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Inside This Issue

Keeping Chickens
at Home 1

The Ultimate Port-a-Potty 7

The Secret to a
Green Thumb 9

The Rise of the
Barter Economy 11

Keeping Chickens at Home

By Janet Lee Voss

There are few animals that provide as many benefits as chickens do.

They are a source of natural fertilizer for the garden, nature's perfect pest control method, easy to keep on a relatively small lot, and they produce tasty and nutritious food.

Chickens are the one type of livestock that almost every backyard farmer can keep. If you're looking for a source of animal protein that's less work than keeping a goat, and takes up less room than a cow, look no further than chickens.



In addition to being a relatively easy way to raise your own protein, chickens are incredibly efficient at pest control. They love to eat insects and slugs.

Chickens are one of the oldest types of domestic livestock, and have been "keeping company" with families for over 5,000 years. All



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domestic chickens are descended from the same genus: Gallus, a wild bird from Southeast Asia. Today there are breeds well suited for egg laying, breeds better for meat production, and breeds that do double-duty and perform equally well at both.

From baby chick to chicken salad, here's how to keep chickens as part of your backyard farm.

Chicken Concerns

Before you get your adorable, fluffy baby chicks in the mail or pick them up at your local feed store, there are some issues to address, not the least of which is whether you are in an area that allows chickens. If your home is within city limits, there are probably ordinances governing whether you can have chickens, how many chickens you can have, and whether you can keep a rooster. (Roosters aren't necessary for egg production.)

Some municipalities that allow chickens require permits, others have space requirements. Some mandate that the chickens be fenced in at all times, while others permit free-range chickens. Code enforcement is generally the department you'll want to check with.

If laws and rules aren't your thing, that's fine. Just be aware that it's hard to hide chickens from your neighbors, and you could find yourself experiencing a visit from code enforcement that you're unprepared for.

Noise

One of the biggest concerns regarding chickens in urban areas is noise. This is a largely unfounded claim, unless you're keeping a rooster (or two). Female chickens will cackle a bit right when they lay an egg. They also "talk to themselves" most of the day, which sounds like a low-level muttering. This "chicken chatter" isn't much a problem anywhere there is ambient background noise.

Roosters tend to crow at daybreak, and periodically during the day. They don't usually crow at night unless they're disturbed by light or noise. Many people make sure they know first, before their neighbors, if their chickens are disturbing by sitting the coop relatively close to a window where they can hear the birds. If two roosters are in residence, they will make more noise because they sometimes engage in a contest of crowing.

Bird flu

There are a variety of pests and diseases that affect chickens, some of which come from wild birds including ducks, blackbirds, and other birds. Avian flu or "bird flu" usually originates somewhere in Asia and travels with migratory birds. If you're located on the West Coast or near a wetland that hosts migratory fowl, your flock of chickens is at greater risk.

The possibility of Avian Flu strains jumping to humans is something to think about. If there happens to be a pandemic flu with birds as vectors, people keeping chickens will be at greater risk. However, at this time, the benefits of keeping chickens far outweigh the risks of catching a fatal flu from the birds. If a pandemic of such proportions does happen, there will be many other things to worry about.

Manure

Many people are worried about chicken manure, but this is actually one of the benefits of keeping chickens. Chicken manure is one of the most nutrient-rich fertilizers you can get, and if you raise chickens, you'll get it for free!

Free-range chickens roam the garden, depositing their "fertilizer" in a manner that spreads it out and prevents it from becoming a nuisance. If you keep your chickens in a coop and run, you'll need to compost the manure. A three-bin compost system that allows you to have one "finished" bin, one in

progress, and one that you're continually adding to is a good way to compost the manure so that you can use it on your garden. Simply mix the manure in with other green and brown materials, as you would with other types of compost, and let it cook for six months. Then it will be good as gold for the garden. Problem solved!

Chicken Decisions

Once you've gotten past your concerns about chicken keeping and have decided to go full-steam into backyard farming, you have three questions you'll need to answer.

Question 1 - Are your chickens going to be free-range (allowed to walk around your yard and garden) or will they be in a coop and run? Or will you pasture the chickens?

Chickens need between 5-10 square feet of outdoor space per bird. Many city ordinances require 10 square feet, so, if possible, plan on the larger amount of space. If you plan to raise chickens, you need at least three hens. Chickens are social creatures, and they'll be lonely without at least three to keep each other company.

This housing question mostly relates to the number of chickens you can keep and where you will put them, rather than the breeds you select.

