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MEMBERS UPDATE

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How To Build A Homestead

Building a Booming Barter System

Budget Gun Or Best Quality: Can You Have Both?

Best Non-Shooters Where Shooters Aren't Allowed

Next Issue: Beekeeping Basics Part 1



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Next Issue: Beekeeping Basics Part 1



How To Build A Homestead

By Nikki Mulder

So, you are thinking of buying some property and building a homestead. Just what constitutes a “homestead,” anyway? The Oxford Dictionary’s modern definition is “a house, especially a farmhouse, and outbuildings.” It goes on to provide the historical definition (as provided by the Federal Homestead Act of 1862) as “an area of public land in the West (usually 160 acres) granted to any US citizen willing to settle on and farm the land for at least five years.” (Too bad this offer is no longer on the table!) As you can see, a wide variance exists between what is considered a homestead. Let’s look at what a modern-day homestead looks like and its purpose.

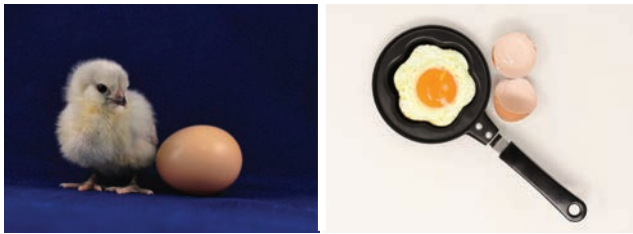
HOMESTEAD MYTHS BUSTED

Homesteads are often very similar to farms. Many people use the terms “farm” and “homestead” interchangeably; however, there is one key difference between the two: most farms are businesses whose primary purpose is building profit in the most efficient way possible. The farmer may reside on the farm, or they may not. While a homestead may also provide revenue for its family, that is not its primary focus. A homestead’s focal point is self-sufficiency— giving food and possible income for a family— using more straightforward and sustainable methods than what you would

2 expect on a working farm.



Homesteads today are as disparate and diverse as the homesteaders who live on them. When you think of a homestead, what comes to mind? For me, it was always a sizeable, sprawling piece of land with various farm animals, extensive gardens, and smaller orchards full of fruit trees. While that undoubtedly constitutes a homestead, it does not encompass all that a homestead is or could be. Sure, I have seen homesteads spread out across hundreds of acres. But I also know people who have micro homesteads on less than one acre of land, utilizing different methods to grow their food and house their animals— from vertical and terraced gardens to permaculture, hydroponics, and aquaponics. There are even urban homesteads where the land that houses the homestead is measured in square feet versus acreage. The only restriction is that of your imagination— and maybe local laws about raising livestock.



HOMESTEADER'S GATEWAY DRUG - THIS IS YOUR BRAIN ON...

Now that we have a good idea of what a homestead is, let's explore how you can begin building one for yourself. The answer to that can be as simple or complicated as you want to make it. I've often heard it said that chickens are a "gateway" to homesteading, and I can't help but agree! Take me, for instance: I'm pretty sure it is a biological fact encoded in my DNA that I am incapable of leaving a feed store that just got in a fresh batch of chicks, ducklings, or poults without at least one or two of those little fluff nuggets in a box— ok, let's be honest here for a second... it will always be two or more! After all, one little guy will undoubtedly be lonely by himself! But that's precisely how I got my start homesteading. First, I brought some animals home and thought, "Hmm... now, where am I going to put these things?"

As much as I'd like to think that I have it all together and am an expert at this, the truth of the matter is that I usually have no real rhyme or reason as to how I do a lot of the homestead things I do beyond that of whim and fancy. Ok... so maybe I do give it a little more forethought than that— especially for the gardening and planting side of my homestead— but as for the animals... it is quite possible that I could use a little more planning and structure. When it comes to my animals, it seems I always do things in reverse order from what would be the logical course of action. The logical course of action (or so my husband tells me) is for me to build housing structures for my animals and then get animals with which to fill them. Sadly, that never seems to be the way it goes for me. But in my defense, it appears to be a malady that many of my female homesteading compatriots here share.

My homestead situation is also unique: I live off-grid with minimal power. This means that running a heat lamp for motherless baby animals in the winter or fall (when we get very little solar) is next to

impossible. Due to this, I raise my hatchlings inside for the first few weeks/months— which is my way of explaining my impulsivity. In my mind (or how I justify it to my husband), I still have a couple of months to build a shelter for them after buying them! My husband does not necessarily share my perspective and tends to slap his forehead and roll his eyes at my "Nikki logic."

Ok, I've confessed to you my complete lack of self-discipline... and although I have likely lost all credibility and respect in your eyes, it perfectly illustrates my point: there is no right way to begin building your homestead. While there may be no right way of creating a homestead— I feel it is my civic duty to mention the obvious— there are plenty of wrong ways. While my method may not exactly be "wrong," it certainly makes life a bit more challenging; even so, there are a few factors that even I take into consideration before impulse-buying chicks. For instance, I constantly research or know how to care for the animals I get. I am confident in providing the time, space, and resources that those animals require. It may be inadvisable for someone living in an urban rental apartment to go out and purchase a gaggle of ducklings... Just because you can do something doesn't always mean you should.



NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION

Back to the subject at hand... If you have a bit of land to work, the sky's the limit as to what kind of homestead you could build and how you could build it. As I mentioned, my way was a bit backward and made things more complicated, but it is doable. I have several friends who started homesteading this way. After all, necessity breeds innovation... it can also help give a little nudge that a reluctant spouse might need to get started. My way is just one of the innumerable ways in which to begin. I've lived in several locations and started a new homestead on each one. In every case, I had

animals I needed to house or quickly got some. In the case of our last two homesteads, we also needed to build ourselves a place to live! These previous two homesteads always began in this order: begin to construct our home, buy animals, create a temporary (usually makeshift) shelter for animals, add honeybees, add more animals, upgrade the housing for animals, plant fruit trees, and finally, plant a garden. Perhaps my way isn't the most reasonable or logical sequence of events, but therein lies my point.

