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MEMBERS UPDATE

April 2024

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Affordable solar: how to get started on a budget

By Nikki Mulder

Solar is becoming increasingly more affordable and desirable as technology improves and the cost of electricity skyrockets–but what exactly does that mean? That means different things to different people, depending on your end goal.

The average solar setup today (or "module," as you will often hear it referred to) is 70% less expensive than it was just ten years ago and a whopping 10,000% cheaper than it was back in 1977!! Energysage estimates the average cost of a 7,000-watt solar panel installation to run around $20,650, with the low-end cost running about $17,430 (before any potential rebates or incentives). That is around $2.95/watt on average. Of course, the price will fluctuate depending on the size, amount, and quality of the panels you choose to install and the state you reside in. That estimated cost encompasses installation as well. Those costs do seem reasonable–especially when compared to what it would have cost you ten years ago– but they are still not what I would consider super budget-friendly for those who might be interested in dipping their toes into the world of solar before fully committing to it, those who may be simply looking for a backup system for if things go wrong, or those who are merely on a strict and tight budget. We fit into a couple of those categories–primarily the last. You are very selective and creative with your money when building a debt-free home on a minuscule budget. Whatever your motives, if your budget is tight and you are looking for simple, economical solutions, here are a few ideas.

In the Beginning

When we started building, "off-grid" was a completely foreign concept. Doing so was a

byproduct of necessity. We only had enough money to a) hook up utilities or b) start building our structure. Connecting to the grid would've eaten up every penny we had to get started with, and accruing more would've taken more precious time than we could afford. As winter in North Idaho waits for no man, it seemed logical to start building our cabin. After only three months of living like pioneers (oil lanterns, candles, woodstoves, etc.), I had fallen in love with the lifestyle and convinced my husband we shouldn't connect to the grid. Eleven months into our new off-grid life, we installed our first solar panels. Fast forward eight and a half years later, and we can't imagine returning to the grid.

Let me preface what I am about to tell you with a confession. When we first started using solar, we had no idea what we were doing–and we are still learning. It would probably be a fair categorization to describe us as jacks of all trades and masters of few. While we are certainly not experts in the solar field, I consider myself reasonably adept at out-of-the-box thinking. I prefer to think of this article as more of an inspiration from which you can draw rather than a strict "how-to."

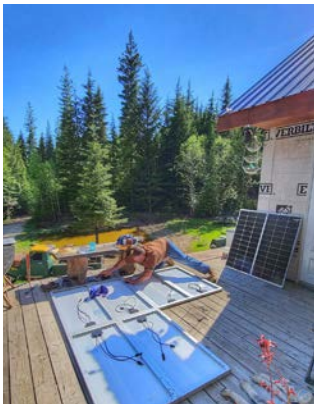
During our first few months in our cabin–really just a shell of a place–we used a generator to run power tools and charge batteries for our cordless power tools. Because our budget was so tight and we couldn't afford to waste fuel or replace our generator if we burned it up, we were incredibly frugal with our power consumption. We usually only ran the genny when we were building and then consolidated any other power usage requirements to those same times.

One day, while browsing Craigslist, one particular ad piqued my interest. Someone was selling their 2000-watt inverter (designed to be hardwired in vehicles) for a fantastic price of $20! Although I knew next to nil about solar, I knew that, for $20, I could afford to gamble a little. My gamble paid off! Not only did the inverter work as advertised, but it launched our solar dreams! It sparked my desire to learn more–to understand how an inverter works and what exactly I could do with it. This desire led me to learn many exciting things about electricity–particularly solar.

Being the frugal, penny-pinching miser that I am, it also drove me to consider the excess, untapped power our generator produced. I imagined capturing all that additional power, storing it in batteries for later use, and using my newly found inverter to tap into that stored power when the genny wasn't operating. This idea required a small battery charger, which I bought and attached to two deep-cycle marine batteries. This extra power storage, combined with the inverter, enabled us to run lights (LEDs), charge phones, and perform other small tasks without running the generator.

Eleven months into it, we saved a few extra pennies and splurged on a couple of solar panels and a tiny, cheap 10-amp charge controller. We paid a little more than $1 per watt for our first two panels, which were only 100 watts each, but those 200 watts of solar power felt more like 10,000 to us! They were a game-changer! After nearly a year of next-to-no power, we could have electricity without the genny! Slowly but surely, we began removing the many extension cords running throughout the cabin and properly wired them for electricity. Of course, there was much more to that evolution, but you get the picture.

The point I am making here is that our first solar setup cost us less than $300!! Yes, we had become incredibly frugal with our power by then and required very little, BUT it was completely doable. In fact, just shy of two years in, we doubled our solar panel wattage to add two more 100-watt panels to our "array." That was all we had for close to six years.



onwards and upwards!

After moving to our new property, we upgraded our charge controllers and inverters and added additional panels. We recently upgraded to a 24-volt system and purchased a more significant all-in-one inverter charger. We also began adding to our battery bank. Our present system comprises eight 100-watt panels, two 430-watt panels, one 5500-watt 80 amp 24v/48v all-in-one inverter charger with auto switching from solar to shore power, and ten deep cycle marine batteries. We also have two additional 430-watt panels and two additional 100-watt panels, which we haven't connected yet.

All said and done, our system (including the battery bank, cables, and four panels we haven't yet connected) is a 24-volt, 2,720-watt system that costs us around $3,300 minus the $200-$300 on all our equipment upgrades over the years. Had we started with what we have now, it would have significantly reduced the overall amount we ended up paying, but a) we didn't have the need nor disposable income to obtain what we have now, and b) we didn't know what we wanted or needed as we were doing it on our own and learning as we went. We certainly couldn't afford to hire someone, and after talking to professional solar installers, couldn't afford (nor did we need) even the smallest systems they were peddling. If you have more insight and knowledge into solar and a little more expendable cash upfront than us, you could probably knock several hundred dollars off of what we have paid overall.

