



Homegrown and Handmade: A Practical Guide to More Self-Reliant Living

Deborah Niemann

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Our food system is dominated by industrial agriculture and has become economically and environmentally unsustainable. The incidence of diet-related diseases, including obesity, diabetes, hypertension, cancer, and heart disease, has skyrocketed to unprecedented levels. Whether you have forty acres and a mule or a condo with a balcony, you can do more than you think to safeguard your health, your money, and the planet.

Homegrown and Handmade shows how making things from scratch and growing at least some of your own food can help you eliminate artificial ingredients from your diet, reduce your carbon footprint, and create a more authentic life. Whether your goal is increasing your self-reliance or becoming a full-fledged homesteader, it's packed with answers and solutions to help you:

Take control of your food supply from seed to plate
Raise small and medium livestock for fun, food, and fiber
Rediscover traditional skills to meet more of your family's needs than you ever thought possible
This comprehensive guide to food and fiber from scratch proves that attitude and knowledge is more important than acreage. Written from the perspective of a successful self-taught modern homesteader, this well illustrated, practical, and accessible manual will appeal to anyone who dreams of a simpler life.

Deborah Niemann is a homesteader, writer, and self-sufficiency expert who presents extensively on topics including soapmaking, bread baking, cheesemaking, composting, and homeschooling. She and her family raise sheep, pigs, cattle, goats, chickens, and turkeys for meat, eggs, and dairy products, while an organic garden and orchard provides fruit and vegetables.

Homegrown and Handmade: A Practical Guide to More Self-Reliant Living Details

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Cindy says

This is a really interesting book targeting folks who are interested in some form of self reliance. Self reliance doesn't happen overnight. There's a lot of planning, trial and error, research and hard work involved. In this updated, revised version, the author shares what she's learned and breaks it all down into 8 sections.

1. Sustainable Garden
2. Backyard Orchard
3. Backyard Poultry Flock
4. Home Dairy
5. Homegrown Sweeteners
6. Home Fiber Flock
7. Home Grown Business

Each of these sections is then broken down into chapters. For instance, under The Sustainable Garden section, there are chapters on planning and growing a garden and cooking from it. These chapters are then broken down even further. So, if you want to know about composting or what to do with a bumper crop of tomatoes, you can flip right to it. It's all very organized.

I imagine, if you are already full on into farming or have a big coop full of thriving chickens, this isn't where you'd go for more information on those subjects. It's more like a starting point. And it's a heck of a starting point. For a book that's only 300 pages, it's chock full of information. Really fascinating. There are recipes, photos and side notes where the author points out things she wished she'd known before plunging into whatever. Want to make your own soap or cheese? There are recipes. Want to make your own maple syrup? Yep. Chapter included. Want to actually sell the stuff you make or grow? Pointers provided.

I love this book and it will be well thumbed and dog eared before long. Although not everyone can own their own little farm or live off the grid, I believe this book has a little bit of something for almost everyone. From planning a garden to raising llamas and alpacas to making soap or knitting a cap, it's a glimpse into what it takes to truly be self reliant.

Shelly says

This book is good for some serious details on a few things, but not great for those of us who are half in already. Having a .19 acre lot with chickens and a garden already, the vast amount of detail on larger animals (goats, sheep etc.) was a bit much and a bit frustrating for those of us who can't just up and buy a ton of land. Good information, but a few different levels of homesteading would have been nice and MUCH more on homemade things would have been great.

Daniel says

I enjoyed reading this book. I have grown vegetables years ago. I can't quite remember why I got out of the habit. This book makes me want to grow vegetables again. Or did I read the book because I knew I wanted to

grow vegetables again. I enjoyed reading about chickens and turkeys. I had not thought of raising sheep for milk or fiber. I had also not given any thought about raising rabbits, goats, llama, alpaca for fiber. I also liked reading about worm composting. I have read a book about worms but, I always like to learn more about a subject. I also liked the part on selling manure, eggs, vegetables, milk.

