Survival Garden: How to Endure an Economic Collapse

Federal debt has reached $27 trillion (Kimberly Amadeo, n.d.), and society is vastly underprepared for the future.

Looking back at history, the warning signs are unmistakable. During the Great Depression, 25% of Americans were unemployed (San Jose State University, n.d.). Poverty and starvation became a norm when the Dust Bowl phenomenon wiped out the crops. Falling prices for remaining farmers caused mass wastage.

California alone lost 22.4 million pounds of unsold tomatoes in 1932, despite widespread hunger (Utah State University, n.d.). Healthcare was non-existent after most insurances devalued. So how did our grandparents' generation survive?

Senior citizens will tell you. Government aid and "hunger marches" didn't get them through "Hoover's time," having a productive garden and chickens did.

Few Americans grow food today, and agricultural families make up just 2% of the population (Farm Bureau. n.d.). During the 1930s, 25% of Americans were farmers. It was easy to source the crucial ingredients for a survival garden.

By contrast, it's impossible to collect the seeds and chickens needed to survive at short notice these days. There aren't enough resources in the community.

Start the path to self-sufficiency before it’s too late.

You don’t have to buy a farm, but maintaining a small garden and chickens is critical. You can stockpile supplies and seeds, so you’re ready to scale when catastrophe strikes.

If you don’t, those dreams of growing enough food to sustain your family in a crisis are just that. It takes time, and plentiful trial and error, to get anywhere close to where you need to be to survive a global shutdown. Think about planting fruit trees. You’ll thank me later when they’ve matured, providing you with ample food for minimum effort.

This article will teach you practical garden solutions to help you survive an economic crash. Implement these, and you’ll be much closer to self-sufficiency.

Why Survival Starts in the Garden

Millions of Americans haven’t started moving toward self-sufficiency, and you might think it’s already too late. I’m here to tell you it’s not.

You can attend classes, read, and consume masses of content, but not get any closer to self-sufficiency. People spend too long finding the ‘perfect’ solution before taking any action, but the theory can only get you so far.

You have to try and fail, over and over. You need to apply yourself, hands-on, and refine your techniques.

Economic Crash – Steps to Prepare Your Garden

The garden is one of your greatest overlooked assets. Still, without the correct systems in place, it’s not much use. You can’t go to the nursery or garden center when the economy grinds to a halt.

I’ll break down the actions you need to take to give yourself a fighting chance.

Lasagna Gardening

Years ago, I took over a small plot at a community garden. It was entirely overgrown, but underneath it had the raised planters I required.

After cutting back the weeds, clearing, and burning for a few days, the remnants of a vegetable garden were clear to see, and I had piles of ash I could use to improve the soil. I started digging over, and that’s when it hit me.

Digging is arduous, hot, and sweaty work. It takes serious effort and calories to achieve the double digging method taught to me by my father and grandfather, but it wasn’t that. Something about the process didn’t seem right.

It was the destruction.

Think about it; you’re twisting the fork, ruining the tiny air-filled channels and healthy crumb structure earthworms

create. Chopping up the worms that improve the soil and make those structures doesn’t help either, and crucial microbes will die when exposed to light.

Digging also gives long-dormant weeds a chance to germinate. That could be a disaster if you have something like bindweed, as breaking its long roots creates root cuttings, which can then spread to other beds.

The alternative? Lasagna (or no-dig) gardening (I learned this from Rodale’s Lasagna Gardening by Patricia Lanza).

Lasagna Beds – Step by Step

1. Salvage some thick cardboard, but avoid heavily printed boxes. You don’t want chemicals leaching into the soil. Remove any tape; plastic in your beds isn’t ideal. Put down a cardboard layer that covers the ground (it’s OK to overlap).

2. Add a layer of mulch, hay, or sawdust, and spread it evenly over your cardboard. Consistency is crucial here. Each covering is essential to grow plants effectively and to prevent weeds.

3. Next, you need a blanket of the more nitrogen-heavy materials. Grass clippings are ideal, and you can use food scraps, too. Many advocate using weeds, but the risk of a few seeds taking root in my bed puts me off.

4. Repeat step 3. A layer of ‘green’ is followed by a slightly thicker ‘brown’ layer, and vice versa. That encourages microbes to process the material faster and better provide nutrients.

If you live near the ocean, add seaweed and kelp. Both are fantastic at providing salts, micronutrients, and other extras your plants crave.

5. Cover with compost, but don’t use lumpy stuff. Take the

time to prepare it, so it’s well refined.

6. Add a final mulch layer. Doing so is crucial to avoid killing your soil life in warmer climates. This final topping will keep moisture in, and you won’t end up with a solid cake.

7. Once you’ve finished with all the layers, you can plant. Remove any weeds that come through initially, but this problem will be short-lived.

Every year, top it up with compost and mulch. Lasagne beds take 10% of the time, which is a game-changer for gardeners.

Water Harvesting

Water barrels are great, but 50 gallons isn’t enough. The amount of rain you could collect when the heavens open is astounding.

Around 900 gallons of water runs off a 50 by 30-foot roof if there’s 1-inch of rain (Cheryl Long, 2012.), which is more than enough to sustain your garden. If you have 20’x20′ space, you’ll need around 250 gallons of water to water to a 2-inch depth once per week (Danny Lipford, n.d.).

That’s the ideal depth for promoting healthy roots, and if you break the soil up, it’ll hold even more water.

I struggled to get my head around where I would store it all, but it’s just a matter of diverting the rain from your downspouts into your garden.

