

HOW TO FEED A HUNGRY CREW

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As the Father of 12 children ages 1-18, (four girls, eight boys), people often ask me, with raised eyebrows, "How do you feed them?" My reply; "Feeding them is the easy part." Actually, feeding such a large gang is not all that easy, but compared to the costs for shelter, clothing, shoes, school, doctors and dentists, the food bill seems small. I will share with you some things we do that help us to survive in this crazy world.

When buying food items we:

1--Choose large sizes

2--Watch for specials on items that can be stored.

3--Do not buy highly processed foods, both for economical and nutritional reasons.

4--Read the label--for several reasons:

To see what sugar, salt, or chemicals have been added.

To see what nutritional value the food contains.

To compare weight/price.

5--Buy whole grains; especially wheat.

We home grind wheat, corn, rice, and soybeans for flour and cereal. The nutrition and flavor of fresh ground whole grains cannot be beat. A mill will be necessary to grind the grain, but the difference in price of home ground products will quickly repay you for the cost of the mill.

We live on a 15-acre lot with a stream on one side so we fish a lot. Deer and other game frequent the area. We maintain a NO HUNTING zone 600 feet from the house. Any critters that come to visit are treated as guests. During hunting seasons we hunt the surrounding hills for deer, pheasants, grouse, ducks, etc. The game helps a lot on the grocery bill. **Caution!** One must be careful that more is not spent on equipment and safari than the meat is worth. Keep it simple.

We keep bees. We have all the honey we want and the surplus is an excellent barter item. We also give it as gifts for occasions to save a "buck" that would be spent for presents. The bees pollinate crop plants for a better harvest.

We keep a cow for milk and the calf grows up for beef. The milking gets to be a pain at times. Never-the-less, our gang will drink two or more gallons of milk a day. At \$1.89 a gallon that adds up to more than six hundred dollars in the 10 months we milk the cow. Cream, butter, cottage cheese and ice cream are also made from the milk.

We keep chickens for eggs and meat. The chickens run free but, during the growing season they often cause trouble in the garden. The chickens are prey for cats, dogs, hawks, weasels, skunks, and etc. They leave their droppings and muddy footprints on everything, even sneaking into the house at times. They do keep the grasshoppers out of the area and eat many other insects. In spite of all said for the flavor of free ranging chickens, I firmly believe that it isn't worth it. A good coop and pen are in the planning stage here.

We have at times kept other small animals for food, i.e. hogs, sheep, rabbits and turkeys.

We keep a dog. To some it may seem this is an unneeded expense, yet the dog eats many of our surpluses and scraps along with his "Friskies". It doesn't really cost much to feed him. He earns his keep by keeping the varmints out of the garden, helping with the stock and discouraging thieves.

We keep a cat to discourage rodents.

We garden. I feel that a large and diversified garden is one of the best sources of pleasure and good eating that a family can find. You just can't get the freshness, flavor and nutrition from supermarket produce that you get from your home garden. You can raise a wheelbarrow full of produce for pennies. The same would cost big bucks in the market. It takes some effort of course but, the children need to learn to work. Remember it is work to earn money for food too.

Garden tips:

Plant many varieties. Try several new things each year. You may find things you really like, which you have never tasted before. You will find those varieties best suited to your own garden. Each lot has its own personality and each gardener his own methods. What works for the guy across the fence doesn't necessarily work for you. Some years certain varieties do well and others don't. By planting a good variety of both cool and warm weather crops, the odds of a good harvest are increased.

Mix 'em up. Plant small plots or beds and intermingle species so the bugs don't find them so easily.

Avoid toxic pesticides. Allow nature's predators a chance to work. Use bug spray and herb sprays instead of toxic pesticides. We use a bit of Rotenone on the cabbages and broccoli. Rotenone is a natural substance which is non-toxic to humans, but is toxic to many plant pests.

