When we offer our children the freedom to participate, they learn life skills.

When kids learn basic homesteading skills, they get a number of really important advantages in life. Here’s a short list of what they gain:
They have skills that can save them a lot of money when they’re on their own, since they won’t have to hire others to do them.

They are able to be self-sufficient and won’t have to rely on other people to help them or take care of them.

They are able to help out their neighbors and communities. They can pass on their skills and use their knowledge to help others. Homesteading practices tend to help the environment, too.

They have the skills needed to not just survive but thrive, even in difficult financial times.

They are prepared for emergencies and challenges. They have what they need for financial freedom and are equipped to live comfortably within their means.

They have added pride and the sense of accomplishment that comes from doing things themselves and doing them well.

Cooking

From a young age, children should learn how to cook simple meals and sides. They can easily learn how to prepare items like fried eggs, two-ingredient flatbread, rice, granola bars, and simple dishes like broiled fish and cranberry sauce.

They should also know how to assemble easy healthy breakfasts and lunches, like fruit and yogurt, smoothies, sandwiches, and salads.

As they grow, they should learn how to cook basic from-scratch items like fresh bread and breadsticks (gluten-free families can find easy sandwich bread recipes online), muffins, salsa, cheese sauce, roasted tomato sauce, and treats like cookies, cakes, and frosting.
It's also helpful to know how to prepare at least one meal for people with special diets, such as paleo, vegetarian, vegan, diabetic, or gluten-free, and to know how to cook at least one good dish for a crowd.

Lastly, they should know how to follow recipes and learn the basics of substitutions.

**Gardening**

Growing a garden is one of the best homesteading skills to have. It allows you to grow the healthiest possible fruits and vegetables for very little money.

Young kids can start growing easy plants from seeds, like sunflowers, lettuce, spring peas, and carrots. They can water and maintain family vegetable gardens, carry out compost and turn the pile, pull weeds, rake leaves, and use a push mower.

Older kids can trim branches, use a gas-powered mower, plant their own gardens, and care for trees.

As kids grow, be sure to pass on knowledge about natural pest control, fertilizing, seed starting, garden zones, protecting plants from frost, irrigation systems, edible landscaping, and other gardening techniques.

**Carpentry**

Kids should learn how to build basic projects like tables, benches, raised garden beds, fences, and shelves.

They should know how to use items like measuring tapes, clamps, and levels, and know how to follow (and design) plans.
They should be able to safely use tools, such as hammers, saws, and power tools.

**Auto and Machine Repair**

Boys and girls alike should learn the basics of how to maintain cars and machines, plus simple repairs.

Teens should learn how to change a tire, check oil and tire pressure, change windshield wipers, add fluids, and other basics.

It’s good to know how to troubleshoot with other machines, as well. Knowing how to change the spark plugs on your lawnmower can save a whole lot of time and money, for instance, as can being able to figure out how to fix a coffee maker that suddenly stopped working.

If you don’t know much about car and machine maintenance, it’s easiest to learn from someone else along with your kids. You can also find information at sites like WikiHow.com.

Also allow your kids to dismantle broken machines (with the exception of dangerous ones like televisions and monitors, which have charged capacitors) in order to get a good understanding of how things work.

**Sewing and Mending**

All kids should know sewing basics, such as how to thread a needle, use a sewing machine, sew on a button, and mend a torn garment.

Older kids should know how to follow (and make) patterns and sew items like curtains and clothing.
If they get good at sewing, they’ll also have the skills to make extra income by sewing items like handmade children’s clothes and cloth diapers.

**Preserving Foods**

Everybody should know how to “put up” extra food for later in the year.

Young kids can help prepare produce, such as by husking corn, chopping vegetables, and freezing produce to preserve the color, taste, and nutrients.

Older kids can learn how to safely can in a hot water bath or with a pressure canner. They can use a dehydrator or a low oven to dry foods. They can make fruit leather, pickle foods, and use other simple preservation techniques.

Take classes in the community together to learn these skills if you don’t know them to pass on, or ask friends or family members to teach you. There are also lots of great groups on Facebook that post tips and recipes, such as All Natural Families (my own group); Common Sense Homesteading; and Canning, Preserving, and Dehydrating Food. Also invest in a Ball canning book and check out some good canning books from the library.

**Natural Health Remedies and First Aid**

Kids should know how to stay healthy, how to treat their own wounds, and which natural remedies they can use for common ailments.

In our home, we keep organic lavender essential oil on every floor and the kids know to put a drop or two on wounds to prevent infection and speed healing. They also know to reach for honey if they have a sore throat (or use it topically for small infected wounds) and grab a bag of frozen peas from the freezer if they need an ice pack.

We take raw chopped garlic as a natural antibiotic (one or two cloves in a spoonful of honey,
three times a day). We prevent and treat colds, flus, and respiratory ailments with elderberry honey syrup.

My husband recently taught my daughter how to make a one-dollar wrist wrap from half an ace bandage with slits cut in each end for her thumb.

Kids should know the basics of how to keep their bodies healthy and how to know when to treat themselves and when to see a doctor. They should also know to question medical advice instead of following anything blindly, and to seek a second opinion if the advice they get doesn’t seem right.

