sorting, skirting, washing, picking, carding, combing, and spinning the wool. Enthusiasts will also find recipes and instructions for natural, plant-based dyes and advice for selling your finished yarn. **160 Pages**

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# Filling Fiber Artists' Palettes

THE HIGH VALUE OF  
RAW FLEECE ROUTE

BY VIRGINIA SCHOLOMITI

**I**N LOOKING FOR MATERIALS FOR THEIR next creation, fiber artists and craftsmen seek to purchase raw fleeces to use “as is,” or to process themselves by hand. Shepherds with small flocks are producing a wonderful array of wool fibers in a palette full of colors and textures. Taking that fleece to a local wool festival to sell, or marketing it directly to customers can be difficult for the shepherd who has no experience in the world of fiber arts.

This niche market is quite different from the bulk wholesale market where wool is graded and packed up with other fibers of similar qualities and then heads out to large industrial mills.

Fiber artists judge each fleece on its individual merits and characteristics and each must stand on its own.

Here are some tips and suggestions for making sure you put your best fleeces forward to represent you and your flock.

## BREEDING FOR VALUE & DEMAND

Okay, it may be too late for you to take advantage of this first tip, but knowing your wool breed, registering your stock, and breeding to a breed standard is really the best way to get a head start on producing great fleece.

Registered breeds have standards toward which they’re bred. With wool breeds, that includes putting a priority on the characteristics of their specific fleece.

Breeds exist to reliably and consistently reproduce. Pedigree and registration help track important traits and work to make them reliably duplicate in each generation. Good breeders adhere to goals and standards set for them. There's a lot to be gained from producing a specialty product, something with superior qualities that can be reasonably reproduced and marketed to the end user. Producing fiber from a recognizable registered breed, renown for certain characteristics may come with devoted followers and consumers looking for that specific fiber.

Demand is increasing for specific high-quality wool, identified by breed, throughout the individual fiber arts community and the local markets that supply them. People are beginning to ask about the fiber and if the animal it comes from is registered with a breed association. This is understood to be a marker of superior quality and standards.

Anytime a consumer recognizes the fiber from a breed, that breed is being promoted. Your fiber will be judged against the standard for that breed, so you will want to be sure you've done your homework.

An added note — experimentation with various crosses can produce amazing individual fibers and animals that often are truly outstanding in many ways. Their fiber meets their producer's individual needs and goals, which may be used in creating their own art. And may very well develop an outside market for their own fiber.

To reach very far beyond your own needs, you must be well-versed in the fiber arts, or be working with a strong and helpful fiber arts community, so you know the specific customer demands for your product. You then need to decide exactly what fibers you want to work with and develop, not to mention years

to commit to the experiment, inconsistencies, failures, and evolution of traits within your flock. This can be a successful road for some, but difficult for others.

If you're not sure what breeds your flock comes from, you can do a bit of research to see if you can identify whether they're a fine wool, medium wool, or long wool type, or a mix. It's hard to market fiber that can't be categorized, but it's not impossible.

Meat breeds historically weren't bred with fiber as a priority, but still produce good usable fibers. Many breeds were developed as "dual-purpose" — mainly for meat and fiber.

#### ARE YOUR RAW FLEECES SALABLE?

Take a look at your newly sheared fleece to decide if it's a candidate for marketing to consumers who want a raw fleece.

As you take your fiber off the shearing floor, it's best to skirt it right away, if you can.

Skirting means removing all the short, inconsistent, contaminated, and otherwise undesirable parts of the fleece. Even if you can't give it a good heavy skirting, at least remove the really soiled stuff and the bits that are damp or heavily contaminated with vegetable

matter (VM). Shake out the second cuts, which are the short bits that come from the clippers when they go back over an already cut section. Your shearer will strive to have few if any second cuts.

**TIP:** Right after shearing, always leave your bags open for awhile, so that the fleece can breath. Store them out of direct sunlight.

Most fiber is at it's best soon after shearing. The sooner you offer it to consumers looking to purchase raw fleece to use for their fiber projects, the better. After a year's storage, fibers tend to lose some of their superior qualities. They may dry out a bit and sometimes even felt a bit.

That doesn't mean they're unusable, but you'll have lost the window of opportunity to present your fiber at its very best. There are fleeces that can be stored raw for longer periods, but in general it's best to market them while fresh.

Here are some things to check before thinking of offering your fleece for sale in its raw state.

#### VM CONTAMINATION

Sheep naturally will always have some hay or other things stuck in the fiber. For



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commercial producers, the price declines when the fiber contains about two percent or more of VM.

The individual consumer will have different tolerances, but no one will want a raw fleece that's contaminated with a lot of VM.

Some bits will fall out when you pick the fiber, card, or comb it — and also in the process of spinning it. Large pieces will have to be picked out by hand, piece by piece. Now imagine just how very tedious that is.



Fleeces contaminated with VM aren't suited to the raw fleece market. Time yourself picking out the contamination. As a skillful and swift textile crafts producer, how many hours per fleece could be profitably spent doing that?

## DISCOLORATION

Some discolorations are completely natural and will wash out, however there are some that will not.

Yolking is a term frequently used when referring to yellowish fiber. Technically, this yellowing is from lanaurin, pigment that's produced by suint glands. Much of the yolking will wash out, but sometimes not all of it.

Canary stain is caused by bacterial action in the wool and will not wash out.

**TIP:** Take a small handful of fiber and lightly wash it and if it comes clean you are good to go.



Staining can make a fleece unusable, or it may just wash out without a trace. In the latter case, growers need not scour the whole fleeces in order to reassure fiber art and hand craft buyers.

There are other stains — for instance, from urine — that affect a fleece. It's not unusual for some fiber in a fleece to retain some staining.

Put a handful of washed fiber from the fleece on the top, to show customers how it washes up, so they can see that the discoloration washes out.

## FIBER INTEGRITY

Check your fiber for tenderness and breaks. Tenderness is a problem of weakness and causes the breaking of the fiber.

Check the integrity of the fiber by picking up a small section from a lock of wool; hold it firmly and begin pulling evenly apart. You want to pull quite hard — up to seven pounds of pressure is suggested — and the fiber should not begin to break apart.

Put it up to your ear and see if you hear the crackling of stands breaking with applied pressure.

Also test the fiber by grabbing each end and snapping it. If the wool has a "break," it will break apart in one place all at once, indicating a weakness in one specific spot in the fiber. These breaks are usually due to a problem that the sheep had at a specific point in time while growing the fleece. It might be due to illness, stress, nutrition, or other environmental factors. It will not be suitable for hand use.

## STAPLE LENGTH

Some breeds, mainly the fine wools and some of the down breeds, grow a very short fleece. That's perfectly fine and standard for these breeds. However, if your staple length is under two inches, it will probably not be one that will grab the attention and adoration of a hand spinner. This does not mean the fiber is useless. It simply means that for this market, it will probably not be gobbled up. Some breeds can grow a very long fiber and it stays wonderfully intact and usable.

## FEEL & GENERAL CONDITION

Put your hands into your fleece and feel it. How a fleece feels is called its handle.

A dry or brittle fleece will feel just that, very stiff, very dry, and sort of lifeless. Overexposure to the elements, sickness, poor nutrition, or other factors may occasionally produce this sensation. Fiber artists and crafters will be handling your fleece just as it is. If it feels "generally unpleasant," you'll have few buyers.

Again, there are other purposes for this fiber, it's just not for the raw market.

## COTTING

Is your fleece cotted (matted)? This sometimes happens when fiber grows too long, or sustains



Cotted fleeces are hard for hand spinners to pull apart. Its value is lost for raw fleece sales.

too much friction from rubbing against something, or rubs inside ill fitting coats. The fibers have begun to interlock themselves together.

Cotting can also be due to genetics. Grab a hunk of your fiber and try to separate the locks or staples. Do they pull apart fairly readily or do you have to really tug and pull on them with a lot of strength. For hand spinning, fiber needs to separate easily.

**TIP:** Some felters seek out a fleece that has started to cot, they want to further full, or felt it. And they may want this fleece. So don't despair, but be sure to mention that it's partially felted when you market it.

### FIBER UNIFORMITY

Does it contain a lot of kemp or hair fibers? (Remember we are not talking here about dual-coated, or primitive breeds.) Look closely at your fiber. Does it have longer, stiff, brittle fibers that sort of stick out?

If your fleece is white, does it have individual black fibers here and there? These may be kemp or hair fibers.

They generally have a different "handle" from the rest of the fibers. They don't take dyes the same way regular fibers do. Some people will not purchase a fleece if they see kemp and hair fibers. There are sheep



Most wool breed associations strive to remove hair and kemp fibers in their fleeces.

breeds that are supposed to have hair and others that have double-coated fleeces. Again, we're not talking about these primitive or dual-coated breeds.

Wool breed fiber is generally consistent and uniform in crimp or curl. It's not hard to understand why consistency is important. But you might not realize that the inconsistent curl or crimp in a fleece will affect the final project and definitely be noticed by the person working with these fibers. The fibers not only look different but feel different and will act differently when used.

Some parts of the fleece that grow in various areas of the sheep are expected to be different from others. This is part of the reason we skirt fleece: Wool from the legs, head, and belly are quite different from the body of the sheep. The britchy fibers around the leg are frequently less curly and sometimes coarser.

It's not news to you that your sheep lie down. And of course their fiber is affected by this repeated pressure. But genetics also play a large part in the consistency of fiber and the amount of britchy wool an animal has.

You can skirt out all but the most consistent and similar parts of each fleece and offer a smaller volume with a superior consistency.

### HIGH-VALUE RAW FLEECE PRODUCTION OPTIONS

If your fleece didn't make it through your inspection, it's time to re-evaluate and decide if it's a candidate for one of the many other markets for wool.

Some people say fleece is a reflection of the health of the animal, however, there are many variables that create a great fleece. Nutrition, environment, health, ease, genetics, breeding, and several other factors allow sheep to produce the best fiber they can. Some breeds haven't been bred with an emphasis on fiber, others were created and/or have evolved to put a high priority on the type of fleece they produce.

Don't despair, there are many other uses for wool, but for today we're only focusing on the market within the craft or handiwork community of fiber artists.

The good news is you can decide whether producing a better fleece fits into the goals you have for your farm. You can begin to work now on a plan to improve your fiber, if that's a direction you want to take your flock.

The most active and supportive breed associations keep an ad presence in *Countryside*, so do the most supportive individual pure breeders and handlers of purebred stock. These breeders are often more supportive than a breed association, especially where the only associations for the breed are in foreign lands or don't exist. 🌱





# All-Natural DIY Teat Spray

BY ANN ACCETTA-SCOTT

**R**AISING GOATS NATURALLY IS QUITE simple. As the keeper of all things naughty, a herd of goats, I spend hours rotating pasture fencing in order to allow them to forage. Some of us may go as far as adding raw apple cider vinegar to their water, provide herbs such as garlic and cayenne to their grains, and even ferment grains. With that said, making a natural DIY teat spray is classified as normal and falls in line for raising goats naturally.

## WHY A TEAT AND UDDER WASH IS NECESSARY

I'm not sure why you decided to raise goats, but for me, it's about the milk they provide. With milking goats comes the need to have a good udder and teat spray on hand. Preferably one which does not contain bleach or any other harsh chemicals.

With keeping goats, it is common knowledge that they are not particular about where they lie or what they are lying on. In order to prevent dirt, grass, or even poop from getting into the milk bucket, take the time to clean the udder and teats well before and after milking. Trust me, you want only milk in your bucket, not hay, grains, dirt, or even waste. Aside from cleaning the udder and teats prior to milking, it is imperative to wash the teats after milking, too.