Returning to the subject: How can you get started on solar on a tight budget? You could save thousands of dollars with some extra effort, patience, and good, old-fashioned bargain hunting. Like most things, the quality of solar panels and support equipment you choose will significantly affect how much you pay. If you are looking at spending tens of thousands of dollars on a vast array to power your home consistent with someone connected to the grid, you will probably want to splurge and invest in the big guns (big name, high efficiency, high capacity, etc.) However, if you are just starting, I see little downside to spending money on a more affordable panel. Even the least energy-efficient panels today surpass the best from twenty years ago.

getting started

Currently, four major types of solar panels are on the market: monocrystalline, polycrystalline, passive emitter and rear cell (PERC), and thin film. The PERC carries the highest efficiency rating, while the monocrystalline has the largest power capacity. Monocrystalline are also your most expensive panels, generally between $1-$1.50 per watt–which is still relatively affordable (and what I recommend) compared to the inefficient, costly panels of yore (panels in 1977 cost as much as $76.77 per watt!!).

Though monocrystalline panels are the most expensive, we opted to splurge on panel type while saving on brand. We purchased Renogy panels, paying $1 per watt for our first 100-watt panels. We weren't sure how purchasing from a minor brand name would work out, but we are pleased with our panels and their performance in our rather inhospitable environment. Although I can't say we have much basis for comparison, unless we strike it rich or find them on ultra-mega sale somewhere, we will likely never purchase a big-name solar panel.

One of the more obvious ways you can locate budget-friendly solar equipment is by buying it second-hand. We have, on occasion, located an item or two at yard or garage sales. Still, we often find them advertised for sale through places like Craigslist or Facebook Marketplace–such as the first inverter I purchased and, most recently, the new 430-watt panels. I would generally advise against finding second-hand panels unless they are unused, you know the year they were manufactured, and you obtain them for a significant discount. The reason for this is apparent: older and used panels won't

be as efficient as new ones. Too old or too used could render them practically useless. Especially if you only have limited space in which to install them. Who wants an entire paneled roof that only operates at 25% capacity? The exception would be if you came across a screaming good deal on used panels or found new (or newer) unused panels at a discounted price, as we did with our latest four. For instance, if I found used two-year-old panels for sale for .25 cents per watt, I would jump on that deal. Anything older or more expensive would be a tough sell for me as I know I can get brand-new panels for .75 cents per watt under the right circumstances (more about that later). In the case of the second-hand panels we bought via Marketplace, they were this year's models, were never used, and were local. We paid $1200 for four 430-watt panels this past summer. In this case, I gladly paid $.70 per watt for "second-hand" panels.

Holiday sales are a great way to obtain reasonably priced solar equipment. My favorites are Black Friday and Cyber Monday. Remember when I said I could find new panels for only .75 cents a watt? In 2019, I paid $71.49 per 100-watt monocrystalline Renogy panel at Amazon on Black Friday. At that same sale this year, Renogy discounted its 100-watt panels to $74.99 plus free shipping and free returns with Prime. Many solar companies participate in either Black Friday or Cyber Monday, and you can find some incredible deals to help get you started, upgrade, or beef up your existing system.

PRIDE OR PREJUDICE?

Another way to keep your initial solar costs reasonable is by forgoing the expensive solar batteries and opting for deep-cycle marine batteries. Unless there is some cosmic shift in value, we will only use deep-cycle batteries. Here's why: A budget-friendly solar battery with a 200 amp hour (ah) capacity will run you around $359.00 (at the time of this article) and has a life expectancy of 5-15 years. (That's a pretty significant variance!) Deep cycle marine batteries with an 80 AH capacity often go on sale here for $69.99 (we will call it $70 to simplify the math) and have a life expectancy of 3-6 years. Let's break down the math on this:

	Low-End Solar Battery	Deep Cycle Marine Battery
Amp Hours	200 ah	80 ah
Price	$389	$70
Life Expectancy	5-15 years	5-15 years
	$389 ÷ 200 ah = $1.95 per ah	$70 ÷ 80 ah = $.88 per ah

Three deep-cycle batteries provide 20% more amp hours than a single low-end solar battery for $179 less!

As you can see, my deep-cycle marine batteries are substantially less expensive (115% less!) than an "inexpensive" solar battery. Of course, the deep cycles purportedly have a much shorter life than solar batteries, but even if we had to replace our batteries twice as often as solar batteries, we would still be paying $.19 per amp hour less. And that is contingent on whether that solar battery lasts more than five years and is closer to fifteen; otherwise, the equation is incredibly lopsided in favor of deep cycles. I have several friends whose solar batteries died seven to ten years after purchase. In contrast, we have had deep cycles that have lasted up to seven years, and rarely (unless completely depleted or otherwise abused) have we had one last less than five years.

The replacement cost is the other reason we use deep-cycle marine batteries. One of our friends who paid a little over $700 per solar battery less than ten years ago recently had to replace their entire battery bank (with several batteries) in the middle of winter when an off-gridder's power storage is most vital. It was a huge, unexpected expense that was difficult to swallow. Even if we had to replace our entire bank (which would likely be more than one purchase

2-4 batteries at different times to mitigate that possibility), we would only be looking at $800-$1000 tops (depending on ongoing sales.)

I understand the desire many have to opt for solar batteries vs. deep cycle batteries–especially if you have a limited understanding and rely on an expert to assist you, and I certainly don't judge. It has been my experience, though, that any of the people we have this discussion with either a) have a vested interest in selling the solar battery as being the superior choice or b) hold a disdainful opinion of using what they view as the "wrong" tool for the job. Perhaps somebody much more solar or battery savvy than I would be able to make a compelling argument for the necessity of a solar battery bank, but I simply can't justify the discrepancy in expense when my method has thus far produced a satisfactory means to an end without breaking the bank.