Plant some giant pumpkins, squash, sunflowers, etc. Dig a big hole. Mix well-rotted manure with the soil then refill the hole. Plant three or four seeds. When the plants are 4 inches tall leave the biggest and pull the others. Water often. When you get one good pumpkin set on a vine, break off any others. Let the plants resources all go to one giant fruit.. Nothing keeps up the interest of the youngsters quite like a giant. Those extra hands are needed in the big family garden. Check the seed catalogs for giant varieties.

Plant some flowers among the vegetables to add some color, beauty, interest, and food for the insect predators who need pollen. Wasps especially like the bloom of the mint family. Some flowers act as deterrents against insect pests.

Plant five or six rows of peas 10" apart then leave a walkway. When the peas are 2" high drag a hoe between the rows to remove the weeds. This is all the weeding they will require. The peas will shade out any late comers. This planting will have all the advantages of a wide row planting but is better because it is so easy to weed. I broadcast a wide row only once and after hand pulling the weeds, decided it wasn't worth it.

Use lots of manure and compost. Regarding kitchen scraps; if the dog or cat won't eat it, most likely the chickens will, for sure the earthworms will. Don't waste organic matter. Feed it to the animals or compost it. Don't put it in the garbage can.

Preserve the harvest by home canning, freezing, or drying.

When canning peaches, apricots, apples etc., throw the pits on the garden. Next year be alert to find the little seedlings as they emerge. Tree seedlings can be potted or grown in the garden for a year, then moved to the windbreak, or used for erosion control. When they mature they will improve the wildlife habitat. Who knows, maybe an exciting new variety will emerge.

When we have garden surpluses, we swap with the neighbors, or feed the animals. Chickens love lettuce and squash. Don't waste. Compost.

Plant a green manure crop. When space in the garden becomes available at the end of a harvest, plant something there to keep down the weeds and increase the organic matter in the soil. We most often plant wheat here as it is inexpensive, plentiful and grows fast, even in cool weather.

Start your own seedlings. By doing so you may try varieties that you will never find in the nursery. You can have bigger, healthier plants ready to set out also.

Read the seed catalogs and other gardening literature to find new ideas and varieties that you may wish to try.

Start some marigolds, the larger the better, in early March. When it is time to plant your seeds in May, mark the row at both ends with a transplanted marigold. Marigolds deter certain pests and by midsummer your garden will have a beautiful yellow or orange border. Be sure to plant plenty of marigolds in the turnip row.

Start lettuce and cabbage, in early spring, outdoors in a small area 18" X 18" or so. When the plants are 2" high, transplant them to where they will grow for the season. Space the plants a foot apart. This is easier than thinning, you don't have to weed a row when the plants are small and it saves on seed. When plants are not crowded, they will develop into nice heads. Plant lettuce among the squash hills. It will be gone by the time the squash sends out runners.

Plant a variety of berries and fruit trees. When choosing trees for the yard, ask, “Will it produce food?”. Many fruiting varieties are also very beautiful when in flower. A succession of bloom also provides food for the bees and predator wasps.

Asparagus is a good crop for an early spring harvest.

Be familiar with the local flora and know what species are edible. Many are considered delicacies. Such information may save lives in a survival situation.

From the notebook of James A. Lofthouse
1980

P.S. 7/4/2002

Soon after this was written, another girl was born, making it a “Lucky 13”. We have since moved from the beautiful 15 acre lot, but still raise a garden on a 1.5 acre lot. The children, have grown up and left to pursue their fortunes. It takes a lot less food these days. In the days when there were so many hungry appetites to satisfy, it was common that everything on the dinner table came from the garden, home production and hunting and fishing efforts.

Things like salt, pepper, yeast, baking powder, and cooking oils were the main staples purchased at the store, making the grocery bill much easier to handle. Granted it took a lot of time to do the work, but I always figured that we were all in it together and everyone was expected to help. For every mouth to feed there was a pair of hands to help with the chores, and everyone learned the valuable lessons of working and sharing. Each experienced the joy of reaping the fruits of the harvest.

I hope that you who still have families to raise may profit from these things I have written.
God Bless You.

Plant a little seed.....

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