Goat mastitis, an inflammation of the mammary glands, occurs when bacteria gains access to the

udder through the teat canal (teat orifices). Mastitis is generally caused by bacteria, however, there are other reasons that can cause it:

- Various viruses.
- Fungi.
- Other micro-organisms.
- Injury to the teats or udder.
- And even stress.

In order to prevent mastitis in milking goats, be sure to spray the teats after milking. Not only does the natural teat spray sanitize the area, it helps to close the teat orifices, minimizing the risk of any bacteria from reaching the udder.

### SIGNS OF MASTITIS

Even with the best preventative care mastitis can happen. Early indications are:

- Decrease in milk yield.
- The milk texture, color, and taste are off. Meaning different than what is normally received.
- Lameness.
- Swollen teats or extremely swollen udder.
- Teats hot or painful to the touch.
- Refusal of feed.
- Doe runs a fever.
- Refusal to allow kid to nurse.
- And the doe can even appear depressed.

Severe cases can result in death. Signs to watch for:

**Blue Bag** — The skin of the udder becomes cool to the touch, swollen, and may become reddish in color. Eventually the udder will turn bluish in color, releasing a watery or bloody discharge.

**Hard Udder** — This condition is much harder to detect and is generally discovered too late. Unfortunately, there are no visible conditions when a doe has hard udder, and the only sign is a reduction in milk supply or no milk at all. At this point, the doe is often culled unless it is a pet.

### HOW TO PREVENT MASTITIS

In addition to cleanliness, there are other steps which can be taken to help prevent mastitis.

- Keep birthing pen, pens, holding areas clean. Bedding needs to be kept dry. Ensure proper drainage around goat housing.
- Use good milking techniques.
- Wean kids slowly to prevent stress on the udder.

### THE BENEFITS OF USING NATURAL INGREDIENTS

Aside from a natural teat spray being better for goats, it is also safe to have around small children and other animals. The ingredients which make up this all-natural solution are a powerhouse of natural items that will not only

clean the teats; they help to prevent issues such as mastitis.

**Essential oils** — All oils mentioned are gentle enough to apply to the skin. Each oil contains antibacterial, antiseptic, and antimicrobial qualities. Lavender essential oil also soothes the skin while providing a calming effect.

**Castile soap** — Castile soap is a gentle soap and ideal to use for washing the udder and teats.

**Colloidal silver** — Silver, once broken down into microscopic particles, is one of the strongest metals available. Silver has antibacterial, antiseptic, and antimicrobial agents. Colloidal silver can easily be brewed at home or purchased online or at many locations which sell vitamin supplements.

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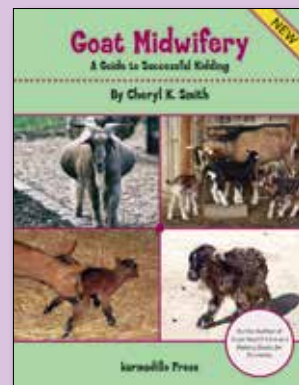


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**TEA TREE***essential oil**Lavender*  
*essential oil**Rosemary**Rosemary oil***ALL-NATURAL DIY TEAT SPRAY**

Because you will go through this natural teat spray quickly, there is no need to add a preservative. An essential oil mixed with colloidal silver or distilled water will last up to one week without a preservative. If you're iffy as to whether you will use up the DIY teat spray within one week, a preservative should be added. Grain alcohol (120 to 190 proof) and glycerin act as a preservative with mixtures containing essential oils.

**INGREDIENTS**

Essential oils

- Lavender 15 drops
- Melaleuca (tea tree) 5 drops
- Rosemary 10 drops

Castile soap, 3 tablespoons

Colloidal silver or distilled water, fill bottle

Grain alcohol (120 to 190 proof), optional preserving agent

**EQUIPMENT**

Amber spray bottle, 32 ounces

Colloidal silver kit, optional

**MIXING INSTRUCTIONS**

Add essential oils and Castile soap to spray bottle.

Fill amber spray bottle with colloidal silver or distilled water.

Gently shake the bottle to mix the ingredients.

**HOW TO USE A NATURAL TEAT SPRAY**

Using a warm wet washcloth, thoroughly wipe down udder and teats. Rinse the washcloth and repeat until the area is cleaned.

Generously spray the teats and udder area with this natural teat spray.

Using a clean, wet washcloth, wipe the teats once again.

After milking, spray the teats generously one final time with the natural teat spray.

Cleanliness, plus a good natural DIY teat spray reduces the risk of does contracting goat mastitis. Take your time during milking, and do not speed through the process. A healthy, happy doe will keep you in milk for years to come; treat her well! 🌿

ANN ACCETTA-SCOTT homesteads on two acres in Washington State, raising poultry, goats, and rabbits. She is an educator and encourager of all who are seeking to live a more sustainable lifestyle. Ann is also the face behind the website *A Farm Girl in the Making* and author of *The Farm Girl's Guide to Preserving the Harvest*.

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Ginger root is key to making ginger beer. It contains anti-inflammatory benefits, along with minerals and, of course, compounds that help quell nausea and soothe the tummy.

## Make Your Own HEALTHY, REFRESHING GINGER BEER

BY RITA HEIKENFELD

**W**HEN WE WERE KIDS AND would complain about a stomachache, Mom would give us a glass of ginger ale to help stop the rumblings and pain.

Fast-forward to today, and ginger beverages have grown up and become quite trendy. Ginger beer is at the top of the list. Not only is ginger beer refreshing, it's much healthier than most carbonated drinks. Why? It's all about the root, which is actually a rhizome. Ginger root is key to making ginger beer. It contains anti-inflammatory benefits, along with minerals and, of course, compounds that help quell nausea and soothe the tummy.

The bonus here is you can make your own ginger beer at home. It takes a few ingredients and only one day to ferment to develop a flavorful drink, teeming with good probiotics.

Ginger beer is not a real beer, since it contains no grain. But because ginger beer uses yeast in the quick fermenting process, we call it a "beer." The alcohol content is so minimal that the FDA classifies it as non-alcoholic.

Naturally fizzy with a sweet and spicy bite, the original recipes I found called for wine/champagne yeast. I didn't have any, so I used regular bread yeast. The second time I splurged and bought wine yeast and used that. Guess what? The ginger beer made with wine yeast had a more refined flavor, but both worked great. I hope you try this recipe!

## GINGER BEER

I used 1½ cups sugar, since as it ferments, it becomes less sweet.

### INGREDIENTS

8 oz. fresh ginger or frozen root, thawed, peeled a bit, and coarsely chopped  
7-8 cups water  
1 to 1½ cups sugar  
1 tablespoon molasses, honey, or maple syrup  
¼ to ½ cup fresh lemon juice or more to taste  
¼ teaspoon (I used a heaping ¼ teaspoon) wine or regular active dry bread yeast  
1 container with enough space for fermentation, covered

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a blender, pulse ginger with 1 quart water until roughly puréed.
2. Combine ginger water, 3 to 4 more cups water, sugar, and molasses in pot over medium heat. Cook and stir until sugar dissolves completely.
3. Remove from heat and let cool to slightly warmer than room temperature.
4. Stir in lemon juice to taste.
5. Line a funnel with coffee filters (3) or double cheesecloth to strain liquid into container. Press on solids. I used a big glass jar. A big plastic soda bottle works, too. There should be 3” or so of space left on top for fermentation.
6. Sprinkle yeast on top of liquid. Give it a good couple of stirs.
7. Cover with lid. Position it so a tiny bit of air can come in. (The original recipe said to seal tight, but I was afraid of jar bursting.)
8. Let ferment/sit at room temperature for 12 hours or so. Mine sat a full 24. The longer it ferments, the more “beery/yeasty” it tastes.
9. After fermenting, pour into bottles, leaving air space at the top, seal and store in refrigerator. I don’t seal mine real tight.
10. Drink within two weeks. Can be used as a base for cocktails. 🍷

**RITA HEIKENFELD** comes from a family of wise women in tune with nature. She is a certified modern herbalist, culinary educator, author, and national media personality. Most important, she is a wife, mom, and grandma. Rita lives on a little patch of heaven overlooking the East Fork River in Clermont County, Ohio. She is a former adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati, where she developed a comprehensive herbal course.

abouteating.com column: rita@communitypress.com



### HOW TO CHOOSE THE BEST GINGER ROOT

Pick firm, plump root. Break off what you want if the root is large.

Freeze root up to six months.

#### What are those little “bumps” on ginger root?

When you see bumps/eyes/swellings on ginger root, that means it’s starting to sprout. Pot up the root a couple of inches in good soil, with bumps pointing up. Water well. Grow in sunny window or outdoors in dappled sun. Be patient. Eventually, lance-like leaves will grow from the root. Makes a lovely houseplant. Yes, you can harvest the new roots that form!

### GINGER BEER TIPS

#### Ginger ale vs ginger beer:

Ginger ale is a carbonated beverage. Ginger beer is fermented.

#### Wine yeast vs bread yeast:

##### What’s the difference?

Wine yeast has a very high alcohol tolerance, while bread yeast has a lower tolerance, which makes bread yeast just fine for ginger beer.





# Corn Cob Jelly

## Waste Not, Want Not

BY RITA HEIKENFELD

The interesting thing to note here is the jelly doesn't taste like corn. It has a lovely, honey-like flavor with citrus overtones.

**T**RUTH BE TOLD, LIKE MANY OF you, I'm pretty frugal when it comes to repurposing food at our house. That's why "waste not, want not" just took on new meaning this year: repurposing corn cobs into jelly.

Okay, I get that some of you are chuckling right now. Sounds a bit weird, but trust me, you'll be happy with the results. The interesting thing to note here is the jelly doesn't taste like corn. It has a lovely, honey-like flavor with citrus overtones. It is delicious on toast, scones, bagels, and muffins. Try it warmed and poured over waffles.

So, whether you grow your own corn like we do, or purchase it from a farmers market or grocery, save the cobs and make this beautiful, unusual (and dare I say "gourmet?") jelly!

We use the cobs from our silver queen corn for making jelly which produce a light-yellow jelly. Depending upon the variety of corn you use, your jelly will cook up anywhere from pale yellow to light orange.

### CORN COB JELLY

**Yield:** 4 jars jelly, 8 oz. each.

If a few kernels are left on the cob, no worries. They won't affect the flavor of the jelly. You first make an infusion by boiling the cobs, then you make the jelly with the strained juice from the infusion.

#### INGREDIENTS FOR INFUSION:

1 dozen or so fresh corn cobs  
Enough water to cover (about 2 quarts)

#### FOR JELLY:

3 cups strained juice from cobs  
1 package (1.75 oz) powdered pectin  
3 tablespoons lemon juice  
3 cups granulated sugar

#### INSTRUCTIONS

##### To make infusion:

1. Rinse cobs and if necessary, cut to fit in a large stockpot.
2. Add water, enough to cover.
3. Bring to a boil over medium heat. Reduce heat to a very gentle boil and cook cobs for about 20 minutes or so. You'll see the water getting milky looking.
4. Remove cobs from liquid.
5. Strain liquid through a fine sieve or cheesecloth to remove particles. Do not press or squeeze — that produces a cloudy jelly. You may have to do this twice.



After kernels are removed, cook cobs for about 20 minutes or so.



**To make jelly:**

- 1.** I wash my jars in the dishwasher. Hand washing is fine. Just be sure to keep jars hot.
- 2.** Keep lids and seals in hot, not boiling, water.
- 3.** Measure out three cups juice. (If necessary, add water to make three cups.)
- 4.** Place in a large stockpot.
- 5.** Stir in the pectin and lemon juice over high heat. Bring to a boil, stirring constantly.
- 6.** Pour in sugar all at once, and bring mixture back to a full rolling boil, stirring constantly. A full boil is one that cannot be stirred down. Boil for one minute.
- 7.** Skim any foam off the top as quick as you can.
- 8.** Pour hot jelly immediately into clean, hot jars. Fill to the bottom rim at the top of the jar, leaving about ¼" or so headspace.
- 9.** Wipe rims with a clean, moist paper towel. Adjust 2-piece metal

canning seals and rings snugly on jars.