Solar doesn't have to be daunting, and it doesn't have to cost a fortune. Every year (even with inflation!), solar becomes more and more affordable, and with all of the resources available to us on the internet, having to hire an expensive professional installer is a thing of the past. With some research, ingenuity, and patience, you can find affordable solar equipment to suit your needs and install it yourself! (depending on your state's laws, of course.)

Beekeeping Basics - Part 1

By Nikki Mulder

To Bee Or Not To Bee, That Is The Question

"If the bee disappeared off the surface of the globe, then man would have only four years of life left. No more bees, no more pollination, no more plants, no more animals, no more man."

-Albert Einstein

Pollination is an essential part of plant reproduction. There are two methods of pollination. The first method is abiotic: pollination that does not require a living organism–predominantly consisting of wind (98%) and water (2%). The second method is biotic: pollination that uses animals to facilitate pollen movement from one plant to another. According to the USDA and Farmers.gov, biotic pollination makes up 80% of all plant pollination, and bees alone account for 80% of that! According to Nasa.gov, "Bees… pollinate approximately 130 agricultural crops in the US, including fruit, fiber, nut, and vegetable crops." As Einstein so eloquently put it, without pollinators, life on earth would eventually cease to exist; bees are a fundamental part of life as we know it.

But let's look at this through a smaller, more personal lens. How does keeping bees help us as individuals? Well, above and beyond the obvious answer–pure, sweet, liquid gold: honey–it is also a huge benefit to have pollinators for our own gardens and local flora.

Bee Accommodations– The Anatomy Of A Hive

Now that we've discussed the "why" you should keep bees, let's jump into the "how" of it. While there are several different models of hives to utilize, this article will focus on the popular and most commonly used Langstroth hive. The Langstroth hive consists of a series of boxes of differing depths stacked on top of one another.

Hive Stand

It is preferable to build your hive off the ground on some form of a stand. Some hives come with a stand, but rarely are those stands adequately tall enough. The height of a stand will be a personal choice; ideally, it will be somewhere in the vicinity of 18 inches to 3 feet tall. This will help mitigate the possibility of a skunk raiding your hive, as well as give you enough height to help keep the entire structure above the snow (if you are in an area that gets snow). Remember that when you have several boxes stacked, the hive can get quite tall, and lifting a box filled with fifty to eighty pounds of honey,

bees, or both from too elevated a position might prove difficult.

For this reason, my hive stands are only at the 18-inch mark (even though we get 8+ feet of snow each year). In a perfect world (one day!), I will have a small pole barn shed with a roof over my hives, plenty of storage space for all my bee gear and extra hive components, and a workbench behind the hives to make removing and inspecting boxes easier! Ah, but I digress–there are many ways to increase the quality of life on a working homestead, but today, I am focusing on the basics.

Bottom Board

The next section of your hive is the bottom board. It makes up the hive floor and contains the primary (and possibly only) entrance for your bees. If you are in a cold climate, that entry will likely change during the winter months, but that is an article for another time. While it is not necessary to screen the bottom board, it is beneficial during the summer months to help keep the hive cooler. It also aids in the monitoring and population control of varroa mites, a parasite that, if left unchecked, can decimate a hive quickly.

Entrance Reducer

There will be a gap for the hive entrance where you place the entrance reducer in the front of the bottom board and the hive body that stacks atop it. There are a couple of different styles of entrance reducers. Still, their purpose is all the same: They help regulate the temperature of the hive and prevent robbing or invasion by other critters (rival bees, yellowjackets, mice, etc.) by providing your bees with a defensible entranceway via a narrow access. This prevents an attack from a large force en masse while enabling defenders to fall back to a fortified position to engage the enemy one at a time (think of it as a "chokepoint" or a castle "gatehouse").

Hive Body/Brood Boxes/ Deeps

I refer to these boxes as "deeps" because they are the largest (deepest) boxes that make up your hive. The deep sits directly atop the bottom board, is usually made of wooden construction, and contains 9 to 10 frames within. It is the primary housing for your bees and where you will find the queen, brood, food, and honey the bees gather and store for their consumption.

Supers

Supers are the additional boxes that you will stack on top of the deeps. They are generally smaller in size (medium and shallow). I usually just refer to these as "boxes"–whether medium or shallow. These are where the honey you will harvest is stored.

Frames & Foundation

Frames are precisely what their name implies: frames. They consist of thin, narrow pieces of wood in a rectangular shape that fit lengthwise into the deeps and supers–the dimensions dictated by the designated box size. Within the frame is an optional foundation. The foundation is a flat sheet of either beeswax or plastic consisting of embossed hexagon shapes that the bees follow to make their comb. The plastic foundations have a thin wax covering to aid the bees in starting their comb. Each style foundation has its merit. Bees prefer the beeswax foundations; however, they are substantially more fragile and require an additional wire for support. While some bees may be reluctant to use the plastic frames, I find they adapt to them relatively quickly, and the advantages far outweigh that initial hesitance. The plastic

frames are far more durable and substantially outlive their beeswax counterparts–especially when extracting honey. You can use your plastic frames for two to three years by uncapping the honey and using a honey extractor, leaving all that beautiful comb structure intact so that your bees don't have to work so hard to draw out new frames next spring—all they have to do is add honey! The other advantage plastic frames have is that they tend to resist wax moths much better than beeswax frames.

One other thing I want to touch on in this section is the use of foundationless frames. Foundationless frames are precisely what the name implies: empty frames with no foundation. These are used primarily in the development of comb honey. While they perform admirably in this capacity, unless you are looking to harvest honeycomb chiefly, they are (in my opinion) a basic beekeeper's nightmare. The reason is this: with no template for the bees to follow, the bees build their comb in whatever shape or fashion meets their fancy. It might seem okay–even desirable–at first glance, but if you are anything like me, you will soon change your mind. A couple of years ago, I decided I wanted some beautiful combed honey to share with friends. What I didn't count on was the fact that the bees, left to their own devices, would choose to interconnect most of their comb—frames and all. I soon realized that it was impossible to pull a single frame from its respective box without destroying most of the beauty of the comb, as each side becomes connected to the frame or comb next to it or to the box itself. Not only did it destroy all that beautiful comb they had drawn out, but it also opened many of the cells, causing the honey to leak out all over the place, making a huge mess–not to mention how much gold nectar it wasted and how angry it made my bees! It also made it all but impossible to perform a proper inspection of the hive. I certainly learned a lesson from that little experiment!

