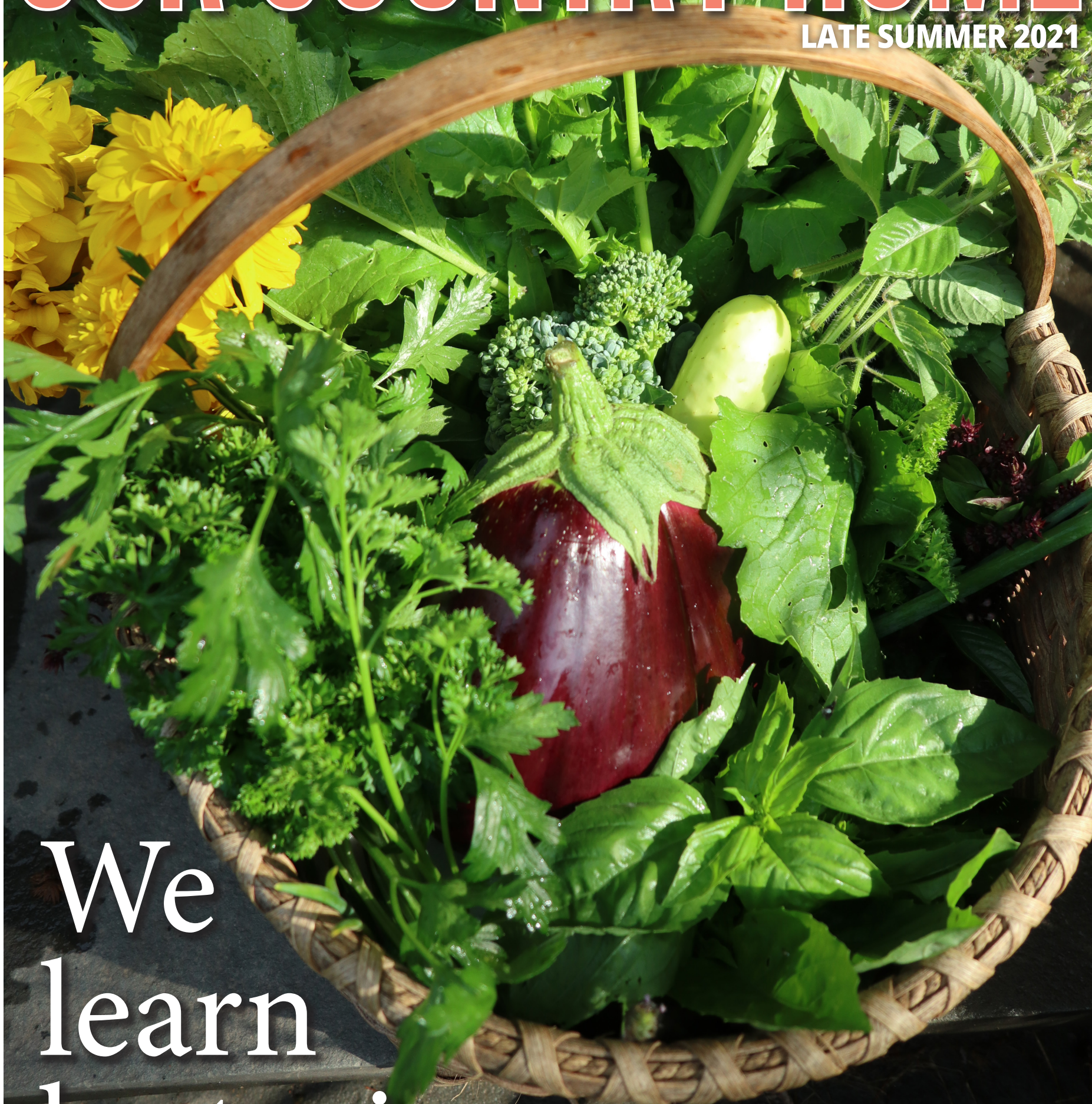


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By LORI MALONE, from the archives

Editor's letter:

Late summer is upon us. The August dol-drums. Everything feels heavy and slow, and the mass of home-repair projects I planned, for when it finally stopped raining... hasn't happened.

We're doing much of our own work this year and it's a learning process, complicated by supply-chain problems. Some projects are waiting for a key component to arrive, and some haven't been started; they're waiting for the first lot to get done.

This issue of Our Country Home is about learning. Start with the foundation, then build on it, slowly and steadily, until your project is done or your homestead created. But that foundation has to be in place first, and then everything can be added in, brick by brick.

We start off with Jane Anderson's joyful introduction to the former Bradstan Country Hotel, now a private home. It's Insta-worthy, magnificently decorated, because owners Scott Samuelson and Eddie Dudek have the knowledge and experience to make it work.

Then there's Kristin White's homestead. She exhorts us to plan, plan, and plan more, because the lives of your animals depend on you.