- 10.** Process in hot water bath for five minutes. (See instructions below.)
- 11.** Remove and let cool. As they cool, listen for a "pop" which signifies a proper seal. Store in pantry up to one year.

**HOW TO PROCESS JELLY IN A WATER BATH:**

This jelly does not have to be pressure canned since it is a high acid food.

- 1.** I use a canner, but any large pot will work as long as you can secure the filled jelly jars in the pot. Some folks place a towel in the bottom of the pot and use scrunched up foil to keep the jars separated and secure.
- 2.** Bring the pot of water to a boil. Place jars in rack or secure as necessary.
- 3.** Boil five minutes, then remove and let cool away from drafts. 🌱



**TIP:**  
**Jars not sealing?**  
 No worries, just store in the refrigerator and use within one month.



# Old-Fashioned CHRISTMAS GOODIES

BY KRISTI COOK

One of my favorite Christmas traditions is the enjoyment of all of the once-a-year Christmas goodies that everyone makes. I do believe I enjoy these treats more than the Christmas dinner. Here's our family's favorite old-fashioned Christmas treats for you to enjoy as well. Feel free to experiment with these recipes to create your own special touch. And here's a little tip — these make the perfect Valentine's gifts too!

## Old-Fashioned Peppermint Patties

Yield: 48-75 patties

### INGREDIENTS

1 cup baked potato, peeled and mashed well  
2 tablespoons butter, melted  
1-2 teaspoons peppermint extract (or other flavor)  
10-12 cups powdered sugar  
1-2 packages chocolate almond bark or 3 bags semi-sweet or dark chocolate chips  
4 tablespoons shortening if using chips  
Several drops of food coloring, optional

**NOTE:** While the potato seems a bit odd in a candy recipe, it really works

to hold the mixture together with zero potato flavor in the final product — I promise. Just make certain the potato is mashed as smoothly as possible; use a ricer if you have one. You can also place the potato in a food processor and acquire a fairly smooth feel. Do not add milk or water if possible, as this creates a softer patty that tends to melt when dipping into the chocolate mixture if insufficient drying time is provided after flattening the patties out.

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a large bowl or standing mixer, combine cooled, mashed baked potato, butter, and peppermint extract until well blended. If food coloring is desired, add to this mixture.
2. Gradually add powdered sugar, one cup at a time until a smooth, workable dough is formed. You want the mixture to be firm enough to hold a ball shape similar to peanut butter cookie dough but not so stiff that it cracks. Depending on the dryness of the sugar and baked potato, you may need to add more or less powdered sugar than indicated.
3. Once dough is firm enough to work, roll two to three teaspoons of dough into a ball. Set balls onto parchment or waxed paper and gently flatten with sugar-coated fingers or a cold spoon. I like to make little hearts out of mine, but the more traditional rounded patty is perfect, too! Allow flattened patties to rest at room temperature for several hours, preferably overnight. This resting period allows excess moisture to dissipate, creating a firmer patty that holds up well to dipping into warm chocolate.
4. If using almond bark, melt as directed on the label. When using chips, combine chips and shortening in microwave safe bowl or in a double boiler. Heat until completely melted and of a smooth consistency. Do not over-heat.
5. Once melted, remove chocolate from heat. Dip individual patties into the chocolate using a fork, tongs, fondue skewers, or other method to allow the patties to be completely submerged in the chocolate. Set patties back onto parchment paper and allow to cool.
6. For less mess when coating the patties, quickly spoon chocolate over patties while they rest on the parchment paper. Allow to dry, then flip, repeating on the other side. (I've used both methods and have been pleased with the results both ways.)



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## Creamy DIY Caramels

Yield: about 32-48

### INGREDIENTS

1 cup unsalted butter  
 1 pound brown sugar  
 14 oz. can sweetened condensed milk  
 1 cup light corn syrup  
 1/8 teaspoon salt

**NOTE:** *This recipe readily adapts to both the hard ball stage needed for wrapped candies and the soft ball stage needed for pecan turtles, candied apples, caramel coated pretzels and the like. It all boils down to the temperature and how long you cook the caramel.*

### INSTRUCTIONS

**1.** In a large saucepan, combine butter, brown sugar, condensed milk, corn syrup, and milk over medium heat. Stir continuously, making sure to not incorporate air into the mixture.



**2.** For wrapped caramels that will hold their shape, bring mixture to a boil and heat to 248 degrees F and cook for two minutes until reaching the hard ball stage. If using this recipe for pecan turtles, candied apples, or other recipes that require a soft ball stage caramel, heat mixture to 235 degrees F and cook for two minutes, or to the soft ball stage.

**3.** Butter the bottom only of a 9x13 glass baking pan. Pour cooked caramel mixture into buttered pan. Allow to completely cool at room temperature. Remove from pan. Cut into squares and wrap, or roll into small balls to be flattened over turtles, pretzels, or other candies.

## Chocolate Covered Turtles

Yield: about 40

3 ounces butter, melted  
 6-10 ounces pecan halves, or about 150 halves  
 1 teaspoon salt  
 1 creamy DIY caramel recipe  
 1 package chocolate almond bark or 2 packages semi-sweet chocolate chips  
 2 tablespoons shortening

### INSTRUCTIONS

**1.** Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Combine pecan halves, butter, and salt and place on baking sheet. Roast in oven for five minutes, or until they begin to smell roasted. Stir every two minutes to evenly roast pecans. Remove from oven and allow to cool slightly.

**2.** On parchment or waxed paper, arrange three pecan halves into a three-sided star shape. Take a ball of caramel and gently warm in your hands to create a flattened patty. Place caramel onto the top of the pecan stars and press gently to adhere the caramel to the nuts.

**3.** Once all the pecan/caramel stars have been made, heat chocolate almond bark according to directions. If using chocolate chips, heat chips and shortening in a double boiler or in the microwave. Heat chocolate until smooth.

**4.** Working quickly, spoon chocolate over the tops of caramel/pecan stars. Allow to cool. If you'd like chocolate on the bottom sides, flip when cooled and repeat the process. 🍫

# A HOLIDAY GIFT BASKET

*Filled with  
Home - Canned &  
Homemade Goods*

BY ANN ACCETTA-SCOTT

**G**IFT GIVING CAN quickly and easily squash the joy out of the holiday season.

Homemade items went to the wayside, whereas mindless gifts became quite popular.

Homemade gifts, gifts from the heart, are much more valued than many realize. And in truth, a holiday gift basket can be put together in minutes.

## DIY GIFT-GIVING IDEAS

There are a plethora of ideas which can be made for the special people in your life. However, the saying, "The way to the heart is through the stomach," is a very true statement. Making food gifts is quite special to many.

Gifting home canned goods does not necessarily take advanced preparation, but planning ahead will prevent you from using jars of food which were meant to feed your family throughout the year.

## PLAN AHEAD

Throughout the year as you're putting up preserves, salsas, or pickled goods, plan on canning extra for gifting during the holiday season. Do not overexert yourself, select two to three favorite items to can more of.

Also, do not be ashamed to use canned goods

from the previous season. The peak of freshness for home canned food is 18 months, which means many preserves, pickled goods, and salsas made the year before are ideal to gift.

## LAST-MINUTE HOMEMADE FOOD GIFT IDEAS

Regardless of how much planning was made, there will always be last minute gifts which will need to be put together.

A seasoning mix made from dried garden herbs is quick to make. Fresh eggs from your flock are always a win. Also, for those who do not can foods, a delicious freezer jam is both easy and delicious.

## OTHER HOMEMADE GIFTS

A holiday gift basket containing jars of home-preserved goods tends to have quite a bit of space within the basket. Basket fillers such as homemade soap, candles, and reusable dish sponges will help to fill any holes in the basket.

Melt and pour soaps, homemade candles in canning jars, and reusable dish sponges take only minutes to make. Not to mention, they are extremely easy to make once you have the necessary supplies on hand.

## RECIPE SHARING

One of the most incredible items to add to a holiday gift basket are family recipes. Not only does this encourage individuals back into the kitchen, it allows the recipient to make the recipe all year long and they will think of you each time.





For the individual who cans food, good fruit butter, salsa, marmalade, jelly, or jam recipes are ideal. However, a delicious freezer jam recipe works great for those who do not preserve foods.

Another great recipe idea would include items which need to be refrigerated, making them not ideal for putting in the basket but can be added at the last minute. For example, my homemade Irish cream liquor. This homemade adult beverage is not only a hit

during the holiday season, but can be enjoyed all year long.

### PUTTING TOGETHER THE HOLIDAY GIFT BASKET

Giftng a basket filled with homemade goods is a true indication that the gift was given from the heart.

In order to assemble the basket, you'll need to make a trip to your local thrift store. Gift bags and boxes create waste, whereas a basket can be used throughout

the year. Look for a basket which can be used in the garden, at the market, or used for storing.

While thrifting, look for linen or basic linen pieces. Linen or cotton napkins, tea towels, and dish towels are great for lining the holiday gift basket, and they can be used after the basket is disassembled.

Make easy jar labels using recycled brown bags from the market. Though this is not necessary, it does add a nice touch to jars.

## FROM MY KITCHEN TO YOURS

Of all the items I preserve yearly, candied jalapeños is the most popular item in my pantry. I make it a rule to not ask individuals what they'd like for a gift, yet I seem to receive requests for jars of candied jalapeños, which is also known as cowboy candy. This sweet and mildly spicy treat partners well with brats, burgers, and salads. Not to mention, the candied peppers can be diced and added to deviled eggs and potato salad to create a delicious, unique flavor.

Ideally, freshly harvested jalapeño peppers are used to create this home canned item. But since these peppers can be found at your local market year round, this recipe ranks number one on the edible gifts list.

### Candied Jalapeño Peppers (aka Cowboy Candy)

#### INGREDIENTS

- 3 pounds fresh jalapeño peppers
- 2 cups apple cider vinegar (5% acidity)
- 6 cups organic granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon turmeric powder
- ½ teaspoon celery seed
- 3 teaspoons granulated garlic



#### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Wearing gloves to protect your hands from oils, slice jalapeño peppers into ¼-inch rounds, set aside. A mandolin will assist in creating even slices.
2. In a large non-reactive stockpot, bring to boil apple cider vinegar, sugar, turmeric powder, celery seed, and garlic.
3. Reduce heat and simmer for five minutes. Add jalapeño peppers and allow to simmer for an additional five minutes.
4. Using a slotted spoon, scoop jalapeño peppers into half-pint jars.
5. Bring the remaining brine to a hard boil for another five minutes.
6. Leaving a ¼-inch headspace, add hot brine to the jars.
7. Using an air bubble remover, remove air bubbles and wipe jar rims. Add warmed lids and rings.
8. Process jars in a hot water bath or steam canner for 15 minutes. Adjust the processing time for altitudes above 1,001 feet in elevation.

Additional recipes for home-canned goods can be found on my website, [afarmgirlinthemaking.com](http://afarmgirlinthemaking.com), including my recipe for homemade Irish cream liquor. 🍷



## Quick 'n' Squeaky Curds

EXCERPTED FROM *HOMEMADE YOGURT & KEFIR* BY GIANACLIS CALDWELL. PHOTOGRAPHY BY (C) CARMENTROUSSER.  
USED WITH PERMISSION FROM STOREY PUBLISHING.