Question 2 - Do you want to raise chickens primarily for eggs, for meat, or for both?

After answering this, go on to question 3

Question 3 - Do you want to keep a rooster?

You don't need a rooster in order to get eggs, but you do need a rooster for fertilized eggs (that hatch into chicks). However, you don't need a rooster to raise chicks. You can buy chicks and integrate them into your flock. For most people who live in an urban area, roosters are NOT a good idea—they're just too loud.

Breed selection

Some chickens are better for meat production; others are better for eggs...some even do double-duty. Unless you plan to run a retirement home for chickens, eventually you will need to "cull" the flock, so it is a nice idea to select a chicken breed that gives good meat when the time is up. Chickens can live for up to 7 years, if they aren't grabbed by a predator.

When chickens are born, they have all of the future eggs (ova) inside them. Most chickens are born with 4,000 ova, but few will live beyond laying 1,000 eggs. A typical laying hen will lay 20 dozen eggs during her first productive year.

Meat breeds

These breeds are best if you primarily want birds for meat:

- Australorp
- Orpington
- Cornish

Egg breeds

- Silky
- Americana
- Ohio Buckeye



All-around all-stars

These chicken breeds are good dual-purpose breeds for egg and meat production:

- Plymouth Rock
- New Hampshire
- Rhode Island Red
- Orpington

Bantams

You might have heard about Bantams. These are

basically “mini-me’s” of chicken breeds. They are usually quieter than full-sized birds of a breed. For every full-sized breed, there’s probably a Bantam. Silky, Japanese Bantam, Peken, and Sebrights are all true Bantam breeds, for which there is no larger-sized counterpart.

“...eventually the chicken will end up in the stew pot or your chicken salad.”

Shopping for Chickens

Part of your decision about which breed of chickens to get will be determined by the availability of the chickens. Farm stores usually have baby chicks in the spring, so as a first time chicken farmer, you might want to pick up your chickens there. You can mail order chickens, but there’s usually a minimum order. If you don’t want 20 hens, you can try to put together a co-op order with friends. Some farm stores will have a co-op ordering option, too. If you mail order chickens yourself, be prepared to get a box with a few dead baby chickens, and follow the instructions for disposal.

Some farm stores will have chicks that have been sexed, while others will not. If the sex isn’t identified, you can end up with a full set of roosters, so buyer beware!

From Eggs to Chicken Salad: The Chicken Life Cycle

It might sound harsh, but eventually the chicken will end up in the stew pot or your chicken salad. Here’s what happens between the laying of the egg and the inevitable end.

Egg: Eggs have to be fertilized to hatch. You can order fertilized eggs for your hens to sit on, or you can place the eggs under a heat lamp and follow instructions. Hens that want to sit on their own eggs

are called “broody.” You can order fertilized eggs for these hens if you don’t have a rooster.

Chick: The chick is the baby chicken. It has an egg tooth that allows it to peck its way out of the egg. These babies grow fast. They need to be protected from damp and cold, and require special feed. Most people raise their baby chicks in the garage or in a bathtub. Warning: they are pretty messy!

Pullet: These birds are immature hens that are less than a year old. Pullets start laying eggs when they’re between 6-8 months old.

Hen: Mature female chickens are called hens. These birds will lay eggs when there is at least 13 hours of daylight per day. Most hens lay one egg every 24 to 36 hours, but some breeds lay many fewer eggs. In the winter, when the light declines, hens will stop laying. You can provide artificial light, but many people will let their hens take a break during the winter when the light is low.

Molting: Chickens molt once a year. Usually they molt in the fall. During molting, chickens use all of their energy to re-grow their feathers, so they don’t usually lay eggs during that time. After the first molt, hens will lay fewer eggs—generally four-dozen fewer eggs per year.

Chicken Keeping

Before you bring home your chickens, you need to think about where they’re going to live and how you’ll care for them. Here’s what to do at each stage.

Baby Chicks

When you first bring the baby chicks home, you’ll keep them in what’s called a “brooder.” This can be as un-fancy as a cardboard box with heat lamps, the bathtub, a rabbit cage, or even a large aquarium! You’ll need room in it for a feeder and a waterer. The chicks will need to be able to move around and lie down to sleep. The bottom of the brooder needs

a clean layer of bedding. Pine shavings are a good choice for bedding. You need to keep the bedding dry. Chicks are susceptible to a lot of diseases.

Once the chicks are a month old, add a low roost (dowel rod works well) about four inches off the bottom of the brooder.