Ann says

This is a beautifully illustrated and well written concise book on home gardening and raising farm animals. It details how to use the food and animal products without waste. Well organized, it also contains chapters on soapmaking, bread baking, cheesemaking, composting, and homeschooling. Lots of tips and ideas for both the experienced and novice gardener and farmer.

Kristin says

I was very happy to receive this book in exchange for an honest review. The subjects of gardening, raising animals, and soapmaking have always been of interest to me. This book provides a complete how-to for just about anybody in any situation. It was very inspiring to live the way the book suggests. I will definitely try to develop my lifestyle around the ideas in this book and put them to good use. I had no idea the complexity of soap making, and I'm glad this was included in this book. An awesome book that I will turn back to for tips and ideas often!

Jessica Buike says

If you've ever considered participating in modern homesteading, this is the book for you! It would also be good for those who want to know more about: food gardening (urban or rural), raising chickens (some cities now allow them), and working with livestock (which has to be rural for the most part).

I wanted to read it because my husband and I have always wished we could live in a cohousing community, which is similar to a homestead except it is multiple families and generations living in a sustainable community. We also talked about running a homestead when we retired.

Which brings me to my next point - this book is also good at talking most people out of trying to run a homestead, because unless you can afford to live off one income, or can find a way to make money while homesteading, I doubt many people could afford the time or care it would take to make this a realistic way to live!

Some of the book is a little too boring and dry, although if you are only interested in one or two of the subjects you could skip the chapters that don't interest you. And some of it is a little too alarmist for me - yes, I disagree with some of the agricultural practices these days, but I don't feel the need to "breed out antibiotics".

Regardless, this is a decently good book on the subject and I recommend it for anyone interested in learning more. I will probably pass it on to a friend who is thinking about backyard chickens!

Mary Tea says

Full of useful advice. I loved reading this book.

Zora says

The best of these types of books I've browsed. While the author admits that any of these things you wish to do -- garden, raise poultry, raise fiber animals -- would need at least one book (and a local expert to mentor you), actually this one book could get you started pretty well.

Cons: a little too much explanation of why you'd want to grow your own food, and some of it utter speculation rather than based on footnotable science, and not enough of a bibliography or "for further reading" section.

Tracy says

This is a great book if you are looking at raising goats or chickens. I was expecting a bit more handmade info and less homegrown, but it is clearly written so most beginners who were interested in livestock would be able to understand it. The introduction is about all of the reasons why you should raise your own food. I found much of this info was wasted pages. Anyone who was interested enough to read the book would also have a good idea why they were interested in raising their own food and wouldn't need the lecture about it.

Tamara says

Look for the crazy tomato lady, coming soon to a parking lot near you.

Sun-Dried Tomatoes

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper, slice tomatoes thinly and put the tray on the dashboard of a car sitting in the sun. Check them daily and remove them when they are thoroughly dried out and hard. They can be stored in a jar or plastic bag and used when recipes call for dried tomatoes.

Melanie says

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Published by New Society Publishers

This book starts with a 25 page introduction, valuable information on the whys of eating homegrown. From the Health stance, nutrition differences, the quality of the food, and its sustainability. In addition, she touches on the frugality of eating home grown and finding pride in one's work. Very good information on chemicals

and how much of the food we eat today is extremely unhealthy for us.

The book is divided into 5 parts, each with a Planning, Growing, and Cooking sections.

Backyard gardening is first with helpful hints on planning a garden that fits nicely into the space you have, and not becoming overwhelmed. To plan according to your future needs and utilizing the fruits of your labor. The orchard is next with the ins and outs of planting, and when and how of harvesting then making delicious jams and other recipes with your fruit.

Caring for poultry for both eggs and meat production. Includes housing recommendations and types of poultry.

Of course my favorite, your home dairy! From planning on which livestock, caring for them, to processing your milk into cheese and soap.

She even includes a section on raising fiber animals!

Covers all the basics and is a great resource for helping someone get started with farming, even in their small backyard.

The only thing I had wished was that the pictures would be in color, but I know that isn't always practical either.

