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MEMBERS UPDATE

April 2023

TOP 21 EDIBLES TO FORAGE IN YOUR OWN NEIGHBORHOOD

Top Self-Sufficiency Skills

The 5 Most Dangerous Self-Firing Firearms

Save That Brass: An Intro To Ammo Reloading

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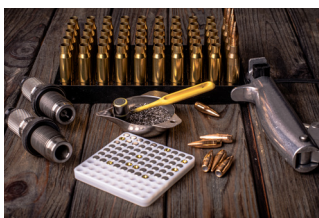
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You can load rounds expressly made for each weapon in your arsenal to get maximum shooting performance every time you squeeze the trigger, set up shop virtually anywhere, and it is a ton of fun. So, let's have a gander at what equipment you will need, components and preparation of cartridges, and how to reload those bags of used brass just lying about.

Next Issue: The Very Best Glock Upgrades



THE 5 MOST DANGEROUS SELF-FIRING FIREARMS

BY ERIC AUSTGEN

Never in my wildest imagination could I have conjured a scenario where a firearm could just go off by itself. The horror I felt when I heard of this phenomenon was the same as when I found out that night tornadoes were a thing. For most of my life, I had labored under the false assumption that gun manufacturers had their collective stuff together when it came to peddling wares that could be potentially dangerous to the general public. However, all of us are human, and mistakes can be made. Therefore, this topic will serve to identify, not indemnify. Some of the manufacturers involved are well-known and not known to have a consistent negative track record. Almost all of these weapons can be had for a cheap price, which should activate your bull stein detectors because cheaply priced doesn't always mean you are getting more bang for the buck. In fact, you may get a loud bang in an unexpected way, and the scars to go with it too.

CAN'T BE A SIX-SHOOTER WITH ONLY FIVE ROUNDS

The most obvious culprit for the self-firing firearms list is the original and clone single-action cowboy pistols, including both cap and ball and cartridge revolvers. There is a two-fold problem that centers on the hammer. The first is that the firing pin is built into the hammer. The second is the questionable safety notch built into the cocking mechanism. With the firing pin configuration, it is impossible to load a full cylinder without risking

accidental discharge from any pressure or force applied to the rear of the hammer. That is the reason only five chambers are loaded, with the hammer resting on the empty one. The hammer can be set to a safe position when cocked to its second position, meaning that when one slowly thumbs the hammer back through each notch, the safety will be on the second click. One should expect the same outcome as with the firing pin flaw.

These are problems inherent with the antique originals and clones made until the 90s. Since that time, when cowboy shooting was coming into its own, many American and Italian manufacturers of replica Old West revolvers have made great strides in providing shooters with improvements in safety designs that allow for carrying a weapon to its full ammo capacity without fear of it going off with a slight jar. Cylinders have been built with notches or pins milled between the chambers to rest the hammer on, whereas some companies have incorporated a transfer bar safety located between the hammer and the recoil plate-mounted firing pin. With these added safety measures, many of these guns are successfully used as daily carry weapons. Despite their best efforts, though, not every product can be perfect, so caution and a well-maintained single-action revolver should be employed when carrying regularly.

AMERICA'S OLDEST GUNMAKER

I warned you that even the best of them can't escape unscathed from a rare hiccup, and Remington is no exception. The Remington 700 has been known as a well-crafted, comfortable, and accurate rifle. The trigger design is what gives this otherwise firearm's sterling reputation a bit of tarnish, although with consistent cleaning and maintenance, one should not encounter this design problem.

The rifle hit the civilian market just after the conclusion of WW2, and by the early fifties, it had a new trigger mechanism called the Walker Fire Control Trigger added to new models. It has a piece of metal, known as the trigger connector, about paper clip length in size, floating between the trigger and the sear, which is connected to the trigger by the tension of a spring. Since the connector is not snug against the trigger, it has a tendency to separate from the trigger body when firing the weapon. When that occurs, a gap develops where all kinds of gunky crap can get into, even the most feared adversary of firearms, no, not anti-gunners, oxidation. This keeps the connector from returning to its proper ready position, causing the trigger to have no contact with the rest of the firing mechanism.

Due to this defect, the rifle can fire on its own if jarred, or simply by touching the safety or the bolt. Videos made to accompany the lawsuits against Remington clearly show this potentially fatal flaw in the design. This shouldn't put anyone off from owning this weapon, as it is a fine, smooth rifle to shoot. But as I cautioned before, cleaning and regular inspection of your firearms will keep them in tip-top condition and ready for action whenever the need should arise, even this weapon.

A CONTRIBUTION FROM THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN

Outside of an interest in Japanese military ephemera and weaponry, I couldn't possibly fathom why anyone would want to own, let alone fire, this next weapon on the list. Although, like every firearm floating around, there will always be detractors and hardcore cheerleaders for specific models, whatever floats your boat is the most important thing.

The Nambu Type 94 pistol was sketched out in 1929, and finally sprang from the drawing board in 1934, with production beginning the next year. It was chambered in 8x22mm Nambu, the cartridges held in a six-round box magazine that slid into the grip. Tank and aircraft crews of the Empire of Japan absolutely loved these guys because they were small enough to be carried and used in the confines of their office spaces. There were only 71,000 Nambu 94s made between 1935 and 1945, with later production models being crudely made as war material began to rapidly disappear. This is why those models have had the moniker of "last ditch" applied to them, and it is these guns that need extra attention paid to them, although that would be a prudent idea when handling all firearms.

What is it with the design that many are not too thrilled about? Well, the breech design allowed for accidental discharge due to the sear bar converting the forward pull of the trigger into a lateral movement that frees the hammer. Did I mention that the sear bar was located on the outside of the weapon? It was indeed, so that meant that this gun could go off if the pistol was cocked and inappropriately handled, usually if the forward end of the sear bar was depressed a mere .07 inches. The only way this bad boy doesn't go off intentionally or unintentionally is to have the safety on. As a matter of fact, just mount it on the wall to look at; that will probably be the best and safest place to keep it from doing any harm.

