

What Animals To Raise In Your Backyard

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Every smart prepper and survivalist knows that social or economic crises have the potential of occurring at any moment.

In anticipation of such events, stockpiles of distilled water, canned liquid, dehydrated milk, powdered eggs, hard cheeses and canned and dehydrated meat, seafood, and poultry are stored for future survival. Who's to say how long a disaster or collapse will last, though? Have you considered what you will do when your food supply runs out, and a can of beans at the supermarket (if there are any left) will cost you 20 bucks?

If your family is serious about survival, and ready to move beyond stockpiling dehydrated and canned goods, you may want to consider acquiring livestock that will work even in the tiniest of survival farms. You'll be amazed at the possibilities that work for a large range of backyard farms, even those in suburban neighborhoods with HOA's.

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I personally grew up on a small backyard farm in a very low income family. The livestock we raised not only provided our family with food and companionship in our time of need, but also taught me the value of hard work, sacrifice, and the circle of life from a very young age.

Here, I'll discuss some of the backyard livestock that virtually anyone, anywhere can keep, breed, and raise for use in both every day living and in times of crisis.

Chickens

I'll start with my favorite feathered farm friends, those lovely ladies known as chickens. Not only do chickens provide you with rich garden compost, happily lap up insects and your kitchen scraps, and make you fresh breakfast in the morning, but each chicken's unique curious, happy personality will surely make them both pets and a thriving food source.

Fresh eggs are clearly the best reason to own chickens. At around 6 months old, hens begin to lay eggs and will consistently continue to lay daily or every two days for several years to come. The more free range a chicken is given to roam, along with hearty kitchen scraps to eat, the more flavorful your eggs will be. Without a doubt, these eggs will taste better than anything you will find in a supermarket.



Another obvious benefit to owning chickens is the natural compost their waste provides. When fed a diet of grains, bread, vegetable scraps or meat scraps, their “poop” is one of the most nutrient rich garden additives one could ask for.

You can't ask for better pest control than the type your chickens provide. They hunt down and happily eat all kinds of insects, snakes, and even small rodents. They also love grass and weed or plant shoots, so if you let them roam free, you'll find your shrubbery and trees are kept well-manicured.

Spring is the perfect time to start a small flock of chickens that can easily be scaled up in times of food shortage. Your local farm supply store most likely has baby chicks available for sale.

Raising chickens is as simple as providing for their basic needs of food, water and shelter. Baby chicks need to be kept warm in a brooder close to a heat source. You can craft your own, or simply use a spare bathtub. You'll also need to know how to recognize mites and diseases and how to treat them.

Rabbits

Rabbits are next on the list as they are small, low maintenance, easy to raise animals, perfect for a tiny farm. Two does and one buck should provide around 180 lbs of meat per year. You can take your pick of several good meat breeds. You could go in for the Flemish Giants, for instance, that sometimes weigh 20 pounds. They eat a lot more, of course, and their fryers, at seven to nine weeks, weigh not too much more than do those of the medium breeds at the same age. The New Zealand Whites are another popular medium weight breed — their white fur is worth more than the Chinchilla. There is a number of other good medium weight breeds.

Rabbit experts recommend keeping an Alfalfa hayrack in each rabbit hutch. They'll also eat dried bread crusts or scraps and just about any kind of vegetable (including the tops). Be sure to avoid overfeeding them, however, by taking out what they leave when they're done eating. Overfeeding can cause them to bloat or have diarrhea. Find out from the person who sold you the rabbit what they've found to be the best feeding methods for their rabbits.

Ideally, you'll want to have two does and one buck, and you'll need to keep them separated until breeding. You can let them breed every 90 days, then gestation will last only about 30 days. The young will nurse for up to six weeks, learning to eat solid food as they grow. On average, your two does and one buck will produce 40 to 50 rabbits a year.

Goats

You'll want to check the local codes for your county, municipality, or homeowner's association before you add goats to your little farm. Some areas consider their noise a nuisance, and you'll need to have at least two as goats are herd animals and get distressed without another goat.

Make sure you have sufficient space. Jennie Grant, a Seattle goat keeper who Time magazine dubbed the godmother of goat lovers, advises "Whatever your purpose in getting goats and whatever breed you choose, be aware that two small goats will require a minimum of 400 square feet devoted solely to the goats. This is a very small area," she said, "and you'll need to create entertainment for them." She suggested building stairways to nowhere they can climb or balance beams where they can play. A clever way to create additional space in small backyards is to build a shed that allows the goats to access a rooftop deck via a ramp or another means. "This will help keep the shed from taking away from the goats' outdoor space," said Grant.



Goats can be loads of playful fun that provide fleece, milk and meat, but they require more labor than our previously listed farm friends. Goats need to be milked twice a day and you have to train them to be milked.

Grant cautions that goats are supreme escape artists. Grant quotes an old Greek saying in her book that it's easier to fence out water than it is to fence in goats. While she pointed out that this is an exaggeration, she also stressed the importance of keeping your goats in your yard and out of your neighbors' property where they might find their way past the prized rose bushes and onto the top of

a newly purchased luxury car. Your fence will need to be at least 52 inches high and can be made from a variety of materials, including panels, chain links or woven wire.

It's important, especially in a small backyard farm, that all of the animals live happily together and that there is enough space available to properly shelter each animal from the elements. A lot of online prepper guides suggest pigs as the next most obvious choice in backyard farming, but I disagree. If you're going to add pigs to your backyard farm, I suggest foregoing the goats, as pigs and goats don't make the best companions. Pigs are super smart. They get emotional, territorial, and aggressive. If you have plenty of grass for your goats to graze on, you won't have any left if you add pigs to root it up. If you've worked hard to build a sturdy, goat safe fence, expect that to come crashing down too, with the addition of pigs.

Pigs will also happily eat your chickens, without remorse - which is why my next recommendation for your small backyard farm is ducks.

Ducks

Just like our feathered ladies that came in at number one on my list, ducks are an excellent source of both eggs and meat. You can even house your chickens and your ducks together. Like baby chicks, baby ducks need to be kept warm in a brooder with a heat source. For super happy ducks, give them a place to swim. Full grown ducks can drink up to half a gallon of water a day, so you'll want to keep their water source replenished.

Always keep a very close eye on the little ones as they swim. They tire easily and could drown. Swimming time should be kept short until their feathers come in and you can help them warm up after swimming by towel drying them.

Mixed flock feed will suffice in feeding both your chickens and your ducks, but never feed your ducks medicated chicken feed. Ducks and chickens have similar housing needs, although ducks don't roost at night like chickens so they don't need roosts. A straw nest on the ground will suffice.

Have some tips for other preppers and survivalists on keeping a small, backyard farm? I would love to hear from you! Let me know in the comments below what you consider to be the best animals for a tiny survival farm!



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