



Urban Homesteading: Heirloom Skills for Sustainable Living

Rachel Kaplan , K. Ruby Blume

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The urban homesteading movement is spreading rapidly across the nation. "Urban Homesteading" is the perfect back-to-the-land guide for urbanites who want to reduce their impact on the environment. Full of practical information, as well as inspiring stories from people already living the urban homesteading life, this colorful guide is an approachable guide to learning to live more ecologically in the city. The book embraces the core concepts of localization (providing our basic needs close to where we live), self-reliance (re-learning that food comes from the ground, not the grocery store; learning to do things ourselves), and sustainability (giving back at least as much as we take). Readers will find concise how-to information that they can immediately set into practice, from making solar cookers to growing tomatoes in a barrel to raising chickens in small spaces to maintaining mental serenity in the fast-paced city environment. Full of beautiful full-color photographs and illustrations, and plenty of step-by-step instructions, this is a must-have handbook for city folk with a passion for the simple life.a"

Urban Homesteading: Heirloom Skills for Sustainable Living Details

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From Reader Review Urban Homesteading: Heirloom Skills for Sustainable Living for online ebook

Beth Lequeuvre says

Usually these types of books encourage methods that are either too extreme or too expensive. This book had neither. It was a wonderful introduction to small, affordable changes that can be made to not only save money but make the world a better place. It was well written, organized well and had fantastic pictures. I also particularly appreciated the additional resources listed in the front and the back of the book.

Melanie says

Urban Homesteading.. Heirloom Skills for Sustainable Living

Rachel Kaplan with K. Ruby Blume
Published by SkyHorse Publishing
Source: Review Copy

I often hear people mention they can't wait to get out into the country to start homesteading. With the information in this book, you can start homesteading right where you are living now.

The first 4 chapters are much like a text book on topics like global warming, your carbon footprint and resources. A good lead in to urban farming but I wanted to get in the dirt. Urban Homesteading says "a Can-do attitude is the most important resource for a homesteading attitude" and I feel that is so true. The authors encourage you to start small, in reasonable bite size pieces. Gather your tools and evaluate what spaces you may have available to you. Whether you live on a lot in in your own home, rent, or even in apartments there are spaces around you available for planting and growing food. In addition there are opportunities available for community gardens, co-ops and school gardens. The paradigm is to think outside of the box, to think beyond acres and acres of land, and utilize what is right outside your doorstep. Think raised garden beds, barrels, depaving a driveway and using that space, vertical gardening.

The book walks you through soil development and getting the land ready for planting, including ideas on composting. It discusses seed types and plants with charts on the best times of year and places to plant them. Included are veggies, herbs and fruits for a complete guide to all grown plants.

The book goes a step further once you have the plants under foot to add in honey bees, chickens, ducks and possibly even a goat. Much information on caring for the animals in small spaces and suggestions and ideas on making it work for you.

I could easily think of many friends and family members who could benefit from the ideas in this book and agree that if you start small and work up from there you can indeed have an urban homestead.

I received a copy of this book from SkyHorse Publishing in exchange for an honest review.

Cherie says

B+ Really nice book. HUGE focus on gardening, and I wish they would've done more stuff w container in houses gardening. Great tips, how I really want to live, total hippie in a little log cabin with my chickens. They do a lot on urban environments, but I almost feel like if it's suburban. I know two people in NYC with backyards.....so it's not always a possibility. But great book, stuff on canning, composing, seed saving, etc.

Tracy says

maybe I have read too many of these recently, but there was nothing outstanding or different in this for me. It is a bit more into community projects rather than individual homesteading.

Megan says

Mixed feelings. There was a lot of this book that I enjoyed, though I did feel it got preachy toward the end. I kinda thought the self-care section would be about making soap or enjoying your garden, not a particular meditation routine. But it covered subjects I haven't seen in books like this before -- like native building materials and water management. And it had a lot of very good interviews, drawing on many people's expertise.

But I think the biggest downside is that the book advertises itself as being a general across-the-country book, but it's really about California. The authors at least are up-front about this, even if the book description isn't. All the interviews come from California because it was local, and they weren't able to travel elsewhere.

Ryn says

This book is an eloquent treatise on sustainability for city dwellers. It was very inspirational, filled with beautiful pictures, interesting and well written. It is not the encyclopedia of country living but it is a good place to start if you have an interest in permaculture and living a more harmonious, earth-friendly, healthy life.

Du says

This book was like main stream permaculture. It had nice pictures and touchy feely graphics and info, but wasn't too interested in the hard to get to information and hands on work. It reminded me of some home renovation shows where you see the work, but know that there are more than 2 people putting the patio in. Nice overview, but not too much behind it.

Anna says

Urban Homesteading, by Rachel Kaplan with K. Ruby Blume, is a breath of fresh air in the usually stuffy room of gardening and homesteading literature. Don't get me wrong --- I adore books by Paul Stamets, Steve Solomon, and others, but these texts tend to be written by, for, and about middle class, white, straight people. Urban Homesteading highlights ideas that are applicable to everyone, and the stunning photos in the book back that theme up.