Maybe you don't live on vast acreage. Perhaps you only have a single acre to work, or maybe you live within city limits and think that precludes you from building a homestead. *Au contraire!* I know many people who live on small lots or smack dab in the middle of town with property measured in square feet rather than acreage, who fit all the criteria of homesteaders! Considering I have yet to install a garden on my current homestead, many of these people are leaps and bounds ahead of me in the department of self-sustainability! Naturally, you will need to check with your local codes. Still, many cities make allowances for small livestock animals—at least a few chickens (usually no roosters, though), rabbits, quail, and a myriad of other small livestock. Even if yours is not one of the cities that do, so long as you have a little space to plant, you could always have a garden and consider bartering some of your produce for eggs, milk, etc., with other homesteaders.

If you have the available space and raising animals is a priority, take your time and research the animals that best suit you and your homestead. It's okay to start small with small animals, one or two large ones, or a combination of them, such as a dozen chickens and a milk or meat cow, sheep, or goat.



PLANTING SEEDS OF CREATIVITY

One of my closest friends lives in a very urban area with a tiny front yard area and a smaller backyard, yet she has a few chickens for eggs and a couple of bunnies for fertilizer, and she grows a

lot of her food for her family. She manages this in several different ways. She maximizes her growing area by planting food where everyone in the neighborhood has a lush lawn. She also grows fruits and vegetables in all her “flower beds” and in any random nook and cranny she can find... including the area between the curb and sidewalk. An overachiever, she may secretly and inconspicuously sow seeds in the alleyway behind her home and even in some of the untended beds of nearby public buildings. Don't get me wrong, I am not encouraging you to take such action, nor advocating for hers, but talk about thinking outside the box and getting the most out of your tax dollars. She takes it to a whole new level of ingenuity!

But what if you don't have any yard to speak of? Maybe container gardening or vertical gardening is for you! So many options and ideas are available today to suit practically every small space gardening need you can imagine. Basic planting pots, planters with trellises, stackable planters, and even hydroponic planters allow you to grow an immense amount of food on the side of a wall or fence! As with many things regarding self-sustainability, your main limitation is that of your imagination and creativity. Truth be told, you don't even need much of that in today's day of technology and our ability to find everything we need at the tip of our fingers online and in a vast multitude of available books!

When I lived on a 30-degree slope on the side of a granite mountain, with rain catchment as our primary water source, I found it quite challenging to figure out how to grow food with minimal water and a sloped, rocky terrain. First, I thought about a terraced garden. Still, the sheer logistics and the amount of labor it would have required for me to carry that much soil up the mountain by hand was daunting. In addition, there was the issue of how to keep it watered with our minimal water supply, especially in July and August, when we tend to get little to no precipitation. I tried a container garden on my oversized deck but quickly found it nearly impossible to maintain moisture and prevent my plants from burning as the decking and granite beneath the container garden tended to act as a heat sink.

Additionally, being on a deck more than thirty feet off the ground, weight was an important

consideration, so I was limited in the amount and type of plants I could attempt to grow. Frustrated with my situation and inability to find a viable solution, I did substantial online research. As a result, I discovered some ingenious rooftop gardening techniques in India using a simple DIY system comprising just a few parts. The construction seemed easy to replicate using a secondhand Syntex tank, cocopeat, and some form of compost for the system's main body. Not only was the design simple and the system inexpensive and relatively easy to recreate, but that system, coupled with a shade cloth, solved almost all my growing problems.

The shade cloth would keep the sun from baking my vegetables; the cocopeat is much lighter than soil and expands to five times its original volume when it absorbs water. The simple yet creative composting and watering system, comprising just a few pipes, mesh, string, cap, and other small pieces, enables you to maximize your growth while minimizing and conserving water as you water from the bottom up, thus reducing surface evaporation. Sadly, we moved to our new homestead shortly after discovering this innovative solution to my gardening woes, so I never got a chance to try it out. I hope to have the opportunity on my new homestead to see how well it functions and to expand my skill set. One never knows when a new skill like that might come in handy!




Start as big or as small as you feel comfortable, but start! Don't have acreage? Plant where you can. Renting and unable to plant? Grow on your windowsills and in planters on your porch. Hoping to buy your first homestead but unsure what to look for? Watch videos online, talk to current homesteaders, tour local farms, check out books at your local library, and make a comprehensive list of things important to you to incorporate into your homestead. The same goes for a property you already own. Every day I look at my homestead and try to decide what would best go where and how best to incorporate my dreams to fit within my land. Sometimes, the answer is obvious, but other times, it requires me to sit with it and figure out how best to move forward. Sometimes, my best-laid plans didn't turn out as well as I'd hoped, and I've had to start over and try something completely different. Regardless, the key is not to get discouraged and take it one step at a time. Sure, your first, second, or even ninth attempt might fail, but that tenth one— that successful one! — that one made it all worthwhile. Also, remember that even our failures are profitable because we learn as much, if not more, from those than we ever do from our successes!

FINAL TAKE

I hope I have imparted some new ideas and/or given you a fresh perspective on homesteading. Rather than provide a paint-by-number description of how to build your homestead, my goal was to illustrate a guide for you to gain inspiration and encouragement. It is easy to become discouraged when considering creating something as large and diverse as a homestead. Therefore, you mustn't overwhelm yourself with all the details at once... and whatever you do, don't convince yourself that you need to wait for that ever-elusive, perfect time— or place— to get started. Don't fall into that age-old trap because “perfect” doesn't exist, and whatever you are waiting for may never come.

