

The Basics of Country Life

The Vegetable Gardener's Bible, Basic Country Skills: A Practical Guide to Self-Reliance, and Small-Scale Livestock Farming

The Vegetable Gardener's Bible

As a new or maybe even seasoned hobby farmer, no doubt your land is home to one or more gardens. But, is your garden all that it can be? Growing vegetables for your own consumption is one of the greater joys in life, and this attitude is extremely evident in Edward C. Smith's *The Vegetable Gardener's Bible*. Smith begins by describing his gardening system "W-O-R-D" (which stands for wide rows, organic methods, raised beds and deeply dug soil) and conveys his expert knowledge on the subject. He describes why this method is superior to the standard, narrow rows with wide footpaths and more importantly, he does so in an extremely vibrant and easy-to-follow format. The key to this system of gardening is that it has shifted from "gardener-centered" to "plant-centered," creating an environment that is friendlier to plants and their needs—rather than the gardener's—making the vegetable garden much more conducive to higher yields. In Smith's wide-bed system, because of the high ratio of bed space to walking space, you can grow substantially more vegetables in substantially less space. The phrase "less is more" comes to mind. Beautifully descriptive color photos and illustrations accompany the step-by-step sequences, formulas for calculating various measurements and tips on everything from garden tools to seed catalogs. Never once did I have unanswered questions on how to lay out a wide bed, or even how to build and install a garden trellis.

Perhaps the most valuable section of the "Bible" is the last—the Plant Directory. This is where the author profiles each vegetable from A to Z, and gives the reader useful and detailed information about each one. Each profile describes the vegetable, the site that will be most optimal for planting, sowing, growing, harvesting and storing, winter care and the best varieties. So, whenever you decide to attempt a new vegetable in your garden, turn to the VGB for all the vital statistics. By getting to know each plant well in the plant directory, I felt as though I had grown them many times in the past. I came away from this book with the knowledge necessary to reap a successful harvest.

After reading this comprehensive text, I trusted the author's knowledge completely and strangely enough, felt that the author had faith in me and my gardening endeavors. Well written and edited, and artfully illustrated, *The Vegetable Gardener's Bible* is spreading the W-O-R-D one gardener at a time.

—KKA

Basic Country Skills: A Practical Guide to Self-Reliance

From finding your first piece of land in the country to learning how to live off that land, *Basic Country Skills: A Practical Guide to Self-Reliance* has you covered. Published by John and Martha Storey, longtime veterans of country living and publishers of books on the rural lifestyle since the 1980s, *Basic Country Skills* is a compilation of writings by nearly 200 "country pros." As John Storey aptly says in his introduction, the book provides "a lifetime of country wisdom in one volume."

The 564-page book is divided into four sections: the home; yards, gardens and orchards; country cooking; and barns, stables and fields. Within each of these sections are detailed instructions on how to do just about anything related to the country lifestyle, whether it's decorating your home with country charm, preserving and storing eggs, or improving the chemistry of your soil. The book offers a rural education you can carry with you and refer to as you tackle various tasks around your home or farm.

Almost as impressive as the amount of information *Basic Country Skills* provides is the way in which it is presented. Illustrations, tables, sidebars, lists and short tips break up the text, making for quick, easy reading. Don't be surprised how quickly the pages become dog-eared from use. Whether building a barn for the family cow or trying to sort the good bugs from the bad in your vegetable garden, you'll find yourself referring to this handy reference again and again.

While *Basic Country Skills* is a must-have for novice farmers and others just starting out in the country, it may also be of value to old hands at the rural life. After all, even experienced country folks may someday need a refresher on pulling taffy or planting water lilies.

—VHD

Small Scale Livestock Farming

Whether farm life is yet a dream you are working toward, or you already find yourself starting out on your own Green Acres, *Small-Scale Livestock Farming* by Carol Ekarius will show you how to roll up your sleeves, get started and most importantly, succeed with a small livestock farm.

No one can tell it better than someone who has been there, and Ekarius and her husband have raised and marketed livestock for over a decade. Neither came from a farming background, yet they learned how to farm. This perspective is especially beneficial to those new to agriculture. However, more experienced farmers might glean new insights as well from the creative and progressive ideas Ekarius presents.

Throughout, the book emphasizes a natural, organic approach to livestock management and farming in harmony with the environment. It's more than tree-hugging sentiment, however—you'll find down-to-earth science and practical advice within.

The natural connection, explains Ekarius, is grass forage. She says, "The industrialization of animal agriculture has eroded the importance of grass and replaced it with grain and processed feeds, but for the small-scale farmer grass needs to again become the centerpiece of the farm."

The book gives basic information about pasture management and grazing for grass-based farming, and a comprehensive overview of raising and caring for livestock on this type of small farm.

Successful farming not only depends on hard work; it also takes planning and monitoring. Detailed chapters cover the business end of things specifically geared to the small livestock farmer with advice on marketing strategies, farm planning and financials.

I found the most enjoyable reading to be the Farmer Profiles—case studies of real life farmers—that illustrate the principles author Ekarius sets forth in a personal way and sharing valuable insight. It was encouraging and inspiring to read about small farmers who are making a go of it and learn from their successes and failures. While there are no glossy photos of happy cows, green fields and country kitchens, this book actually tells you how to butcher poultry, lay a straight fenceline and all kinds of useful information in down-to-earth terms, just like talking to a helpful neighbor up the road.

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