THIS PISTOL IS DEFINITELY NO BULL

Normally, when I get the mind to add to the armory, I tend to gravitate more toward proven American-made products, eschewing anything of foreign manufacture, save black powder shooters from Italy and any firearm from Germany because I have never had any problems with them. However, I got a little excited when I heard about Taurus out of Brazil and their combo .45LC/.410 revolver. Bullets and birdshot working in concert to deter all kinds of threats; it was almost like heaven, and I never heard one ill word spoken of it. Researching other Taurus products put a temporary kibosh on any purchase from them until I could figure out the true quality of the manufacturer. The roadblock in question? The Taurus PT 24/7 DS.

The PT 24/7 DS was introduced in 2004, targeting the civilian concealed carrier and law enforcement (as a backup firearm), with production running till the latter part of 2016, and finally being put out of production by the flaws in the safety system. The final nail in the coffin of this weapon was the lawsuits and payouts resulting from these failures. The gun features a transfer bar safety system that prevents the pistol from firing unless the trigger is squeezed, something the company boasts of as the “Taurus Safety Latch.” Combined with a positive firing block, these safety features are supposed to prevent accidental discharge if the firearm is dropped.

One such lawsuit claimed that the magazine did not sit properly in the gun, to which the owner smacked the bottom of the magazine, causing the slide to slam forward, and the weapon discharging after a slight bump to the slide. The result was a GSW to the owner’s hand, his wife’s arm, and son’s neck, the latter wound being fatal. A suit filed by a police officer alleged that the PT 24/7 DS had fallen from his holster, discharging when it hit the ground, and shooting him in the leg. He suffered extensive nerve, bone, and tissue damage as a result of this incident. It is interesting to note that he had owned this weapon for the previous 5 years without any problem; just saying. A deputy in Iowa was engaged in a foot pursuit when the same thing happened to him. Thank the Lord, no injuries were sustained that time.

Since these guns were taking a beating harder than a pinata at a birthday party, coupled with the Brazilian National Police sending thousands back because theirs were popping off whenever the hell they felt like it, Taurus quietly settled the suits, extended the warranties for existing owners, recalled the rest for repairs, and then unceremoniously put it out to pasture. It also didn’t help that it came to light that several other firearms manufactured by Taurus shared the same safety features. So, I would say proceed with caution when it comes to Taurus and their products, and stay away from this shooter as much as possible. In fact, run far and fast away. I know it will look very seductive when you see the low sticker price it has hanging on it now, but just like a bad marriage, this union will probably have a messy ending.

MAYBE JUST STAY WITH THE RUSSIAN OR CHINESE VERSION?

There is no doubt that firearms built on an AR or AK platform are quite popular with civilian shooters. Some have their reasons for owning them other than the fact they are reliable and a helluva lot of fun to shoot. When it comes to an SKS or AK platform, the hands-down winner, every time for me, would be the original Chinese, Soviet, or Bloc-partner-made weapon due to their reliability in function, even after taking a damn good thrashing on the battlefield. Other than that, they are just commie weapons, like VWs are Nazi cars. Therefore, it would seem kind of nutty to go out and buy an AK-47 that’s not built by the “experts.” It does happen every now and again. However, this is one AK manufacturer that requires closer scrutiny and some time to pass in order to satisfactorily call their product a complete success.

Inter Ordnance, out of Palm Bay, Florida, started out as a military surplus dealer and then decided to get in on the gun-making racket. They make AR/AK weapons and a couple of 1911 variations, with more weapons designs already in the works. The parts used to make these weapons are a blend of domestic and imported, with furniture being more heavily import-dependent. From what I have seen by researching this company’s operations, it appears to be a very small workforce that has been saddled with the almost Brobdingnagian task of filling a 5,000 per month AK quota, all while trying to improve quality control and attempting to streamline the business into a well-oiled machine. This may be a significant factor in why this company’s AK has been poo-pooed for production quality rather than design flaws.

There is a bevy of complaints in online forums about Inter Ordnance and their AK. I don’t ever mine these places as a source of research material for anything you have read. However, I must break protocol just this once, only because these gripes come directly from people who have had these weapons fail in their hands and faces, so I think I can trust their assessment.

The complaints include the piston separating from the carrier after only a few rounds, trigger

guard rivets falling out and the front trunnion rivet shearing off. The AK blew up in a shooter's face due to shoddy rivets and improper headspace. Magazines do not sit correctly, the front sight is canted and can be moved easily, it fires in full-auto bursts without touching the trigger, cycles a round but doesn't set the hammer, shoddily-made receivers causing consistent jamming and difficulty in clearing, bolt-hold-open problems, hammer/trigger/bolt misalignments, loose stocks, bad finishes, cheap and worn springs, pistons, and gas tubes being used, bolts jamming against the magazine, bolt handles needing to be pushed forward to chamber a round, failure to feed problems (FTF), and the list goes on and on forever. The anger at having time and money wasted is very palpable in these reviews, a torrent of vicious litany condemning the company, its products, and the horrendous customer service all laid out in well-reasoned arguments.

On the other hand, some customers have reported that their AKs have performed magnificently for them without a whisper of the problems going on with the other rifles. It is unknown if these are really satisfied shooters shouting this AK's virtues from the mountaintop, or they could be bots or paid operatives employed to wrangle more business. With the deceitful use of technology at the present

time, anything is possible. It could be said that even the best of companies let the occasional misfit by every once in a while. However, it seems this company is doing the complete opposite, slowly driving itself out of business.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

It is stressful enough to carry a firearm in an increasingly dangerous world, especially if you worry about whether or not your trusty daily carry will one day decide to fulfill every gun hater's wet dream, and squeeze a round off all by itself. The instances of that will be rare if you stick to a thoroughly rigorous inspection and maintenance program, replacing parts as they wear, and keeping the weapon properly lubricated to protect it from substances injurious to its finish and operation. Buying American never hurts. It will also help to do your due diligence before purchasing a firearm. Research the company from which you wish to purchase. Look for recalls, lawsuits, the ratio of negative to positive reviews of all available products, and any other red flags that you would consider to be a personal deal breaker. Hopefully, this will get you started off on the right path to avoiding the lemons out there and finding that one shooter you just can't live without. So, until next time, dear reader, stay safe and let's be careful out there.