**“GREAT THINGS HAVE
SMALL BEGINNINGS”**

- FRANCIS DRAKE



Building a Booming Barter System

By Nikki Mulder

The Propensity To Truck, Barter, And Exchange One Thing For Another Is Common To All Men...

- Adam Smith

With the inflation rate spiraling out of control, it can be tough to stretch your dollar enough to make ends meet. What if I told you there was a way to do so without having to cinch your belts too tight or take on a second job... and in some instances, without any money at all! I'm sure you have heard of bartering. In fact, in bygone days— long before our Federal Reserve System— it was the primary avenue for attaining many of the goods you needed, but did you know that the barter system is still alive and well today? It IS! Many of us still barter for much of what we need where we live.

There are many ways to go about bartering, and I would like to review a few examples of how we go about bartering. I will also explore other options we have not yet employed ourselves. Like many people, we've had to live off a strict budget for several years

to pursue our dream of building a debt-free home promptly, with as little time spent working outside the home as possible. This has required a ton of sacrifice and more than a little ingenuity on our part.

Improvise, Adapt, And Overcome

Our income changed significantly when we retired from the military. Although I'd already had us on a strict budget for three years before entering the civilian sector so that we could do so debt-free, that budget was slashed to pennies on the dollar once we transitioned. Suddenly, instead of getting four ample paychecks a month—one for each of us on the first and the fifteenth—we were receiving two minuscule paychecks on the first of each month. Like many others before us, we had to learn how to stretch a much smaller dollar amount for a much longer period once we retired. No matter how prepared I thought I was, that turned out to be a much more challenging task than I had anticipated. For the first year after retirement, my husband took a full-time job outside the home, but it quickly became clear— as he worked upwards of 60 hours a week at a manual labor job and was exhausted when he came home— that it would be very

difficult for us to build our home if he continued to work as he did. Something had to change. We began to think outside the box, considering the skills we each possessed and how we could employ them to bring in extra income.



My husband began buying cheap, broken-down vehicles (usually with blown head gaskets or the like), cleaning them up to pristine condition, fixing everything wrong with them, and flipping them for a profit... something we affectionately refer to as “Polishing a turd.” He quickly gained a reputation among local high school kids (and their parents) for being the go-to guy for inexpensive, reliable vehicles. He didn’t limit himself to just cars and trucks, though. Nothing that could be fixed and resold was off the table: automobiles, boats, ATVs, campers, motorcycles, riding lawnmowers, you name it. After a time, my boys and I joined him in his endeavor, and together, we broadened our scope to encompass more diverse items and different ways of using them. We found items at yard sales, on the side of the road, and sometimes even at the dump! You’d be surprised what our “throwaway” culture disposes of! We found a practically brand-new propane generator that was leaking because a seal had fallen out of it. We just glued the gasket back in place, and now it works like a champ! We didn’t always sell stuff for cash; oftentimes, we would trade or “barter.”



Some Of The Best Things In Life Really Are Free

Did you know Craigslist has a “Free” and a “Barter” section?— at least ours does. It is amazing the free things you can find in the free section of Craigslist—or even Facebook Marketplace— simply because people want it gone but don’t want to trash it or bother with the hassle of trying to sell it. Likewise, many people put items in the barter section. Sometimes, they do so because they know that it is unlikely they will make much money off of what they are selling, but often find someone who wants the item they have and is willing to trade with them something they find more useful. It is truly a win-win scenario when that happens!

We often search in many areas to find items better suited to our needs, and it is not uncommon for us to travel several hours to do so. Sometimes, we would barter for building materials, and other times, we would barter for other items that we saw value in and knew we would have an easier time selling in our locale than where the person getting rid of it was located. Oftentimes, we “traded up” on those items we bartered.

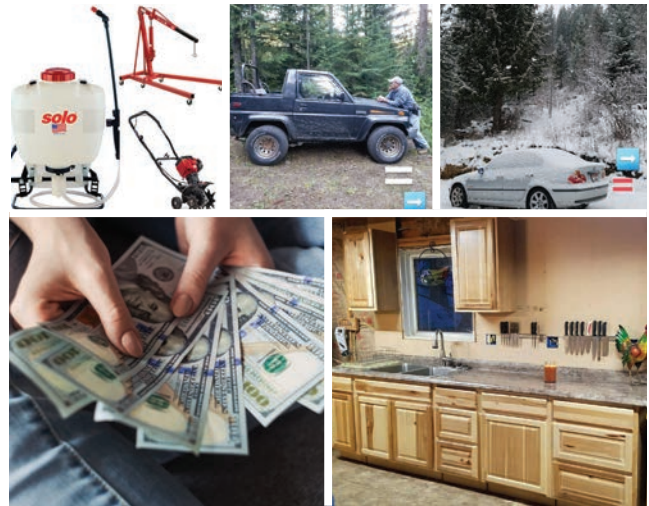


For instance, boats in our area sell for a premium, and unless you have a decent amount of money or are willing to go into debt for it, you won’t be buying one here. However, we discovered that if one was willing to travel far enough— several states over— there were many older (late 90s to early 2000s) boats for sale at incredibly low prices. Even calculating drive time, gas, wear-and-tear on our vehicles, and the cost of repairing anything needed, we could turn between a \$1,000 to \$5,000 profit. That is more “flipping” than bartering, but

whenever we have an item for sale, we always offer the additional “or trade” option to the sale price. Sometimes, we get just cash; other times, we get a trade or combination of both. It’s all about timing, supply, and demand... which brings me back to my example.