You will need a heat lamp to keep the temperature between 90-100 degrees for the first week. Reduce the temperature by five degrees each week for the first five weeks. Keep an eye on the chicks to make sure the temperature is right. If the chicks are huddling under the heat lamp, they're too cold—turn up the temperature. If the chicks are panting or sitting in the corners furthest from the heat lamp, they're too hot.

A feeder and waterer are important. You'll need to clean them both at least once a day. Chickens poop a lot, and they will do so in their own food and water. There's specially formulated food for chicks. Feed this, and don't give the chicks treats. Check their egg vents often to make sure that they aren't plastered over with dried chicken poop. This condition is called "pasting" and can seriously harm the bird.

Acclimating the Chickens

At five weeks, you can begin to introduce the chickens to the outdoors. The term "hardening off" applies to chickens as it does to plants. You'll have to help the chickens get used to the outdoors. One good way to do this is to get a dog crate with the bottom removed. Take it outside for a few hours at a time with the chicks in it when the temperature is at least 60 degrees. You will still need to keep an eye on the chicks because they are still very small and can escape!

After the chicks have their feathers, you can move them into their coop full-time. You should keep them locked in for a few days so that they can get used to the coop as their home. After that, you can either start letting them out in the yard (while you watch them) or in the chicken run.

Free-range or Coop and run?

Your chickens will need a coop, whether you have free-range chickens or chickens that live in a run during the day. The chickens will rest at night in the coop and they'll lay their eggs in the nesting box.

Coops

All coops need nesting boxes. It takes a little more work on the front-end, but if you can build a nesting box that opens from the outside, it will be easier for you to grab the eggs. You need at least one nesting box per every 2-4 hens. The boxes should be at least 12x12 inches in size. The top of the nesting box should be sloped so that the chickens don't roost (and poop) on it. Along the front of the nesting boxes, provide a roost perch over a box lip. The lip will keep the bedding and eggs in, and the roost provides a place for the chickens to land as they fly up to the roosting box.

There should be other roosts in the coop and run besides the roosts on the nesting boxes. The regular roosts should be lower than the nesting boxes or else the chickens will sleep in them.

Besides the roost perches and nesting box, the coop needs bedding. Pine shavings are a good choice. The coop needs ventilation; either from wire mesh walls, or a vent from the top.

Chickens that wander the garden during the day will need to be shut in their coop and run during the night to protect them from predators.

Chicken Tractors and Paddocks

A chicken tractor is a moveable coop. The nesting box is solid and built like a regular box. The run is smaller and usually made mostly of wire mesh. The tractor can be moved around for the chickens to scratch up weeds and deposit manure around the area. This is a good way to naturally control weeds, pests, and get natural fertilizer. You can even make chicken tractors

that fit over raised bed gardens to get the benefit of chickens in those gardens.

Keeping chickens in a paddock is sort of like using a chicken tractor, but larger. If you're keeping chickens in a paddock system, you divide your yard into different zones. Each zone is fenced from the rest, but provides entry to the coop area for nesting and egg laying. It's more work to set up a paddock system, but less work for overall maintenance.

Free Range and Fencing

You don't have to keep your chickens in a coop. To get the benefit of natural chicken pest control and fertilizer, let them out in the garden. You need to fully fence your yard if you're going to let the chickens out. You need to grow a variety of trees, shrubs, annuals, and perennials in order to avoid worrying about chickens eating everything in your garden. Chickens love fruit, and will eat blueberries and blackberries right off the bushes. By giving them different plants to forage around and different levels and shrubs to use for cover, you can leave the chickens in the yard.

It is imperative that chickens have a place to take cover from predators and that there are lots of different plants in the garden, or the chickens--and your garden--will be at risk of predation. You'll have to bring the chickens in at night. It's useful to get your chickens on a schedule so that they can expect to be fed at night. That will make it easier for you to get them inside—they'll be hungry and they'll want food.

Care and Feeding of Chickens

Once you have the chicken "home" set up, care and feeding is relatively easy.

Food

Free-range chickens that can walk around the yard need less feed than chickens that are kept inside a

coop. There are different types of feed available at farm stores. Consult the store for information about which food to give your chickens. Remember to feed chickens at night if you're letting them free range. Chickens will also need grit to help them digest. Granite fines are perfect for this.

If you'd like to give your chickens "treats," feed them a bit of plain yogurt, warm oatmeal (in the winter) or mealworms. The bites should be small, because chickens don't chew.

Water

A nipple waterer is best for chickens. Change the water frequently.