Jude Waterston is back, with macaroni and cheese. Developing recipes requires experimenting: what's the best pasta? The



RR photo by Joe Cooke
Cat Alexander just wants a nap.

best cheese? Let's try this, let's try that. The final result is wonderful, a far cry from the box mac-and-cheese I grew up with.

And since it is still the age of COVID-19, let's talk about ventilating our homes. The 1970s-era oil crisis demanded tighter houses to save on heat, but that led to a whole other set of problems. Architects Robert and Victor Dadras talk about the importance of air circulation to keep us all healthy.

Barbara Winfield rounds out the issue with her decorating workshop. Learn from Barbara, who has decades of experience, and remember why nothing is better than a good teacher.

Until next time, please take care of yourselves, and enjoy summer's waning days.

Annemarie Schuetz, Editor
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On the cover: Late summer harvest; RR photo by Laurie Stuart

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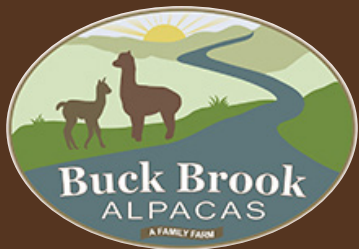
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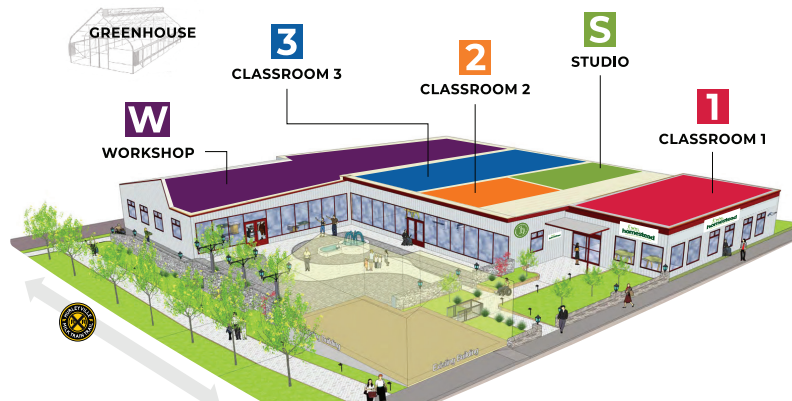


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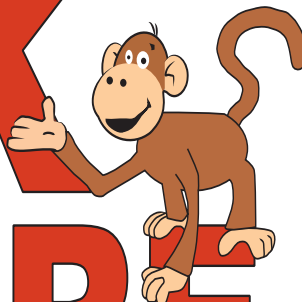
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The foyer at Samuelson and Dudek's gracious home.

Photos contributed by Scott Samuelson and Eddie Dudek
Artful room: the bedrooms at the former Bradstan still remind us that it's a beautiful world.

The bountiful Bradstan

Although this B&B closed in 2018, its beauty continues to shine over White Lake.

By JANE ANDERSON

What do you do when you close a beautiful hotel overlooking a picturesque lake? Why, you live in it, of course.

Eddie Dudek and Scott Samuelson have embraced their beautiful, five-bedroom, five-bath vintage jewel of a home since before they opened it as the Bradstan Country Hotel bed-and-breakfast in 1991. Although B&B operations ceased in 2018, the house remains as gorgeous now as it has ever been.

There isn't much history available at your fingertips on the internet, beyond that the building started its life in 1900. During the late 1940s, it operated as Brown's Royal Hotel, one of about two dozen hotels and camps catering to New Yorkers hoping to catch the lake's cool breezes (and maybe a trout or two).

The house, across the street from White Lake, caught the eye of Dudek and Samuelson in 1985. By then, it had been closed for a while, and decay had set in. But the couple saw the house's beautiful bones; after gutting it down to its beams, they restored it to its circa-1900 beauty—with a few modern touches, naturally.

By 1991, it was a bustling bed-and-breakfast. True to their roots as entertainers (Dudek was a dancer; Samuelson, a singer), they converted the large parlor into a real cabaret. Musicians such as Julie Wilson, Karen Mason, and Ann Hampton Calloway mesmerized those who gathered around bistro tables and along the chestnut-colored bar—but none were as dear to the owners as singer Nancy LaMott. When the unparalleled chanteuse passed in 1996, the Bradstan honored her memory by naming their

cabaret room after her. Although the tables are long gone, and songstresses no longer enchant guests, there's a certain ambience when you enter what's now Dudek and Samuelson's living room. Is it the bar that's still there? The handsome fireplace—where you can just imagine someone resting their elbow or their drink as they listen to a torch singer belting her heart out?

Perhaps it's Lois.

Her cool demeanor sizes you up on your way into the cabaret/living room or on your way upstairs. Dressed simply but elegantly, her hair is chicly short and her eyeliner is always on point. Is she a ticket-taker, a bouncer, a gadfly who's taking names to report in the next issue of *Variety*? At this point, no—she's a mannequin (shhhh, don't tell her).