A few summers ago, we traveled to get a pontoon boat, but it turned out the pictures we got were old, and the person wasn’t exactly forthright when discussing it— one of the biggest pitfalls of pursuing something like this— and the interior of the boat had to be completely gutted and replaced. Because we had driven more than a thousand miles, we didn’t want to go home empty-handed. We managed to dicker him down a bit more and dragged it home. Due to the work it needed, we didn’t finish it until September. This is where timing is important! Have you ever tried to sell a boat in the winter? I’ll just say this: always buy off-season and sell in-season. People are often short-sighted—they won’t buy a snowblower until after it snows! This is no different! September is the tail end of the boating season here, and we knew if we didn’t get rid of that boat soon, we would be stuck with it for the winter—and we had no place to store it! We began to look to see what was listed for sale, so we might have an easier time trying to sell or trade during the winter. We finally found a guy selling a 30’ enclosed car trailer and traded the boat for the trailer and a few thousand dollars. That next year, we used the trailer to move to our new property. The trailer also stored all our household items through the winter while we built our new cabin. The following year, we traded the trailer straight across for a skid steer tractor, an item much more useful to our homestead.

Barter items also don’t have to be equal in monetary value. An item’s value is what the person is willing to give for it. It’s become a game with us to try to barter up to what we need. We trade an item we no longer need with an item we think others in our area might want, then offer that item for sale or trade. Oftentimes, we get many offers for an item and can choose our best option. We continue this process until we can barter for or buy (with money from selling that item) something we need. Sometimes, it takes a while; sometimes, it’s quick! My favorite barter sequence started with a few items we didn’t need and ended by funding my kitchen.



Sometimes, the Value Is Greater Than The Worth

My husband saw an ad on Craigslist for a 90s Daihatsu Rocky. The gentleman selling it informed us that his wife wanted all the extra “junk” gone from their property ASAP. He ended up trading the Rocky and an extra “parts car” with us for a 10-year-old engine hoist, a small one-year-old Craftsman rototiller, and a brand-new backpack weed sprayer I’d found at a yard sale for \$5! My husband pieced together a single, running vehicle from the two. After playing with it for a while— another benefit of this system: we get to use our items until they sell, which means we usually had one boat or another all summer long—he eventually had someone offer him a 2003 BMW sedan that needed some love. He promptly fixed everything that needed fixing on that vehicle and reposted it for sale or trade. The car ended up selling for \$2800! That’s a tidy sum, considering that the whole series of barter started with us trading items we no longer needed and had paid less than \$250 for! The money from that series of transactions is how we purchased all the kitchen cabinets we needed for our cabin!

Some other ways to barter are with goods or services. If you have a particular skill set, you can offer that up for trade. When my youngest—who’s mechanically inclined—was fourteen, he decided he wanted an older Toyota pickup. Because Toyotas retain their value, he had little hope of finding one he could afford anytime soon. Our old neighbor, logger Ray, asked us to help him with a few things around his property. While we were there, my son saw Ray’s old, broken-down



1985 Toyota pickup sitting with a rusted-out bed, overgrown with weeds, and asked him if he would sell it to him. Ray is older and happily offered it to him in exchange for work. My son spent many days at Ray's, helping him work on his firewood truck and drag logs up the mountain, cutting, splitting, and stacking them so Ray would be warm for the winter. My son recently finished everything he agreed to and received the title to his "new" truck. His older brother similarly obtained his first blacksmith anvil. Another example: months ago, we cleared a distant neighbor's driveway of snow. Although we weren't expecting to be compensated, she insisted on sending us home with a large squash, some homemade elderberry juice, and several small satchels of herbs. Similarly, one of our older neighbors, who has more money than ability, pays to have gravel brought in for our community road during the summer. Because we are opposite, my boys help him split and stack firewood, and we keep his driveway clear for him in the winter. These more localized examples are also a great way to build community!



Modern Sharecropping, A Mutually Beneficial Partnership

You could also exchange the use of your land for a portion of the goods it is used for. This is called

sharecropping. My one friend allows a large apiary in the area to keep bees on her property. She doesn't have to do anything with the bees, and every season, she gets free honey—not to mention the abundance of pollinators who visit her garden! Another friend has extra pastureland, so he partnered with a local farmer. The farmer pays for everything and does all the work to grow and harvest hay on the land. In exchange, the farmer gives my friend a percentage of the hay every season. It's the age-old collaboration of neighbor helping neighbor and both coming out better for it. One of my neighbors here on our mountain makes all sorts of homemade products, from cheeses to soaps and candles, that they occasionally barter with others. Their property also has little flat, usable land, so they often raise meat birds on another neighbor's property a few miles away. In exchange, they share the meat they harvest from the birds.

Another thought would be to begin a community or neighborhood cooperative or consider doing a sort of rotational monoculture gardening. Monoculture gardening is where you focus on one type of crop. You could join forces with other like-minded individuals to split the workload. Rather than splitting all your time, money, and energy, and spreading yourself so thin trying to do everything yourself, you could each pick one (or more) item that you want to focus on growing, and the entire community shares their harvests. Of course, there are pitfalls to such an arrangement. It takes a lot of faith in your fellow neighbors, and there is no guarantee that everyone's crops will be successful to the same degree. Everyone would have to agree on what they will grow or produce and how it would be split... especially if one member's crop failed. It would also require a rotational schedule of crops to prevent the soil from being depleted.



Many people here still use the good old-fashioned barter system when it comes to items they produce

on their homesteads. A person with laying hens and plenty of eggs may arrange with someone with a milk cow to exchange eggs for milk. Someone who grows an abundance of zucchini or squash but who struggles to successfully grow other items may find someone to trade with. Sometimes, you can go to the farmer's market and ask the vendors if they are willing to trade. Maybe you have a few old apple trees that produce more apples than you could ever eat or preserve. Find someone willing to trade apples for apricots, plums, or cherries. Maybe you are unable to pick your trees due to health or time constraints. Advertise for someone to come and pick for you in exchange for splitting the fruit with them. Are you an accomplished baker? Trade baked goods for other items you need. Are you great at dehydrating or canning? Offer to can garden items in exchange for a portion of the finished product. Do you have a freeze-dryer? Do the same!