Egg collecting

Check for eggs in the nest boxes in the morning and evening.

Manure/bedding

Change the bedding when it is damp. You do not want the manure to build up, as it can cause unpleasant odors, disease problems, and parasites. Compost the manure for six months before using it in the garden.

Cold

Chickens need to be kept warm. Coops need to be insulated, but still well-ventilated. When the temperatures drop to 40 degrees or lower, it is important that the bedding is changed frequently so that it isn't damp or humid.

There's more to chicken keeping than what's described, but this is enough information to get you started and help you decide whether raising backyard chickens is a good decision for you and your family. Once you establish the chickens in their coop and get into a routine, chicken keeping is no more trouble than growing a garden, but is just as beneficial.

The Ultimate Port-a-Potty: A Composting Toilet and Other Solutions

By Janet Lee Voss

In a crisis or emergency situation, would no plumbing be a problem for you?

It need not be, but only if you create your own composting toilet. When there's no sewage treatment plant to suck away your waste, and you want to avoid a smelly outhouse, you need to make a composting toilet. Although it's relatively simple to make the actual structure, it's how you use it that counts.

Here's how to make a composting toilet for efficient, effective, and low-impact waste removal.

Making the Composting Toilet

A composting toilet is not an outhouse—that's an entirely separate proposition. Think of a composting toilet as something like a chamber pot that you keep in your house and then empty into the compost pile. There are two main components: the seat and the bucket.

To build a composting toilet, construct a box with four sides. (It will, essentially, be open at the top and the bottom.) The bottom will remain open, because this is how you'll put the toilet over the bucket. If you really want the toilet to be self-contained and portable, you can put a bottom on the box and lower the bucket down into it, though. You will fit this box over the bucket. For the top of the box, construct a top with a hole cut in it and a toilet seat installed. Then attach this top to the box with a hinge (and, if you have children around, a hook that you can lock). You will then be able to lift the top easily to remove the bucket to dump it. You can use any toilet seat with a lid for the seat.

That's the entire construction part—it is as easy as that!

Using the Composting Toilet

The difference between a composting toilet and an outhouse is that a composting toilet is something that you use inside and empty outside for further composting.

Once you have the composting toilet set up, you will need to gather some materials to put on top of the "deposits." Slightly aged compost such as chopped up leaves or sawdust work well. Brand-new wood shavings do not have enough microbes to begin breaking down the wastes and confining the smell. They are also bulky. Kitchen scraps and fresh clippings of leaves, weeds, or grass, don't work well, either. They have too much nitrogen in them (as does your waste matter). Just as you balance the carbon to nitrogen ratio in a normal compost heap, so too will you balance the carbon to nitrogen ratio in your composting toilet.

Once you use the toilet, you will use a scoop to dump at least one inch of high-carbon shavings or compost on top of the deposits. Then, just shut the lid until next time.



Five, five gallon buckets with lids are enough for a family of four for one week. Once one bucket has been filled, you can remove it, cover it with a lid, and leave it in the toilet room. It is fairly efficient to empty the buckets at one time, once a week.

Emptying the Composting Toilet

When you're ready to empty the buckets, take them outside to the compost pile.

Before emptying the buckets, dig into the compost pile to create a divot for the waste in the bucket. Then empty the buckets into the center of the pile, rake the rest of the pile over them and cover with new green or brown material such as grass clippings, weeds, chopped leaves, etc. This will put the "humanure" straight into the center of the pile where the temperature is highest and the microbial activity is fastest.

After emptying the buckets, rinse them out and then dump the water onto the compost pile. Many people who have an active composting toilet system have a rain barrel system close to the compost pile so that they can use rain barrel water to rinse out the buckets.

As you see, the "composting toilet" doesn't produce compost right on site, but is just one part of an overall process to compost human waste without need of a sewer or outside inputs.

So, What is an Outhouse?

When people think "composting toilet" they most likely think of smelly outhouses from grade-school camping trips. An outhouse is certainly a larger proposition than a composting toilet. Many people actually prefer composting toilets to outhouses because they are a way to keep the toilet indoors (which is more convenient at night or when it is cold outside). Composting toilets can also be done in smaller spaces without excavating a deep hole.

You can build your own outhouse by digging a deep hole and covering it with a toilet apparatus much like what you'd use for your composting toilet. To use the outhouse and keep it from becoming too buggy or smelly, each deposit should be covered with a cup of wood ashes or lime. Just keep the covered bucket handy (to keep out moisture) with the toilet paper.

