



Practice Homesteading

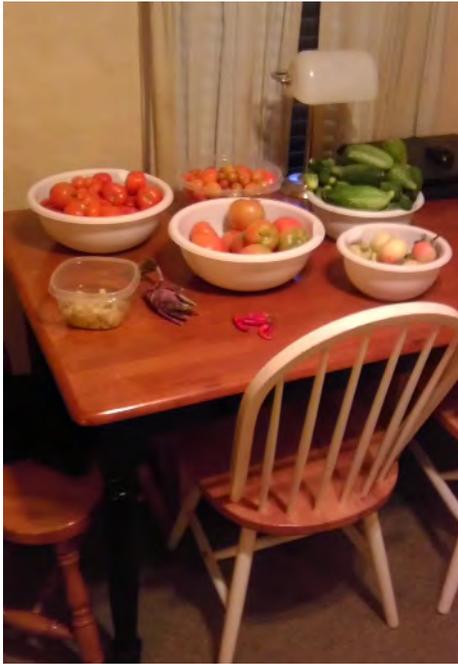
by Mary Evelyn Lewis

Homesteading may seem like a simple and novel concept, but it actually stems from the Homestead Act of 1862, signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln on May 20, 1862. The intent of this act was to encourage Americans to move further west and populate more areas of the country; and to grow resources like timber and food to supply the growing communities. To become a homesteader back then, you had to be 21 years old, improve the land granted to you by the government, and then file for the deed of title. One other requirement was that you had never taken up arms against the U.S. government. Of course, improving the land usually included a lot of back-breaking work, as it was typically virgin prairie or forest.

Today, homesteading can be defined as self-sufficient living, learning (and practicing) old-fashioned skills, a

self-sustaining lifestyle, or as simply as “back to basics” living. If you’ve ever canned fresh vegetables to preserve them for the winter months, or sewn your own clothes, you have practiced homesteading skills. More and more people are choosing homesteading as a way of life. But, if you ask a homesteader what it means to them, you will receive many different answers.

Debbie McLaughlin, who appreciates the efforts of the original homesteaders, says “Homesteading gives me the joy of understanding the hard work our forefathers went through to carve out their own corner of this country. Also, a true appreciation of how our food is grown.” She isn’t alone, regarding food. Martha Gillis says “I like the idea of raising food to eat and knowing what was used to raise it, without wondering what preservatives and



other additives are in it. Fresh and natural food.” Another prevailing theme for most homesteaders is satisfaction. Make no mistake, homesteaders tend to be determined, talented, creative folks. Martha also shares this, “There is a deep feeling of satisfaction as you enjoy fresh food that you’ve raised, or picked from someone’s harvest that they’ve shared with you.”

Community is a large part of homesteading. Let’s face it, we all at some point grow more than we can possibly use ourselves. Many places are happy to reap the benefit of a healthy harvest. Our family donates our extra tomatoes and cucumbers to the local food shelf, and we share with our neighbors. It is amazing the goodwill that grows over a bowl of fresh cherry tomatoes.

We don’t have to start from scratch to cook from scratch, unlike our ancestors. There are online communities for homesteaders to find and share information. Also, homesteading no longer requires acres of land. Noel Napolitano shares, “I have met city apartment dwellers who succeeded in growing almost all of their food, and trading food and work for other things needed.” An apartment with a patio or balcony can provide a space

for growing a few veggies or herbs. If you own a home with a small yard, ditch the lawn and grow a garden instead.

For an idea that is over 150 years old, homesteading has stood the test of time. If you are interested in homesteading, it is possible to begin with baby steps. Volunteer to work at a community garden in your city or town. Talk with your local librarian about resources near you. Search the word homesteading at www.google.com. You will find links to books, magazines, blogs and online communities



focused entirely on homesteading. More and more people are embracing the hard work and time involved to know where their food comes from, and enjoying the smell of freshly turned black dirt and the flavor of a tomato still sun warm from the vine.



Mary Evelyn Lewis is an aspiring homesteader and a freelance writer. She, along with her family, are learning to live sustainably, baby step by baby step. Find out more about her at <http://www.maryevelynlewis.com>.