Great book, a great starter, but includes enough depth for even seasoned farmers to utilize the information. Thanks to the Author for providing me with a copy of the book in exchange for an honest review.

Jennifer Shirley says

If you want to know what you are really eating, you have to do it yourself. Guide book for learning to be self-reliant in these modern times where most people just count on someone else to supply the store with what they want. I grew up in a farming community and this is a great book to learn the healthy way to raise food and animals on your own land.

Jessica says

When Deborah Niemann and her husband have been homesteading for 15 years now and over time they have expanded and added to their homestead. I hadn't seen the original edition, but this one is the updated 2nd edition. I really liked her introduction about why they changed their lifestyle to one of homesteading and the benefits from that change. I also know that any book Joel Salatin writes the forward to will be worth reading! I really liked how she organized the book by topic - gardening, orchard, poultry, homegrown business, etc. that way you could read the sections that interested you the most. But some of the other sections were helpful - I'm not planning to raise pigs, but the chapter on cooking with pork and lard was still something I wanted to read. Overall, it is a good introduction to the various aspects of homesteading. It's not meant to be a comprehensive guide - the chapter on honey is only a few pages long and that is not enough to make you a beekeeper, but it can explain the basics so you can then delve further into that aspect if it interests you with other books, classes, etc. Overall, a very helpful book if you want to do more for yourself.

A quote I really liked:

"It first became obvious to researchers in the 1970s that farmers had a much higher rate of some cancers, although they are otherwise healthier than the general population. Since then, studies from many countries

have found that farmers have increased rates of leukemia, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, multiple myeloma, soft tissue sarcoma, and cancers of the skin, lip, prostate, brain, and stomach. After eliminating possible causes - such as increased sun exposure causing an increased risk of skin cancer - insecticides were declared the culprit for the increased risks of leukemia, multiple myeloma, and brain cancer. Herbicides have been linked to non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and soft tissue sarcoma...A 2004 study showed that children of farmers who apply pesticides have higher rates of several cancers. That study included 17,357 children born to Iowan farmers after 1975 and compared them to the cancer rates for the general population of Iowa during the same time. Researchers found that there were twice as many cases of childhood lymphoma and two and a half times as many cases of Hodgkin's and Burkitt's lymphomas. They also had more than twice as many bone tumors and germ cell tumors. The researchers also found increased rates of brain tumors, neuroblastoma, retinoblastomas, Wilms' tumors, and soft tissue tumors. Even more telling is the fact that the cancer rates were three times as high for children whose parent did not wear chemically resistant gloves during mixing and application." (p. 10)

Helena says

Lots of practical advice and some fun recipes I'm going to try out.

Joy says

I learned about this book from the Cold Antler Farm blog a week or so ago, and was interested enough to pick it up for my Kindle. I found this book to be a very good "primer" on how to add more self-reliance into your life, whether that is growing vegetables, making cheese from your own goat milk, or raising rabbits for fiber. The author is not trying to write an exhaustive or definitive work on any one subject, but instead writes clearly and approachably about various topics that she has personal experience with on her own farm.

Each section is laid out with a bit about why you would want to do something, what you will need to do it, how to find what you need to do with it, and how to finish up when you've got it. So for the section on dairy animals, there is motivation (fresh milk where you know exactly what went into the animal's diet and how the milk was handled), guidance on what you need to get started (a dairy animal, a milking shed, etc.), a bit on technique and choices (how to pick which dairy animal is right for you, basic milking technique), and what to do with the milk when you're done (yogurt, cheese, etc.). The author also provides various notes on important things to consider, such as finding a vet for your animal before you bring it home or the importance of cleaning udders before milking, that someone who hasn't had the experience might not know.

The book is sprinkled with anecdotes from various people, and each of those is applicable and illustrative to the section where it is included. The author's voice is clear, calm, and provides lots of interesting information in an easily digestible manner with a good dose of humor along for the ride. While I am not personally planning to raise my own animals or food to any great extent, I am very interested in learning more about the different processes that go into such ventures, and I really enjoyed this book for teaching me.
