

# Why Practical Skills Are Still King (And How To Learn Them)

When my parents' lawnmower broke recently, my father took apart the engine and found the problem: a broken governor shaft. While the part for that lawnmower was no longer made, if it were, my dad would have been able to singlehandedly repair the mower.

Similarly, I have memories of my grandmother canning peaches and pickles in a steamy kitchen during the summer. She also used to pack the freezer with blueberries she grew herself. These are still tasks she undertakes on occasion.

While freezers and riding lawnmowers didn't exist at America's founding, the hands-on, practical skills involved in the above activities represent the sort of American know-how and independent attitude that built the country. However, this mastery of the practical is fading with each generation.

In the best of times, most people don't need these skills. In the West, typically, garments no longer *need* to be mended repeatedly, food can easily be delivered to many places, and roadside services can help change a flat tire. And as [trades](#) decline, with many students opting for college by default, it's no wonder that many of these life skills are on the outs.

But in a time when shortages are common, recession looms, and inflation is sky high, these skillsets seem increasingly relevant. So where can we start?

Traditionally, these various tasks have been divided between the sexes. That doesn't mean that young women shouldn't learn to repair a tire or that young men shouldn't learn to cook. Yet, as a starting place, this split can be helpful.

## **Skills for Young Women to Learn**

For the young ladies out there, saving garments from the trash pile is an easy and rewarding task to start with. A sweater with a hole or a shirt with a missing button are projects for an afternoon that only require some thread, a needle, scissors, and perhaps a replacement button.

Personally, I'm trying to learn canning and preserving. As I mentioned, it's something my grandmother did for many years, and my great-grandmother was known for her amazing pickles.

A project with a more everyday application is cooking or baking. Ample free recipes and cooking tutorials are available online to follow along with. Eventually, the recipes will accumulate to a repertoire of meals fit for all occasions.

## **Skills for Young Men to Learn**

For men, a practical, yet simple, task to start with is changing a car's oil. Not only will this save money, it's also a job that can be done in an hour or two, and the only needed supplies are a bin to catch the dirty oil, some rags, and the correct kind of clean oil for the car.

Reading up on how internal combustion engines work will offer troves of information that can be applied the next time the lawnmower breaks. Or learning to replace a broken light switch could serve as an introduction to basic electrical work.

And just like the skills for young women, these tasks are very rewarding. There's nothing quite like the satisfaction from hands-on work and a job well done.

# How Can We Learn These Skills?

Today's age is filled with ways to learn new skills. There is a plethora of online tutorials on how to mend clothing, change a car's oil, or cook a simple recipe. Plus, a local library likely contains books on cooking, engines, or home repair.

But perhaps the best way is to find someone who can teach. Not only is this the perfect opportunity to learn something new, it's also a great way to connect with parents, grandparents, or some older people from the community.

My father started learning his mechanic skills growing up by watching my grandfather in the garage, though neither of them is a mechanic by trade. Meanwhile, both my grandmothers are competent sewers, and I learned to sew by working on projects with each of them.

If you have a hands-on skill or know a trade, offer to teach someone who may be interested. Show your friends and family how to fix something around the house, cook your signature dish, or replace that button.

And for those of us ready to pick up these skills, let's pick one to start with and find a way to learn it. Once, nearly every American knew at least a few of these. Along the way, we'll not only [brace for hard times](#) and save some money but also impress our friends and family and live up to the tradition of American know-how.

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