Top 21 Edibles To Forage In Your Own Neighborhood



Have you tried foraging for food options in your neighborhood yet? If not, this is the perfect time to get started! Most people pass by these opportunities, but if you've got an eye for it, you could shave off some of your grocery budget. And, of course, you'll be extremely glad you learned what you can and can't eat from the wild after the SHTF.

Let's examine some wild food options available in the United States. Get to know them well enough, and you'll be able to spot free food from a distance!

Top 21 Edible Plants/Nuts/Vegetables In The Wild

There are many edible plants, but we'll focus on 21 for now. Sit back, relax, and get ready to learn!

1. Pacific Crabapple



Have you ever had a crabapple before? If not, it's probably because of the name, right? I'll bet you didn't know that crabapples are native to the US and apples aren't! Crabapples' fruit is bitter, but it's still perfectly edible. So, next time you find some crabapples in the wild, put their name out of your mind and try a taste. They grow in Northern California and up to Alaska.

2. Wild Strawberries



These wild cousins of regular strawberries can be found from Newfoundland (Canada) down to Oklahoma. You probably didn't know that the strawberries you enjoy today weren't invented until the 1830s. At that time, breeders mixed a strawberry with a wild South American strawberry, and the rest is history.

Although these may not look exactly like modern grocery store strawberries, they have a distinctive sweet taste. Try replacing store-bought strawberries with their free, wild relatives.

3. Potato Bean

The potato bean has several other names, including hopniss, apios, and American groundnut. No matter what you call it, you can find this perennial vine in forested, moist areas, especially near streams. It can be found in the west, from Texas to Minnesota, and in the east, from Florida to Nova Scotia.

The potato bean has four edible parts:

- Its flowers provide a nice salad ingredient.
- Its shoots are crunchy and have a mildly pea-like flavor.
- You can add its beans to a soup.
- Its tubers can be eaten like a potato and make excellent chips.

That's a lot of bang for your foraging buck. If you live in the right area of the country, head on out and grab yourself some potato beans. Make sure you watch yourself the first time you try this snack, as a small percentage of people become sick from an allergic reaction.

4. Pawpaw



Pawpaws are widespread from Ontario down to Florida. They also make their way as far west as Nebraska. They were once so abundant that a town in Michigan was named after them. Now, they're threatened in New York and New Jersey, so you must be careful when removing the pawpaw from its tree.

Its closest relative is the custard apple. The sweet flesh of the plump fruit evokes memories of bananas, mangos, and egg custards. The right time to harvest them is in September or October.

Pawpaw trees tend to stick together, so if you find one, you'll probably find several more. Be aware, though, that not every tree will produce fruit.

5. Wild Asparagus



The major difference between wild asparagus and the type you'd find in a grocery store is the thickness of their stalks. Wild asparagus displays a much thinner stalk, as seen in this image. Fortunately, you can find it in many parts of North America, so some might be growing near your home!

To prepare it, simply boil it as you would commercial asparagus. Alternatively, you can eat it raw. This particular edible contains lots of thiamine, vitamin C, vitamin B6, and potassium, which will keep you moving, too.

6. Cattails



You've almost certainly seen cattails before, but did you know that you can eat them? Cattails were one of the staple foods for numerous Native American tribes. And, unlike some other wild foods, you can use almost the entire thing.

- Boil the rootstock (usually found underground).
- Boil, or eat raw, the stem near the base (it's white).
- Boil the leaves like spinach.
- Break off and eat the corn-dog-looking flower. It tastes like corn!

7. Dandelion



Your view of a dandelion - a weed, a flower, or a food source - will determine your thoughts about eating them. This entire plant is edible, no matter your thoughts, making it a great find. One tip - try not to eat any mature leaves, as they develop a bitter taste. If you have no choice, though, you can boil them first to remove most of the bitterness.

Use the leaves to garnish a salad, or simply mix them with some water and drink the entire thing. It is a good, easy-to-find plant that can help keep you alive after the SHTF.

8. Fireweed



This is another flower that Native American tribes used to eat. So, we know it's edible. Much like a dandelion, the fireweed leaves become bitter as they mature, so eat them when they're young. The seeds and flowers have a peppery flavor, and you can eat the stalk, too. Even better, fireweed provides a good source of vitamins A and C.

9. Plantain Plants



Not to be confused with the fruit called plantains, you can find these leaves in most parts of the world. They can grow up to 4" wide and 6" long and typically sprout in bogs, marshes, and alpine areas. You can identify them by their short-stemmed, ribbed, oval leaves, which hug the ground.

Like most plants, it's best to eat these leaves before they mature. Otherwise, you're going to get quite the bitter flavor. From a health perspective, plantain plants contain plenty of calcium and vitamin A, plus a bit of vitamin C.

10. Prickly Pear Cactus



Take a look at the above picture. Does a cactus look edible? Well, surprisingly, this prickly plant is extremely nutritious. Found in the desert areas of the US, the fruit has an uncanny resemblance to a purple or red pear.

Once you've found this cactus, you'll have to remove all the spines from the exterior skin carefully. Failure to do so will make it feel like you're trying to eat a porcupine. The young stems are also edible, but you should boil them before you consume them.

11. Field Pennygrass

From early spring to late winter, you can find some field pennygrass almost anywhere in the world. Whether or not you know it, you've seen this plant. Think back to all the times you passed by an innocuous-looking weed with small, white flowers on the side of the road. Of course, you shouldn't eat the one from beside the road because this plant can become contaminated. Instead, look for it in the woods.

One fantastic quality of field pennygrass is that it will suck up all minerals. So, if it's growing in a field with other plants and flowers, it'll be even better for you. The edible parts of this weed are the leaves and seeds. You can boil pennygrass or eat it raw.

12. Curled Dock

The nearby image shows what a curled dock looks once it's dried. Before this, though, the leaves are green. You can find curled dock by looking for its distinctive bright red stalk, which can grow up to three feet high.