While I don't want to discourage you from attempting comb honey, I hope that by sharing my little debacle with you, I can save you some frustration and encourage you to do a little more research on the subject than I did before jumping in with both feet.

Queen Excluder

The queen excluder is a flat mesh grate (metal or plastic) that separates the honey boxes from the deep during "honey flow" (the period that honey is most abundant and at the end of which beekeepers harvest). Its purpose is to prevent the queen from accessing the upper honey boxes during honey flow, thereby preventing her from mixing brood in with the honey. The mesh grate is wide enough for the worker bees to squeeze through but too narrow for the queen. (A queen excluder is optional, and many beekeepers opt not to use one as they feel it reduces production in their hives. I suggest doing your research and deciding for yourself.) Remove the excluder after the honey flow harvest.

Inner Cover

The inner cover acts as a ceiling for the hive. It can have one or more small openings cut into its flat surface for access from the hive into the "attic" space, as well as a small opening notched out in the front of the cover to the exterior of the structure. This inner cover helps regulate the hive's temperature by acting as an additional insulator between the hive and the outer cover; it prevents the direct heat of the sun or the direct chill of the cold winter air. It also helps reduce condensation by increasing airflow.

Outer Cover

The highest portion of the hive is the outer cover, which acts as the hive roof. A lid for your hive, this component fits snuggly around the outside and on top of your inner cover and is tall enough to provide a small gap (or attic space) between the outer and inner covers–sufficient for bees to move freely between them. The outer cover should be covered in metal (or other waterproof material) and

extend out past the width and depth of the hive, like eaves, to protect the hive from precipitation.

Location, Location, Location

Okay, so now that we know what kind of house to build our bees, we need to figure out where we need to set that house up.

There are many factors to consider when deciding where to place our beehives. It is much more important than you might believe–because once you have installed your bees, if you decide they aren't where you want them, you are pretty much limited to the "3 feet or 3 miles" rule which (loosely) states that if you're going to move a hive, you don't want to move it more than 3 feet from its current location or you will need to move it 3 miles, but nothing in between if you don't want to risk your bees becoming disoriented and not being able to find their way back home.

Here are the primary considerations for that prime beehive real estate: Sun, wind, trajectory, water, protection, and accessibility.

Sun - Your hive needs to get adequate sunshine. Ideally, you want your entrance to face southeast. It not only gets your bees to rise and shine to get an early start with the sunrise but also provides warm sunshine during the cooler (or cold) winter months. In a perfect world, you can find a place that offers adequate sunlight without being in direct sun, but it has been my experience that, while not ideal, bees do manage even in the harshest desert environments without shade.

Wind - If you are in an area with a lot of wind or high wind gusts, you should place your hives in a protected spot or provide your bees with windbreak.

Trajectory - Establish that the path before your beehive is clear for easy egress and ingress. Additionally, if the direction your hive faces has any cross traffic–pedestrians, vehicles, etc.– ensure you place some form of barrier (wall, shrub, etc.) six feet in front of the hive within your bee's flight path to encourage your bees to gain altitude quickly and fly over any potential hazards or pedestrians. Additionally, ensure the area in front of your hive doesn't have tall grass or weeds that impede travel or invite unwanted guests.

Water - Water is vital to life. Bees are no exception. Your bees should have access to an ample water supply. If you don't have accessible groundwater on your property, you must provide your bees with water and ensure it is always clean. Many people use a birdbath, but anything that is shallow and holds water will work. I have used many things, including dog bowls and gold mining pans. It is crucial to include stones, pebbles, marbles, or some other similar items for the bees to stand on (or grab onto if they fall in) to prevent them from drowning.

Protection- Be aware of what is above or near your hive. You don't want to place your hive under a tree whose branches become snow-laden in winter and dump tons of wet snow on top of your hive. Nor do you want it to be in the path of anything else that might fall on it or near a body of water that might flood or wash it away.

Accessibility - I cannot stress this one enough! It is a critical consideration and goes hand-in-hand with the 3 feet/3 mile rule! If you cannot easily access your hive and be able to maneuver around it with room enough for several heavy-laden hive boxes, DO NOT place your hive there! Look at the terrain. Is it easily accessed, or does it have trip hazards? Is it on a hillside? Can you access the hive from both the front and the rear? Is there room to expand if you need to split a hive? Is there room for you to put a fence, electric fence, or another means of protection around it if needed? Can you get a vehicle, wagon, or some other means of locomotion to it when honey harvest time rolls around? Do you have room to expand your hives vertically without impedance– and to remove and replace all the components of your hive easily?

As you can see, there is much more than meets the eye regarding beekeeping–far too much for me to address in a single article. I touched on why you should keep bees and where to house them, but I have barely scratched the surface of how you will do it. In my next article, I will address the issues of how and what you will need to care for your bees, where to obtain bees, how to install them, periodic hive inspections, and honey extraction. An additional article on winterizing your bees will follow these two initial articles on Beekeeping Basics, so stay tuned!