One issue that you'll run into with an outhouse is a "Matterhorn effect" with waste. It is worth the time to throw a bucket of water in to knock down "Mt. Vesuvius" every now and then. Otherwise, and particularly during winter, you'll have a frozen volcano of poo that reaches up all the way to the toilet seat.

When building an outhouse, be careful to site it at least 100 yards downstream of your water supply. Placing the outhouse or privy above the water supply can result in contaminated water.

All in all, to avoid digging and have a convenient toilet inside the house, a composting toilet is the way to go. (Pun intended!)

Important Notes Regarding Composting Toilets

1. In order to keep the composting toilets from having unpleasant odors, you must use adequate cover materials. One handful of sawdust will not do. You need at least an inch on top of each deposit.
2. Before using any compost, it needs to have heated thoroughly to at least 140 degrees Fahrenheit for five to six weeks. It is worth getting a thermostat to check the temperature to ensure that any harmful bacteria have been killed.

The Secret to a Green Thumb

By Marjory Wildcraft

It is springtime once again, which means it's the perfect time to get that garden started.

If you've never grown anything before, or even if you have, you'll find this article inspiring. I'm the first to admit that only a few years ago, I went from being a natural born plant killer to growing the giant beanstalk. Believe me; if I can discover and successfully learn the secret to a green thumb, then anyone can.

Since then I've worked with thousands of people over the years and I've found the biggest block to getting started is what I call "black thumb syndrome." A lot of us just don't have any experience growing things and we are pretty sure everything will die. Or, like many people, you have tried getting started a few times, had some failures, and gave up not realizing there are some very simple principles to follow to becoming a super gardener.

I understand completely because that is my story. Seriously, when I first started out on the journey to become self-reliant I had very little experience in gardening or farming. I was great in the business world - I could run meetings, organize events, and handle office politics - but grow food? Not a chance. I was a complete and utter failure at it. Every houseplant I ever had, died of something or other and my yard only survived because it had been there forever anyway, long before I had arrived.

So what happened? One day I opened my eyes and saw how very possible food shortages truly are and realized that they will always be there, out on the horizon. Once that reality dawned on me, it was clear to me that growing my own food might one day be the only way I could get to eat. Watching my two kids play, I knew I had to be able to provide for them if the unthinkable ever happened. I knew that I had to learn how to grow food.

So I plunged in, and the first place I started was the instructions on the seed packets. They said "plant and come back in 90 days." So I planted, and I watered, and I watched, and I prayed. And everything just died. Have you ever had that experience? I tried again a few more times with the same result. Needless to say, I was getting more and more discouraged.

One time, my entire broccoli crop died after a light frost. I couldn't understand why. Broccoli is a cool weather plant and is supposed to be able to handle freezes. Why did mine die with just a light frost?

Fortunately there were some experienced gardeners in my neighborhood. I kept looking at their robust, healthy and vibrant plants, and my pathetic little struggling vegetables. Why were theirs so healthy and mine so sickly? I kept going back and forth and asking questions. Surprisingly, even those experienced gardeners couldn't really tell me why they were so successful.

Despite my repeated failures, being able to grow my own food was too important of a need for me to give up. So I kept visiting more successful gardeners and farmers, reading, researching, and trying experiments until I finally understood this very simple principle:

The key to successfully growing food lies in the soil.

My neighbor with the best garden was planting in beds made with two feet deep of richly composted horse manure. My soil, on the other hand, was essentially plain sand with little organic matter and almost no nutrients

Once I understood this simple principle I began to see it everywhere. The most common mistake that beginners make is they don't realize how important

good soil is. Almost all of the common vegetables we like to eat require rich, fertile soil to grow well. Plants need nutrients to be strong and healthy. They need the nutrients to be able to handle temperature extremes, wind, and variations in water. Once I got really good soil going in my garden my plants thrived.

The really awesome thing is that the plants pass those nutrients on to you when you eat them. And as you eat more and more nutrient-dense food, you become stronger and healthier too. You too will be better able to handle extremes in temperature, wind, thirst and hunger. You'll also be able to toss out a lot of those nutritional supplements, as you will no longer need them.

But it all begins with the soil.

I can attest to this. For most of my life I was 'cold sensitive' and would start grabbing for a sweater when the temps dropped into the low 70's. After several years of eating deeply nutritious home-grown food, I happily run around barefoot in 40 degree weather.

The early settlers of our country knew the value of good soil and our earliest towns were founded in areas because they had rich soil. But that was at least a century ago, and since then, those areas with great growing soils have been paved over with shopping malls, buildings and subdivisions. It is not likely many of you have access to good naturally occurring soil.

