

Five animals you should have on your homestead

It seems that the food shortages, the soaring gas prices, and the lack of trust in the supply chain have made folks reconsider their priorities. Crowded cities are no longer the desired place to live for many, and more and more people are getting into homesteading after moving to rural areas.

Now regardless if you want to quit your day job to become self-reliant or if you want to try a new hobby since you have the space and time available, you can make your homesteading experience a little easier by learning from those before you. They say that trial-and-error is the best learning experience, but when it comes to homesteading is better to have a head start and know where to begin.

No homesteading project, small or big, is complete without having a few dependable animals, and in today's article, we will make sure you start right by listing a group of animals that are a must-have for your homestead. You may know that chickens are the first choice for every homestead out there, but animal husbandry goes beyond chickens. So let's look at the animals one should consider for their homestead.

A grazing animal or two

When it comes to grazing animals, you have to decide if you should keep a cow or a sheep. This, of course, depends on what you need the animal for. Perhaps you want it for meat or milk or wool. You may say that you can also eat sheep, but not everyone likes the taste of mutton. In this case, a cow is more desirable since not only can it produce more meat, but it is also the preferred meat choice for many. Even more, with the right breed, you can get a dual-purpose cow that becomes a source of both milk and meat.

If you want to make your own clothes, and textile production is envisioned as a source of income, then you will opt for sheep. If you follow this path, you will need to decide if you want more sheep and if you have the space to accommodate all the grazing animals.

For small homesteads, one or two grazing animals may be enough for the needs of a family, but if you want to raise livestock for profit, you can imagine that you need a lot of space for your animals.

Getting a cow

Old folks say that no farm is complete without a cow, and this is your best choice if food is your main concern. You will need to do a little bit of research to decide which breed is best for your budget, meat preference, and region.

The most popular beef cattle are Angus, Hereford, and Texas Longhorn. If you lack space and you can't handle big animals, you might want to consider the smaller Jersey cow. They are good milk producers, and they provide delicious beef.

The number of cows you keep will also impact your homesteading budget since feed costs will go up, depending on the number of animals you have, and you also make sure you can provide enough pasture.

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Getting sheep

A lot of folks prefer sheep as their starter or training animals since the feed costs and maintenance are pretty low. Unlike cattle, sheep don't require heavy-duty fencing, and this will considerably reduce your costs. Sheep also don't require feeders or waterers, and they can grow well on grass alone. The main problem with sheep you may encounter is that

these animals are more susceptible to parasites and worms compared to cattle. An infestation could do real damage to your sheep before you are able to spot it.

Dairy goat

A miniature dairy goat is usually the preferred choice for many homestead beginners since they are low maintenance and provide milk for their families. These goats are obtained by breeding Nigerian dwarf goats with purebred American goats. There are many breeds you can choose from, but I recommend going with the Nigerian Dwarf breed from the start.

Get a buck and a doe since the does will produce milk to feed their young. They will lactate for up to eight months after giving birth, and they have no problem sharing their milk. They are an all-around breed, and they are highly productive despite their small size. Each doe will produce up to two quarts of highly nutritious milk per day.

A recommended setup for your homestead is comprised of one buck, two does, and the kids they birth. However, it is important to mention that when you want to limit the breeding and separate the buck from the does, you will need a wether (castrated buck) to keep them together. If you isolate the buck and don't provide company, it will get depressed, stop eating, and may even die.

Meat rabbit

Meat rabbits are a smart choice for your small homestead since they don't require much space, being housed in cages or hutches. They cohabitate well with other animals, especially fowl, so you could build a large chicken or duck coop and house both your chickens/ducks and rabbits.

Keeping a "bunny" farm can be highly productive because

rabbits breed like rabbits, pun intended, and they will provide ample meat. If the situation goes out of hand and you end up with too many bunnies, you can sell the offspring and make some extra cash.

If you want to raise rabbits, here's an idea that will prove useful for your homestead. The poop of your rabbits is highly valuable for your garden since it's an excellent fertilizer with its high nitrogen content. Since it also stinks, you would want to hang the cages above a mulch pile. If you do so, the poop will compost with the mulch, and you will get rid of the smell.

Ducks

As I've mentioned at the beginning of the article, a lot of folks pick chickens as their first birds for the homestead, and for a good reason, since there are breeds that are excellent layers. But how about getting some ducks as well, since these can be all-around birds that will improve your meat and egg production?

My breed of choice is the Muscovy duck, which technically is not really a duck since it has geese descendants. These ducks haven't been hybridized and are wilder in nature than your average ducks, which makes them more self-reliant. There are outstanding foragers, and they like to take to the sky if you don't clip their wings. Perhaps their best attributes are that they raise their young, they are quiet, so you won't deal with noise complaints from your neighbors, and most importantly, they will help you get rid of garden slugs.

A Muscovy duck is larger than its hybridized cousin, being able to grow up to 15 pounds and provide double the meat. When it comes to eggs, even though they are not as productive as chickens, the eggs they lay are more nutritious. So even if you would have half as many eggs compared to chickens, they are highly nutritious, and they make up for this downside by

providing a better meat ratio than chickens.

Pigs

Keeping pigs is hard work, and if you decide to get some, it's recommended to make your life easier by picking a few Kunekune pigs (originating from New Zealand). These are medium-sized pigs and have a much more pleasant temperament than their American cousins. These are fat and round pigs and the females grow to be between 100 and 180 pounds, while males usually grow between 200 and 250 pounds. They have short snouts, and in their case rooting in the ground will not be a problem; they also won't challenge fences.

The main advantage of these pigs is that they are grass-based, and they love to forage to procure their food. They are not dependent on grains like other breeds, and if you have a pasture for the cows or sheep, these pigs are an ideal choice.

Feeding your animals

Once you get the animals, one of your most important jobs will be to feed them and keep them well-fed all year round. Here are a few things you should know based on information gathered on-site at my father's farm. He also uses an organic mash which he prepares as follows: He uses 2 cups of dry feed per animal and puts it in a five-gallon bucket, and then pours enough water to cover the feed. It lets it soak overnight so that the grains are turned into porridge.

Feeding the Cows

- Daily pasture grazing is recommended
- Hay as needed in the winter
- Mineral lick

Feeding the goats

- Daily pasture grazing is recommended (make sure there are broadleaf plants and bushes on the pasture since the goats will prefer these instead of grass)
- One cup for each goat of organic alfalfa pellets in the morning and at night one cup of organic chicken grains
- For debloating, you will need to give your goats baking soda
- Hay as needed, especially in the winter
- Salt lick

Feeding the ducks

- Daily pasture grazing is highly recommended
- At night, provide them with feed so that they will return to the coop. They will continue to forage if they are not well fed
- Additionally, you can also give them kitchen scraps at night.

Feeding the pigs

- In the morning, provide them with one cup each of mash, and at night give them chicken scraps. Since there will be times when there aren't enough kitchen scraps, it is recommended to give them one cup each of mash.
- Hay as needed

Feeding the rabbits

- Hay as needed since it helps their digestion
- Half a cup (you can even give them one full cup, depending on their size and appetite) of organic alfalfa pellets in the morning and at night.
- Fresh leafy greens daily (oregano, wireweeds, dandelions, sunflower comfrey, mint, etc.)

Concluding

Raising animals for your small (or big) homestead is not rocket science, even though some say it's a continuous learning process. At first, this endeavor will require a lot of research on your side, and besides the work you put into raising the animals, you also need to have patience. Things will improve with time, and your work and dedication will provide you with high yields. Nothing beats that feeling you get when providing food for your family from your own self-sufficient operation you've built.



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