

# HOBBY FARMING



## Growing a Good Life from America's Roots

by John D. Ivanko and Lisa Kivirist

Small-scale farming—whether it's called hobby farming, market gardening, part-time truck farming or homesteading—satisfies many Americans' yearning to work the land for pleasure, as well as profit. These days, you're just as likely to find a hobby farm in the city or suburbs as on a country lane.

Anyone serious about growing a large percentage of their own food, raising animals, tending colonies of bees, nurturing an orchard, generating their own renewable energy onsite or managing a timber stand or pond might be considered a hobby farmer. It's about living close to the land, caring for it and letting it inspire daily life. It also can contribute to the family's livelihood through sales of products such as honey, fresh produce, eggs or surplus energy.

"Living on our farm allows us to engage with the natural world with its

seasonal patterns, provides many of our family's needs in a sustainable way and offers a marvelous foundation for our home-schooling adventures," enthuses Heidi Hankley, who lives with her husband and two kids in a straw-clay insulated home with a wood-fired masonry heater. Her husband commutes to his environmental engineering job in Madison, Wisconsin, and helps out after hours.

Their seven-acre farm includes a small flock of hens for eggs, three beehives, an organic garden that sends Hankley to the farmers' market once a week in season, and three acres of tall-grass prairie. "We knew we wouldn't need to cultivate all of our open land to meet our needs, so instead of leasing it out for more cropping and haying, we decided to restore it to prairie," she explains. Their set-aside lands earn a per-acre payment from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Conservation Reserve Program.

"When the farm is a lifestyle, not a way to earn a living, that's hobby farming," write Michael and Audrey Levatino in *The Joy of Hobby Farming*. They operate the 25-acre Ted's Last Stand Farm and Gardens, outside Gordonsville, Virginia. "It doesn't mean one isn't serious about farming," says Michael. "We have a thriving, diverse farm business ourselves, but we pay most of our personal expenses via outside employment."

On a residential lot in Santa Monica, California, Lewis Perkins nurtures an abundant orchard of avocados, oranges, guavas and pomegranates as a member of the Home Growers Circle for Forage restaurant, in Los Angeles. Each year, he sells more than 600 pounds of fresh citrus and herbs to Forage. He also harvests his own ginger, pecans, macadamia nuts and bay leaves. When not in the orchard, he works as a certified financial planner.

"My garden is so satisfying," says Perkins, who raises more than 30 fruits on his urban farm. "Sometimes I'll spend an entire day working in my field, which comprises a 50-by-150-foot city lot."



“A farm has its own spirituality that gives immense meaning and pleasure. It can’t be measured in acres or the quantity of animals and crops. A farm is a spiritual thing that feeds your soul, as its spirituality pours out of every building and bale of hay.”

~ Thomas Moore

With enough pasture, livestock can be raised on small land holdings. Backyards work well for hens, while larger lots or a few acres may support goats, sheep, llamas, horses or a cow, depending on local ordinances.

“You can raise goats on a very small acreage, but then need to supplement the pasture with hay and grain,” says Diana Kalscheur Murphy, owner of Dreamfarm, a community supported agriculture (CSA) enterprise in Cross Plains, Wisconsin. “We have 24 milking goats grazing on about three acres of pasture.” She moves the goats to different pastures in alternating years. Murphy’s goat’s milk cheeses have earned awards, paid the bills and led to making many new friends.

The popularity of hobby farming is growing as more people reclaim control over the quality of their food and rediscover the joys of living close to the land.

Hobby farming, despite its name, demands hard work and often a commitment to re-skilling oneself. It may be necessary to learn the finer points of growing vegetables, pruning an orchard, canning pickles and birthing livestock.



“To avoid trouble with the IRS, the most important thing is to show that you are working towards making a profit over several years,” advises Michael Levatino. Besides registering their business with state and federal agencies, hobby farmers must pay applicable sales taxes, keep a separate business bank account, and maintain records of business expenses and revenues. For hobby farmers, especially those with animals, there is no time off. In cold climates, winter is a time of processing, planning next year’s gardens or making repairs, while a farm in warmer regions can produce crops or other products year-round.

“If everyone’s a part-time farmer, we can collectively go a long way toward living in a more healthy, just and sustainable world,” Levatino observes. “Many people primarily go into hobby farming so that they can make the jump from being a responsible consumer to a responsible producer.”

*John D. Ivanko and Lisa Kivirist, co-authors of Rural Renaissance, ECOpre-neuring and Farmstead Chef, operate the award-winning Inn Serendipity farmstay B&B with their son in Brown-town, WI. Connect at InnSerendipity.com.*

## Helpful Resources

Database of State Incentives for Renewables & Efficiency, [dsireusa.org](http://dsireusa.org)

Lifestyle Block, [LifestyleBlock.co.nz](http://LifestyleBlock.co.nz)

National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service, [attra.ncat.org](http://attra.ncat.org)

Renewing the Countryside, [RenewingTheCountryside.org](http://RenewingTheCountryside.org)

Rural Renaissance Network, [RuralRenaissance.org](http://RuralRenaissance.org)

# A FARMSTEAD SUMMER SUPPER

Who doesn't savor the flavor of fresh, seasonal and local cuisine? Have fun with these recipes from the new *Farmstead Chef* cookbook for a delicious summertime supper.

## Warm Zucchini Dip Appetizer

Zucchini is the ultimate mystery ingredient; different people claim to taste different flavors—from noodles to soy sauce—but it's really the zucchini.