So how do you get great soil? If you can afford it, and you want to get the best possible start, go to a reputable local nursery and buy some rich organic soil and have it delivered to your site.

But, since I am also really big on doing things sustainably and for free, going out and buying soil is not a great idea for the long run. As time goes by, you'll need to keep adding to your soil to replenish it, and you don't want to have to keep buying things. So what do you do?

The key to good soil is good compost. And good compost fixes any kind of problem soil you have; be it rocky, sandy, clay, or whatever. Making compost is easy and is usually made from stuff you typically throw away; junk mail, lawn clipping, leaves, coffee grinds, and vegetable scraps. Making compost is a really simple process where nature does most of the work. Don't worry about the details too much for now. Just designate a small corner of your yard or garden area and start piling up those scraps. If you live in an apartment, I suggest you start with a worm bin under the counter. When done properly, it only smells like rich earth.

Fertility, compost, and soil building are so important to your health, and the health of your garden and livestock, that I will come back to this topic many times in the future.

Here is a quick demonstration of what fertility can do for you. Below is a photo of two trees of the same species; both have the same soil and both get the same water and sun. Yet the one on the right is clearly healthier with its abundant dark green leaves.

Why the difference? Well, I happened to have a small flock of geese who loved to sit in the afternoons in the shade of the tree on the right. Geese are a bit messy (to put it nicely) and while they rested there, they would of course, add a little fertility to the spot each



day. The extra fertility those geese gave the tree on the right made a huge difference as you can see.

An ancient wisdom that you'll come to appreciate



more and more is encapsulated in the saying – “all true wealth comes from the ground.”

In my next article, I'll go through three simple steps to getting started – and I'll help you avoid another one of the biggest mistakes I see new gardeners make. Until then, stake out an area for a small garden bed, clear out the weeds, and get the best possible soil you can! And by all means, start a compost pile.

For feedback, or to comment please email support@absoluterights.com.

The Rise of the Barter Economy

By Tim Young

In a crisis situation, everything changes. The way we think, the way we live and frankly...the way we survive.

Many have predicted that America's and the world's economies could collapse at any moment, leaving us without a viable currency. What would we do if we were left without money or if it was worth less than the paper it was printed on?

The answer is simple: we would barter. When's the last time you traded a good or service for another? For some of us it's been more recent, but for the majority of the world, it was when we traded baseball cards or food at lunchtime in elementary school.

Almost immediately after currency was coined, the basic concept of trading skills for items, or even items for items, was lost. The basic principles that governed our survival as a community shifted, changing what was a basic sharing system and turning us into a more greed based and selfish society.

If things go south and we are without currency, what will we do? Having “luxury items” becomes irrelevant and survival begins to take its rightful place at the top of our list of desires. The entire world would be flipped upside down and many wouldn't know how to fend for themselves.

I'm sure that you have begun to prepare for the worst, but that can only go so far. What happens when you need work done that you don't have the skills to do? Or need a specific item that you just don't have that is critical for survival?

As much as I hate to reference Hollywood, the book/movie *The Hunger Games* shows us such an example. There were large communities of people who were left with no food to survive on their own. Currency was extinct and all they had to bargain with were skills and simple food items. It wasn't pretty, but neither will our society be if our money loses all of its value, or we find ourselves stuck in a world in crisis.

Bartering and a barter economy will be crucial to your survival.

From a Paperclip to a House

Learning how to barter can lead to some amazing things. I want to start off by telling you about the story of Kyle MacDonald, also known as the 'red paperclip guy.' His story is remarkable and may be a rarity, but truly shows the power of bartering.

MacDonald started off his trading with a red paperclip... one singular clip. He traded that clip for a pen shaped like a fish... fair enough... but this is where the fun begins. It gets a little long, but I want you to see the power of bartering.

Next, MacDonald traded that pen for a doorknob; swapped the doorknob for a camp stove; the camp stove for a generator; the generator for a keg of beer and a neon beer sign; the keg and sign for a snowmobile; the snowmobile for a two-person trip to Yahk, British Columbia; the trip for a cube van; the cube van for a recording contract; the recording contract for one-year of free rent; the free rent for an afternoon with rock icon Alice Cooper; the afternoon meeting for a motorized Kiss snow globe; the snow globe for a speaking role in a film; and finally the speaking role in a film for a house.

That's right... in less than 14 months, MacDonald traded and bartered his way from a singular red paperclip to a house. If he could do that with no training, imagine what you can do when you are prepared and know what you're doing.

