

# Cultivate Yourself by Exploring Self-Sufficiency

I'm a modern woman, so I have modern problems. I often complain about a lack of time; I'm too busy making a living. Yet I'm surrounded by modern conveniences intended to make my life easier. I have a dishwasher, a clothes washer and dryer, a disposal, and a computer. All these machines are intended to reduce the amount of time and labor I need to expend on keeping my house, so what am I doing with the freedom I've gained?

I'm working and going to school online to earn my master's degree. But even though I'm not watching talk shows or playing video games, I'm not immune to the ways so many Americans fritter away their spare time. I confess I have surfed the Internet when I was supposed to be writing my column. In being freed from the necessity of growing our own food or beating our clothes on rocks down by the river, we have lost the knowledge of the homemaking arts, and with them, the art of self-sufficiency. Just because we can go to our local grocery stores or Jessica's Organic Stand to buy all the food and produce that we need doesn't mean we should. There are many activities we've abandoned that taught us a lot about appreciating the earth and respecting her willingness to share her abundance.

Since we no longer have to go out and forage for roots and seeds, we have the time to invest in enterprises that were once a necessity but can now be leisure. These are all things that in my opinion people should know how to do. One should have a working knowledge of how to plant a vegetable garden, prepare and cook our own food, sew our own clothes, and build our own shelves. I so admire those of us who know how to clean their houses and heal wounds with stuff in their kitchens. I yearn for the medicine men and women of the past who helped transmit this knowledge to all the members of the human tribe.

In lieu of our own personal Shaman, my husband and I have decided to teach ourselves by doing. This weekend, we planted peppers, squash, beans, and cucumbers in pots. That way, we reason, we can control the quality of the soil. We put them in full sun, like the seed manufacturer suggested. We'll supply the water and hope and see what nature provides.

Last week, we sprouted adzuki beans for the first time, like all you raw food enthusiasts have been encouraging us to for ages. A quarter cup of raw beans yielded about four cups of sprouts! Talk about abundance.

I know I didn't "make" them, but I'm as proud of them as if I did. However, I did make the Magic Mineral Broth we've been drinking as breakfast for the past two weeks. It's delicious and satisfying and eliminates my hunger the way no broth from a package or a store ever could.

When I took off my nail polish last week, I found myself with the driest, most brittle nails. They were a sorry sight, lusterless with white blotches. I checked out some of the exorbitantly priced natural nail products at the local health food store and saw the main ingredient was peanut oil. I've begun to oil my nails daily with peanut or olive oil, and they are stronger and shinier than they've been in years.

Since we screened in our carport, we've been spending more evenings outside rather than watching TV. We listen to the crickets at night, and look forward to listening to the sound of the rain on the roof. Before TV and radio, people read or sat around fires and talked or told stories. They played musical instruments and sang. These are worthwhile ventures; their contributions to society are unquestionable.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not an anachronism who advocates living in the past because it was a simpler time.

I am not at all recommending we eschew indoor plumbing, toilet paper, or vacuum cleaners. This doesn't have to be an all-or-nothing endeavor. Why can't we embrace self-sufficiency in some areas and make it a work in progress?

Remember the show on PBS in 2001 called *Frontier House*? I never saw it. But I heard it was kind of like a public television reality show. The action revolved around three families who agreed to experience life on the frontier recreated as accurately as possible. The year 1883 was emulated by stranding them deep in rural Montana, where they would be forced to fend for themselves for five months, just like those who traveled west during the early 1880s to take advantage of the Homestead Act, promising free land to those who settled the area. Perhaps if I had seen it, the idea of self-sufficiency wouldn't appeal to me now as a fun thing to do.

In the interests of not getting carried away, I'm also drawing the line at a vegetable garden for now. The thought of raising chickens or sheep or the like isn't even on my radar. Who am I kidding; I'm



*A container garden is a first step on the road to self-sufficiency.*

a city girl after all. I grew up in Pittsburgh and lived in New York City for most of my adult life. Pigeons are the closest things to livestock we had in Manhattan!

Although planting a garden and sprouting are just baby steps on the road to self-sufficiency, I'm proud of what we've embraced so far. Spending time caring for my home and garden reminds me to live in harmony with the environment and not exploit it completely for my convenience and comfort. Producing less waste and using fewer harmful chemicals makes me feel like a co-creator, or at least a contributor to the maintenance of this lovely planet, instead of like a user or a pillager. And even if my harvest is less than ideal, I'll have good stories for the evening campfire.

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