THE WARSAW GHETTO UPRISING: A VALIANT FIGHT AGAINST THE FINAL SOLUTION

By Eric Austgen

AN EVIL GENESIS

At the conclusion of the "Flower Wars," that is, the annexation and occupation of Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Lithuania, Hitler turned his sights toward bringing Poland into the Lebensraum fold. The Poles naturally wanted nothing to do with this plan, a fact Hitler knew very well, and he also knew that the type of diplomatic wheeling and dealing that helped with the Czechs would certainly be ignored. Therefore, the first shots in the old scramble brains conquest for a little German breathing space in Europe commenced on the first of September 1939. Poland fell within a matter of weeks, with the occupation force quickly setting up a seat of the General Government in the vanquished capital of Warsaw. This government was headed by a one time lawyer to Hitler named Hans Frank. Frank took his hatred for Jewish and Non-Jewish Poles to a fanatical level, almost meeting and exceeding Nazi Party ideology to the point one would think he would be adored by all espousing the same. Quite the opposite. The guy managed to step on so many jackbooted toes in his quest for power that he earned an enemies list that went all the way to Reichs-Fuhrer Heinrich Himmler, the ratty-looking guy that was head of the SS. Even though the Nuremberg Laws were being implemented and enforced, Frank still had frequent clashes with Friedrich-Wilhelm Kruger, the commanding general of SS and Police forces, over the control of the Jewish populace. Meanwhile, completely oblivious to the internal struggles of evil degeneracy, the Jewish Poles of Warsaw went about their lives, never knowing what the future may hold.

JEWISH LIFE UNDER THE NAZI BOOTHEEL

In addition to the Nuremberg laws, Frank, himself a jurist, and his subordinates passed a barrage of antisemitic legislation in the city and elsewhere within his control. He demanded a Jewish council be set up to liaise with his office, a twenty-four member board that was tasked with passing along and making sure everyone was in compliance with all ordinances and acting as an intermediary for all grievances within the Jewish population. The Jews within Frank's sphere of influence were forced to

wear a white armband with a blue star of David, display the star in their shops, close up synagogues, disband private prayer groups, and end educational pursuits. Further humiliation and discrimination came when Jews were purged from occupations, had their homes confiscated, denied use of public transport, and kept from walking on certain streets.

Being the power and control types they were, the Nazis were wary of letting the Jewish community mingle freely with Non-Jews without having a proper eye kept on them, so it was decided to wall off a section of Warsaw and deposit them there. This bought them some time to figure out how the Israelites would fit in or be dealt with in the ensuing "Thousand Year Reich." In April 1940, more than 90,000 Jews brought in from other parts of occupied Poland began construction on the first walls of the ghetto in the west-central part of the city. To add insult to injury, the Jewish Council was forced to pay for its construction. And to compound the humiliation, an edict directing all Jews to relocate to the ghetto within two weeks was issued on the Jewish Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. Once the ten-foot walls topped off with barbed wire had been completed and the relocation complete, the ghetto was sealed off on the fifteenth of November 1940.

By early 1941, around 450,000 Jews found themselves trapped behind the restrictive ghetto walls. The flow of traffic in and out was heavily regulated, and anyone who attempted or aided in an escape was immediately executed. The size of the ghetto was about 1.3 miles, and with that much humanity crammed into that small of an area, problems are bound to persist. One such problem was the food situation. Initially issued only an 800-calorie-a-day ration, that soon fell to 180, necessitating a need to smuggle in food from the outside through contacts with former acquaintances, paying off guards, or the thriving black market. With only five public bathhouses serving 1,700 people a month and an already poor plumbing system to begin with, proper hygiene was almost impossible to achieve, especially with bad-quality soap at their disposal.

As everyone was all in one place, so to speak, the Jews saw no reason they couldn't start up their old lifestyle and practice their traditions as best as possible under the circumstances. Educational instruction began, as did theatrical performances, and most importantly, a return to observance of religious practices. The small acts of resistance did much to annoy the Nazis but weren't enough for them to lash out in any meaningful retaliation. The population numbers were already declining due to the subhuman conditions of living and the deportation of able-bodied 14-60-year-old males to various labor camps throughout the Reich. These small acts of defiance served to keep morale and hope up when none could be found in that bleak landscape. These acts also helped to keep the fighting spirit alive in those young enough to do so, which would help spur on their bravery and resolve in facing a well-trained and equipped fighting force.

HOW TO CALMLY PLAN MURDER

By January 1942, the Jews of Warsaw had been living in the ghetto for a little over a year. On the 20th of that month, fifteen men representing the legal, military, labor, and political interests of the Third Reich met at a palatial estate in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee. The master of ceremonies was Reinhard Heydrich, the Reichs Protector for Bohemia and Moravia, or to the locals just "The

Butcher of Prague," with his right-hand man from the Jewish Affairs Bureau, Adolf Eichmann, planning the whole operation. Also in attendance was Heinrich Muller, the chief of the Gestapo. In just under ninety minutes, these men sat down to a buffet luncheon, heard, quibbled, debated, and acquiesced to what was demanded and expected of them from Heydrich and Eichmann, two detestable weasley-looking men who wouldn't think twice about eighty-sixing you for looking at them wrong. The plan was "The Final Solution To The Jewish Question," which laid out what would become of all people declaring any sort of Jewish heritage in Nazi-occupied lands. This wasn't limited to the Jews in Europe, no siree; the Nazis were thinking large and included those residing in the U.K. and all neutral nations; even the U.S. got a brief mention. It's not as if wholesale murder against Jews hadn't been committed since the Germans' engagements on the Eastern Front began; the murders would now be streamlined into a more effective system. At the end of the meeting, a campaign of terror and murder the likes of which the world had never seen would be unleashed upon multiple enemies of the Reich, with the Jews squarely at the top of the list.

A COMING STORM

The inhabitants of the ghetto had by no means gone to sleep and knuckled under while in captivity. They knew that something worse was eventually going to come down the pike. The Wannsee Conference was a confirmation of their fears, and in accordance with the wishes of the High Command, the "Great Action" began in mid-1942. In essence, it was more of a resettlement operation than anything. From July to September of that year, SS and Police units deported nearly 265,000 Jews to the death camp at Treblinka, with 35,000 being killed during the operation inside the ghetto. The dawn of 1943 saw only seventy to eighty thousand inhabitants left. During the "Great Action," a general idea that their number may be up next morphed into the creation of several Jewish underground organizations. The Jewish Combat Organization was an armed self-defense group that had roughly two hundred members in its ranks. The Betar, a youth group of the right-wing Revisionist Zionist movement, brought together a force known as the Jewish Military Union. There was tension between both groups in the beginning; however, their shared hatred of the Nazis and desire to stop the destruction of the ghetto eventually cooled, and they joined together for the common good. Combining the forces put their numbers at about 750 by the time they lowered the hammer on the SS. In order to do so, they would need more firepower, which would not be received until late 1942 when contact was firmly established with the Polish military organization known as the Home Army.