"We had a Halloween party, and a friend asked, 'You do have a witch, don't you?'" Dudek explained. "Uh, no, we didn't. So he provided this 'lady' and we dressed her and named her Lois." Now she presides over the entry, coolly assessing

whoever enters.

Ah, the entry. Back in 1985, dull concrete steps rose steeply to the house's ample porch. That didn't mesh with the grand hotel idea; those steps are still there (do you know how expensive and messy it is to jackhammer concrete?), but you'd never know it for the stately wooden twin staircases leading from the front patio and hiding that past misstep.

Enter the cheery red doorway and a stunning foyer greets you. To your left, a massive, jaw-dropping mirrored armoire. Ahead, ivory curtains are parted to allow you a peek inside (hi, Lois!).

The home is a marvel of detail. Crown

But the couple saw the house's beautiful bones; after gutting it down to its beams, they restored it to its circa-1900 beauty—with a few modern touches, naturally



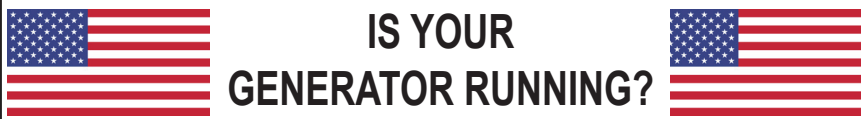
Victorian grandeur in one of the bedrooms.

molding accents nearly every wall. To your left is an inviting dining room (which served as the breakfast room during the B&B's heyday). A quick look at Yelp reveals photos of fun couples gathered around this table for French toast, coffee, and invigorating conversation. Although the room is mainly empty now, it's still a happy place, with gold walls, red cornices over the large windows, and a unique chandelier dangling over the large dining table. Off the dining room is an efficient kitchen, with cherry cabinets that were installed from a vintage tear-down. Now, Majolica vases, Fiestaaware, and whimsical roosters line the tops of the cabinets and decorate the walls—"they're either souvenirs from our trips, or gifts from friends," Dudek explains.

Back in the hall, Dudek points out the

twin half-baths near the cabaret room before leading the way upstairs. Here are five gorgeously appointed bedrooms, each with its own bath. Some rooms were converted from two rooms to one: those now have "sitting rooms" or expertly designed dressing rooms. All of them are beautifully decorated, and the north-facing rooms have windows that look out onto sparkling White Lake.

Walking through the rooms at the former Bradstan Country Hotel, admiring the antique furnishings and period lighting, not to mention the pristine wallpaper, you definitely get a good vibe about the history of the place. A lot of love, and a whole bunch of fun, happened here—and it continues even though it closed to the public three years ago. It's nice to know that such an exquisite property is cared for and endures.



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RR photos by Kristin White

Welcome to the homestead.

By KRISTIN WHITE

Homesteading. It's the latest topic for those of us who want a simpler life. We want to get back to basics. But how do we get started and how do we make our homestead successful? How do we avoid mistakes that could kill the animals we care for? There are a few things that all homesteaders, and wanna-be homesteaders, should know.

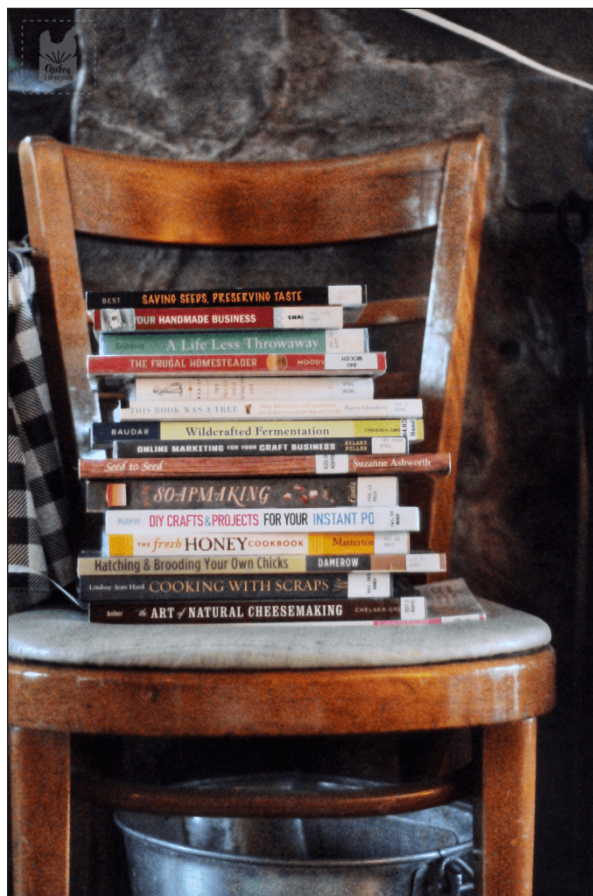
First things first. Have a good plan. It's that simple. Don't jump in with both feet. I know it's hard to wait before you purchase your livestock or start your garden, but trust me, you will want to have a good plan. That plan will not only keep you on track, but it will help you understand where you might need more help.