**F**RESH, SQUEAKY CHEDDAR curds are one of the most fun cheesy things to eat. Traditional recipes, however, take most of the day to make. I came up with this recipe as a way to shave off a few hours and still have great results. I use yogurt and adore the fresh, unique flavor and the texture. Try your fresh curds plain, with pesto, with caramelized garlic, or even as poutine.

### Quick 'n' Squeaky Curds

Makes about ¼ pound.

#### INGREDIENTS

1 gallon whole milk  
1 cup fresh yogurt or kefir  
1 teaspoon salt  
⅓ teaspoon calcium chloride diluted in 2 tablespoons cool water (optional; suggested for store-bought, homogenized milk)  
¼ teaspoon double-strength or ½ teaspoon single-strength rennet diluted just before use in ⅓ cup cool, nonchlorinated water

#### INSTRUCTIONS

**1.** Pour the milk into a large pot, and place that pot inside a larger pot. Fill the larger pot with enough

water to come up the sides of the inner pot. Set over low to medium heat and warm the milk to 95 degrees F (35 degrees C).

**2.** Combine the yogurt or kefir with 1 cup of the warm milk in a small bowl and whisk together, then add the mixture to the rest of the milk. It's okay if the milk cools to 93 degrees F or so. Stir in the diluted calcium chloride, if using.

**3.** Hold a slotted spoon or cheese ladle over the milk and pour the diluted rennet through the spoon into the milk (the spoon helps disperse it). Then use the ladle to stir the milk with five up-and-down strokes. Hold the ladle to the top of the milk in several spots to help still the milk.

**4.** Cover the milk and let sit undisturbed, maintaining the temperature between 93 degrees F and 95 degrees F until it coagulates, 30 to 45 minutes. Test the curd for a clean break. Note: If it cools off during this phase, don't try to rewarm it until step 9.

**5.** Using a long knife, cut the curd mass into ⅜- to ¼-inch columns, then with your blade at an angle, make a few horizontal cuts

about ⅜-inch apart through the columns. Let rest for 5 minutes.

**6.** Maintaining the temperature at 95 degrees F, stir the curds very gently for 5 minutes. Then warm the curds to 110 degrees F by increasing the heat very slowly over 30 minutes.

**7.** Line a colander with cheesecloth and place over a bowl. Heat a pot of water to about 120 degrees F.

**8.** Pour the curds into the colander and tie the cloth in a bundle. Set the colander and bundle over the pot of warm water to help keep the curds between 102 degrees F and 105 degrees F. Cover the pot with a lid if needed. Let sit for 15 minutes.

**9.** Open the bundle and cut the curd ball in half. Line the colander with the cheesecloth. Stack the curd halves on top of each other and place back in the cloth-lined colander. Fill a plastic ziplock bag with 110 degrees F hot water and set on top of the curds. This helps keep the curd slabs warm and create the desired texture. Let sit for 15 minutes.

**10.** Uncover and rotate the two curd slabs and re-cover with the bag of hot water. Let sit for 15 minutes longer. Repeat rotating and warming the curd slabs until they have the texture of cooked chicken breast, about 1 hour.

**11.** Cut the slabs into pieces that are ½ to 1 inch by ¼ to ½ inch.

**12.** Set the colander over the pot of hot water. Place the curd pieces in the colander and sprinkle with ½ teaspoon of the salt. Stir, then cover with the hot water bag, rewarming as needed, and let sit for 5 minutes. This step is called mellowing.

**13.** Repeat the salting and mellowing one more time. Eat the curds right away, or refrigerate for up to three weeks, but they lose their squeakiness within the first day. 🌱



# A DIY Cheese Press Plan

BY KATE JOHNSON



## Are You Ready to Make Cheese Curds and Pressed Cheeses?

**T**HIS HOMEMADE CHEESE PRESS PLAN will get you off to a great start when you're ready to tackle pressed cheeses with your milk.

Like most dairy goat owners, when I first began making goat cheese, I started with chèvre — the classic soft goat cheese. I made a lot of chèvre. I'd flavor it different ways, from adding chopped Kalamata olives into the cheese, to rolling the chèvre into a log and coating it with fresh herbs, to adding honey for a sweet and tangy treat. And at the end of each milking season, I'd make a bunch of chèvre and freeze it so that my family could enjoy delicious goat cheese all winter long. Eventually, I got sick of it!

So then I learned to make mozzarella. And ricotta. And fromage blanc and cottage cheese and several other soft, fresh cheeses. These were delicious but I yearned for more. I was ready to make pressed and aged cheeses. I'd always heard that soft cheeses were easy and hard cheeses were hard, so I was a little intimidated to get started. Of course, hard cheeses aren't really all that hard to make, but they are a bit more involved and require more planning, preparation, and time. I had to decide what cheese to make and where to get the cheesemaking supplies, most notably, a decent, affordable cheese press. I was also unsure about how to make a DIY cheese cave. I

found good supplies online but it seemed that many of the presses available were quite expensive, up to \$275! Boy, I'd have to make a lot of cheese to justify that expense. I found a number of homemade cheese press plans online so I started with one of them.

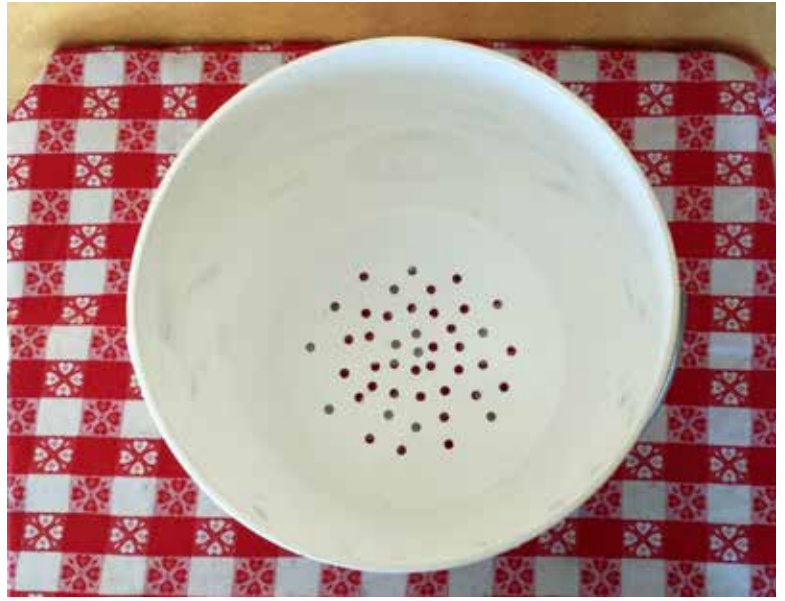
The first press I built required purchasing two heavy, quality wooden cutting boards (not exactly cheap) and then drilling big holes in each corner for a set of four

wooden rods that connected the two boards. The idea was to put the cheese curds in their form on the first cutting board, and then top that with the second board with a bunch of free weights on top for pressure. This sounded doable; my husband had an old set of metal weights in our home exercise room. I

I learned that I could have made a press that would work just as well, if not better, without spending a dime.

bought supplies, made the press, made my cheese curds, loaded them into the form, put the weights on top, and waited. Within just a few minutes, the curds shifted as they released whey, and the weights shifted to one side and promptly slid onto the kitchen floor. It made a huge racket and left two giant, black skid marks on my linoleum floor that remained until the day we put in new kitchen flooring. At least no one's foot was down there!

Feeling that was a major failure, I decided that following a homemade cheese press plan might not



be for me and that maybe I needed to just buy a press. I settled for one that I found on eBay for about \$50. It had springs and a screw that you'd tighten to create the pressure for the cheese. It was anyone's guess exactly how much to tighten the screw to get the desired pressure, but at least it all stayed in one piece and didn't damage my house!

Eventually my husband felt sorry for me (or grew impatient waiting for the perfect pressed cheese) and he bought me that expensive press I had seen online. I loved it and it worked well. But I learned a few years later, when taking a three-day cheesemaking course from Linda and Larry Faillace from Vermont, that I could have made a press that would work just as well, if not better, without spending a dime. So that's what I did and I'm here to show you how.

### INTRODUCING, THE BUCKET PRESS!

This is the best homemade cheese press plan I've seen and the concept is so simple I almost felt silly when I first learned it (like how I felt when I made my first batch of chèvre). Here's how it works:

1. Go to a local bakery or deli and ask if they have any three-to-five-gallon food grade buckets that they're getting ready to throw away. They're usually happy to have you recycle them. You'll need either two or three buckets of the same size. (Note: if you can't find free buckets, they are inexpensive from a restaurant supply store.)

**TOP LEFT:** A three- to five- gallon bucket makes a perfect cheese press. You will need two or three of the same size.

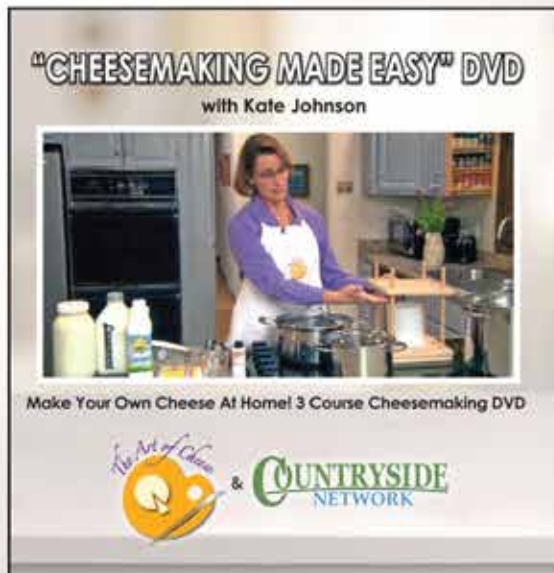
**TOP RIGHT:** Drill holes in the bottom of one bucket.

**BOTTOM RIGHT:** Mark the bucket with a permanent marker.



# Cheesemaking Made Easy DVD

*Make Your Own Cheese at Home*



BY KATE JOHNSON

Making cheese at home does not have to be complicated or difficult. Let Kate Johnson, award-winning cheesemaker and “cheese coach,” show you how to use basic ingredients to make a wide variety of cheese in your own kitchen. There are 3 videos to help you achieve immediate success as well as build the skills that will allow you to further refine the craft of artisan cheesemaking. Each course will explain the ingredients, tools, and science involved so you’re not just following a recipe, but truly understanding the methods and reasons behind them.

[iamcountryside.com/shop](http://iamcountryside.com/shop)

2. Drill holes in the bottom of one bucket with a power drill. The more holes the better, but not so many that you compromise the strength of the bucket base.

3. Fill a gallon jug with water. Pour that into the other bucket, and then mark the water line with a permanent marker. Label that line “8 pounds.” Do that again, and label the next water line with a “16.” If your buckets are big enough, do it one more time and mark that line with a “24.” Now you can go back and fill in a few lines at the half way points to represent 4, 12, and 20 pounds (or you can estimate where 5, 10, and 15 would be as shown in the picture).

4. That’s it! You have a homemade cheese press that will accommodate at least 15-20 pounds of pressure. (You can always use additional weights to make it heavier or skip the water and just place weights inside the bucket.)

## HOW TO USE

If you only have two buckets, place the one with the holes directly into your kitchen sink. (Be sure it’s a very clean, disinfected sink.) If you have three buckets, place the one with holes into one without holes and the bottom bucket will serve as your sink.

Put your cheese form into the bucket with the holes, put a piece of cheesecloth into it, and then scoop your curds into the form and put the follower on top. If needed, put a can on top of the follower to give you something to rest weight on.

Put the remaining bucket, with the appropriate amount of water or weight, right into that bucket and on top of the follower. You may need to put a kitchen towel or pot holder in between the buckets to keep the top bucket from wobbling, especially at first when the curds are still full of whey.