Eating this can be a bit of a challenge, as the stalk has a very bitter taste. To do so, remove the outer layers from the stalk and boil it. Go ahead and change out the water a couple of times as it boils, too. It is the best way to turn this plant from extremely bitter to truly edible.

13. Chicory



You can find this purplish-blue flower throughout the US. If you locate it, you'll have a healthy snack! You can pull the flower off the plant and eat it whole without cooking it first. You can also make the root of this flower taste good by boiling it. And if you find this plant when it is still young, you can pluck off the flower petals and boil them, too.

14. Morel Mushroom

Mushrooms can be scary because many have similar features, and only some are edible. Fortunately, finding a morel is relatively easy, and it'll be tasty, too. After all, these have a rich, gourmet flavor and feature a honeycomb cap.



Morels are one of the most sought-after wild mushrooms. They're located across the US in damp, wet spaces. You can commonly find them in the leaf litter of the woods at ground level. Morels grow from one to 12 inches tall and are more abundant in the springtime.

15. Sulfur Shelf



Also known as “Chicken of the Woods,” this semi-wrinkled, stacked shelf tastes like chicken. They have yellow to orange-white flesh and may be watery when you collect them. The ripe mushrooms that are ready to eat will be rubbery and damp.

The stalk is so small the sulfur shelf doesn't even appear to have one. Locate them by looking at the base of a conifer or deciduous trees such as chestnut, cherry, willow, yew, beech, or oak.

16. Wild Pecans

The wild pecan nut looks and tastes almost exactly like the pecans you buy in a store. You can easily find them in the lowlands of the deep south, but you can also find them up to Illinois.

The major difference between a wild and commercial pecan is that the wild variety is easier to remove from its shell and is a bit smaller. These durable nuts are usually still good, even if they've spent the entire winter on the ground.

17. Acorns



You'll find plenty of acorns under oak trees during the fall across the US. If you're starving, go ahead and eat a few. They'll be incredibly bitter due to the tannins, but they won't kill you.

If you have some time, however, your best bet is to boil them for 15 minutes, change the water, and boil them again. Keep doing this until your water doesn't change color. The best way to use acorns is in a stew or soup.

18. Beechnuts



American beechnuts are sweet, while European beechnuts have a bitter taste like acorns. Check the tree to ensure you're getting the American variety. If it has a wrinkled, pale gray trunk (which feels like elephant skin) and large leaves up to five inches long, you're in luck! If it has a dark gray trunk with two to four inches long leaves, you've found a European beechnut tree.

One bad thing about beechnuts is that they spoil very quickly. So roast them or eat them raw shortly after harvesting. You can also extract their oil, similar to gourmet olive oil.

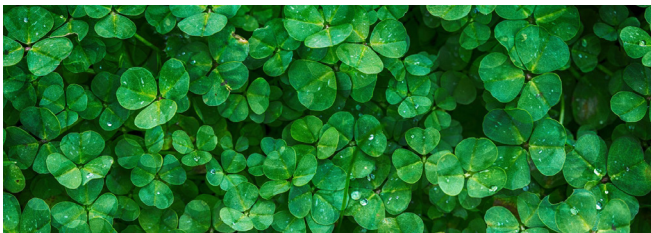
19. Pine Nuts



There are tons of pine nuts inside pine cones, but you can only eat the Pinon pine and Ponderosa pine varieties. As long as you recognize which pine tree the cones came from, you can extract them from the cone to eat! But before you do, you'll need to shell the nuts.

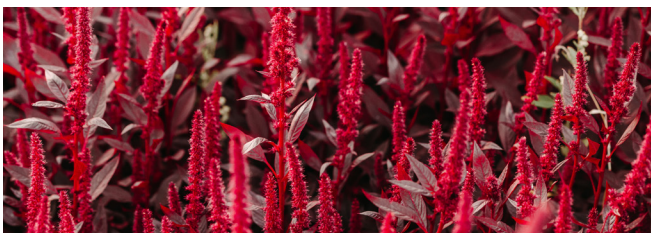
Pine nuts are closest to sunflower seeds. They're relatively small and can taste fantastic if you add some salt to them. You can also use pine nuts in most pesto recipes.

20. Clovers



Four-leaf clovers are considered lucky, but any three or four-leaf clovers are edible. Look for an open grassy area, and the odds are high that you'll find some clovers waiting to be discovered. Although you can eat raw trefoil leaflets, it's a much better idea to boil them first.

21. Amaranth



Amaranth is an edible weed that takes on the red look pictured above for part of the year. The rest

of the year, though, amaranth has green leaves. The entire plant is edible, but you'll probably want to avoid the leaves with spines.

Warning: Amaranth isn't poisonous, but being grown in nitrate-rich soil can make it less than tasty. Boil the leaves to eliminate the nitrates and oxalic acid that give them a bad flavor. Once you're done, don't drink the water. If you're in an emergency situation, you can eat the leaves raw; you just probably won't like them very much.

Plants To Avoid At All Costs

It would be a real shame if you went foraging and picked up some items that are NOT food. Side effects of this include anything from feeling a bit off to dying, so it's not something to mess around with. The good news is that we've compiled a list of qualities to keep an eye out for. If you find one or more of these qualities, do NOT eat whatever you're considering.

With so many poisonous plants, it's better to be safe than sorry. If you're not 100% sure how to identify a plant, steer clear if it presents any of the following.

- Fine hairs, spines, or thorns
- Discolored or milky sap
- Bulbs, seeds, or beans inside pods
- Soapy or bitter taste
- Parsnip, carrot, dill, or parsley-like foliage
- Grain heads with black, purplish, or pink spurs
- Almond-like scent in the leaves and woody parts
- Three-leaved growth pattern

Most toxic foods have these qualities. Some of the edible food we mentioned do too, but they are the exception, not the rule.

Final Thoughts

There are many things in the woods that can hurt you. Therefore, you need to take the time to become familiar with the wild foods you can eat.

It's also vital to remember that if you're unsure if something is edible, it's much better just to assume it isn't. At the end of the day, it's better to remain hungry than to consume something that kills or seriously harms you.