I know you want to start your homestead right away, but don't. Wait. Save some money. Do your research. And draft your plan. As with any good plan, it will be fluid. You'll make changes to it as you move forward and as you learn more, but you need one. For every aspect of your homestead.

Garden? Write it down. Draft it out.

Livestock? You will definitely need a good plan. You're dealing with the lives of animals, so you will not want to do this without thinking it through and putting pen to paper.

Ask yourself this: How much time do you have to devote to the homesteading life? If you don't have the time to tend to your dairy goat operation, then you might need to think it over before you dive in. Want 100 chickens and to start an egg business selling eggs to the city? Do you have the right location and set-up for that? How about the time needed to collect eggs, wash eggs, package eggs, and then drop them off to the various locations in the city? Write it



RR photo by Kristin White

A stack of books reminds us that you need to research before you take on projects, especially ones that involve other lives.

down. Plan it out.

Purchasing your homestead? Don't rush into it. Think about the location of the house, the outbuildings, where you'll put the garden and the livestock. Do you need to do extensive work to the property? Is it turnkey and you'll just need to unpack your bags? What about the actual location? Do you need to move a long distance? Or is it just right around the corner? Map out what all of this will look like.

I think most of us want to get started on our homesteading journey yesterday. But a good plan is a must. As I stated above, it can change, but it is so important that you really think things through.

And don't forget that emergencies will happen. You will want a really good plan for that too. Do your research and then put your emergency kit together. For everything. Animals, humans, the garden, buildings. You name it and you'll want to be prepared. I love being prepared but I do find myself caught unaware. A lot.

What happens when things go sideways? Because they will. Do you have a network of neighbors, friends, or other homesteaders that you can rely on? Did you do all your research before you brought home the 100 chickens? Because part of being a good steward to the land and livestock, is doing your research. Read the books. Take a class. Join a local group of homesteaders.

Here's a warning: Don't just rely on the internet. There's a lot of great information out there on the internet, but nothing, and I mean nothing, beats being able to take a class or ask someone in person. Sure, you can send that "homesteading guru" a message, but will they respond? Will they actually know and understand your needs? Will

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SIMPLE LIFE - Page 7

they help you research the issue(s)? And that YouTube video by that guy from across the country? He's not going to hold your hand while your animal is in pain. You know who will? The farmer down the road. The person whom you paid to take that class. Or your local homesteading expert. That's who you need to rely on.

Don't get me wrong. The internet is a great starting point. There are groups on Facebook for just about everything you could imagine, including all aspects of homesteading. But don't consider those to be your only source. I have seen it time after time where someone jumps in with no plan and buys all the discount chickens at the local feed store with no way to house the chicks. They don't even know how to brood a chicken!

When someone asks me a question about chickens, the first thing I ask is, "Did you do your research?" Invariably the answer is, "Yes, I joined a Facebook group." Or "I watched a YouTube video."

Friends. That is not research. And it is going to take you longer than a week or a month to research and figure things out.

Why am I going on and on about this? It's the lives and livelihood of your animals. Being a good steward to the land and the animals. Trust me, it doesn't take much to kill a baby chick. Or have all your well-tended seedlings die. I've been there, done that. But with a little patience and a lot of research, you will find yourself on a successful homesteading journey. Now go out there and make your homesteading dreams come true!



A scarecrow watches over the garden at the White homestead.

TRR photo by Kristin White



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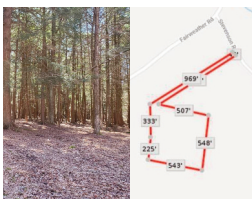
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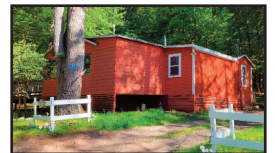
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"ASK FOR JOY"

Mac and Cheese,

By JUDE WATERSTON

Circa 1962. All three kids in our family are eagerly awaiting dinner: Mom’s baked chicken with macaroni and cheese. While the Ronzoni elbow macaroni boiled away in a large pot of salted water, my mom worked on the sauce with me at her side. I carefully cut logs of Velveeta “cheese” into squares. With sticky fingers I moved them from the cutting board to a bowl set out before me.

Velveeta is a “pasteurized prepared cheese product” that sits not in the refrigerated case of the supermarket, but on a shelf, any shelf. Like a cockroach, it would most likely survive a nuclear explosion.

Mom opened a can of Campbell’s Cream of Tomato Soup and the gelled contents were eased out and plopped into a saucepan. The empty can was filled halfway with whole milk, which was poured into the pot and stirred to combine. I popped a chunk of Velveeta into my mouth and my mother looked at me with a fake frown. She took the bowl of cheese and dumped it into the hot soupy sauce in which it melted almost immediately just as its name, Velveeta, was intended to connote a “velvety smooth” product.

The mixture in the saucepan was an abnormally-bright yellow-orange in color. Mom stirred in the cooked elbows. She never baked her mac and cheese; we ate it right away, piping hot, along with baked chicken slathered with Campbell’s Cream of Chicken Soup, mixed with a heaping tablespoon of Lipton’s onion soup mix before being baked to a rich, golden color.