As you can see, bartering can take many forms. It has become a staple for us. My children have been raised to never look at anything as useless junk. Instead, they carefully consider what potential or value a thing might have for someone else—after all, one man's trash is often another man's treasure.





Best Non-Shooters Where Shooters Aren't Allowed

By Eric Austgen

One obstacle on the march to unrestricted freedoms and carry for the 2A is the nuisance known as gun-free zones. These completely ineffective feel-good pieces of propaganda have already proven to be ready-made abattoirs for those bent on wholesale homicidal intentions. Until these designated places and signs for easy pickins are removed, law-abiding citizens will need to get crafty in order to protect themselves and others in these asinine cities and while out and about. We will discuss some alternatives to firearms when one needs to go “naked” in places where even thinking about a firearm gets you a felony conviction. These alternatives were chosen based on effectiveness in keeping distance from and incapacitating an attacker, whether short-term or permanently. I would also like to please direct your attention to local laws concerning some of these items as they may be on the naughty list. However, one should be able to choose another item from the following if a particular non-firearm is frowned upon.

Make Them Dance A Jig

The best and most recognized form of non-firearm defense is probably the Taser. A much better



alternative to the stun gun or baton, these are, or at least should be, the first thing that many in law enforcement should employ in situations where non-lethal force is warranted. For the uninitiated, these are the guys that look like firearms, but instead of lead, deploy two electrodes that have barbs at the end to embed in the target's skin. Once contact has been made, a high-frequency wave of electricity is sent into the subject's nervous system, which will cause the assailant a little minor discomfort and burns around the puncture site but will give them one helluva wallop full of pain, uncontrollable muscle spasms with neuromuscular incapacitation, nausea, disorientation, and some other things best not mentioned in polite company. While this device was designed to be non-lethal, there is always the potentiality that the object of the exercise may fall

and crack their head open or sustain some other sort of secondary injury. There are also some people walking around with a defective electrical system already; however, these should not be a deterrent to putting your Taser into action.



Two Taser options to consider are the TASER Pulse Plus and X2 models. The Pulse Plus has a prepackaged cartridge that fires two electrodes fifteen feet with the aid of a laser sight, delivering a thirty-second muscle-convulsing reminder of why crime doesn't pay. This device can also be paired with an app that will notify the local lawdogs to be dispatched to your location if the Pulse Plus is fired. It also comes with a high-capacity lithium-ion battery to ensure reliability every time it goes out with you. A package deal from the manufacturer also has a nifty holster for open and concealed carry. The X2 is a neat little warrior that is resistant to the elements. It has a powerful LED light, ambidextrous safety and a class 3A laser sight. Should one find that the electrodes missed the mark or are used up, there is a stun option on the X2 if one needs to go to close quarters. It also provides information on the power level, cartridge inserted, and when the device was last used. It will also run its own diagnostics and recalibrate itself 20 times per second so that it sends the maximum amount of jolt where it's needed.

A Tasty Irritant

The next best option for non-firearm self-defense would be giving your attacker a face full of spicy goodness. Although they certainly won't enjoy it, it will give you the much-needed advantage and time to make good your escape. The Oleoresin of Capsicum is such a great vasodilator down to the capillaries that it will cause immediate inflammation of the mucous membranes and respiratory system.



Naturally, the scumbag will have great difficulty breathing and will experience stinging pain to all exposed skin, rendering them more useless than they were before for anywhere between fifteen minutes to an hour. Usually when one thinks of pepper spray delivery systems, the old reliable can comes to mind. However, since I love the psy-op aspect of self-defense, our two options for pepper spray delivery look suspiciously like lead slingers.

The one major drawback of the spray can is their range. This will generally give an attacker enough time to get close to their target without giving the target time to deploy the can to squeeze off a burst. The pepper ball gun gives the carrier a better opportunity to draw, acquire the target, and incapacitate it from a comfortable distance. The gun is capable of firing multiple balls should one find themselves confronted with a plurality of thugs or one thug who just happened to catch you on the wrong day. The gun is powered by the same CO2 cartridges used for BB and pellet guns, of which a constant supply can be had at any fine retailer of sporting equipment. Like their louder, more lethal counterparts, pepper ball guns will require some practice and training in order to be proficient. Fortunately, these guns come with blank practice balls, so you can have fun plinking away while getting familiar with the piece.



Now, I am fully aware that we are staying away from spray cans, but this one fits right into a unit that looks just like a handgun. Developed by Mace, a company well versed in projectile and aerosol oleoresin products, this device sprays a stream of the stuff within a twenty-foot radius, and it's also law enforcement strength. It also comes with an OC canister and a convenient water practice canister.

Giving Them A Good Whack



Our next entries into the non-firearm fun run may be categorized in the “too close for comfort” department, but the effective use of either will give the attacker a much-needed reflection on their life choices and a chance for you to retreat or give them a little what for.

Blackjacks or the lead sap has always been a favorite of mine to carry in the various “People’s Republics” up and down the Front Range of my home state. The reason is that they carry enough authority behind them that the perp will wish you had shot them instead. The actual blackjack can be a beavertail or straight affair with a slug or shot of lead in varying weights measured in ounces contained in the head. They usually top out at seven to eight inches so that they still remain concealable without advertising the fact. Properly made Saps have a spring action in the shaft in order to absorb a portion of the blow’s impact; that way, mommy’s little pride and joy will only be bruised and sore for a short time. Which brings me to my next point. We have discussed where to strike the human body without drawing a messy lawsuit. Always avoid the head, neck, spine, sternum, rib cage, elbows, knees, and ankles. Everything else is fair game and incapacitating when hit correctly, although if you find yourself up against one of those rare types who are determined and have nothing to lose, the “areas not to hit” list may be off the table.