The police and SS units returned in January of 1943 to resume deportations, this time to forced labor camps in the Lublin District. A small group

of resistance fighters infiltrated the Jews being rounded up, and when the signal was heard, the fighters broke ranks and fought the Germans with pistols. Many of the Jewish fighters were killed in the attack, but it disoriented the Germans and helped the massed Jews to disperse. Resistance leaders began urging those ordered for deportation to defy them and hide instead. Due to this defiance, the Nazis only managed to deport five to six thousand in this time and suspended operations in the latter part of January. This heartened the remaining Jewish residents, and they began constructing bunkers and shelters to prepare for what the Germans surely had in mind for them.

A LAST DESPERATE FIGHT

On April 19th, the eve of Passover, members of the Jewish Combat Organization had caught wind that the Germans had a final deportation action in the works. Residents of the ghetto were instructed to get to their shelters and be prepared to hide or fight. The Germans already had a good idea as to the defensive organizations in the ghetto from their encounter in January, which is why the SS and Police chief Ferdinand Von Sammern-Frakenegg was replaced with a ruthless guy who was accustomed to partisan warfare, Jurgen Stroop. By no means was Berlin hedging their bets on just one guy; they also supplied him with 2,000 soldiers and police, with some artillery and tanks thrown in for good measure.

The Jewish Combat Organization was armed with pistols, rifles, and a few automatic weapons. They also had grenades, many of them being homemade makeshift affairs. This weaponry was enough to knock the Nazis off guard on the first day of fighting, driving them outside the ghetto wall, and handing Stroop twelve casualties in the process. From then on until the end of the uprising, the resistance fighters frequently clashed with Germans, and even though they lacked any form of military training and discipline, they managed to wage a very successful guerilla campaign against their oppressors. They would strike the enemy hard and fast, then retreat into the safety of the buildings or shelters and bunkers located nearby. While the resistance fighters were doing the fighting, other ghetto inhabitants were doing their part in thwarting the Germans in their deportation schemes by constantly refusing to show up at collection points to head for places unknown. These people were able to hold out for almost a month against a very formidable and well-equipped force just by being, well, ungovernable, if you will. The ghetto was slowly and systematically burned and demolished by the Germans in their attempt to draw out their attackers. Unfortunately, on the eighth of May, German forces captured the headquarters of the Jewish Combat Organization, leading to the suicide of the leader and some staff commanders who wanted to avoid capture. Later, on the sixteenth, satisfied that the resistance effort had been effectively quashed, Stroop reported to Berlin that "The former Jewish Quarter in Warsaw

is no more." On the same day, he ordered the Great Synagogue to be destroyed as a symbol of the German victory.

AFTERMATH

Soon after the uprising had been quelled, the SS and Police deported 42,000 ghetto survivors to the forced labor camps at Poniatowa and Trawniki, with the remainder going to Lublin/Majdanek Concentration Camp. These poor souls would be murdered in November of that year in a two-day shooting operation called Harvest Festival. At least 7,000 Jews were killed in the fighting, and many were captured in the days after fighting ceased. Those that were captured were sent to Treblinka to be murdered. Even though the ghetto had been liquidated to the Germans' satisfaction, many individual Jews continued to use the rubble of the ghetto and its underground bunkers and shelters as occasional hiding spots. They also provided a public service by harassing and attacking Nazi police patrols out wandering where they shouldn't. Of the Warsaw Jews left after the liquidation, it is estimated that as many as 20,000 lived in hiding on the Gentile side of town.

Because of their actions, the Warsaw Ghetto Jews delivered the largest, and symbolically most important, uprising during the Second World War. This also had the distinction of being the first urban uprising in Nazi-occupied Europe. It carried enough weight to inspire other ghetto inhabitants scattered across the Reich's eastern frontier and give the steel and resolve to the underground and partisan groups fighting against similar odds. Shortly after the conclusion of the "Battle of Britain," the most heavily bombed target of World War Two, Winston Churchill, gave a speech to the

House of Commons, one part of which seems rather appropriate here in that, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

Normally, I would leave you with a post game analysis of what we have been through together, but I feel the story speaks for itself, and I have every faith in you, dear reader, that you can read between the lines. If I had one important point for you, it would be to impress on the historically ignorant or stupid just how important history is and its nasty habit of repetition. I would like to end our time together on a more personal note if you'll allow me this rare indulgence. My cousin Wilhelm was arrested and held in preventive police custody, being labeled as a "Berufs Verbrecher," a career criminal. He was sent to Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp in August 1940, had a green triangle attached to his prison issues, and given inmate number 28636. A little over a year later, he was sent to Gross-Rosen in Poland and exchanged 28636 for 1313. When the Soviet heat was getting to be too much in early 1945, he was sent to the Flossenburg subcamp at Leitmeritz, ending the war with inmate number 86883. From there, his fate is unknown, and I am still awaiting records. In memory of everyone who has suffered persecution at the hands of any tyrannical regime and bravely chose to stand and fight, I respectfully dedicate this piece. So, until next time, dear reader, stay safe and let's be careful out there.

Which Shooter Is Right For Me: The AR-10 Or AR-15?