This was our favorite dinner. It was served with canned peach halves dotted with butter, sprinkled with cinnamon, and baked alongside the chicken. A small, fresh salad completed the meal. The next day, if there was any leftover mac and cheese, my



RR photo by Jude Waterston

You want a pasta that can stand up to the delicious sauce.

mother would crisp it up for me in a skillet coated with a little butter. Janet found it nauseating, but I delighted in it.

When Janet was in college and my brother was a father of young twin boys, they both continued to use Mom’s recipe for mac and cheese. I had become interested in health foods while in high school and had given up as many processed foods as I could, carefully read-

Most important was my search for a pasta shape that scored more points than the tiny, simplistic, comma-shaped elbow macaroni, which brought to mind overcooked, pale and limp store-bought macaroni salad seen in every supermarket’s deli case.

ing jar and box labels. Mom’s mac and cheese was out of the question. In an effort to come up with a healthy and delicious alternative, I began experimenting with different cheeses and learned to make a bechamel sauce, into which the grated cheese was added to form a smooth base for the pasta.

American cheese was disregarded entirely. Sharp white cheddar won me over. At first, **- Page 13**



Core ingredients in 1960s-era mac and cheese.



RR photo by Jude Waterston

Velveeta was a beloved ingredient for mid-century macaroni and cheese, because of the way it melted.

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MAC AND CHEESE - Page 13

like Mom, I too made my pasta purely stove-top, not realizing the benefits of oven-baking the mac and cheese to give it that all-important crisp and golden top. So, my first attempts were eaten hot out of the pan and though they were tasty, I sensed something was missing. Also, in homage to the color of Mom's dish, I often added a tablespoon of tomato paste. It did nothing for the taste and didn't come close to replicating the garish color of the original. So that addition was ditched.

Most important was my search for a pasta shape that scored more points than the tiny, simplistic, comma-shaped elbow macaroni, which brought to mind overcooked, pale and limp store-bought macaroni salad seen in every supermarket's deli case. I wanted something more substantial and preferably ribbed to further help the sauce cling to its surface. Coiled, corkscrew shapes like fusilli and rotini were contenders, and cavatappi, which resembles an elbow macaroni grown in size and thickness, became a favorite. Medium shells work well because the sauce collects in the shell's cup, squirting out when you bite down, a plus. I even made an Italian version of macaroni and cheese calling for wide egg noodles. Noodles love a creamy sauce, and the mixture of fontina, mozzarella, and Parmigiano-Reggiano cheeses made a fine version.

Sometimes I added strips of prosciutto di Parma (Italian dry-cured ham, sliced paper thin) or sauteed cubes of pancetta (pork belly meat that is salt-cured, not smoked, but can be substituted for bacon, as it gets crispy when cooked).

You would think it's easy to find a truly great macaroni and cheese, but many miss the mark. There is an exemplary version in Manhattan at Le Zie Restaurant, where they incorporate woody, earthy truffles and even top the dish with a whole slice of that glorious fungus. But I no longer live in the city, so I have searched closer to home. My favorite, by far, discovered some years ago, is served at the Heron Restaurant in Narrowsburg, NY. It has all the right elements: a pasta shape that catches all the creamy, cheesy sauce and a crunchy topping (studded with thinly sliced scallions) which contrasts beautifully with the rich, perfectly cooked pasta.

I believe I have come close to creating a mac and cheese that could compete with the Heron's version and I offer it here. It is sophisticated and homey at the same time. But I have to make one admission. As I write this, a part of me wishes that for just a few moments I could once again be that expectant six-year-old at my family's table, digging into my mom's mac and cheese: bright orange, creamy, and so very delicious to me then.

Macaroni and Cheese Supreme

Serves 4

I like, on occasion, to add crispy cubes of pancetta or torn shreds of prosciutto to this mac and cheese.

10 ounces dried pasta, such as cavatappi, rotini, fusilli, or medium shells

1 ¾ cups lightly packed grated sharp cheddar cheese

½ cup lightly packed finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

2 cups half-and-half

1 ½ cups heavy cream

3 tablespoons unsalted butter

3 tablespoons all-purpose flour

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Mac and cheese crunchy topping (see recipe below)

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Cook the dried pasta a minute or two less than the package directions suggest for al dente pasta. It will continue to cook in the oven.

Drain well. Meanwhile, grate all the cheeses and toss them together in a bowl. In a saucepan or Dutch oven large enough to hold the cooked pasta, melt the butter over low heat. Add

the flour and stir continuously with a whisk or wooden spoon for about 2 minutes, until smooth. Add the half-and-half and cream and raise the heat to high. Whisk until the mixture thickens, about 2 – 3 minutes. Remove from heat and add the cheese. Season with salt and pepper. Pour the mixture into a lasagna or other shallow baking dish and sprinkle the crunchy topping evenly over the top. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes until bubbly, then run under the broiler to crisp the top, about 2 minutes. Serve hot.