Earth has incredible storage potential. The amount of H2O your soil can hold depends on the clay-to-sand ratio, but the surface area of one cubic inch could be 25 feet (Cheryl Long, 2012.). That’s up to six inches of water per foot of ground.

What do you need to do to make this work?

It might sound expensive, but you can collect many of the

items you need for free. If you can salvage most of the materials, the rest won't set you back much.

Water Harvesting System – Step by Step

1. Find or buy some standard-sized trash cans or similar-sized plastic containers. Rain barrels work, but the bigger, the better. Box-shaped are superior to round, as you can stack them closer to your walls.

2.Source a hose manifold (a fitting that lets you attach multiple pipes) to each rainwater tank you plan to use. You'll find these in most plumbing supply stores. While you're there, get a suitable bulkhead fitting for each manifold.

3. Next, you need to cut holes in your trash cans on the front side close to the bottom. You could use a spade bit or hole saw if you have the right size.

Take care if you choose to go this route. Drilling through plastic can cause the drill bit to slip. If that happens, you could cut your fingers (I know, I still have the 3-inch scar).

The easiest method without a specialist bit is to mark out the correct size for your bulkhead, drill a hole your jigsaw blade fits through, and cut out the circle.

If you haven't got a jigsaw, you can drill multiple holes around the circle's edge and punch it out. Some light sanding or filing to smooth out the edge is necessary. Once you've got the shape right, put the bulkhead fitting into position and screw on the manifold.

4. Cut a hole in the lid of your container to fit the downspout. If you have trees hanging over your roof, consider blockages. I use a mesh or screen to avoid clogging, but you'll have to cut your downspout above your container.

5. Collect some old garden hose lengths, making sure the pipes

you find aren’t too short. Leakage doesn’t matter, but joining small lengths of different hoses isn’t the most fun you can have in the garden.

6. Attach the hoses to the manifolds, arrange them as you like, and drill holes in the pipes for the water to flow through. A good tip is to work with your garden’s existing contours to improve water distribution.

When it rains, check that the water flows as you’d expect, and add/close holes as required. Now your garden is a water storage unit, and your crops will thrive.

Self-sustainability is mostly a result of saving time and energy. Solutions like this one can save you hours. The more time you avoid wasting, the better systems you can create.

Livestock

When it comes to livestock, space is vital. There’s a minimum amount of land needed even for the smallest of animals, and many require expert knowledge and heavy investment.

Luckily for us, one animal is ideal for those seeking self-sufficiency, and it’s not the most exotic.

Keeping chickens is the first step most people take. The benefits of these beautifully efficient creatures outweigh the difficulties you’ll experience getting used to caring for them.

You’ll receive eggs, a natural garbage disposal unit, pest and weed control, and affectionate pets all in one.

Factors that often discourage people from keeping chickens include the smell, waste that attracts rodents and flies, and mountains of chicken feces, but there are solutions to this.

One option is to move the chicken coop around using a mobile

enclosure, and another is to free-range your birds to avoid desertifying a patch of your land. However, both require ample space.

Properly composted chicken manure supercharges your growing capabilities with readily available fertilizer and doesn't take up growing space for those with limited area.

Be warned; you can't just chuck it on your veggies raw.

Here's how you can compost chicken manure and then use it on your lasagna beds. This method takes a waste product and turns it into something that'll nourish your edibles.

Chicken Manure Compost – Step by Step

1. Find a suitable container. A traditional plastic compost bin is ideal if you have one. Otherwise, you can use pallet wood and nails to create a frame and then line it with black plastic or old jute bags pieced together.

Make sure none of the matter can escape, or things could get messy.

2. Collect all the bedding and manure from your coop. You'll need a rake and a shovel, and it's best to select tools sized to match your hen house.

There's nothing more frustrating than clattering around with over-sized tools for the job.

3. To create the perfect environment for the microbes that process organic material, you need to achieve a carbon-to-

nitrogen ratio of 30:1 (Planet Natural Research Center, n.d.).

The best way to accomplish this is by following the two-part brown, one-part green method.

For every shovel of manure, add two shovels of bedding. I've seen excellent results with less, thanks to the nitrogen-rich properties of chicken poop.

4.Temperature is everything when it comes to effectively composting chicken manure, so you need to add water (the "hot compost" method). Above 160°F will kill off the microbes, so use a thermometer.

The sweet spot is between 135 and 150°F (Washington State University, n.d.), and around three days at this temperature will produce high-quality fertilizer.

5. Take the center of the pile and move the heated matter from the center to the edges. Then, replace that middle with the bedding and manure that surrounded it. Repeat this process at least three times every three days.

6. Once you're sure every part of your compost pile has been heated through (you'll need to monitor it regularly), let it cure. Usually, 60 days is ideal, but you'll have to experiment based on your local environment, the nitrogen content, and the ratio you chose.

7. When your compost smells like good quality soil, crumbles to the touch, and is mostly dark in color, it's ready.

Now you've got a free source of a crucial ingredient for your lasagna beds, and you've solved a waste problem at the same time.

Not only that, chicken manure is one of the best fertilizers. You won't have to hulk it back to your property or pay for delivery, either.

It’s Time to Take Action

Now you have a few ideas and practical steps to prepare your garden for an economic or political crisis.

Developing sustainable systems with salvaged or repurposed materials is rewarding, and your hard work will pay dividends. There’s nothing more empowering than taking action to secure your future.

It’s time to get started on the path to non-reliance on the economy. In the event of a financial meltdown, it could make all the difference, but you need to take action.

If we can become more self-sufficient, we can survive whatever is thrown at us. Keep researching ideas, and put them into practice.

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