TOP SELF-SUFFICIENCY SKILLS

Whether it happens because the SHTF or because you simply want to learn, it's always a good idea to develop more self-sufficiency. Not only will this put you in a much better position to survive whatever comes next, but you'll also learn some trade skills that will make you a more valuable commodity.

Which skills should you be practicing? There are numerous options, so it's really up to you! Just be sure to select at least one or two of the below options that others in your intended bug out group don't know how to do. And you'll instantly become someone who the others can't afford to let perish.

TOP SELF-SUFFICIENCY SKILLS FOR WHEN THE SHTF

Think of something you've always wanted to learn. If it's on the list below, go for it! And even if it's not, set aside time to learn more about it. Then, return to this list and learn at least one more skill. You'll thank us when you're the only one who can solve certain problems after the SHTF.

SMALL ENGINE REPAIR

It should be instantly obvious how necessary this skill can be. We're not talking about cars here, either, although that's another hugely important skill to pick up. Instead, we mean small engines that

you'd find in air compressors, chainsaws, pumps, generators, rototillers, saw mills, 4-wheeler ATVs, etc. Keeping these items running will be of the utmost importance because once they die, they're gone forever.

All of these small engines can currently be maintained by repairmen, but it's not like you'll be able to call one out of the Yellow Pages after society crumbles. And even if you could, do you have any idea how busy they'd be?

So, how can you learn this skill? Easy! Many community colleges offer classes in small and large engine repair. Signing up for one of these courses is your best bet, as you'll be certain to receive decent instructions. If this isn't possible, though, go on YouTube and look up "Small Engine Repair Course." Click on the playlist put together by Mike Gile, and you'll be treated to 32 videos that will change your life.

Once you've gotten a handle on how to repair small engines, you may wish to learn how to repair car engines, too. This will be a useful skill for a time, but if the SHTF, cars will eventually stop being useful. And this will probably happen well before most cars would break down due to a lack of gasoline.

HOME REPAIR AND BASIC CARPENTRY

However, there are a few car basics that everyone should learn. For example, knowing how to change a flat tire is critical, especially with the debris that will inevitably fill the roads. Simply go on YouTube and look up “How to Change a Tire” by Howdini.

Another thing you should know is how to jump-start your car. If you’ve got jumper cables, you’re already well on your way! To learn the right way to do this, however, you should look up “How to Jump Start a Car” by Dad, How Do I? on YouTube.

WELDING

If you’ve never welded before, you may be surprised by how often you’d end up doing it after you’ve learned how. Again, community colleges often offer a relatively inexpensive course on welding. Of course, you can also turn to YouTube. There is a playlist available called “Welding Basics for Beginners” by Miller Welders that goes step-by-step.

When it’s time to get started, pick yourself an MIG wire-feed welder. From there, you can adjust the voltage and wire feed speed to match the thickness of the steel. If you pick up a 120V MIG welder, you’ll be set for all basic welding repairs. A 220V welder will work better when you require a deeper weld.

How do you get one? It’s as simple as turning to Amazon. Simply enter “120V MIG welder” in the search bar, and you’ll be treated to more than 200 results. You’ll find some as cheap as \$138 and some all the way up to the astronomically expensive \$1,589. Choosing one can be difficult, but we’ve got a tip for you – Amazon’s top-rated “Forney Easy Weld 261” costs \$239 (retail price is \$399.99) and has a 4.7-star rating from more than 2,900 reviewers.

To become even more self-sufficient, you may want to purchase a combo welder and generator like the TOMAHAWK 15 HP Engine Driven Portable 2,000-Watt Generator with 210 Amp Stick and TIG Welder with Kit. Be aware that a combo set probably won’t work to quite the same level that an individual one will, but if you’re looking for ways to save space and money, this could be a good way to do so.



Getting started with some basic home repairs doesn’t require a lot of advanced knowledge, although you will need the necessary tools. You can learn how to make your projects level, square, and plumb just by fooling around. Try building a shed or a deck, or even get your friends together and raise a barn like the Amish do.

Knowing how to correctly do carpentry will probably require you to at least look up some lessons. Over on YouTube, you can look up “A Total Beginner’s Guide to Woodworking” by Steve Ramsey.

As to performing basic home repairs, there is a virtually endless list of videos you could watch. Because you’ve got the survivalist spirit, though, we’re going to suggest checking out “33 Totally Cool Home Repair Tricks” by 5-Minute Crafts.

Remember – learning these skills will become ultra important once you can no longer simply call a repairman or a carpenter. Therefore, commit to learning at least a few useful tricks. And if you get really good at it, you can even barter your services.



HAM RADIO OPERATOR

Do you intend to ride out the end of the world with some friends and/or family? At least one of you (and ideally two) will need to learn how to operate a HAM radio. This will provide you with an invaluable source of information, along with some much-needed human contact from a safe distance.

If you've ever watched *The Walking Dead* or *Jericho*, you can appreciate how necessary this skill is. To learn how to use a HAM radio, you don't even need to know Morse code. Instead, you'll simply need to study for a few hours and then pass an online test. Easy peasy!

Naturally, after the SHTF, there won't be anyone monitoring the estimated 3 million amateur HAM radio users, so it won't matter at that point if you've gotten your license. But if you want to be able to practice, you really should pass the test and pick up your license. To ensure you pass the test, look up "Baofeng Ham Radio from Noob to Skilled in 60 Minutes" by Ham Radio Crash Course.

When it's time to purchase a HAM radio, you can head to Amazon. They have an extensive selection of options, including some HAM radios that are as cheap as \$21. The 2-Pack Baofeng UV-5R is their top-rated product, with a 4.6-star rating from more than 435 people.

ADVANCED FIRST AID

You already know how to do basic first aid, and that's extremely helpful to yourself and your group. But does anyone know how to do advanced first aid techniques? This one is more of a commitment than the other items on this list because it generally requires you to pass a course that lasts 17-21 hours. Learning how to save a life is worth it, however.