Macaroni and Cheese Topping

Makes enough for one 9" x 13" casserole

1 cup coarse fresh bread crumbs

¼ cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

2-3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil or melted butter

Combine the crumbs and cheese in a small bowl. Season with salt and pepper. Add the oil or melted butter and stir to coat evenly. Sprinkle the mixture over the mac and cheese before baking.



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Well aired

*Does your old house feel drafty?
That could be a feature, not a bug*

By ANNEMARIE SCHUETZ

Cold breeze tickling the back of your neck in winter? Don't be in a hurry to seal around that window.

The point of ventilation is "to get fresh air into a room," Robert Dadras, of Liberty firm Dadras Architects, said. "People don't realize that [in a house] they still need air from outside."

Old buildings leak. You may have noticed, if you moved into an old Victorian, or even a pre-1970s, house here.

The alternative is modern buildings, where, without the influx of fresh air, problems can develop. Uncirculated indoor air builds up moisture, odors, dust and air pollutants, according to the American Lung Association. Too much moisture inside can lead to mold or rotting wood.

"It can be stuffy. You're sensing there is no oxygen," Dadras said.

Sometimes the repercussions can be worse than a little discomfort.

Sick Building Syndrome was first identified in the 1970s; people had headaches, nausea, dizziness, dry coughs and more. Inadequate ventilation is the most common cause, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Up until the 1970s, they say, building ventilation standards "called for approximately 15 cubic feet per minute (cfm) of outside air for each building occupant."

But starting in 1973, oil prices shot up. Ventilation standards were tightened to conserve fuel; the EPA says that the levels were tightened to 5 cfm per occupant. "In many

cases these reduced outdoor air ventilation rates were found to be inadequate to maintain the health and comfort of building occupants."

A 1984 report by the World Health Organization found that "up to 30 percent of new and remodeled buildings worldwide may be the subject of excessive complaints related to indoor air quality."

Carbon monoxide can build up indoors too, says the ALA. So can radon. Both can kill. So can COVID-19, which spreads through the air.

Ventilation built into older homes

"Everyone seems to love the Victorian era for style," said Victor Dadras, partner at Dadras Architects and Robert's brother. "But much of it was functional."

Double-hung windows, for instance. "The upper sash was more important in order to have air circulation." You opened the upper window, you opened doors or transoms over the doors, and let the air flow through. And it mattered for health. "Indoors, people breathed out germs."

- Page 17



This is an easy way to ventilate a hot attic: an open window and a box fan to blow air in or out of the room.

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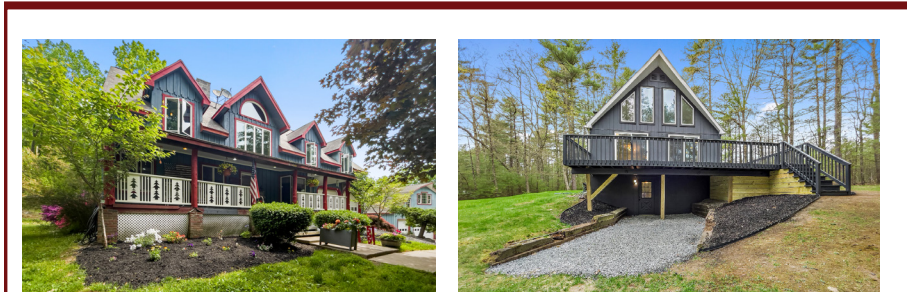
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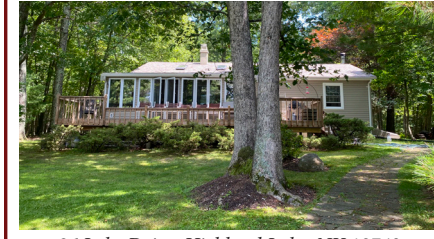
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WELL AIRED - Page 15

Outdoors, even in the slightest of breezes," the germs dissipated.

Higher ceilings helped air circulate, Robert Dadras said.

What can be done?

So you've bought a house and you want more ventilation but you're concerned about your heating and cooling bills too. What can you do?

"HVAC systems condition the air," said Robert Dadras. (They cool and heat the air, but they also treat it, removing moisture, smoke, airborne bacteria, and more. The "V" by the way, stands for "ventilation.")

It saves money to keep warm or cool air inside, Victor Dadras said, but new systems can mitigate an abrupt temperature change as you bring outside air in.

UV light can be used to sanitize at home, as hospitals do, Robert Dadras said. The bulbs have to be replaced when needed for it to work properly though.

"Keep the windows open as much as possible," he said. If you have double-hung windows, open the upper sash.

In winter, it may drive up your heating bill. In summer, it may let in some warm air. But keeping your home ventilated will go a long way toward keeping you healthy.



RR photo by Joe Cooke
A double-hung window, ventilating.