Yields 8 appetizer servings

2 cups fresh zucchini, shredded  
(or any summer squash)  
1 tsp salt  
½ cup mayonnaise  
½ cup plain yogurt  
¼ cup hard granular cheese,  
grated (Parmesan)  
¼ cup bell peppers, finely chopped  
4 green onions, thinly sliced  
1 garlic clove, minced  
1 tsp Worcestershire sauce  
1 tsp canola oil  
Pita chips for dipping

In a bowl, toss the zucchini and salt. Let stand 1 hour. Drain and press out excess liquid. Mix in mayonnaise, yogurt, cheese, peppers, green onions, garlic and Worcestershire sauce. Stir until combined. Pour mixture into a lightly oiled 8-inch baking pan and bake at 375 degrees for 15 to 20 minutes or until bubbly. Serve hot with chips for dipping.



## Garden Fresh Salad

With a little balsamic honey dressing, this salad is like eating sunshine. Enjoy the fruits of the land.

Yields 4 servings

½ cup sweet pea tendrils (young,

green tops of sugar snap sweet peas)  
½ cup sugar snap sweet peas,  
strings removed  
1 cup tender mesclun salad mix  
(comprising small, young leafy  
lettuces, chervil, arugula or endive)  
¼ cup young Swiss chard leaves  
¼ cup young dandelion greens  
¼ cup nasturtium flowers (edible)  
¼ cup bee balm flowers (edible)  
¼ cup croutons

Wash the delicate salad greens and give the edible flowers a quick shake, checking for insects. Pat dry the mesclun greens. Arrange the delightful colors and textures on the plate, topping with a few croutons and a drizzle of salad dressing.



## Balsamic Honey Dressing

With just the right amount of kick, this dressing can be stored in a canning jar in the refrigerator for a week or so. Give the jar a shake before serving.

Yields 1 cup

½ cup balsamic vinegar  
¼ cup onion, chopped (1 small onion)  
1 Tbsp soy sauce  
3 Tbsp honey  
1 Tbsp sugar  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
¼ tsp crushed red pepper flakes  
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Purée the vinegar, onion, soy sauce, honey, sugar, garlic and red pepper flakes in a blender on high. Gradually add the olive oil. Continue puréeing until thick, about 2 minutes.



Tip: Prepare the dressings at least a few hours before serving to let the flavors marinate. Shake well before using and store in the refrigerator. The fresh flavor and absence of preservatives make it best to whip up only the amount that's needed.



## Maple Syrup-Marinated Wild Salmon

Preparing fish is often as much about the marinade as the quality of the catch. Look for certification by the Marine Stewardship Council ([msc.org](http://msc.org)) and use the regional sustainable seafood pocket guides from the Monterey Bay Aquarium ([MontereyBayAquarium.org](http://MontereyBayAquarium.org); search *Seafood Watch*) and Environmental Defense Fund ([edf.org/seafood](http://edf.org/seafood)).

Yields 4 servings

- 2 lbs boneless wild Alaskan salmon fillet
- 2 Tbsp maple syrup
- ½ cup fresh-squeezed orange juice
- ½ cup bourbon
- ½ cup soy sauce
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tsp fresh ginger, grated
- 1 Tbsp brown sugar
- 3 Tbsp canola oil
- 3 Tbsp green onions, finely chopped
- ¼ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp pepper
- ½ fresh lemon, thinly sliced (optional)
- ½ medium yellow onion, ¼-inch sliced (optional)

Combine maple syrup, orange juice, bourbon, soy sauce, minced garlic, grated ginger root, brown sugar and oil in a bowl. Sprinkle salt and mash and blend the mixture with a fork to release flavors.

Place salmon fillets skin-side up in a glass cake pan. Pour marinade mixture over salmon fillets and let sit covered in the refrigerator for 8 hours. To broil in the oven, pour ½ cup marinade on a foil-lined jellyroll pan. Place the fish skin-side down on the foil and pour about 1 cup marinade over it. Add

sliced lemon and onions on top. Broil fish at medium heat (450 degrees) for about 15 minutes, watching carefully to avoid overcooking. Baste occasionally with remaining marinade.

For outdoor grilling, heat the grill to medium before grilling individual salmon fillets, skin-side down. Depending on their thickness, cook the fillets 15 to 20 minutes, checking frequently to avoid overcooking. When the bottom sides are done, turn fillets over and grill the topsides for five additional minutes.



## Oven-Roasted Potatoes

This healthier alternative to hash browns, made with olive oil, makes a nice side for breakfast or a comfort starch for dinner (just not on the same day).

Yields 8 servings

- ½ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup butter (½ stick), melted
- 2 tsp beef bouillon paste (not stock)
- 1 tsp thyme
- 1 tsp marjoram
- 3 Tbsp dried onion flakes
- ¼ tsp celery seed
- ⅛ tsp celery salt
- 2 lbs potatoes, peeled & quartered (about 8 cups)

In a 9-by-13-inch baking pan, mix oil, melted butter, bouillon and herbs. Add potatoes and coat with mixture. Bake for about 30 minutes at 450 degrees, until tender and golden brown. Turn potatoes occasionally while baking.



## Cheese Roasted Asparagus

Eat all the asparagus you can this summer, and hope there's some left to save and freeze for continued mealtime oomph during the winter months.

Yields 4 servings

- 1 tsp canola oil
- 1 lb fresh asparagus, trimmed
- 2 Tbsp green onion, chopped
- 2 Tbsp celery, chopped
- 2 Tbsp hard granular cheese, grated (Parmesan)
- ¼ cup breadcrumbs
- ¼ cup butter (½ stick), melted
- ¼ tsp salt

Place asparagus in a lightly oiled, 9-by-13-inch pan, in one heavy layer. Mix remaining ingredients and spoon over asparagus. Bake at 375 degrees for 45 minutes or until tender. Serve on a white platter to bring out its vibrant green color.



Source: Farmstead Chef cookbook, co-authored by Lisa Kivirist and John D. Ivanko ([FarmsteadChef.com](http://FarmsteadChef.com)).