Things you'll learn in an advanced first aid course include CPR, how to clear a choking person's airway, what to do to stop a deep wound from bleeding out, etc. Other things that they'll teach you include how to treat someone when there is no medical equipment nearby.

If you don't have access to an advanced first aid kit, you'll need to improvise with items around you.

For instance, you could rip your shirt to create a makeshift bandage, place ice on a hurt spot to avoid swelling, or even use a steak knife to perform a tracheotomy.

Taking a class is the only way to make sure you've got these techniques down. Being unable to attend a class doesn't mean you can't attempt to learn, though. You could go to YouTube and look for the 85-video playlist "First Aid Training - ProFirst Aid Advanced (2015 AHA Guidelines) from ProTrainings," brought to you by ProCPR.

Ideally, you'll have a CPR dummy to practice on and can get some hands-on experience. Even if you don't, try to learn as much as you can and keep practicing. You never know what type of danger your group could get into once civilization falls apart, and having someone around who can perform advanced first aid could literally make the difference between life and death.



SURVIVAL FISHING

Fishing for survival is quite different from trying to win a bass tournament. Long gone will be your father's slow, leisurely fishing outings where catching a fish actually takes second place to being out on the water. Instead, you'll need to figure out how to reliably and quickly bring in enough fish to feed everyone in your group.

To do this, you're going to need to pick up some nets, fish traps, and trotlines. Pay close attention to your local laws because you can't use all of these tricks in every location. Once the SHTF, though, go nuts!

One of the best things you can get is a trotline. Once you've set this up, you can leave it alone and

get some other chores done. By the time you return, there should be an abundant amount of fish on the line. Therefore, having a trotline should have just jumped up your list of necessary bug out items.

Another fantastic way to accrue a lot of fish is by tracking when they spawn. As soon as spawning season begins, you'll find fish such as salmon, bass, crappie, stripers, and walleye clumped together into schools of fish. You can use trawl and gill nets to capture a large group without putting too much effort into it.

There are several people on YouTube who want to teach you how to fish for survival. One playlist in particular by The Wooded Beardsman caught our eye. It's called "Survival Fishing Challenge!" It includes 15 videos that will teach you invaluable skills, such as catching a fish without a rod, hook, line, or bait.

Those of you who already fish won't be in for that hard of an adjustment, although all your fancy electronic equipment will probably be for naught when society crumbles. For those who have never been fishing, it might actually be easier to learn survival fishing techniques instead of the slow, steady pace that most anglers keep right now.



Getting a trotline should be your first priority (again, check to see if they're legal in your area). Put hooks on the line and bait, then anchor it between two solid objects (for example, two trees). It's also important to use a couple of floats. Once it's all set up, you can sit back and let the hooks bring you your dinner. As long as you know something about the lifecycle of the fish in your lake, river, or pond, this method should give you the most bang for your buck.

Tip – putting a trotline in the water when there are schools of fish nearby is an excellent way to feed everyone. Make sure you select a good spot that the schools are swimming through for the best possible results.

GROW YOUR OWN FOOD



We've spoken extensively on this topic in the past, so we won't spend a lot of time on it right now. But it's imperative that at least one or two people in your group know how to go from seeds to a bountiful harvest. After all, you can't survive on fish alone. It may require more work to have a fruitful garden, but it's one of the best things you can learn.

Is gardening your thing? Great! Keep doing what you've been doing, and see how much of your food can come from your own yard.

If it's not your thing, you might not think that it's worth all the effort, but you would be wrong. After all, unless you have regular access to food and water after the SHTF, it's going to be very tough to survive.

Yes, a garden needs to be tended to and there are several things that can go wrong (pests, for instance). However, if you pay attention to what you're doing and watch over your plants, you should be able to add a lot of food to your group's food stores.

Are you still nervous about growing food? Start with the easiest seeds and grow the following:

- Beans
- Pumpkins
- Peas
- Cucumbers
- Radishes
- Lettuce
- Squash

As you can see, growing beans is easy, and it may be necessary to keep your protein levels up. All the other items on the list will also provide you with a delicious way to keep meeting your nutrition needs.

Once you've mastered growing these vegetables, you can stretch your gardening muscles by picking something harder to grow. Before you know it, you won't even remember why you were worried about trying to get carrots, onions, and artichokes to grow, despite them being some of the hardest vegetables to raise.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Many of the self-sufficiency skills that will help you the best require a community college course to become truly adept at them. Put aside whatever concerns you have about going back to school and sign up for a course today. Your goal isn't to get a degree; it's simply to learn how to weld, repair small engines, etc.

One of the best things about this list is that there is truly something on it for every interest level. Does the idea of welding make you want to poke out your own eyeballs? That's okay, you can learn how to garden or use a HAM radio instead. But make sure that someone in your intended bug out group knows how to weld, too.

So, what are you waiting for? Grab your group, assign the items listed above, and get learning! You'll be extremely glad you did once everything falls apart.





SAVE THAT BRASS: AN INTRO TO AMMO RELOADING

BY ERIC AUSTGEN

Have you ever dreamed of being the owner, operator, and chief quality control inspector of your very own small arms munitions factory? Well, my friend, I have some good news for you. Not only can you be all those things, but you can do it for a fraction of the cost that name brands will soak you for the very same product. In addition, you can load rounds expressly made for each weapon in your arsenal to get maximum shooting performance every time you squeeze the trigger, set up shop virtually anywhere, and it is a ton of fun. So, let's have a gander at what equipment you will need, components and preparation of cartridges, and how to reload those bags of used brass just lying about.

ANOTHER TYPE OF BENCH PRESS TO IMPRESS HER

The nice thing about starting up a project of this nature is that it won't break the bank; if you know where to look, that is. The items needed for reloading can be had for a nominal price through online venues such as gun swapping sites, eBay, and dealers in gently-used firearms accessories. If the

area in which you live has the intestinal fortitude to hold a shooter show, then you can pick up a treasure trove of reloading supplies after a decent afternoon of good old-fashioned haggling. For now, we will focus on the basics to get you started in the right direction.