Change of air: why air exchanges are important

We've gone back to the old ways of doing some things; the new standard for ventilation rates is 15 cf per minute per person, according to the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers.

ASHRAE also calls for our homes to get .35 changes of air per hour. That, says the EPA, gives you acceptable indoor air quality and minimises all the problems you can get from your building.

The rate at which outdoor air replaces indoor air is called the air exchange rate.

Fireplaces and cookstoves might need supplemental ventilation, and bathrooms and kitchens might want some kind of exhaust system.

It's important, says the EPA. "Increasing the amount of outdoor air coming into the building helps to control pollutant levels, odors, temperature, humidity and other factors that can impact the health and comfort of building occupants."

People knew the value of fresh air in the past

In the 19th century, Catherine Beecher, in her "New Housekeeper's Manual," protested tightly-caulked homes in the North, where people lived in one room, carefully sealed against the weather, for the six months that winter lasted. No wonder people have spring fever and biliousness, she said. "All these things are the pantings and palpitations of a system run down under slow poison." Carbonic acid from heating stoves, undiluted by fresh air, killed people, she said.

Respiratory disease killed people too. Take tuberculosis.

To fight TB, which often transmitted through the air, we brought in fresh air. We slept on sleeping porches. We went to the Catskills for the high altitudes and clean air, Robert Dadras said. "People came here with TB and didn't leave," because returning to the city could kill them.

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Decorating workshop

By BARBARA WINFIELD

Anyone can make a home look like a million—if you have a million dollars.

The reality is that most homeowners tend more toward a beer, rather than a champagne, budget.

Here are some professional interior design tips to help you fix up and refresh your home cheaply and easily.

Start by choosing one room in your house.

Make a list of everything you like and dislike about this room. This exercise is designed to help you decide what changes you want to make.

With your list in hand consider the following possible ways to change the look of the room:

1. How much can I actually spend on redecorating this room?
2. Name three things in this room that can be easily changed.
3. What is preventing you from making these changes?
4. Is the furniture comfortable? If not, can any pieces be eliminated or replaced?
5. Would the room benefit by adding architectural features such as decorative molding, new doors, new hardware or a chair rail?
6. Measure the room using graph paper (1/4" = 1'). It's easier to move furniture around on

paper than to move the actual pieces. This will also prevent purchasing items that may not fit in the room.

Decorating tips:

The color scheme of the room should convey the mood you want to create: bright and lively, mellow and relaxing or you can choose a color scheme from a favorite painting or fabric. Look through books, magazines and the internet for rooms that draw your attention.

Take as much time as you need to plan out the colors and patterns you want to use. People tend to have a sense of urgency about decorating, and wind up making quick decisions that can be costly.

For maximum flexibility, consider keeping walls, flooring and upholstery colors neutral. This will leave you free to add colorful patterns in an affordable way, by using artwork, window treatment, pillows and area rugs.

Next, think about where you can add storage pieces, either freestanding or built-ins. Consider buying multipurpose furniture: a coffee table with drawers or shelves, upholstered cubes that open for storage, or decorative screens to hide stuff.

After deciding what can be done, pretend you are moving and start by boxing up three types of items. Don't forget to clean out closets and drawers.

Label boxes as follows: things that can be thrown out, items to keep and items to sell or give away. (Items in the last box can be stored in a basement, attic, or storage facility.)

Place boxes and furniture in the middle of the room—this also makes it easier when you start painting. Remove window dressing and roll up area rugs. Leave shades or blinds, if in good condition.

Mix, don't match. Your room doesn't have to match perfectly or have a theme. Nor do you have to go out and buy all-new things. Check out your other rooms for furnishings, photos and accessories that can be swapped.

Decorating a room doesn't have to be overwhelming. There is no reason to rush, because then it's more likely that mistakes—which could be expensive or practically permanent—will be made. Take your time. Then the result is more likely to be what you want.

Barbara Winfield is an artist and writer specializing in art and interior design. Her experience includes full-time editorial positions at several national home furnishings magazines. She is the recipient of the Dallas Market Center Editorial Award, as well as the author of two home design books, "The Complete Book of Home Details" and "Dream Log Homes and Plans." She has taught at the Fashion Institute of Technology in NYC.

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In seed time, learn

By LORI MALONE, from the archives

Summer is slowly slipping away. Fall is just around the corner. The gathering season is almost here.

I often find myself gathering things: pinecones, twigs, dropped feathers—anxious to preserve these bits of nature that will eventually be blanketed under snow.

Bringing nature home

Natural elements, when arranged in groupings and displayed in interesting vessels, inexpensively give a home warmth. A basket of pinecones, a collection of antlers or twigs are easy to assemble, while providing strong visual impact. (See sidebar for the best way to preserve these elements.)

A bouquet of found feathers arranged in a silver vase has a very sophisticated look, and is also easy to arrange. To keep feathers fixed in place, fill the bottom of the vase with kitty litter, sand, salt or rice, which make ideal filler for dried arrangements. Other ways to display natural finds include placing them under a cloche; pinecones, river stones and bird nests are very attractive when displayed in this fashion.