Now all you do is wait! Your cheese is being pressed and the weight will follow the curds as they release the whey. Expelled whey will drip through the holes into the lower bucket or sink.

Pretty nifty, huh? The best homemade cheese press plan ever! Now figure out what recipe to start. Good pressed cheeses to start with are Colby, Monterey Jack, and some farmhouse cheddars. (I’ve had varying successes with the latter; not all recipes yield the same results.) 🧀

**KATE JOHNSON** runs a cheesemaking school in Longmont, Colorado where she and her family also raise Nubian and Nigerian Dwarf dairy goats. Visit [www.theartofcheese.com](http://www.theartofcheese.com) or email her at [kate@theartofcheese.com](mailto:kate@theartofcheese.com)

To learn how to make cheese in the comfort of your own home, check out her *Cheesemaking Made Easy* DVD at [iamcountryside.com/shop/cheese-making-dvd](http://iamcountryside.com/shop/cheese-making-dvd).



# Laws and Considerations for Selling Homemade Food

BY MARISSA AMES

**M**ELISSA'S DREAMS FINALLY FELT within reach. Then she received a cease-and-desist order.

"When I was a kid, my dad introduced me to the all-glorious doughnut," narrates Melissa Derby of Fallon, Nevada. He would bring home a raised chocolate bar, which Melissa shared with her brother and sister. "My love of that perfect treat grew from there.

"Fast forward to the fall of 2019. I desperately wanted an apple cider doughnut but there wasn't anywhere close that sold them." Fallon, in fact, didn't have any doughnut bakeries except for their two supermarkets. And neither of them sold the type Melissa wanted. So, she made them herself. Her parents visited said the doughnuts were good enough to sell. "That was a lightbulb moment. Once I realized that this was turning into a serious business, I knew I needed to make sure I was conducting it correctly. I went onto the Nevada State site and applied for a Cottage License. A few weeks after applying I received an email letting me know I had been accepted and that I was good to conduct business. I posted on my business page about the great news and the orders came rolling in!"

Melissa did everything right according to

Nevada's Cottage Food laws: She only made recipes with approved ingredients, she made the sales in person, and she didn't market in retail stores.

"About a week after, I got a letter from the Churchill County Planning Department letting me know that they were aware that I was conducting business but there was no record of Derby's Donuts and I needed to contact them immediately. I was so confused because I thought that applying for the Cottage License meant that I was good to go."

In addition to her Cottage Foods License, she needed to be licensed with both the county and the state, needed to apply for a Tax ID number, and even needed an additional permit if she wanted customers to pick up their doughnuts at her home. Without that last permit, she was restricted to event venues and deliveries.

"I have four children and a giant van so delivering for everyone unfortunately just isn't in the cards!"

While conducting business under the radar might be feasible in some areas, it wasn't so in Churchill County. Word travels in small towns. "My biggest concern is that I didn't want anyone to think I was conducting business in any manner other than what was appropriate."



Melissa had to stop selling until she acquired those additional licenses, which totaled over \$300 even with a cottage food exemption. Since most cottage food businesses are owned by lower-income individuals living in rural areas, and the majority of them are mothers or grandmothers who are also raising children, that \$300 isn't just sitting in the bank. Friends jumped into action and started a fundraiser. Within 24 hours, they had raised almost \$1,000. Melissa purchased her licenses then used the remainder of the funds to gear up for her first event.

Per small towns, word again traveled fast. Melissa updated on her business page: "So I got a very encouraging phone call this morning! The county knows I wasn't trying to do business the wrong way and they are appreciative I'm getting everything taken care of." Melissa was again free to sell doughnuts.

While Melissa's story represents a swift resolution to crashing dreams, it ended better than that of many home bakers seeking to sell their products for a little cash.

### WHY SO STRICT?

Cottage food is a strictly regulated industry, and laws vary state by state.

Like raw milk laws, cottage food regulations have a solid reason: the customer deserves to know if the food they're buying can make them sick. But, also like raw milk laws, some states and their legislators are more open to the individual details.

Roadside stands, bake sales, and cookies at craft fairs used to be commonplace. But laws tightened up, either mandating that the foods come from a commercial kitchen or even outlawing all sales of home-crafted foods.

In 2009, an incident known as "Pie Gate" shut down the traditional fish-fry fundraiser at St. Cecelia Catholic Church in Pennsylvania. The culprit: the pies, and the grandmothers who made them. Pie sales would be fine, said the inspector, if made in a commercial kitchen. But the bakers were all elderly, and some disabled, unable to make it to the church's kitchen.

Communities sprang into action and, since 2010, laws have loosened nationwide. The Institute for Justice stepped in to help.

"We are a pro-bono law firm," said Jennifer McDonald of Institute for Justice, "and we represent

individuals who have had their rights violated by the government, and that includes the cottage food industry where cottage food businesses are treated differently from other businesses."

The state of Kentucky, before 2018, restricted cottage food sales to only the farmers who grew the ingredients. Jennifer and the Institute for Justice worked with a small group of producers to advocate for change and introduce a bill. Now, anyone can sell cottage food in Kentucky.

Before you start an endeavor, Jennifer says, "Research your local laws, because you don't want to invest time and money into a business that isn't allowed under state and local law. If what you want to do isn't legal, work with your representatives to change that."

Not all states even allow cottage sales. New Jersey currently bans it completely, though Jennifer and her

team are on the case. "It's the only remaining state that does not permit the sale of homemade goods. Part of the problem has been a single legislator who tripped up cottage food bills for a decade."

"I was so confused because I thought that applying for the Cottage License meant that I was good to go."

### THE ARGUMENT FOR GRANDMA'S PIES

Arguments against cottage industries include: You can't monitor someone's home kitchen, they're taking business away from brick and mortar facilities, etc. But most of those claims have been disproven.

Let's take the claim about cleanliness. Home kitchens are usually much cleaner than licensed commercial kitchens. It's like the hospital analogy: as hard as you try to sanitize equipment, the volume of people in and out of the facility means more disease transmission. Also, home cooks take more pride in their kitchens than employees take in the workplace.

How about public health? Most states have implemented safeguards to ensure you know your baker, that labels list all ingredients, and that the health departments can trace food back to its source if you get sick. States even mandate that foods sold under a cottage license have the least likelihood of harboring pathogens.

Then there's the argument that it competes with local businesses. The passage of cottage food laws had a significantly positive impact on the number of businesses, both employer and non-employer. Jennifer McDonald says, "Groups of people are doing it at home as a hobby business, and they are perfectly

Some states have separate “cottage foods” and “pickle” laws, meaning you could sell fruit-based jams and jellies, but home canning containing vegetables must comply with different license.

happy doing it at home. And there are people who start the business with the intent of testing the waters before going into a brick and mortar food business.” On the other hand, research in 2017 showed that when states restricted the kinds of foods that people could produce, bakers were less likely to expand their businesses, especially in rural societies.

#### NAVIGATING THE COTTAGE FOOD BUSINESS

The key to operating a cottage business without extreme health department oversight is reducing risk of disease transmission. That may include restricting the types of foods you can sell: Some states don’t allow bread with cheese baked into it, and Wyoming is the only state that allows sales of homemade cheese. Some states have separate “cottage foods” and “pickle” laws, meaning you could sell fruit-based jams and jellies, but home canning containing vegetables must comply with a different license.

States have different laws regarding where and how you can sell. Oklahoma prohibits selling at events, restaurants, retail stores, and roadside stands. Ohio allows sales at events, farmers markets, in-home, at restaurants or retail stores, and even online via mail order.

And you may only be allowed to cook the food under circumstances. For instance, in Nevada, children may not be in the kitchen while you cook cottage foods. But Arizona’s law specifically allows developmentally disabled individuals to make and sell food products without individual training or licensing.

Before you embark on a business, research all the details: Do your labels need to include your home kitchen address? What containers can you use? Do you need to modify your aunt’s jalapeno-cheddar bread recipe before you can legally sell it?

For a general compilation of laws, visit [Forrager.com](http://Forrager.com).



Melissa Derby at her first event, Fallon's Sunflower Festival.

Forrager works to keep producers up to date on their state laws plus provides a place to advertise cottage food operations. But keep in mind that Forrager isn’t always up to date, as it’s run by volunteers. Contact your local health department for all the particulars.

#### THE SKY IS NOT THE LIMIT. OR IS IT?

Can you get rich with a cottage foods business? Again, it depends on where you live.

Lawmakers argue that, if you need to hire employees, you can pay for additional licensing and insurance. They place income caps on the industries to ensure that you indeed need financial leeway. The problem with these sales caps, though, is that home cooks can’t amass the funds needed to obtain food handlers’ licenses. Minnesota limits sales (not profits) to \$18,000 per year, Washington restricts it to \$25,000, and California allows up to \$50,000 in sales per year. Wisconsin used to have a sales cap of \$5,000 but thanks to work by dedicated cottage food advocates, it now has minimal oversight and no sales cap!

Ten years ago, making money selling homemade food was either an unattainable dream or undesirable with imposed restrictions. But each year brings more advancements for food sovereignty, with hope and advocacy for those states still working to loosen the laws. 🍷





# Celebrate the Season WITH THESE ADORABLE PASTA ANGELS!

BY JULIA HOLLISTER

**D** ID YOU KNOW there is another use for pasta other than on the dinner plate? Yes, it's true. The cute little pasta shapes are waiting for your imagination to bring them alive.

Why not craft pasta angels?

All it takes is a heaping helping of innovation, a box of bow tie pasta, and some glitter. These angelic items are perfect for Christmas decorations, craft fairs, magnets, and more.

A bit of warning: This glue and glitter project is not recommended for young children.

First, it's best to make a list of items you need (plan to spend around \$35) and lay-out a work plan and a space where you can create without having to move frequently.

## CHOIR ANGELS

### SUPPLIES:

Disposable gloves (I wish I used a pair before working with glue and glitter)

Wax paper

Bow tie pasta (no need to look for gourmet finds)

Glue (Elmer's is fine)

Spray on glue (Krylon is preferred)

Sparkling iridescent glitter in shaker container

Small magnets, if desired (available on Amazon)

A giant container of imagination

Okay, your gloves are on and all the crafty supplies are ready. Let's get started.



**STEP ONE:** Select two bow tie pastas (you don't have to pick the prettiest; they all look the same). You will have to trim one pasta to form the bottom of her/his garment. This is the trickiest step in the process.

**STEP TWO:** Carefully put a large drop of the Elmer's glue onto the two pieces of pasta. Hold them together for about one minute until they are beginning to bond. You might fan the "almost" angel to hasten the process.

Take a break now. Ask Alexa to play some Christmas music while you light your cinnamon stick, nutmeg, and orange-rind scented candle. It's okay to admire your angel sitting and waiting for a cloak of sparkling snow.



These plump pasta are waiting to be transformed into Christmas cuties. This is when that glue, glitter, and extra pearls make their encore.

**STEP THREE:** Spray the connected angel with a substantial covering of the spray glue within one minute, sprinkle a generous sprinkling of the glitter, making sure to cover all the crevices.

Add more music to your already aromatic work space and wait for the final touch.

**STEP FOUR:** Select a medium-sized pearl from your bag and put a small dollop of white glue on top. Place the “head” onto the body and hold for a couple of minutes to make sure it is attached. This step requires an ounce of two of patience; so save the celebration for a couple more minutes.

Your “choir of angels” is almost ready to celebrate the holidays.

Here are a few ideas for making them really sing: A small magnet can be attached on the back of each angel, watching the baby Jesus in a manger scene or for decorations throughout the home.

### GUARDIAN ANGELS WITHOUT WINGS

But, back to crafting these handy tubes into some Christmas follies.

