52 Homestead Skills
A self-taught homesteader’s one-year journey to learning a skill a week
Kimberlee Bastien
A few years ago, Kimberlee Bastien was a typical 9-to-5er with a husband, two kids and a hankering to homestead. She tended a vegetable garden, where she learned she can kill a whole lot of different plants. Her attempt at raising chickens took a nasty turn when a ferret murdered all 30 birds in one night. Kimberlee was queasy yet undeterred. (She’d already drank the homesteading Kool-Aid.) She’d never mucked out a barn, milked a cow or even preserved a single food. But Kimberlee’s an optimist. She and her family traded their suburban life for a century-old homestead and a 200-foot barn (with only some major minor structural issues). Not knowing where to start with this homesteading thing, Kimberlee and her husband challenged themselves to learn 52 homesteading skills in a year. “When we started out I did have reservations about 52 homesteading skills in one year, but I didn’t think 10 homesteading skills in one year sounded quite so impressive, so I decided I would go for it,” says Kimberlee.

Follow Kimberlee’s misadventures at www.theoldwalshfarm.com, or on Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest at theoldwalshfarm.

Just don’t ask about her “New Brunswick’s Most Wanted” ducks ...
Sample Q&As

Q: When and how did the homesteading bug bite you?
A: Although I grew up in the city, I always looked forward to summers spent at grandma’s house where I helped “plant” worms, dig potatoes and pick peas (back then I wasn’t so picky about what I planted). Unfortunately, I didn’t appreciate the opportunity I had to learn from my grandma and usually found more reasons to go to the beach than help out in the garden. So when it came time to choose a career, I didn’t even consider farming. I went to college and studied public relations, I got a job as a communications officer at an insurance company, got married and had my first child. That’s when everything changed for me.

I started thinking fondly of that little vegetable garden. I wanted my kids to have that same experience. I wanted them to know where their food comes from and to enjoy the same fresh and nutritious food that I had.

Q: Where do you get homesteading inspiration?
A: Since I didn’t grow up on a farm or have any sort of farming education, I turned to books. My nightstand is always full of the latest homesteading titles. I also took a local course on organic gardening with Alyson Chisholm of Windy Hill Organic Farm in New Brunswick and an online permaculture course with Geoff Lawton.

Q: How has your family adjusted to homesteading?
A: Perseverance. We have had to deal with death, injuries, runaway animals, voles destroying our fruit trees, perturbed neighbors, escaped bees and many other surprises and failures. None of this is uncommon. This seems to be the case for all new homesteaders because there is just so much to learn -- you can’t possibly know everything about all of these skills.

Q: You’re an eternal optimist. Have there been any projects that made you want to throw in your homesteading towel?
A: At one point we discovered lead paint in our kitchen cabinets. The kids and I had to move to my parent’s home for a month while my husband stayed at the farmhouse to completely renovate the kitchen. I thought this was the end of our homesteading challenge. But I was able to convince my parents to let me raise six ducklings in their basement.

Too young to go outside, we outfitted a large box with a brooder and placed the ducks downstairs beside the bed the kids and I were sleeping in. That was a mistake. I had no idea how loudly ducklings quack at night. I also didn’t realize just how much they poo and then shake their tail feathers. My parents were not impressed when I decided to give them daily baths in their tub. Let’s just say if they knew then what they now know about ducks, they would have never agreed to my half-baked plan.

Q: Which homesteading skills are you most proud of learning?
A: I am very proud to be a beekeeper and I take pride in supporting these small but very essential creatures. Without bees more than a hundred thousand varieties of plants would disappear along with about half of the food in the grocery stores and that gorgeous, golden, sweet nectar we call honey.
Sample Q&As

Q: With a bountiful garden, what’s your favorite go-to recipe for using up produce?
A: Soup! Nearly any vegetable can be turned into a delicious soup. Tomatoes, carrots, potatoes, squash, broccoli, onions, turnip, zucchini, cabbage, etc.

Q: Between establishing a garden and orchard, wrangling poultry and children, and blogging, when do you sleep?
A: I can’t do it all! No one can. Just like everyone else I only have 24 hours each day and I have to choose how to spend those hours. And just like everyone else who takes on a new project, I had to give up doing something else in return. So instead of watching TV or religiously mopping and vacuuming my floors, dusting my shelves and organizing my closets, I homestead.

Q: What advice would you give other would-be homesteaders about this lifestyle?
A: Don’t be afraid of making mistakes. Everyone can learn new skills and become more self-sufficient. Everyone can learn to garden and preserve his or her own food. It’s just a matter of educating yourself and going out and giving it your best shot. I think when I look back on my life, it will be these types of challenging activities that will have given me the most satisfaction.

Also, start small with one or two skills you would like to learn and then add on as you get more proficient at each one. Fifty-two homestead skills in one year may be a bit ambitious.

Q: What’s next for The Old Walsh Farm?
A: I actually meant to take a break after finishing this quest, to recharge and re-evaluate, and give my husband (who thinks this book should have been titled 52 Ways to Keep My Husband Busy) a well-deserved rest from my nonstop “little” requests.

But despite the numerous mistakes, setbacks and failures, I ordered four sheep, a guardian livestock dog and two more beehives. It is safe to predict our homesteading misadventures are not coming to an end any time soon.
NEW BOOKSHARES LESSONS FOR ASPIRING HOMESTEADERS

52 Homestead Skills offers practical knowledge and down-to-earth advice

TOPEKA, Kan. (Nov. 15, 2018) – Do you dream of living more simply on a bucolic homestead? Do your dreams include turning your bedroom into a seed-starting greenhouse or getting a visit from the police inquiring about your delinquent ducks?

Regardless of your background, the lifestyle comes with a learning curve. 52 Homestead Skills: A self-taught homesteader’s one-year journey to learning a skill a week, released today, gives prospective and new homesteaders an approachable guide to the tasks and challenges they may encounter. Author Kimberlee Bastien challenged herself to learn one skill per week for a year, taking readers along as she navigates establishing her family’s homestead. She organizes these skills by month, making 52 Homestead Skills a year-round resource. From pruning fruit trees and keeping poultry and bees, to making mozzarella, deodorant and laundry soap, Bastien shares lessons learned – with recipes, positivity and a generous helping of self-deprecating advice.

“As soon as you think, ‘I’ve got this,’ Mother Nature laughs and throws you an unexpected frost, a hungry predator or a swarm of bees,” says Bastien. “The learning never ends. And that’s OK. Because life without challenge would be boring.”


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52 Homestead Skills: A self-taught homesteader’s one-year journey to learning a skill a week
By Kimberlee Bastien
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Who leaves a suburban life to build a homestead from the ground up without knowing what they’re doing? That would be Kimberlee Bastien. Bastien challenged herself to learn one homestead skill per week for a full year. She shares what she learned in 52 Homestead Skills, detailing her adventures with making mozzarella cheese, learning to knit, building a beehive and becoming a beekeeper, raising ducks and chickens, planting fruit trees and saving seeds, and creating her own healthy alternatives to laundry soap, dish soap, cough syrup and more. Bastien emphasizes that if you want to start your own homestead, just dive in and do it! “The learning never ends,” she says. “And that’s OK. Because life without a challenge would be BORING.”