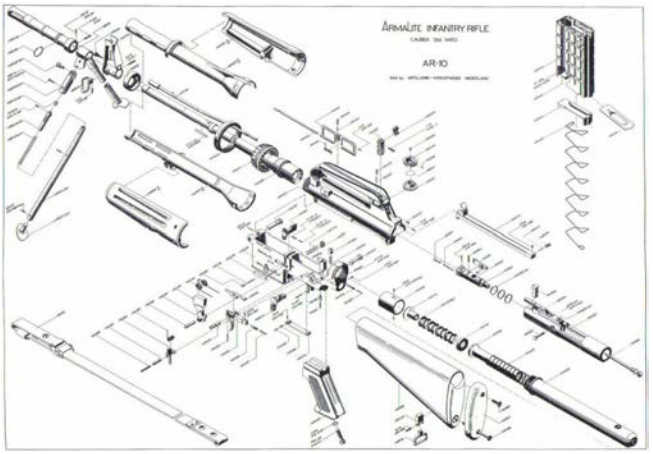
By Eric Austgen

It would be virtually impossible to find anyone residing in the known universe who hasn't heard of an Armalite firearm or rather an "AR." Whatever anyone's opinion of these rifles, whether informed or inculcated, it is a fact that the Armalite-designed firearms are extremely popular with sporters for defense, recreation, and memory making. It's also very popular with the best gun salesmen in the world, insufferably brain-dead activists. The informed of the bunch will, with no doubt, at one point, have considered whether to pick up an AR-10 or 15. While it is true they look very similar outwardly, a closer inspection will reveal a vast difference with each firearm. We will have a brief look at the development and compare both weapons so that yours will be a well-informed decision at the time of purchase.

From The Air To The Ground

As we have covered the beginnings of Fairchild's Armalite Division and the development of the AR-5 survival rifle for use in the Air Force, we shall pick up our story from there. Shortly after the success of that rifle, Armalite and Eugene Stoner recalled the sweet taste of government money and submitted a rifle design to the army, which, at that time, was looking for a replacement for the M-1 Garand. The rifle design Stoner submitted was constructed with aluminum alloy upper and lower receivers, a piston-less direct gas impingement operating system, and high-impact polymer furniture. The impingement system allowed for exhaust gasses to be sent directly to the receiver to cycle the bolt carrier. The reduction of weight would have been very welcome on the battlefield. However, there was just a teeny weensy bit of a problem with the aluminum steel composite barrel and the 7.62x51mm round in which the weapon was chambered. The barrel was the first of its type attempted, pushed heavily by the higher-ups at Armalite, and reluctantly accepted by Stoner. The chief engineer didn't need to be a psychic to tell you that the barrel on the AR-10 ruptured faster than a case of apoplexy, and any hope of

securing a government contract was less than nil. In the aftermath of the weapons trials, the army decided to send the M-14 to do its battle speak in Southeast Asia. The AR-10 was mothballed until Stoner and Knight Armament joined forces thirty-some years later to revisit the design. Coming back to life as the SR-25, it was configured as a long-range operations weapon, with the US Special Ops Command adopting it as a sniper rifle. The army was so impressed by it that it replaced its existing M24 sniper rifle with this system. It may have taken a few years for that contract to come through, but it allowed the designer a sense of satisfaction and vindication when it did.



Incoming Cliche Alert!

I would imagine that Mr. Stoner may have been a bit steamed at the avoidable failure of the AR-10 in front of an impressionable and judgmental clientele; however, Armlite was bound and determined to restore its reputation in the eyes of the same. The US Army Continental Army Command burned a few taxpayer dollars to study both global conflicts to figure out that the military needed to ditch the variety of weapons in its inventory and get an all-in-one rifle. It was to be chambered in 5.56, fed from a twenty-round magazine, six pounds in weight, and could penetrate both sides of a standard combat helmet at 500 meters. The order came down to reconfigure the weapon to win back the esteem of the ever-fickle army brass. Stoner, along with his assistant, Robert Fremont, and John Sullivan, went back to the drawing board and designed the AR-15. Whereas lighting is not known to strike twice, disaster usually has that nasty habit, and Armalite missed out again. With the wolves at the door, Armalite was forced to sell the design, and it ultimately ended up in the hands of Colt.

About three years after the army rejected the AR-15, Air Force Chief of Staff Curtis LeMay placed an order for 80,000 rifles due to the fact the low recoil allowed the shooter to fire accurately at a rapid pace and the heavy weight and recoil of the M-14 was an outdated menace. Wanting to know what the Air Force was up to, the army conducted its own testing and found that more soldiers qualified as expert marksmen using the rifle as opposed to the M-14 rifle. Despite this and the fact that the AK-47 was besting the M-14 over in Vietnam, the army stubbornly refused to give in and buy the new rifle. That is until Vietnam evolved past the advisor stage, necessitating greater production of combat rifles, a feat the M-14 couldn't accomplish satisfactorily but something the AR-15 could easily handle. Once in military service, it was designated as the M-16, and the rest is history, one of which we will touch on in the very near future. The military finally found a weapon that it was not only happy about but could be standardized with each subsequent model, giving the added benefit of readily available interchangeable parts that could be easily assembled by anyone with basic mechanical skills. It, along with the shorter M4 version, is still in the federal armory while its semi-automatic sibling is in civilian hands, defending and delighting wherever it goes.

Understanding Our Differences

There are many parts that are interchangeable between the two AR weapons systems; however, before we get to those, we should have a fair understanding of what really sets these two apart.

The most noticeable difference is the caliber of the weapon. The standard caliber for the AR-10 is .308, with the AR-15 firing a .223 or 5.56 round. Now, these are the basic calibers; however, with the standardization of these weapons, newer conversion kits for different calibers are coming out to satisfy those who like to shoot multiple calibers without buying a corresponding firearm for each. These kits allow for even a light shooter like the AR-15 to hold its own while hunting, and heavier guys like the AR-10 turned into a leisurely afternoon plinker.

Another difference one will encounter is the bolt carrier and gas system. The bolt carrier will be noticeably larger and heavier to handle the more powerful loads and calibers employed. The AR-15 is smaller and not as heavy due to its intended design for low-recoil ammunition. Though they may not be similar in size, they do function the same. The functionality is operated by the direct gas impingement system. The AR-10 will feature a system that is bigger in order to facilitate the amount of gas needed to cycle the heavy bolt carrier, whereas the AR-15 does not require gas ports as large as its brother. Therefore, gas systems can not be successfully used between the two.