Another pasta variety that

will generate lots of ideas is the paccheri. This tube pasta (around \$7 a box) is best known for its versatility on the dinner plate. You may be tempted to stuff the beckoning shape with meats or favorite cheeses but don’t do it.

The Italian chefs warn that these large, thick tubes should never be stuffed, as they collapse on cooking. In Italy, it is often served with a seafood sauce.

But, this plump pasta is waiting to be transformed into Christmas cuties. This is when that glue, glitter, and extra pearls make their encore.

Let’s get started ... children, wearing disposal gloves, can join in the fun too.

Begin “Guardian Angels without Wings” project.

**STEP ONE:** Lay out a sheet of wax paper on a level surface or countertop.

**STEP TWO:** Pour a sizable amount of glitter into a plastic glass, for dunking.

**STEP THREE:** Select a tube with a round opening that a pearl can nestle in. All tubes are not alike so use a sharp eye when making selections.

**STEP FOUR:** Cover the pasta with glue and immerse in the glitter, making sure the tube is covered.

**STEP FIVE:** Make a circle of glue on the pearl and set on the opening. Hold for a couple of seconds.

**STEP SIX:** Stand the glittered “angel” on the paper to dry.

When they are dry, stand a couple in the dry soil of houseplants, add them to Christmas wreaths, or as an addition to tabletop flower displays. Look around, kids can also come up with their own surprising ideas.

Now you can celebrate the Christmas season along with heaping helpings of your glittering ingenuity. So, heat up the mulled wine, turn up the Yuletide music and ask, “Where did I put that fruitcake I received from Aunt Martha?” 🍷

**JULIA HOLLISTER** is a longtime journalist with a passion for all things sustainable. Raised in a rice growing family on the Texas Gulf Coast, she quickly learned the value of living off the land. Julia once taught gold panning in the Sierra Foothills and loves finding ways to stretch a dollar by finding new uses for everyday household items.



# COMPARING THE BEST WAX FOR CANDLES

BY REBECCA SANDERSON



**C**ANDLES MAKE A HOUSE FEEL LIKE A home, but they can be expensive. Making your own candles can improve the affordability. There are several options for candle wax, and some waxes are better for certain types of candles. Your choice of candle wax may also depend on your environmental views and cost. Where does wax come from, and how is wax made? We will look at all of these factors as we compare the best wax for candles.

## BEESWAX

Beeswax is possibly the oldest wax used for candles. As a byproduct of bees making honey, it is fairly environmentally sustainable. Beeswax is hard enough that it is great for making pillar candles (tall column candles with no container) and tapered candles, yet still versatile enough to be used for container candles. It has a high melting point. Some of the downsides to beeswax candles are that they don't hold color or fragrance very well. However, beeswax has a naturally sweet aroma and subtle coloring that shines on its own. The biggest drawback to natural

beeswax is that it can often cost more than twice as much as some of the other candle wax choices.

## COCONUT WAX

Coconut wax is always a blend with other waxes such as soy wax or paraffin wax to aid in hardness. It is a very easy wax to work with: It has a very low melting point and holds scent well. Although it tends to be just a little pricier, it is a good blend for beginners wanting to do container candles.

Your choice of candle wax may also depend on your environmental views and cost.

## GEL WAX

Gel wax is not truly a wax by definition. It is typically a blend of mineral oil and polymer resin. Gel wax is rubbery, transparent, and often used in novelty candles. It is usually a soft wax that must be in a container. It does burn longer than paraffin wax; up to twice as long. If you do not like bubbles, then gel wax may not be the best wax for candles as it is more prone to having bubbles. However, it doesn't shrink as it cools, so the need to top off the container is eliminated. The price is usually

cheaper than beeswax but more than other candle wax choices.

### PALM WAX

Palm wax is made from hydrogenating palm oil. It is a hard wax that is good for pillar and votive candles. It often hardens to form a crystallized pattern whether as a pillar or container candle. Palm wax also has a fairly high melting point, even higher than beeswax. While it is a completely natural wax, the sustainability of palm is a concern for many.

### PARAFFIN WAX

Paraffin wax is a popular choice for many candle makers. It is easy to work with, comes with different melting points for different projects, and is the cheapest option. Different blends with paraffin wax give this versatility. Most commercial candles are made from paraffin. It also has good scent preservation and can be the best candle wax for scent throw. Yet, paraffin wax is not the most environmentally sound choice because it is a byproduct of crude oil refinement.

### SOY WAX

Soy candle wax is fairly new to the candle market, only around since the 1990s. It is made from hydrogenated soybean oil and is very environmentally sustainable. 100% soy wax is soft and best used for container candles. However, soy wax comes in many blends to give different hardness levels. As long as the blend contains at least 51% soy, it is termed a soy wax blend. Soy is often blended with paraffin or other waxes and oils such as coconut oil, beeswax, or palm wax. Soy blends vary in price as candle making supplies, depending on what else is in the blend, but they are typically mid- to low-range in the price comparison. Because soy is denser

than paraffin, it does not release scent from fragrance oils as well.

### PAIRING WICKS WITH WAX

Some candle waxes are more versatile while others are used for very specific results. Whichever wax you use, be sure to research which wick to pair with it. If your wick is too thin, it can melt a tunnel through your candle instead of burning the candle down evenly. A wick that is too thick may not burn down as quickly as the wax, leaving a large, partially-burned wick sticking out above the wax. Also, just because a candle has a lower melting point doesn't always mean that it doesn't need to be brought to a higher temperature for pouring. Be sure to follow pouring temperature recommendations from your wax supplier. The

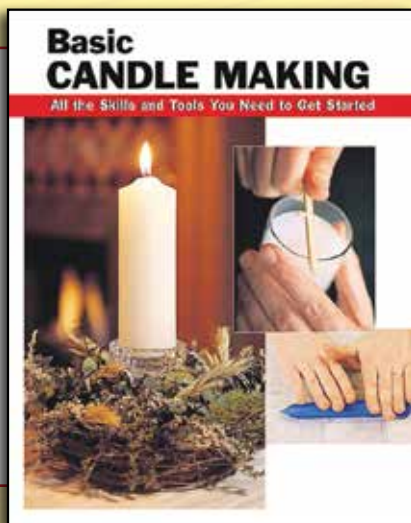
melting point does have a lot to do with how long your candle lasts.

Now that we have compared the best wax for candles, you can make a more informed choice as far as what type of candle you will make. While some waxes are very versatile, others win the prize for being environmentally sound. While none of them is the perfect option for every candle project, you can certainly find one perfect for yours. 🌱

**REBECCA SANDERSON** grew up in a very small town in Idaho with a backyard full of chickens, goats, sometimes sheep and ducks, and other random animals in addition to the cats and dogs. She is now married with two little girls and loves the homesteading life! Her husband is very supportive (tolerant) of her continued experiments in making many items from scratch and he even helps sometimes.

## All The Skills & Tools You Need To Get Started With Candle Making

By Eric Ebeling



Step-by-step color photographs and descriptive detail make this book indispensable for beginners looking to create beautiful and functional scented candles on their very first try, and for experienced crafters who want to sharpen their skills. Includes guidelines for buying tools and materials, preparing the work space, and working safely and effectively, as well as suggested shopping lists.

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# Sewing Rabbit Hides

HOW TO GO FROM RABBIT FARMING TO OUTERWEAR

BY MARISSA AMES



**L**EATHER IS NOTORIOUSLY DIFFICULT TO work with, but stitching rabbit hides isn't much different from sewing thick cloth.

Different rabbit breeds produce different types of fur. Most pelts come from rex rabbits, which have short, thick, velvety coats. Jersey wooleys have longer hair and Angora rabbits have silky strands so long that they are often harvested and spun into yarn without ever butchering the animal. The most sustainable pelts come from meat rabbits such as New Zealand, Californian, and larger Argente breeds.

A quick study proves that the meat is leaner and has higher protein than chicken breast. Rabbits are also cleaner and less obnoxious than chickens. Raising rabbits can be the most humane meat choice for both the animal and urban neighbors. But though many homesteaders raise rabbits for meat, they don't often save the pelts because tanning rabbit hides requires more work during their already busy lives and the financial return is low unless they craft items for themselves or loved ones.

Rabbit hides can be crafted into hats, gloves, blankets and bedspreads, toys, pillow covers, baby booties, and more. It's an exceptionally warm garment lining

for people who spend long periods in intense cold, such as hunters, farmers, ranchers, and construction workers. Though sewing rabbit hides takes more work than purchasing a hat at a department store, the effort is appreciated by those who need the insulation.

## OBTAINING THE HIDES

If you want to cut costs and be involved in the project from start to finish, tan the hides yourself. Tanning rabbit hides via a salt/alum brine is easy and costs very little. You need green (raw, unprocessed) hides, non-iodized salt, alum, water, and a non-reactive container such as a plastic bucket with a lid.

Homesteaders raising rabbits for meat may offer hides for free because they don't want to see the resource go to waste. Offer to tan one out of every five or 10 pelts for the homesteader. Or, if she offers a high-quantity, offer to make a hat in trade. Homesteaders thrive on trades and that hat may help her complete her chores on January mornings.

If you don't want to tan them or can't find green rabbit hides, search for products that have already been tanned. Look first at homesteading communities where the rabbits are

It's an exceptionally warm garment lining for people who spend long periods in intense cold, such as hunters, farmers, ranchers, and construction workers.



The best choices are leatherworking or furrier needles, but if you can't find those, judge based on size and quality.

raised. Then try online classifieds or craft fairs, because those pelts are often processed as hobbies and the sellers want outlets for their interests. The best, and most expensive, rabbit hides are found at leatherworking stores.

Once you obtain the tanned hides, store in a cool and well-ventilated area until you are ready to use them. A cardboard box or paper bag work best, within a basement closet. Place mothballs or aromatherapy inside the box if insects are a problem.

### CUTTING THE HIDES

Decide what you're going to make and find a pattern. If you find no patterns for fur, search for one suited to fake fur or thick canvas, or draw the pattern on sheets of paper. Use scrap fabric to make a model of the original product so you can test sizes and dimensions without wasting pelts.

Place the pelt, fur-side-down, on a cutting board. Lay the pattern atop the hide, paying attention to the "grain," the direction in which the fur grows. The best finished products have all the fur running in the same direction. Pin in place or tack down with glue dots and trace the outline with a felt-tip

pen. Set the pattern aside and cut the hide using a scalpel or sharp knife. Avoid using scissors because they will shear through hair you'll want to keep, creating uneven lines on your finished product.

If you're working with scraps or small pieces, you may need to sew several scraps together to make a piece large enough for your pattern.

### SEWING THE HIDES

Some non-commercial sewing machines can handle leather. One well-known for its strength and durability is the Pfaff 130, a black-lacquered German masterpiece manufactured in 1932. Modern machines rated for leather range from \$250 to over \$1,600.

But you don't need a special machine unless you intend to sew many items out of rabbit hides. Some lower-end sewing machines can handle leather if you use a larger needle such as No. 19. A hand-sewing needle and thread work well enough for small projects.

Purchase several needles that are wide enough to handle the abuse but sharp enough to puncture the hide. The best choices are leatherworking or furrier needles, but if you can't find those, judge

based on size and quality. Select a strong thread, such as types intended for upholstery or carpet, in the color closest to your pelts. And don't forget a thimble. Repetitive pushing at the back of the needle may eventually puncture your fingertip.

Laying fur against fur, align the edges you intend to sew and pin them in place. Binder clips also work well to maintain a tight grip without slipping. If the edges are too thick, flatten them with a hammer. Consider applying iron-on reinforcing material to the backs of the hides if you're making heavy projects such as coats. Also, use a very strong thread that can withstand the weight of all the rabbit hides.