A case cleaner will be needed to knock off dirt or loose powder residue that remains on or in the shell casing after use. To accomplish this, you could purchase a small, medium, or large tumbling affair to handle the daily production rate of your factory. The tumbler is nothing more than a plastic half bowl with a removable cover sitting on a motor, and vibrating the brass in a grit medium of your choice. Harbor Freight has an excellent line of these tumblers for a song. You could also go for the super cheap method and soak your brass in a mixture of water and Tide. Another alternative is regular dish soap, water, vinegar, and salt. The only downside is that the brass must be totally dry inside and out before any reloading operations proceed.

The reloading press will be the most important piece of equipment, outside of the dies, that you will need to do multiple tasks with ease. Now, you will have some snake oil salesman trying to get you to buy the most up-to-date state-of-the-art multi-stage press doohickey with all the bells and whistles. However, this will not be necessary, as a single-stage press is all that will be needed to do the job. Besides, a single-stage press is good for keeping focus on the individual stages of reloading. This way, you are able to avoid any errors that may be encountered if your attention is divided when everything is going on at once. This would be the smart way to go, but if you are a glutton for punishment or can work under those conditions, by all means, have at it. Those living in tight quarters and the on-the-go shooter should invest in a small hand-held press that does the same thing as its full-sized brother without taking up as much space.

While a reloading press gives you the leverage needed to prepare and push bullets into the casing, the caliber-specific dies is what will actually spit out the fine quality product you so desire. Depending on the manufacturer, these dies usually come in a pack of three or four to effortlessly crank out your private munitions dump. The sizing and decapping die will push the walls of the case back to factory dimensions, while a pin in the center of the die pushes out the spent primer. The expanding die allows you to consolidate two processes into one, as it will create an opening in the case mouth that is large enough to insert a bullet. And because it is hollow in the center, a powder dispenser or funnel can be inserted to fill the cartridge at the same time. The final die you will need is for seating and crimping. This basically pushes the bullet into the case and crimps the mouth of the casing against the bullet to produce a nice sealed unit.

Make sure to purchase dies and shell holders for each caliber you intend to reload. Also, be advised that some dies can only be used with a specific company's press and will not be interchangeable with other makers' products, so do your research well and pick the best reloading supplier that will do right by you.

Depending on the type of powder you will be using

scale and measure. Powder scales are associated with smokeless powder, as the exact amount needed is weight-based rather than measured out in volume like blackpowder. While on the subject, there are powder dispensers on the market that will help your production in a brisk fashion, but if you like quality control, there is nothing wrong with loading each case with a scoop and funnel, but only after being properly weighed or measured.

Although it isn't a physical component of the production line, a reloading manual specific to your caliber or weapon is a must-have, especially if you want to avoid any catastrophic failure due to improper loading and want to keep your shooter on target every time you take it to the range. Many reloading supply manufacturers print their own manuals, whereas some hardy individuals have printed some fine reloading tomes pertaining to specific weapons of interest to collectors and the average shooter.

GETTING DOWN TO BRASS TACKS

For years, my ears have bled when firearm cartridges are erroneously referred to as bullets. Although I have patiently explained it to her many times, my beloved still refers to them as bullets. I suspect it's to get my goat more than anything, but much confusion remains as to how ammunition should be properly addressed. There are but four components to a cartridge, nothing too complicated, and easy to follow.

The shell casing itself has many slang words attached to it. However, its main function is to amalgamate the separated firing methods used until the mid-19th century into one neat little package. At first, they were made of copper, then they were upgraded to brass after the former metal was found to be less than reliable in handling the heat of the powder charge and difficult to extract from breech-loading weapons whose barrels had been heated from consistent rapid firing. The routing of the 7th at Little Bighorn is one example of this metallurgical disaster. The modern standard of cartridges has been around since the turn of the previous century. Though tinkered with, they have changed little in the interim.

The most common cartridge is the centerfire, with the exception of the .22 rimfire, and it houses the primer in a hole located in the casehead. Early cartridges had a solution of fulminate of mercury encased in the head, which facilitated the powder's ignition. Since mercury is nasty stuff to play with, engineers went back to the drawing board, and came up with the primers we have now. The primers are a shorter version of their percussion cap brothers, filled with lead styphnate, and then a triangular brass fitting called an anvil is secured on top of it. There are small and large sized primers available to reload small and large caliber weapons. When used in conjunction with a quality powder, a quality primer will quickly and evenly ignite the powder to achieve the most effective bullet velocity possible.

Modern cases have been built to take some very hot loads and come back to ask for seconds or more. That is why one can easily run both smokeless and black powder through them, loading them to their breaking point. Alternatively, shooters who enjoy a light recoil can scale back. The variety of products and their manufacturers is almost endless. Smokeless powder generally comes in ball, flattened ball, flake, and stick powder, each of which is used for different firearm applications. The old reliable black powder ranges from cannon grade to 5FG, though 2FG and 3FG are the most common powder sizes used for this type of shooting. This propellant is commonly graded by its coarseness. You must remember to factor density into the powder equation, as you will need to give the primer the space it needs to flame and burn the powder properly.

Last but certainly not least, the character that has been taking all the credit from the cartridge; Monsieur Bullet. The variety of bullets out there is astounding, and because it is my profound wish to get you excited about reloading, here are some bullets that can add a little spice to your life. Full metal jacket, soft and hollow points, boat tail, boat tail hollow point, lead round nose, wadcutter, semi-wadcutter, semi-jacketed soft and hollow points, jacketed soft and hollow points, open tip, very low drag, armor piercing, ballistic tip, frangible, tracer, and bonded. No wonder this guy hogs all the glory; his multiple personalities are all pretty kick ass.

However, if one possesses the wherewithal to do so, well-ventilated bullet casting sessions are a real scream, and a part of the quality control process. Just remember that one may not have the variety in lead bullets that they would have with the bullets with the extras.