The case studies sprinkled throughout Urban Homesteading are part of what gives this book such a rich flavor. For example, the authors highlight Spiral Gardens, a non-profit that brings gardening and fresh food into a low-income community in Berkeley where lack of access to fruits and vegetables leads directly to shortened lifespans. Reading Rachel Kaplan's book reminds me that there is a social justice element to growing your own food that we often forget in our middle class bubble. Can you imagine living in a place where you can't get perishables without driving and can't afford to drive? Of course growing your own is the answer!

Gardening kidsI don't want you to think the book is preachy or dense, though. Instead, Urban Homesteading is an easy to read introduction to dozens of topics that every beginning homesteader is interested in, all told with an urban flare. And the book is worth reading just for the artwork --- stunning photos of dozens of urban homesteads and homesteaders interspersed between original artwork by K. Ruby Blume. This is the perfect book for a budding urban homesteader to pore over for ideas, or for the established homesteader to put on her coffee table (if she has one) to subtly influence more mainstream guests.

(In the interest of full disclosure, I should tell you that Rachel Kaplan let me download a pre-release version of the ebook to review, but I have to admit that I didn't expect the book to be half as good as it is!)

Check out my blog for urban homesteading tidbits from the book.

Shannon says

I think this book lost me when it suggested peeing in a bucket & dumping it in the compost as a good source of nitrogen. I'm sure it was a useful description of how to do many things but I felt that it was a) over the top, and b) meant to sound scientific but written by non-scientists. Glad it was a library book.

Tinea says

Great intro to permaculture, especially the ethical & holistic nature of that system. And if you like woowoo kinda earth spirituality, you'll love this. But I pretty quickly ran out of patience, and this felt like a whole lot of blahblahblah. Written by California hippies who live in sprawling cities where every home has a yard, where people own their homes, and where you already have access to a "local neighborhood seed bank" and a warm, sunny climate all year round. Every few chapters had a little paragraph "for renters" and "for cold climates" as an afterthought, but the bulk of the projects and ideas really don't fit into a small-space, small-budget, short-lease, wintery paradigm. Which is fine if that's not you, but this book really was not useful for me. The authors were surprisingly sheltered and dense in their recommendations, seemingly having no idea that not everyone in the world lives in their climate and circumstances, despite a nod at social justice in the text.

Whitney Pittsenbarger says

This is one of my favorites for transitioning to the homesteading life, especially with limited space and restrictions. I feel like this book is complete in every subject, unlike many others that focus heavily on some subjects but not others and has real ideas.

Chechoui says

The book has wonderfully rich and colorful photos that detail models of a variety of urban homesteads - a.k.a. backyard gardens and farms, including layouts and diagrams. The book was a bit over the top and philosophically hippie dippie for me, but there were a lot of great ideas in the presented. It very much emphasized the Northern California geographical and cultural region, so a lot of the ideas did not seem as plausible for other parts of the US that have harsher winters, as well as truly urban patio spaces, say in NYC, where the notion of Urban Homesteading is going to be quite different without a yard. It also had a bit of a utopian gospel bent to it -- down to setting up your toilet outside in order to compost your waste -- that clearly exceeds your average working professional who wants to live environmentally soundly but is not about to join a commune as some of the examples in the book show. The book also tried to cram a lot in it, which is good, but some sections were very much detailed, and others were just glanced over. For instance, how to set up and feed backyard chickens was breezed over, but detailed recipes for medicines you can grow in your back yard and recipes for goat milk were included. More folks are more likely to have a few chickens in their backyard than harvesting their own medicine and goat milk, so it seemed to miss the mark for the mainstream. Overall I recommend this as a library book to check out for ideas that you can later research more in depth on the web.

Emily says

This book was full of solid information and it gave me tons of ideas. It was only a little woo-woo and preachy, but some of that comes with the territory. Overall it was pretty solidly grounded in reality (don't be a martyr, only do as much as you can manage, etc) which was a pleasant change from some homesteaders and preppers who only think that 100% is too little to dedicate to saving the earth / freedom from The Man. I borrowed a copy from the library and I think it's something I'll add to my library for reference. Would recommend if you're looking for a reasonable approach to incorporate food, livestock, and/or water management into your small yard.

Kate Singh says

Gave me hope for the future of our society. Well written and gives us ideas for becoming sustainable and going back to a slower more self-sufficient way of living even in the city.

Stacy says

This was a pretty cool introduction to the concept of living a sustainable lifestyle, with overviews of raising

your own produce, meat/eggs, beekeeping, make your own fermented drinks/foods, etc. There are some detailed projects in this book, like how to create your own self-watering containers for vegetables or make your own kimchee.

Other parts of this book were interesting but a bit far-fetched, like the section on composting toilets. For example, how about sterilizing your poo by growing a tree in it for a month, then "giving the tree to a loved one"? I kinda cracked up when I read that, as nothing says love like a tree nurtured with your own poo.

Or one model fed the poo to flies who laid eggs, which became larvae, which then fell into a pond attached, filled with fish who ate the larvae... and ultimately the fish are to be eaten by humans. I'm sorry, but the idea of eating those fish is just... unappetizing.

Also, I take issue with a suggestion in the section on being emotionally self-reliant in which the author encourages the reader to "use psychedelic drugs to deal with your emotions". It seems to me that even if you are self-reliant in every other way, if you still have to be dependent on drugs to help you deal with the life you have led, what's the point of it all anyway?

Ok, with those reservations, it's a pretty cool book with neat anecdotes and ideas to get you started thinking about the world differently.