Sew along the edges with a machine or by hand, using a whip stitch or cross stitch. This may create a small ridged seam which will usually be hidden when the project is complete. Be sure to tie off the ends so your hard work doesn't come undone. Keep knots on the unfurred side.

After you've sewn the entire project, turn it fur-side-out. Use a needle to fluff out hairs that have become caught in the stitching. This will also hide





Don't throw the scraps away! Even small pieces of rabbit hide can be saved for future projects such as patchwork quilts or hats.

your seams if the fur is the same color. Gently brush hair with a soft hairbrush or tumble your project in a dryer, set to no heat.

### SAVE THE SCRAPS

Don't throw the scraps away! Even small pieces of rabbit hide can be saved for future projects such as patchwork quilts. Some crafters even save strips to secure end-to-end then twist into a thick, soft "yarn" for weaving blankets in a style used by some Native American tribes.

Store scraps in the same manner you stored the original hides: in a well-ventilated container such as a cardboard box, set in a cool, dry place.

### BLANKETS

Patchwork quilts utilize scraps well. If you're willing to sew small pieces to larger ones, you can cut rectangles at two-inch increments, such as 2"×4" or 6"×6", piecing them together to eventually make a body-length rectangle. Using rectangles of different sizes allows you to work with flaws such as

small patches of hair slip. Just cut directly across the hairless patch. Turn edges in when you stitch scraps together and you can hide the slipped area very well.

It takes approximately 100 good, large pelts to make a quilt for a double bed and 50 to make a lap blanket. If you craft pelts for other projects, save the scraps and sew them together as they accumulate. Eventually, you'll have enough for a small blanket.

Once you've completed your rabbit hide rectangle, purchase a matching back piece out of strong fabric such as denim or cotton duck. Batting is probably unnecessary and will add to the overall weight of an already heavy project. If you choose a filler material, keep it thin and lightweight. Match the back of the fabric to the sewn side of the pelt rectangle. Pin in place. Working on a quilting frame or a flat surface such as a table, stitch the two pieces together about every four inches, using a needle and thread and keeping stitches well hidden in the fur. Or make a traditional tied quilt, using loops of yarn and knotting it

on the fabric side. Bind the edges with long strips of strong fabric.

### CROCHET-AND-FUR HAT

First, select the style of hat. Rabbit hide patterns ([sewbon.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Sewbon\\_Ear\\_Flap\\_Hat.pdf](http://sewbon.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Sewbon_Ear_Flap_Hat.pdf)) are scarce on the internet but you may find a couple of them. Search fake fur patterns for more options. If you're experienced with cutting out patterns, or are comfortable with trial and error so you can attain the exact style you want, first choose a crochet pattern then cut the fur to match. ([allcrafts.net/crochet/crochethats.htm](http://allcrafts.net/crochet/crochethats.htm))

Draw or print your pattern before cutting the fur. Cut out the pattern pieces then place them on the bare side of the rabbit hide, paying attention to the grain so your fur all goes the direction you want. Trace the pattern with a felt-tip pen then cut out using a sharp blade.

Placing cut pelt side against the cut side, sew the ends together to make a secure cap. Fit the cap over your head occasionally as you sew to judge fit. Once

the cap is completely sewn and feels comfortable, set it aside as you crochet the top piece.

Use a strong, versatile yarn in a color that coordinates with the pelts. Tight single crochet is best for hats that may encounter a lot of use or abuse. Don't use many lacy or open stitches unless you intend to add a lining between the hide and the crocheted cap because the white skin would otherwise show through. As you crochet the top, periodically place it over the sewn hides to judge whether it will fit. Don't worry if the cap is a tiny bit too small, because it can stretch. It's easier to fix a tight cap than one that has been crafted too loosely.

Once you have matching crochet and fur pieces, place the fur piece inside the crocheted cap with the fur facing toward the scalp. Attach the pieces in several places, starting at the very crown and working your way down, looping the thread through the leather then through the crochet. It's important to start at the top because you can always sew fur pieces onto the bottom if the ends don't match. Work your way around the circumference of the cap, all the way to the bottom edge.

Bind the ends several ways. The most attractive method involves curling the fur edges up and around the crocheted cap, looping the very edge in before sewing the excess fur to the crocheted surface. These ends can be a half-inch or several inches, depending on the desired effect. The important thing is to turn the hide so the fur fluffs out at the edges.

If you want to focus more on an artistic crochet stitch, trim the hide (or attach more if the hide is too short) so pieces match perfectly. Sew together, pulling the crocheted edge down just past the hide and stitching it flat.

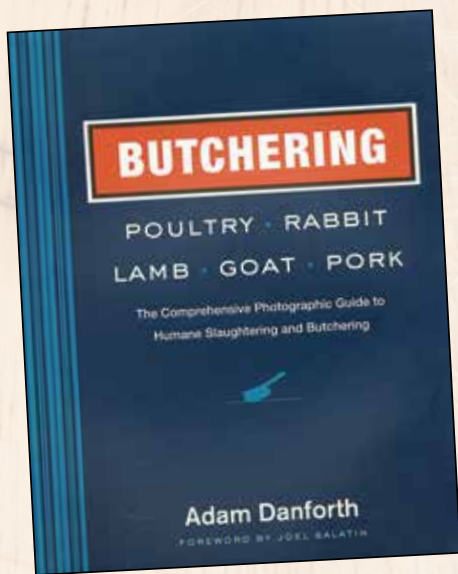
Embellish the hat by weaving ribbon in and out of the crocheted cap, sewing on bows or gems, or by attaching a loop onto ear flaps so they can be secured to buttons sewn high up on the sides.

After trying your first project, you'll probably realize sewing rabbit hides is not as daunting as it seems. Don't stop now. Keep this usable resource from being thrown away and craft gloves, pillows, or clothing to keep everyone warm. 🌱

## Butchering Poultry, Rabbit, Lamb, Goat, & Pork

BY ADAM DANFORTH

### The Comprehensive Photographic Guide to Humane Slaughtering and Butchering of Poultry, Rabbit, Lamb, Goat & Pork



Locally raised animals, humanely slaughtered and expertly butchered—that is the best meat we can eat. With Adam Danforth's full-color comprehensive manual, you can learn the skills necessary to take an animal calmly and efficiently from pasture to freezer. **446 Pages**

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# KNITTED DISHCLOTH PATTERNS

Handmade for  
Your Kitchen!

BY KATHLEEN CUBLEY

A FEW THINGS WERE CERTAIN ON every visit to my grandma's lake cabin each summer. There would be knitted dishcloths in the kitchen, fluffy beach towels stacked in the bathroom, casseroles for dinner, bologna sandwiches for lunch, sunburned shoulders, and crickets chirping in the evening.

There seemed to be an endless supply of these things, and I've adopted some of them (no bologna!) in my adult life. My grandma's and mom's casserole recipes appear frequently in the meal rotation, we have a section of beach towels in the linen closet, and I love my handmade dishcloths. In fact, I just made a new one this week.

I am an avid knitter, and I always have a sweater or shawl pattern on my needles, but I like to break up these larger projects with small items, and knitted dishcloths are a great option. If I don't need a new one, my mom does, or I knit them up for wedding or baby gifts. These handknit items are always appreciated, and you'll love making them, too.

If you're just learning how to knit, knitted dishcloths are great practice. I use the world-famous Granny's Dishcloth; here's the pattern:

## GRANNY'S DISHCLOTH

(ORIGINAL DESIGNER UNKNOWN)

**Yarn:** Sugar 'n Cream by Lily (100% cotton; 95 yards [87 meters]; 1.98 oz [56 g]), color shown #191178, Sonoma

**Needles:** Size 7 US (4.5 mm)

**Notions:** Tapestry needle

**Gauge:** 18 stitches = 4 inches

**Finished Size:** 7.25" square

## DISHCLOTH INSTRUCTIONS

**Cast on** 4 stitches.

**Row 1:** Knit.

**Row 2:** Knit 2, yarn over, knit across row.

**Repeat** Row 2 until there are 46 stitches on the needle.

**Row 3:** Knit 1 knit 2 together, yarn over, knit 2 together, knit to end of row.

**Repeat** Row 3 until you have 4 stitches on the needle.

**Bind off** and weave in ends.

The great thing about using this pattern to learn how to knit is that you practice several skills: the knit stitch, the yarn over increase, and the knit two together decrease. All this in a small, super useful dishcloth!

I do have to warn you that these are addictive, and soon you'll be knitting them for yourself and everyone you know.



### MORE OPTIONS — SAME KNITTED DISHCLOTH PATTERN

This dishcloth pattern is really versatile; turn it into a throw, a baby blanket, or a shawl.

**Make a Throw:** You can keep increasing (repeating Row 2) until you have 234 stitches to make a 52" throw for your living room. Yarn choices for this would be just about anything! You could choose a soft, worsted-weight merino yarn like Malabrigo Merino or Rios, or a workhorse yarn like Cascade 220 or Lion Brand Wool-Ease.

I'm making these recommendations based on the washcloth gauge, which is 4.5 stitches to 1 inch (18 stitches = 4 inches), but you can really use any size yarn for this pattern. Just keep repeating Row 2 until you get to the width you want, and then start Row 3. Couldn't be simpler.

**Make a Baby Blanket:** If you're looking for the perfect baby blanket pattern, this is it. Choose a washable yarn, such as Knit Picks Comfy Worsted (I love it for baby items), and increase to 135 stitches to make a 30" blanket. Sugar 'n Cream would work for babies, too. If you want a wool option, Cascade 220 is a good choice, and it comes in lots of colors.

**Make a Shawl:** For the easiest of shawl patterns, follow the first half of the dishcloth pattern (Rows 1 and 2), and keep knitting until you have the width you want, and then bind off. You can use any yarn that you have on hand. Many knitters have an overabundance of sock yarn, which is perfect for shawls. (If you know how to knit socks, you'll probably have a ton of sock yarn to choose from!) If you're using sock

yarn — also called fingering yarn — increase to 294 stitches, and then cast off. You'll end up with a 56-inch-wide shawl. This pattern is based on knitting 5.25 stitches to the inch on size US 2½ needles (3.0 mm).

### CHOOSING DISHCLOTH YARN

Cotton yarn is the go-to for knitted dishcloths. There are lots of options in many gauges. If you've been knitting for awhile, chances are you have some in your stash already!

I've just discovered a bamboo yarn, Universal Bamboo Pop, which is naturally anti-bacterial, and would be perfect for a dishcloth. It knits up into a super-soft fabric, so it would be great for a washcloth or facecloth, too. Knit one of these bamboo versions, pair it with a beautiful soap, and you have a wonderful gift with a handmade touch. I think handmade gifts are the best to give and receive.

If you spin your own yarn, use it for washcloths, too! I've knit one out of a non-washable wool; I (gasp) washed it, and it was fine. It shrunk a little bit, but it still works just fine. Give it a try.

### TURN DISHCLOTHS INTO DOLLARS

Looking for small craft business ideas? Washcloths are so quick to make, you could knit up a bunch and sell them at craft fairs. If you're a soap maker, why not add washcloths to the mix? I've seen them at craft fairs, and they're always good sellers. People have been using this particular pattern for years and years, and seeing one of Granny's dishcloths brings a sense of nostalgia to many of us. That's a pretty great marketing tool!

I hope you'll try making a washcloth. I know you'll enjoy using them, and maybe you can start a tradition in your family like I've got in mine. 🍵

**KATHLEEN CUBLEY** is a knitter, crafter, gardener, blogger, and all-around maker, who lives in Spokane, Washington. Kathleen blogs for Interweave and on her own blog, "The Craftermath," and she has a YouTube podcast called "On the Needles."