The jury may still be out on Darwin and his central theory. However, everyone who has heard of our next weapon knows for a fact it came from the sea and onto the land, but that’s about it. The monkey paw or fist looks just like a group of bunched fists. It is used primarily as a weight or anchor at the end of a rope or heaving line. According to the maritime safety guide from Britain, it’s not considered quite cricket for seamen to place any type of weighted material in the head of the paw as it’s looked upon as poor seamanship. Having had a sailor in the family, they don’t really give a rip for such things, and weighted material of all kinds have been made into these fists to make their job easier or settle the occasional dispute. One may buy an already prepared paw or learn how to tie one from any available knot-tying source. When it comes to weights, it would probably be advisable to use the same type found in blackjacks, just in case the law frowns on the use of unconventional foreign objects. The law has a love-hate relationship with the fist and sap; however, if you aren’t left with many options of defense when illegally disarmed, it would be wise to add these heavy hitters to your weapons stash. Who knows, maybe getting some sense knocked into them will make them change their criminal ways, but I doubt it.

Something About A Pen And A Sword



Granted, there will be times when criminals don't make theft so clumsily obvious. Some have it together to the point that the target doesn't know what hit them. For the times or places when our other weapons options are not practical, there are two nasty little weapons that can be carried on a keyring or clipped inside a pocket that will deliver some devastating blows for you to get away or pull a backup.

The keychain-mounted one-two punch is a kubaton. This little powerhouse is about five and one-half inches long and up to an inch in width. The body is lined with six grooves for better grip when using it for hammer strikes or punching. This multi-purpose weapon digs into bony, fleshy, and other sensitive bits for pressure control on the unruly. The knuckles, forearms, bridge of the nose, eyes, neck, groin, solar plexus, spine, and temple are some of the places this unit may be employed to achieve great pain. One of the better examples I have seen has a shaft with grooves milled to comfortably fit all sizes of digits with a blunted square head and pointed end. This definitely is better than relying on the old roll of quarters in the fist to get a couple of good ones in. Rather, you will have more leverage with the poking and prodding than just with punching.



I like things that have plenty of form and the functionality to go with it. That is why we have included a tactical pen on our list. Ok, technically, it's a kubaton, but the makers of the Atomic Bear Tactical Swat Pen tossed in a pen function to endorse that check after dropping any potential bank robber with a couple of well-placed thwacks. It is built of lightweight but tough aircraft-grade aluminum. In addition to its capabilities for self-

also break windows for that odd pet or child that gets left in a car.

I Get The Stick Part. Is It Speak Or Walk Softly?



I remember from sometime in my youth being told the value of a good piece of hickory as it's a good hardwood used for tough jobs that require nothing but the best. I could think of no better situation than self-defense, where both nature and made man plastics can be an excellent attitude adjustment for those with a criminal mentality.

If one were to press a large audience as to the most readily available stick used for beating the everlovin' bejesus out of someone, the resounding chorus of baseball bat would shake the walls of the hotel ballroom they were sitting in. Yes, the original favorite "assault weapon" that is more accessible than a firearm and does a better job at trauma, the blunt force type, and available in aluminum or wood. But hold up a second! While the bat is a great weapon for a smackdown, the materials used for their construction are somewhat lacking. Aluminum is susceptible to denting or bending, and I'm sure you have probably seen a ball game or game highlights where wooden bats have exploded after connecting with the ball in just the right spot. Cold Steel is a knife maker that likes to venture into the self-defense realm, and this has produced a wonderful bat for their Brooklyn series, which comprises five different models of varying lengths and shapes. They are constructed of solid polypropylene, so there will be no worry about dings, cracks, or breakage occurring during the tenses innings of real life.



Since I am a traditionalist at heart, and I'm a sucker for old stuff, our next skull thumper was designed originally as a means to check tire pressure in the days when handheld gauges weren't around and it was miles between gas stations. The hickory tire thumper has been around for ages and ranges from crudely made pieces to professionally lathed and polished-up ones for the more discerning of motorists. Generally, it will be a slim stick about eighteen to nineteen inches in length and one inch in diameter; it has grooves milled or carved in the handle and is weighted in the head by an iron rivet or bolt. The inclusion of the rivet will vary amongst makers and is not really necessary to have; however, it is nice to know there is a little extra wallop that can be packed into an aggressor's sensitive areas, especially when the long shadows of twilight begin to descend upon the lonely stretch of desolate highway you may one day find yourself stranded next to.

As you can see, non-firearm weapons are very effective, short of being lethal. Although some of the weapons listed here have the potential to be lethal, this should not be the aim of the person in self-defense mode unless the situation warrants it to be. The primary goal is to stop the attack and call the professionals in to handle it the rest of the way. It is much better to retreat and live to fight another day, so to speak. I did leave a couple of options off the list as they may seem a bit too overwhelming for the general public to see you wielding one, but it's worth a mention. They are the tactical tomahawk and war hammer. The tomahawk is pretty self-explanatory; however, the war hammer combines the wonder of a slim crescent ax head with a hard hitting hammer on the opposite side. Two very mean-looking implements scary for public use, but right at home doing a variety of chores out in the field or just stashing it in the car for when you're out and about, the apocalypse just happens

to occur, and you must deal with the onslaught of insanity that usually goes with such events. There is also no doubt that these weapons are handy to stash in a bag or car as a convenient last-ditch backup should something happen to your primary weapon, a lifesaver indeed. Until these useless gun zones go away, we shall be forced to bag perps another way, whether the bleeding hearts like it or not. So, until next time, dear reader, stay safe and let's be careful out there.