Drying flowers from your garden is another way to have a keepsake of these last days of summer. Hydrangeas are probably the easiest flower to dry. Simply place them in a vase with water, forget about them and in a few weeks you will have a lovely bouquet with a delicate antique hue. Grasses can also be dried this way; however, cone flowers, mums, roses or any flower with a thin stem or dense head needs to be hung upside down to dry to prevent the stem from bending. (Do not use candles around dried flower arrangements).

Your local farmers market or garden store has much to offer. Don't forget to stop by.

Swap out summer linen pillows with more textural woolen or furry ones. Display your own collection of natural finds in apothecary jars or mason jars, on cake plates, silver trays or any vessel that won't distract from their natural beauty. Manila tags found in stationery and office supply stores are inexpensive, and when affixed to lidded jars provide space for documenting your find with information about where you found it, the species (if applicable), or a lyric or poem that it inspired, adding to its interest.

Creating centerpieces

For round or square dining tables try displaying fresh fruit in a large white bowl or an assortment of gourds on a wooden tray. Pinecones and acorns placed in glass or ceramic bowls have a sculptural aesthetic. Even a bundle of twigs wrapped in twine and placed on a pedestal cake plate creates a simple, zen-like accent.

Candles always evoke warmth and festivity. Try grouping an assortment of candlesticks of varying heights on a tray, preferably the same metal tone, style or color. Don't have an assortment of candlesticks? Pillar candles of varying sizes work just as well. You may want to line the tray with river stones or dried beans to keep candles secure and absorb the wax drippings.

Odd numbers always seem to work best when arranging things in groups. Outdoor lanterns also evoke country charm when used indoors as an accent on a table or incorporated into a centerpiece grouping. Again, an odd number of varying styles and heights will create the best presentation.

For a fresh and easy flower arrangement, turn a bundt pan upside-down and fill halfway with pebbles or floral foam to anchor the stems and add water. Fill with evergreens from your garden and adorn with acorns and pinecones. If the greens are fresh and properly watered, place a large pillar candle in the center. (See sidebar for tips on how to get keep your fresh arrangements longer.)

Arrangements for oblong tables work best in two symmetrical arrangements or linear grouping. Try using 5-9 tin



Photo by Kristian Septimius Krogh

Crisp white linens and tableware offset the dark brown pinecones clustered around pillar candles. Twine tied around the place settings secures flatware and creates visual interest to the stark, yet inviting nature-themed tablescape.

cans or baby food jars placed evenly apart down the center of a long table. Be sure to remove labels and glue—soaking them in hot, soapy water should do the trick. If the glue is persistent you may want to use rubbing alcohol. Place fresh sprigs of pine, mulberry or, for a culinary twist, fresh herbs like chives or dill into the tin cans. Remember to keep them low so guests can see over them during a meal. Finish off with votive candles placed in between each vessel. You can create a table runner using brown or white craft paper to help define your linear arrangement.

For symmetrical arrangements, try using two large pumpkins or gourds, hollowed out and lined with a glass bowl or jar. Add garden-picked evergreens, grasses or leaves, tightly packed to give them a lush look. Cut the stems short enough so only the fullest part of the stems and branches cascade over the lip of the vessel. You can rubber band the stems of this arrangement if you have trouble securing them.

For a more dramatic centerpiece, place twigs or branches in two tall vases (set evenly apart) and adorn with light-weight decorations or family photos. These should be removed when the meal gets underway to avoid obstructing the flow of conversation.

For a splash of autumn, collect some brightly colored leaves and dry then in a cardboard box or traditionally, between pages in a heavy book. (See sidebar for instructions.) Scatter the leaves down the table's center to create a natural table runner.

Whatever elements you choose to employ, be sure to keep it simple. Let nature be your guide while you gather and ready your home and soul for fall and all that it encompasses.

Preserving leaves

One method for preserving leaves is to place each leaf between two sheets of wax paper with a cloth under and on top. Then, with a hot iron press down with even pressure being sure not to move the iron around. Keep in place until the wax melts. Let the leaves cool and then cut them out, leaving a small edge of wax paper to protect the seal.

Preserving pinecones

Line a standard cookie sheet with foil and bake the pinecones at 350 F. until all of the pitch is melted. Let cool and arrange.

You can coat with a sealer if you want to keep them longer than a season.

Tips for fresh flowers and greens

To keep fresh flowers longer, be sure to use a clean vase and trim away leaves that fall below the water line. Add a few drops of household bleach to keep the water bacteria-free.

Change water every few days and wash the stems. Give the stems a fresh cut before placing them back in the vase.

Tips for using herbs

To keep herbs from wilting, arrange them in water with crushed ice. These arrangements aren't intended for more than a few hours.

Tips for other natural elements

It's always a good idea to inspect your finds before bringing them into your home. Branches with insect tracks or wormholes may be best left outside. You can wash most of your finds in warm soapy water and let air dry if you plan on using them around food.

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