GETTING THE FACTORY SET UP

I should just add a short word on where and how to get your reloading operation situated. For the most part, the non-complicated presses and their accessories can be packed up and taken anywhere to be set up, even in the deep forests of the back forty. Large-scale enterprises will be hopelessly stuck at home on the workbench; however, the wise reloader should always have a press and supplies that can be used on the go in emergency or non-emergency situations. The presses can be secured to a sturdy table or bench via mounting by screws or screw clamps. Other things such as dies, hand tools, powder, primers, and personally chosen items can be stored in a cabinet, tackle box, or a multi-pocketed travel bag. Tumblers should be set up in a ventilated area. The point is that this activity should take up as little space as possible, and in the quietest space possible, keeping everyone in the rest of the house happy and out of your hair.

FIRING UP THE PRODUCTION LINE

The first thing you want to do when reloading ammo is case preparation. The brass you use should be fairly new and clean without discoloration or any indication that the casing wall has been corroded from the caustic residue left from spent powder. Dirty brass is a pain in the rear and time-consuming to spiff up, so for purposes of clarity, we will deal with once-fired brass bought in a bulk bag through a dealer of such things. We will also be dealing with straight cased brass for handguns and some rifles, but not bottleneck rifle brass; that's for another rainy day.

Since these rounds have been fired with little chance of cleaning by the brass supplier before being bagged, the casings will need to get down and boogie in the brass tumbler. The brass is added to a medium of either ground corn cobs or walnut shells, and a grit polish to help knock off loose

powder, dirt, or other residue. This also helps to give the case a nice shine. This should be done outside or in a well ventilated area, as there is a risk of residual lead to be considered in addition to the length of time and noise that goes with it, depending upon tumbler model.

Once this has been accomplished, you will need to restore the case back to original factory specs. This will involve popping out the primer, if you hadn't done that already prior to tumbling, and expanding the casings walls back out. This is done by putting your deprimer/resizing die in the press, placing the casing in the shell holder, and pulling down on the lever. This will give you brass that is darn near close to what it was when it left the factory. It will also pop the primer out so that you can clean the primer pocket out, and resize the hole if needed. As time goes by, with you merrily reloading the same brass again and again, I should warn you that the brass will reach its breaking point. With each reload session, the case should be checked for length, with any excess shorn off to achieve proper length. This will also require deburring and chamfering of the case. Just a heads-up.

Now that the case has been cleaned, resized, and deprimed, it will be ready to have a new primer inserted. This can be done with hand tools or a die with that function built into it. Whatever is easiest for you. Once the primer is set into the cartridge, a dab of sealant around the primer would be ideal, as it will keep moisture away from the interior so as not to degrade the powder and primer.

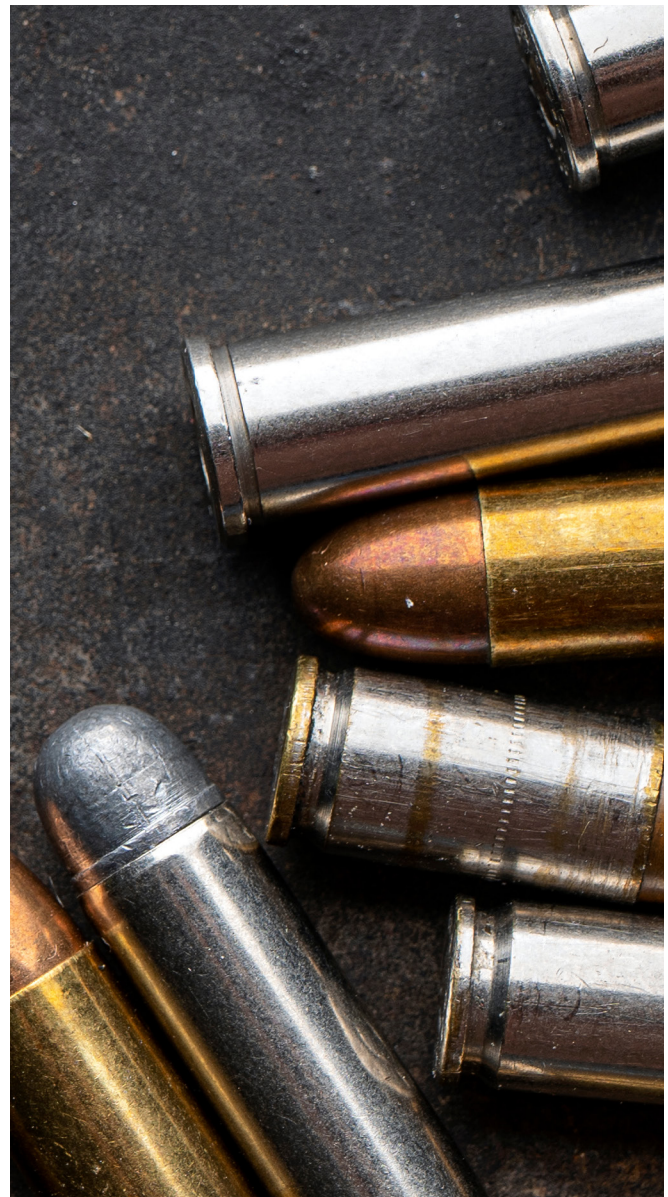
The powder will be the next thing to add to the primed casing. There is a diverse amount of powder formulations for different calibers and firearms on the market. What type you use will be entirely your choice based on your research; however, powder loading is the same across the board. Just remember; smokeless is weighed, and black powder is measured. When the powder has been prepared, it can be poured into the case with a press-mounted measure or with the scoop and funnel method.

The diva of the cartridge will be the last to take its place in the casing. Before this can occur, an

expanding die needs to be used to widen the

mouth of the case. You will now need to switch to the bullet seating die. With the casing in the shell holder, insert the bullet into the mouth, and press down with the die to seat the bullet and crimp the cartridge at the same time. This step will complete and add another round to your ever-increasing munitions bunker.

With the increasing threat of ammunition bans and the rising costs related to inflation, reloading would seem to be the smartest, most economical way to stockpile ammo, custom-made ammo, no less. Even though it is a money saver in the long run, it is truly a valuable skill to learn, an art to pass on to generations who will be the future guardians and defenders of our cherished freedoms and liberties. So, until next time, dear reader, stay safe and let's be careful out there.



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