BUDGET GUN OR BEST QUALITY: CAN YOU HAVE BOTH?

By Eric Austgen

These days, it seems as if there is a cheap alternative to every high-end product on the market. In the world of firearms, this has been pretty standard since they first hit the scene. When I was growing up, the mere mention of a “Saturday Night Special” gave a cringe, conjuring an image of a criminal picking up a cheap pawn shop piece for a night of debauchery and then having it blow up in their hand when they used it. The vernacular may have changed to describe these types of cheap, easy-to-get weapons; however, they still remain in circulation and should be avoided at all costs. This is why we will have a look at how affordability may not represent quality and vice versa. We will also examine some firearms that are both budget-worthy and reliable.

ROLLING THE DICE OF LIFE



When many people are considering a high-dollar purchase of some sort, they wisely do as much research as possible to get the maximum bang for their buck. But I have found when talking to these sages of fiscal responsibility that when it comes to cheaper purchases, they have no end to money burning a hole in their pocket. They don't care if they need to keep replacing the item or if it performs its short-term task and is allowed to die as designed. That may be perfectly fine for cheap plastic crap made for everyday conveniences, but that will certainly not fly with firearms. There is no doubt that guns can get expensive, whether right out of the box or with multiple upgrades. These are worries for those who have money flowing from couch cushions. For those contemplating their first firearm purchase, budget should always be the first concern, along with the immediate need for the firearm. In order to make a satisfactory decision when it comes to cheap or budget guns, it would be a good idea to know the difference between them. A budget gun is one that offers performance and high quality but is reasonably priced. The cheap gun, on the other hand, is priced lower than budget guns and is usually made of inferior metals and parts that are guaranteed to fail or not even

work at all. So as you can see, one need not fork over a king's ransom to get a quality weapon for whatever your needs. In fact, most budget guns will only make a dent of one or two days wages in the average consumer's pocket, which demonstrates manufacturers' dedication to the citizens' right to bear arms by offering quality products for nominal prices. Well, that, and gaining a loyal customer base and possibly money as well.

There may be a temptation to save a little more cash by going to a gun show or shop to pick up a second-hand piece. This is probably not a good idea, as the weapon may be past its shelf life and not worth the headache of replacing all or some of the internal parts, let alone the concern for the integrity of the frame, slide, or cylinder. If this is your only option until graduating to a better handgun, it would be advisable to have the weapon inspected by the in-house gunsmith, if it hasn't been already, or get verification from the dealer that it has been inspected just to get an idea of how much mileage you can get out of it. I can assure you these dealers don't want to sell any faulty weaponry, and they will be as honest as possible about the weapon as far as their knowledge goes. It should be noted that budget guns will likely need to be replaced more often than their more expensive siblings. This will depend on the frequency of use and the type of ammo run through it. Therefore, one should do their due diligence to get the best for what they are paying. It would also be advisable to reserve upgrades and accessories for future firearms with a longer life span. However, like with any firearm purchase at any price, research will be paramount, and since we will discuss some quality, budget weaponry a little bit down the page, let's get acquainted with why cheap firearms aren't worth the pot metal they are made out of.

ALL I CAN HEAR IS BABY CHICKS



One of many problems encountered with cheap guns is that they get a bit costly during their lifetime. This can be blamed on the poor quality of the metals used, which will cause breakage of parts more often than not. It would be pure insanity to keep replacing parts; not only is it a money pit, but it is also just a crutch helping the gun limp along to a possible catastrophic failure.

Many of these guns have obvious visual defects right from the factory, with some lacking the smoothness of better-made products. These weapons will have stiff trigger and cocking mechanisms, inconsistent reliability in shell and magazine ejection, inaccurate sights, and other smaller things that slip through the cracks of the manufacturer's inferior or non-existent quality control department. That certainly is a great way to churn out legions of cheap weapons for a song, but it ends up screwing the customer. Since many cheaper companies cannot afford the pricier millions of dollars in quality controls in place at brand-name facilities, they don't mind letting a few faulty pieces get by the inspection process. This is because the bottom line will dry up if every gripe is addressed. God forbid you should have something go wrong with your firearm because customer service seems to go MIA when complaints start rolling in. So, as it was when we were wee children, if you bought it and broke it, you're stuck with it, which is not something a person looking for a means of self-defense wants to hear.

Speaking of self-defense, the even shorter or non life span of these weapons should be a deterrent for all EDC and defensive consideration. When keeping oneself alive, it's better to have something more reliable strapped to your hip. Sure, the cheaper alternative may have worked great the times you have used it, but what if you got one of those lemons that work okay for a while and then decide to give up the ghost when you really need it. Most cheapy pistols may not live beyond a few hundred rounds, and it would be nothing short of pure Providence for any that do last. At that point, it would be better employed as a paperweight or at least as a haunting reminder of why it's bad to go cheap where firearms are concerned.

Now that we have gotten past the depressing, gritty aspects of shady gun manufacture, we can move on to some firepower to help get you along until your bank account permits a weaponry upgrade.

HAND ARTILLERY



Many of my readers may recognize the Taurus brand as one that effectively combines both quality and affordability into its products. Many of their firearms are geared more toward entry-level shooters but offer a variety of choices for seasoned shooters looking for sensibly priced firearms for EDC rotation.