# HOW TO MAKE BATH BOMBS:

## AN EASY DIY GIFT

BY MARISSA AMES

**I**F YOU'RE JUST STARTING your soapmaking journey, learning how to make bath bombs is a good first step. Often ball-shaped, bath bombs are dry, chalky, conglomerations that fizz and release fragrance when dropped in water. They're sold as novelties, though additions like witch hazel and skin-friendly oils can add benefits. Many "how to make bath bombs" recipes exist online, some with cornstarch and some with Epsom salt. These are easy for beginners and safe for kids to make (if nobody is allergic to the ingredients, and oils causing sensitivity aren't used).

### HOW TO MAKE BATH BOMBS

If you already know how to make bath salts, you already have some bath bomb ingredients. Bath bombs and bath salts are two of many Epsom salt uses.

#### FIVE ESSENTIAL BATH BOMB INGREDIENTS

Baking soda (8 ounces)  
Citric acid (4 ounces)  
Water or witch hazel (½ to 1 Tablespoon)  
Food coloring or skin-safe soaping pigment  
Skin-safe fragrance or essential oil (2 teaspoons)

You've probably seen other tutorials, teaching how to make bath bombs, which include more ingredients. We'll get to those.

Fizziness is the essential bath bomb quality. This fizziness is achieved by combining baking soda, which is very alkaline, with citric acid. Water activates the chemical reaction. When an acid meets a base, carbon dioxide releases from the sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) and the mini-volcano causes aesthetically pleasing bubbles.

Water or witch hazel binds the active ingredients together so it can be molded and handled. Witch hazel offers skin benefits that water doesn't. Fragrance and color make your bath bombs delightful. Be sure to add enough essential oil to scent an entire tub.

#### OPTIONAL BATH BOMB INGREDIENTS

Olive oil or coconut oil for skin benefits (3 teaspoons)  
Epsom salt for detoxifying benefits (4 ounces)  
Cornstarch to harden bath bomb (4 ounces)  
Food coloring or skin-safe soaping pigment  
Biodegradable glitter for aesthetic appeal  
CBD oil (1 Tablespoon)

To make bath bombs, start with two separate containers. In the first: mix all dry ingredients. Combine citric acid and baking soda and any salts or cornstarch. If you're using micas or powdered pigments for color, add these now. Stir to combine, breaking up any lumps.

In a second container, mix all wet ingredients. Melt

coconut oil before mixing it with essential oils. Avoid oils which can cause skin or respiratory sensitivity, such as citrus, cinnamon, or Peru balsam. If you're using food coloring, add it with wet ingredients.

Now, very gently and gradually, add wet ingredients to dry. Remember that water activates the chemical reaction, so add it a couple drops at a time. Some soapmakers use spritzer bottles. Stir ingredients with a silicone spatula or a gloved hand. Mix in just enough liquid to make a ball that holds together after you release it.

Though two-sided bath bomb molds are available, you can use almost anything as a mold. Try festive silicone muffin pans or mini tart molds. Press the mixture into molds, remembering that the tighter you pack it, the longer bombs will last in the bath. If you're forming two-sided bombs, overpack the molds a bit before pressing them together. Hold both sides together for a minute, ensuring they stick, then lightly tap the molds to release.

Allow your bath bombs to sit for 24 hours in a cool, dry place before using them in the tub or wrapping in plastic.

#### HOW TO MAKE BATH BOMBS WITHOUT CITRIC ACID

Can you make bath bombs without one of the two most important ingredients? Well ... yes, and no.

There are a couple of reasons why you might not want citric acid. The first is a corn allergy. Though this acid is "citric," it's made with the cheapest and most plentiful crop in the United States.

Good, ol' corn. Second, citric acid may be difficult to find.

If you live in a metropolitan area, or near a hobby store, you can find most bath bomb ingredients. Baking soda is readily available in the baking section; Epsom salt is at the pharmacy. Citric acid, though it's cheaper

ordered in bulk, can be found online, in brewery or cheesemaking shops, or in the canning section of many supermarkets and department stores.

But if you don't want to use citric acid, how can you attain the fizziness? Soap Queen, a prolific blogger and YouTube personality

working with the soaping supply store, Brambleberry, tested several recipes that attempt to replace citric acid. And she wasn't pleased with the results.

Since lemon juice contains some citric acid, it can add to the chemical reaction when it meets baking soda. But the bubbles are minimal. Another recipe suggests cream of tartar, which is the potassium acid salt of a tartaric acid. Again, activation with water produces a little fizz but not much. The third, which Soap Queen demonstrates in her video, attempts to use cornstarch instead of citric acid. The results are gloppy, slimy, and not at all fizzy.

Most experienced soapmakers agree that, when learning how to make bath bombs, you find citric acid for the best results. 🌿

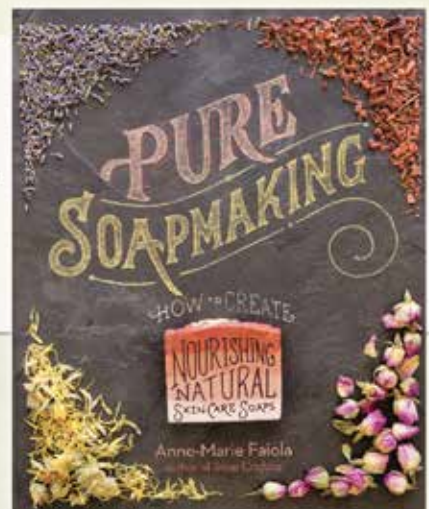
Mix in just enough liquid to make a ball that holds together after you release it.

## How to Create Nourishing Natural Skin Care Soaps

# PURE SOAPMAKING

It's easy to make luscious, all-natural soaps right in your own kitchen!

32 recipes — simple castile bars to intricate swirls, embeds, and marbled and layered looks



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# KIDS & SOAP:

## Homemade Arts and Crafts for The Holidays

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**W**INTER HOLIDAYS OFTEN INVOLVE COLD weather, hot drinks, and homemade arts and crafts. It also means the kids are out of school for one to three weeks. What homemade arts and crafts can kids do, without risk of injury, that can also serve as holiday gifts? Try soap!

Easy melt and pour soap recipes make great kids' projects because they don't melt at high temperatures. They usually clean up with water and a washcloth. Kids get satisfaction in knowing they made the homemade arts and crafts themselves (with a little supervision.) And the projects keep children busy so parents can sneak away to hang lights or wrap gifts.

If you've never made a melt and pour soap project, don't worry. It's easy to do. Find a soap base, which is available at craft stores and online. The highest quality bases are usually from companies that sell wholesale soap making supplies. Bases can be hypoallergenic, can contain honey or goat milk, or may be hemp or olive oil-based.

For color, purchase artificial soap making dyes or natural pigments and micas. Food coloring isn't strong enough and will dilute the soap base. For fragrance, essential oils are fine, if you research first to ensure the oil won't irritate skin. Colorants and fragrance must be skin safe! Do not use candle dyes or scents. If you shop a website that sells specifically to soapmakers, you can find a myriad of luscious fragrances.

Melt soap in the microwave, in a glass or plastic container. Or turn a slow cooker onto low. Perhaps use a double boiler. No matter how you melt it, the soap doesn't have to get very hot to be liquid. You should be able to insert a finger, without burning yourself, and the soap will still be soft enough to mix in colors and scents.

Of course, supervise small children to be sure soap isn't overheated and the heat source is safe.

To clean up, simply soak pots and bowls in a larger bowl of warm water, then scrub clean. Soap-covered clothing can be tossed directly into a washing machine.

### SIMPLE MOLDS

The youngest kids may be unable to make the simplest homemade arts and crafts. For them, just obtaining cute holiday molds and filling with melted soap is enough. Acquire festive shapes but remember these don't have to be made specifically for soap. Holiday candy or cupcake molds work great.

### GINGERBREAD SOAPS

You'll need soap base, natural or artificial brown colorant, a gingery or cinnamon-scented fragrance, a jelly roll pan or small cookie sheet with sides, waxed

Holiday candy or cupcake molds work great.



paper, and gingerbread men cookie cutters. Most or all can be found at stores that sell products for homemade arts and crafts. Soap supply companies make fragrances so luscious they rival the nutmeg and buttery tones of a cooked eggnog recipe.

Line the cookie sheet's bottom and sides with waxed paper. Melt soap base and mix in fragrance and colorant. Pour soap into the cookie sheet and let it cool until it is solid but not completely hard. Cut out gingerbread men with the cookie cutters. Cool completely, remove excess soap, and melt the trimmings to make more soaps.

### PEPPERMINT SWIRLS

You don't need fancy molds or cookie cutters for this one. The bottoms of tiny paper cups will do. You'll also need white soap base, red coloring, peppermint fragrance, and two bowls or pans for melting.

In one bowl or pan, melt a little base then add red coloring. In the other, melt more soap base and stir in peppermint fragrance. Now pour a little white soap into the bottom of each paper cup. Don't wait too long before drizzling in the red. Gently swirl colors with a toothpick then allow soap to cool. Pop soaps out of the cups then use a vegetable peeler to bevel edges and make them look like peppermint candies.

### SOAPY TREE ORNAMENTS

Candy molds can double as soap molds because melt and pour soap doesn't get hot enough to melt the plastic. For a cute idea, purchase bird-shaped molds such as doves and chickens so you can also teach kids about the song "12 Days of Christmas" history and meanings behind the birds.

For this homemade arts and crafts project, you will need soap or candy molds, coffee stirrer straws, soap base, and any color or fragrance you choose.

Trim coffee stirrers into segments about an inch long. Melt soap, stir in fragrance and color, and carefully fill molds. When soap is still a little soft, insert a coffee stirrer into each shape, near the top. Be sure stirrer stands straight up. Allow it to cool completely then unmold. Trim stirrers so they lie flush with soap. With a piece of wire, clear any soap which may clog the stirrer's hole, then insert ornament hooks to hang shapes from the tree.

### SOAPS ON ROPES

This project is made the same way as Soapy Tree Ornaments, except you need larger molds, such as those silicone pans that make cute muffin shapes. Also, look for drinking straws and cut to two-inch lengths.

When soap is nearly solid, insert straw segments.



Have an adult help when using a wooden dowel or skewer.

Allow it to cool fully. Unmold, trim straws, and clear the holes with a nail. Insert yarn or twine into the straws to make ropes. Tie ropes at the ends so they can hang from shower hooks. If an adult or older child help with the project, the rope can be inserted using a wooden dowel or skewer instead of a straw.

### HIDDEN TREASURES: THE GIFT THAT GIVES AGAIN

Hidden Treasures soap allows recipients to unwrap their presents, use the soap, and find a second gift! Choose opaque soap base so you don't spoil the surprise. Also collect square or rectangular molds, which can be as simple as the cavities from those cheese-meat-and-cracker lunch packs. Select fragrance and colorants of your choice as well as craft ribbon in complementary colors. For the hidden surprise, choose items the recipient may like. These must be water-resistant, able to withstand semi-hot temperatures, and small enough to fit. Kids may enjoy finding toy animals or army men in their soap. For a romantic surprise, hide a ring (but be sure the recipient doesn't throw away the soap before finding their hidden treasure!)

Melt soap base and mix in color and fragrance. Pour a thin layer into each mold: just enough to suspend the gift in the middle instead of letting it rest on the bottom. Let that layer cool. Set the gift into the mold then re-melt remaining soap and pour on top, completely concealing the gift. Let each soap cool completely before unmolding. Tie ribbons around the finished soap so it resembles a wrapped box. Be sure to include a note telling the recipient that a second surprise awaits if they use the soap! 🍀



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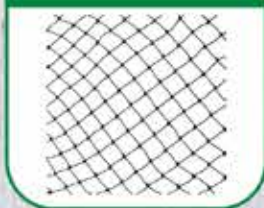
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