When stripped bare, it's easy to see how the upper and lower receivers of each weapon are completely incompatible. The AR-10 is longer to facilitate the .308 or 7.62x51mm round. The AR-15 will naturally have a shorter receiver. Another way to quickly determine the difference between the two is a side-by-side comparison or an inspection of the length and width of the magazine well. While we are on the subject, there are some AR-10 upper receivers on the market that are not compatible with other similar models. Some models will have an upper and lower that is machined like an AR-15 or have a diagonal cut that dashes any hope of interchanging parts. It would be best to research what parts to use, as some brands have AR-10s that will use either type of cut.

The buffer and spring will be the last of your worries when it comes to interchangeable parts capabilities. The buffer helps to slow down the rear travel of the bolt and soften the perceived recoil of the fired round. Again, the AR-10 will require a larger buffer to handle the hot, larger loads put through it. As one can imagine, the spring that needs to go with such a buffer would require a tremendous amount of strength to return the bolt back to its starting position. And you would be right; however, this is one of those parts that are kind of on the fence about whether they should be swapped between the two ARs, although just to be safe, it would be advisable to buy all non and questionably interchangeable parts for your particular model of firearm.

Rejoicing In Our Similarities

It would be safe to say that you can swap between the two in a pinch for the rest of your AR platform if it has absolutely nothing to do with the aforementioned parts.

The trigger group should all be the same, regardless of caliber and model of the weapon. Location of the trigger and the guts needed to make it work are the same, making parts changes easier. They are both set up to take specific triggers you like to use for whatever application you choose. It should be noted that this may not be the case with hyper-specific trigger groups and DPMS-style rifles.

Buttstocks and buffer tubes go hand in hand and should be mentioned together. The reason that buttstocks can be readily switched out is because both ARs use the same buffer tube and buttstock interface. Due to having the same interface, the buffer tube can be changed between the two, though one should be sure that the tube is of the proper length, has adequate strength to withstand the weight of the buffer and spring, and be prepared to shop around if what you have on hand doesn't fit the bill.

The furniture of both firearms will be fully interchangeable unless you own an earlier, original AR that requires a custom reproduction of the pistol grips or handguards. This shows just how far evolved from the 50s these weapons have become in their standardization. Today, pistol grips and hand guards of all varieties of colors, design, construction, and mounting options can be had to the content of one's heart. I have seen some guns that have a bit of "bling" to them; most of them are gaudy and just so God-awful to look at, and then there is the class that comes with a fully accessorized and upgraded AR platform that offers plenty for the shooter without looking too "busy" or scary to Joe and Jane Q. Public.

The AR-10: What Is It Good For?

Even though the AR-10 is the older of the two platforms and not as standardized as it should

be, this shouldn't be a drawback to choosing this weapon. The primary reason one should own this firearm is the range it can bring when out hunting or using it in its military capacity as a sniper rifle. The .308 or 7.62mm rounds are best for taking down game at longer ranges without being affected by windage. It is also capable of faster follow-up shots comparable to a well-tuned bolt action job with the same type of accuracy. This ability is excellent for taking down medium to large sized game and for use up close and long distances.

The good thing about the .308 round is that it can be loaded to whatever you need it for, whether it be for close up medium game encounters or for precision long distance shooting. Granted, the ammo for this weapon may get a bit expensive, but one is able to cut down on cost with reloading brass and through conversion kits.

The AR-15: What Is It Good For?

What isn't it good for? That should be the question. Since this weapon has been available to both civil and martial clientele, it has undergone refinement and standardization to a point where parts and accessories are flying around everywhere that one could assemble a complete AR-15 platform from several suppliers instead of just one. If one were to do it right and shop around, an AR-15 build could run you less than $500 bucks in some cases.

That kind of accessibility for shooters of every pay grade is one of the reasons for its appeal, along with easy maintenance. Another reason is owed to the availability of nominally priced ammo that is easier to control by shooters of all ages and experience levels.

This firearm is a wonderful weapon when it comes to self-defense, competition, law enforcement, and employment in certain game hunting. Due to the multiple applications of the AR-15, there are a variety of uses, from hunting to self-defense. When purchasing for home defense, it should be remembered that ammo that penetrates and stops will be ideal instead of punching completely through the target, the wall behind it, and maybe a fence or tree outside, or worse, another person. Meanwhile, a round with a hotter load with an AR-15 should be engaged to take down game in your state that has been approved for hunting. With all the checkmarks laying in the win column for this platform, it is easy to deduce why it is one of the most popular and reviled pieces of weaponry forged in the last century. As long as there are supporters and detractors out there helping to drive up sales, I don't believe we will see this firearm go away any time in the near future, that is, unless the powers that be decide to go for the big gun grab they have always salivated over in an extremely perverted Pavlovian manner.

Throughout history, many works of literature, films, plays, and the sort have used the everyman character as their protagonist. The AR-15 is similar to the everyman in that it is not necessarily the poor man's gun but rather a humble offering that draws people together in a common identity. It has been a comfort to many, knowing that there are others out in the world that share that common interest and gun. Forget about having a Coke, a smile, and teaching the whole blessed world to sing, just give everyone an AR, and perfect harmony will not be far behind. After all, witnessing a polite society on a global scale would be a mind-blowing experience and not one to miss.

To many, the AR platforms represent the very epitome of simplicity and ease of use that come with every firearm. It can be transformed from an okay feeling stock option to a comfortable extension of your body with a few simple parts and accessories upgrades that won't cost an arm and a leg in the long run. No matter how your feelings run when it comes to the Armalite-designed and inspired firearms, the evidence has consistently shown just how popular and effective these weapons have been since their inception. So, until next time, dear reader, stay safe and let's be careful out there.

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