When it comes to an entry-level 9mm, the Taurus G3c would be a great start. It is a straightforward pistol that would be fantastic for novice owners to learn loading, unloading, firing, and disassembling a basic semi-automatic pistol. The double-action-only pistol holds 10 or 12+1 rounds, which is ideal for concealed carry or to keep handy at the bedside. Although 9mm is relatively light in the recoil department, the sub-compact build of this pistol may amplify it for those not used to handling a full-sized 9mm pistol. This will warrant an excuse to head to the range to try out a few full-sized jobs to get a comfort level with that caliber. The retail price for this gun is about \$300. Coupled with the ease of use and high capacity magazine, it will be a reliable joy to carry.



Over the years, Ruger Arms has made some fine weaponry. One such weapon is their American model. This neat shooter is chambered in either 9mm or .45 ACP, of which one may carry 17+1 of 9 and 10+1 of .45. For a \$500 budget pistol, this one has ergonomics and recoil control built into it, which is unheard of for other budget handguns of its type. One might expect for a double-action-only model's trigger to drag a bit; however, the trigger action is very crisp and smooth with this lead slinger. This model also comes in full and compact sizes to satisfy a whole host of shooters.



Another brand name that produces reliable budget handguns is Sig Sauer. The P250 model is a dream for those at all shooting levels. It is chambered in five of the most popular pistol calibers, including .22, .380, .357 Sig, .40 S&W, and .45 ACP. The magazine capacity will vary with each caliber, ranging from 10+1 on the low end to the max 17+1. These pistols are also very easy and comfortable to shoot, and if you don't like the feel of one caliber's recoil, there are conversion kits available to rechamber the gun. These weapons were supplanted by the P320 in 2017, which means that finding these pistols will take a little shoe leather on your part. Well, a few skin flakes from your fingers for the online gun shops and shoe leather for the gun shows, just to be specific.

GIVE THEM ONE AND TWO BARRELS



Two shotguns that we have discussed at length, the Mossberg 500 and Remington 870, fall within the budget category, but as you are well-read into both subjects, we shall forge ahead into some brand-name budget boomsticks instead.

Most trap and skeet shooters will tell you that decent guns for those sports can cost a pretty penny. For those operating on a budget, that can be lousy news. However, Winchester has been keeping its finger on the pulse of the sporting world. The fruit of its labor was the SXP Trap, a nifty \$489 entry-level sport shooting and hunting pump action 12 gauge. The internal magazine holds three, with one in the pipe. The shotgun comes with a system to easily and quickly switch out chokes, which will surely be a delight for sportsmen competing in different events or hunters looking for the right pattern for different game.



The Benelli label has always been associated with the higher-end, expensive shotguns. However, the company has been known to throw us paycheck-to-paycheck types a bone every now and again. The hunting market is where the \$400 Nova model has been heavily advertised, but with varying lengths of twenty-four, twenty-six, and twenty-eight inches, and chambered in either 12 or 20 gauge with four in the mag and one in the chamber, it's perfect for winging a home invader and the hapless duck that happens to fly by right after.



While some may think that simplicity in a handgun is on par with cheap and would negate the reliability and affordability factor, that would be the complete opposite for the Stoeger Condor. There is nothing simpler than a break top 2 shot capacity scattergun. No worry about shells being improperly ejected or cycled; just pop it open to remove and insert shells without a messy fuss. It is very moderately priced at \$349 dollars, with a choice of four different gauges, 12, 20, 28, and .410. The barrel maxes out at twenty-eight inches, so it really is more on the sporting end of shooting, but it can be used for home defense in a pinch.

THE OLD RELIABLE RIFLE



Another budget weapon that has been described here before is the Ruger 10/22. A staunchly, rock-solid, reliable starter rifle that is a delightful tool to always have around. However, some of you may look for variety in caliber for your first budget AR-15. Have no fear; I've got you covered. Check it out below.

The lightweight stock of the Remington 770 makes it very comfortable when carrying for long distances or for a period of time. It also helps that it is a simple bolt-action platform that will not cause anxiety in new shooters. The 4+1 capacity rifle is chambered for .243 Win, .270 Win, .300 Win Mag, 7mm Remington Magnum, and .30-06. It also comes with a basic 4x40 scope, which is well-suited for small to mid-sized games. Overall, a nice little twenty-two inch barreled piece to suit every hunting and comfort need.



Those of you with ARs on the brain, especially first-time buyers, know that these platforms can get quite pricey, as accessories and upgrades are added. I have seen some reach into the five grand range, which seems ridiculous for such a basic rifle platform, but hey, what the hell do I know? Well, I do know that the good people over at one of my favorites, Smith & Wesson, came out with the MP15 Sport II model for the budget-conscious and those who don't mind limited customization but are rather focused on the all-important hinder-saving functionality of the firearm. It comes in the standard .223 or 5.56 caliber, your choice, and depending on your local laws, can hold either a ten or thirty-round capacity magazine. The retail price is well below the more outrageous price tags out there, coming in at \$500, which should be more than acceptable for those who have been wanting one for a really long time.

Hopefully, I have been able to assuage some fears the new prospective gun buyer may have when confronted with the budget versus cheap gun debate. These guns we have discussed are among the best, but are by no means the end all be all for budget guns, and I encourage you to check out the subject even further. The trick to staying on the safe side of things is to stick with brand-name, known gunmakers that produce quality, budget shooters. Just because these firearms leave the factory as a lower price tag item doesn't mean that they are inferior in any way, as these companies have already purchased multi-million dollar quality control systems and will apply it across the board to every single weapon that rolls off the production line without discrimination. Since these guys have a pedigree and a reputation to uphold, all customer complaints are addressed. I'm not sure as to how fast you will be delivered satisfaction, but I guarantee you won't break a sweat getting the runaround or being transferred around the office or globe a few hundred thousand times. I am happy to say that you may rest in complete assurance that the same reliability of the company's other high-end products will be the same for those with the first time budget shooter in mind. So, until next time, dear reader, stay safe and let's be careful out there.





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