

Beyond Raising Chickens: Survival Techniques You Should Try

Counting one's chickens before they're hatched is taking on new meaning in the age of the coronavirus.

Baby chicks are the new toilet paper, *The New York Times* [explained](#) over the weekend. Chicken-suppliers have been cleared out as Americans adjust to quarantine and their minds switch to survivalist mode.

I can't say that I blame them. Americans are sadly removed from the land and any form of self-subsistence. Seeking means to support oneself is right and natural in times like these.

But raising chickens isn't the only way of doing that, nor is it the fastest. Gardening is also a viable way of restoring some sense of self-sufficiency to the American population.

Due to troubles with a voracious deer population, I was seriously considering hanging up my gardening gloves for a season. COVID-19 gave me several reasons to change my mind.

For starters, gardening is cost-effective. The economy is taking a beating, and many will be tightening their belts to make less stretch farther. Those who practice gardening can extend their food bill, but only if they approach the black gold in the backyard in a wise manner.

One of the big mistakes beginning gardeners make is buying a lot of tools and expensive plants. Eagerness is wonderful, but taking a moment to count the cost before jumping in will make the most of your money. Instead of a beautiful raised bed requiring lumber and lots of extra dirt, why not dig up a patch of grass in a sunny area, do a little research, and

invest in a bag of fertilizer that will strengthen the soil you already have?

When it comes time to select your plants, think short term. Raspberry bushes and rhubarb plants are wonderful, but they take years to establish themselves and give produce. Instead, you can spend just a few dollars on seed packets. Even living in Minnesota with a short growing season, I have found it possible to plant zucchini, squash, cucumbers, beans, and carrot seeds directly in the ground in late May and still reap a bumper crop by the end of the summer.

Planting cheap, easy plants like these is also forward-looking. Winter squash plants produce abundant fruit which stores well in a cool, dry place for a number of months. Fresh garden carrots also store well in the refrigerator for a long time, while zucchini and green beans store well in the freezer.

Finally, gardening directly contributes to the gardener's health, both physical and mental. According to a [2017 meta-analysis](#), gardening provides "a wide range of health outcomes, such as reductions in depression, anxiety, and body mass index, as well as increases in life satisfaction, quality of life, and sense of community." I'm already anticipating the cheering nature of the outdoors, the extra exercise, and the cathartic relief that sinking my hands into the soil will bring in this season of social distancing and uncertainty.

Lest you think I encourage gardening simply because it's a long-time hobby of mine, allow me to offer some advice from another gardener who was far wiser than I when it comes to the tilling of the earth. Thomas Jefferson extolled the benefits of gardening in a [1787 letter](#) to George Washington, saying:

"Agriculture is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals and happiness. ... The moderate and sure income of husbandry

begets permanent improvement, quiet life, and orderly conduct both public and private.”

Americans have moved away from agricultural pursuits in recent generations, preferring instead to rely on the convenience of a postmodern society. Things change, however, when that convenience disappears. Is it possible, as Jefferson’s words suggest, that this disappearance could be to our benefit, not only in a monetary sense, but in mental, emotional, and moral senses as well?

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[Image Credit: Pxfuel]