Online Barter Economies

When you think about barter economies, you probably think 'Wild West,' or some olden time when communication wasn't so instant and people had to share through their lives.

In reality, barter economies never left us; they've

evolved with us.

You really don't have to go far to actually participate in a barter economy. They're everywhere, just not in the physical way that we saw a hundred years ago. Rather, you can find them online.

Craigslist is the most common and quite possibly the most successful of the modern barter economy websites. Not only can you buy and trade for free on the site, you can sell your services and abilities to your local community. In a way, Craigslist has become the new town center, where an entire region's barter economy can successfully function and grow. Here, instead of a traditional loud market full of people, we have a bland, black and white website that gets the job done.

Another interesting development in the Internet barter economy is the free give-and-take system. You can find this on websites such like U-Exchange, Freecycle and CaretoTrade.

U-Exchange claims to be the largest online trading site in existence. U-Exchange costs nothing to join and there are no fees for completing a trade, something that many other sites employ in order to make a little money for themselves. There, you can offer trades with others for no cost at all.

This website is not only available in America, but in over 82 other countries as well. So if you ever found yourself in trouble in another country, you would most likely have the ability to barter for something you need there.

Freecycle is a revolutionary site in its simplicity. You log in and register to an online community based in a city or small region and literally offer your items for free.

On Freecycle, you can find everything from bicycles to the kitchen sink, and not spend a single penny in the process.

CaretoTrade is another great website for online bartering. On this site, there are actual sections

where one can set up exchanges of items. You can login as a user and post what you are willing to trade and what you're looking for. This is exactly like the town centers of old before there was consistent currency.

These websites are all well and good, but I know by now you've asked yourself...

What happens if we don't have the internet to connect and trade on?

Well, then you will really have to go 'old school' as I say, and truly work as a community to survive.



You'll Be The Rich One

If you're reading Lamp Lighter, odds are that you have a good storage of items that you'll need to survive. Not only will they help you make your own life comfortable, but the critical items that you have stored will be incredibly valuable in a barter and trading environment.

We've mentioned in our newsletter before that seeds could become as valuable as money is now and we aren't kidding. Think about it. Seeds are a consistent way to grow and provide food from virtually nothing. If you had seeds to trade in a market, you could get just about anything you wanted.

I want you to think about a scenario where the worst happens and money is worthless. You'll have extra of everything stored up, and hundreds of others in your very own neighborhood won't...

You have suddenly become the richest person in town. Not only are you in the best shape for the long haul, you will also be in the best position to negotiate for whatever it is that you need to continue your 'wealthy' lifestyle.

The Return of the Barter Marketplace

Economies are tanking around the world as you read this, and as such, people are changing the way that they function in order to survive. Greece is a great example of this.

Greece's economy is garbage. There is no better way to say it. They took on universal health care and a few other major social programs along the way that they just couldn't afford and it caught up to them... sound familiar?

The people have simply been running out of money and as such, people had to act to survive.

A small town in Greece called Volos has created its own currency. It's called the TEM. The TEM to the people of the city is the equivalent of one Euro, but because the value of Euro may tank, it's unimportant to the community there.

Volos functions independently from Greece. At the moment over 800 businesses in the town use the TEM, allowing them to have their own barter economy that functions quite successfully.

National Public Radio recently sent a reporter to the town to see exactly how things worked there, and they were shocked at the success. The townspeople had formed a legitimate community with one another, trading services and goods and very simply... living off of the land.

Farmers farm, mechanics fix things, and yoga instructors teach classes....

And this all functioned in its own separate economy.

The reality that is a terrible economic crisis brought on by a failing government melts away when you can function as a society like Volos does.

The American Reality

As I pointed out above, we are almost Greece. The framework has been set to turn our nation into a pile of rubble and we will more than likely be bartering for everything that we need not long into the future.

When I talked about where you can trade with others online now, I bet a lot of you thought materials and simple tasks. Things like furniture or tutoring... nothing too deep. In reality, a lot of Americans have begun to step away from the current government-sponsored economy and work on their own.

James Gorrie, macroeconomist and author of *The Gorrie Details on Absolute Wealth*, has said many times that Americans are sick of federally sponsored, genetically-modified foods. They are tired of eating pink slime instead of meat, fruits and vegetables that have God-knows-what sort of chemicals put on and in them.

Instead of eating the unknown, regular people are starting to farm for themselves and develop farmers' markets across the nation. They intend to get us away from this absolute garbage and live longer, healthier lives, and away from whatever someone "in charge" has deemed appropriate to put in us.