Most communities offer first-aid classes that are great learning tools for teens. Be sure to also keep good books in your home that offer thorough medical information from a variety of traditions.

**Sustainable Living**

Kids should grow up learning how to practice basic sustainable living skills like:

- Reusing

- Recycling

- Upcycling
Do-It-Yourself projects

- Budgeting

- Avoiding debt

- Bartering

- Shopping thrift stores, garage sales, Craig's List and Freecycle

- Fixing things themselves

- Making do

- Living within their means

One of the greatest gifts we can give our children is the ability to live creatively on less money. Stay away from malls and expensive stores. Focus on activities that are free or low-cost. Encourage creativity in solving problems, reusing items and finding needed products.
Also, teach kids to shop for quality over cheap junk. In the long run, it’s generally better to invest in a wellmade item than buy the cheapest one available. You can often find quality items at fair prices by buying used, shopping sales, and being creative.

Sustainable living also applies to energy and the environment. Teach kids to rely on less energy and resources by doing things like hanging laundry on a clothesline, using a push lawnmower, biking and walking on short errands, collecting rainwater in a rain barrel for the garden, and investing in solar and wind energy.

**Foraging**

We are surrounded by free, healthy, tasty foods that are generally organic and plentiful, yet almost nobody makes use of wild edibles today.

That’s a shame for other people, but it’s great news for families who know how to forage for wild foods. Some of the wild foods that are in most areas include:

- Nuts like walnuts, chestnuts, and acorns

- Berries like blackberries, mulberries, elderberries, and blueberries

- Fruits like wild plums, apples, crab apples, and wild grapes

- Greens like miner’s lettuce, watercress, lamb’s quarters, and dandelions
Plants and fungi like morel mushrooms, cattails, and wild asparagus

Medicinals like plantain leaves, elderberries, and nettles

Check out some foraging books from the library to see which ones you find most helpful, and then order a few of your favorites to stock your home library. Involve kids in seasonal foraging for the items that are plentiful in your area and well-liked by your family.

In our family, some of our favorite foraging foods are black walnuts, acorns, mulberries, spring cattails, immature milkweed pods, crab apples, and black raspberries.

**Basic Housekeeping Skills**

Kids should know the basics of how to clean and care for a home. These skills can include knowing:

- How to do laundry

- How to wash dishes by hand and use a dishwasher

- How to do seasonal cleaning
10 Homesteading Skills Every Child Should Learn

Written by Alicia Bayer
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How to keep a house in order

- How to use a vacuum cleaner and Shop-Vac

- How to use simple items like vinegar and baking soda to clean a home

- How to do a quick clean for company

- How to do basic home maintenance and repair jobs like changing furnace filters, unclogging a drain, and putting up storm windows

By teaching your kids to master these 10 skills, you’ll be setting them up to homestead for years to come.

Easy Fruit Leather

Right now we have tons of fresh blackberries and raspberries in our Minnesota backyard, and I was looking for a new way to use them. I found a wonderfully easy recipe to make fruit leather, and it was a big hit with our whole family.

Not only is this all-natural, but it costs very little (or nothing, if you grow your own berries!) and is a great way to use up fruits that are past their prime. Kids can also have fun mixing and
matching fruits. Here’s the recipe, adapted from recycleyourday.com.

**Ingredients**

2 cups fresh fruit (cleaned, pitted, peeled, etc.) 2–3 Tbsp. honey (raw and local, if possible)
Several drops lemon juice

**Tools**

Blender, sheet pan, parchment paper (optional: food mill or sieve and spoon)

**Instructions**

1. Purée your fruit in a blender until well processed. If you like, you can remove the seeds from fruits like blackberries by pressing the purée through a sieve with a spoon or running it through a food mill. We left our seeds in and liked the crunch and extra fiber.

2. Stir honey and lemon juice into the purée. You can adjust the measurements to suit the sweetness of your fruit.

3. Line a sheet pan with parchment paper and pour the purée mixture overtop to about a 1/8 -inch thickness.

4. Dry according to preference. Options for drying include:
The original recipe calls for cooking it in an oven at 200˚ for approximately 2 hours. I found that our fruit leather needed easily twice this amount of time. Our raspberry/blackberry mixture needed about 4 hours and our strawberry fruit leather needed slightly more. In light of this, I went looking for a more energy-efficient means of drying it.

Other recipes online call for setting the oven to 140˚ and leaving it overnight. This can cause the fruit leather to become too dry and crack if you’re not careful, and obviously there’s still a fair amount of energy usage.

Use a food dehydrator.

You can try the “hot car method,” which is widely recommended online. Put the fruit leather in the back window of a south-facing car on a sunny day. It should take about an afternoon to dry.

Dry your leather outside. Simply cover it with a clean window screen or tented cheesecloth and leave in a sunny location where it won’t be disturbed.

Dry it outside in a solar cooker or even under a garden cold frame (a glass cover meant to protect plants from frost).

The fruit leather is ready when it is just slightly sticky to the touch. When it’s ready, it will easily pull off the parchment paper. Use a pizza cutter or kitchen shears to cut it into rectangles to serve, or roll up the rectangles for later. Store it in the refrigerator. A glass jar is a perfect container if you’re not planning on eating it within the day. Ours never lasts that long!