Some Americans are smart like you, and are ready to function on their own. They just won't buy what they are being sold by "the establishment."

Being a Top Barterer

So we've discussed where to barter and how the world is trending. Now I'd like to talk to you about how to be an excellent barterer in what could be our future way of life.

I hope that you like interacting with people. Sadly many of us have been taken far away from a lot of social interactions thanks to the Internet. If a crisis

occurs and computers are knocked out, more than a few people will be left in what's essentially the wilderness without the speed and convenience of the colored screen and keyboard.

Being a top barterer means that you know how to deal with real people... that you can talk to strangers, and be able to read them. I hope that I can teach you a few tricks in this article.

Understanding Value

You know the old saying, "One man's trash is another man's treasure?" That couldn't be truer than in the bartering process.

The first thing you need to realize is that value is relative. Something that you may not think is worth anything could be precious to someone else.

NEVER go into a trade assuming the value of the items that you or the other person has. If you do this, you could defeat yourself in a trade before it even begins.

Let's say you know that shovels are plentiful in the area where you live, but you think that the person you're trading with needs a shovel in order to effectively farm. You will assume that you have bargaining power and may value the shovel well above what it is worth. If you enter the trade and ask way too much in exchange, you run the risk of turning off the other person involved in the trade and potentially ending the transaction.

Conversely, you may take that same shovel to try to barter with someone that produces farm equipment. Here, you would assume that the item has very little value because you think the other person has this item already. If you undervalue your item, you could practically give it away, which would also be a huge mistake.

It's critical that you go in and feel out the situation before engaging in bartering. This goes for anything;

whether it is a good or a service. Which brings us to our next tip; know whom you are trading with.

It's important to understand just whom you are going to be dealing with. In retail stores now, we don't care who we buy from, because it makes no difference what the pricing of an item is. You walk into a store, pick something up, take it to a register and smack money down to buy it. Game over. In a barter economy, it's so much more complex.

In order to understand whom you are going to be trading with, you should ask questions. You never know what people are like, especially if you have never met them before, so be careful in choosing the right questions to ask.

You want to get the person to divulge as much information as possible without tipping them off as to what you're doing. Feel them out, but let them do a lot of the talking.

Ask basic questions like: "So what do you do here?" and "How has (whatever they do) been going recently?" to start.

These questions are probing, but not too specific. Generally, people want to talk about themselves. By getting them talking about how their livelihood has been, you can learn a little bit more about their needs and have an upper hand in trading.

It's Like Playing Poker

In order to keep the upper hand in trading, you're going to want to play what would seem like a game with the person that's bartering with you.

90% of the game of poker is acting. Players get different hands of cards and don't want to show what they have to their opponents so that they can win the pot. The same goes with bartering.

The last thing you want to do is show everything you have before you trade with someone. If they perceive you to be weak and needy, they may take advantage

of you; but if they see you as strong with the upper hand, they will bargain evenly and even give up a bit to you.

We recently lost one of the greatest poker players of all time, Amarillo Slim. Slim was no pushover and knew not only how to win at the game, but also how to negotiate. In one of his most famous quotes he said, "Look around the table. If you don't see a sucker, get up, because you're the sucker."

I want you to think about that as you begin to barter with others. You always want to maintain the upper hand or at least stay even when you're negotiating with others. This becomes even more critical when your personal survival is on the line.

I know that right now, the disappearance of currency and resurgence of bartering seems a long way away for our society. The reality is that it could happen at any moment.

I want to make sure that you are in the best possible position in order to provide for your family. Remember, being prepared and stocking up on what could be valuable is the best way to keep an advantage for you and your family if crisis hits.

And be smarter than they think you are.



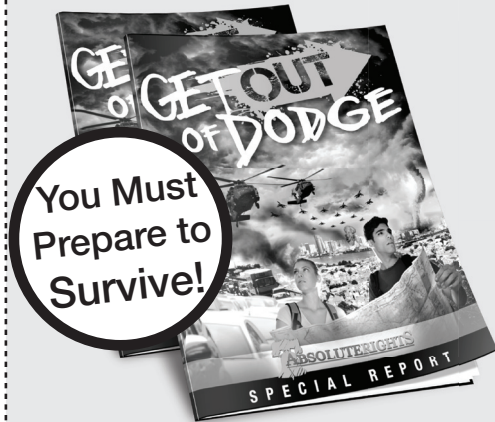
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