CHAPTER 8 - URBAN SURVIVAL SYSTEM

THE COMPLETE STEP-BY-STEP SYSTEM TO GUARANTEE YOUR SURVIVAL
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Chances are that most people will be in the city when a disaster strikes. The vast majority of our population lives and works in the city, so it only makes sense that we would be there when a crisis comes to call. Even if we ultimately decide that we need to bug out and get away from the city, we'll be forced into surviving in an urban environment for at least some of the time.

Urban survival has both advantages and disadvantages. The biggest advantage we find is that we have our home available to us. Along with our home, we have all our possessions, at least some of which can help us to survive. We are also close to many of the resources we will need to survive, assuming that others don't grab those resources first. However, the big problem with surviving in an urban environment is the people around us. We will be surrounded by people who will be competing for those same resources, some of whom won't have the scruples that you and I do.

It is said that desperate people do desperate things. As the first few days without power and water pass and people start eating up the food they have in their homes, they will begin to get desperate. It won't take more than a week for people to start looking at where they can get supplies from, either legitimately or by killing someone to take what they have. That's when things will start to get dangerous.

That's why home defense is such an important part of prepping. At some point in time, you're probably going to have to defend your home, as it will end up being attacked by those people. You might be able to put off that day by practicing good operational security and keeping your prepping a secret, but people will eventually figure out what you're doing, especially your neighbors and friends.

The "Grey Man" Theory

One of the things you'll have to do in an urban survival situation is to make yourself as invisible as possible. People notice what sticks out, so you don't want to stick out. You don't want to look like you're living better than other people are, and you don't want to look like you're eating better than other people are.

The grey man theory is about blending in. There are people all around us, each and every day, whom we don't notice. Maybe it's a beggar on the street or the janitor at the office. It could be the delivery boy or the cop on the street. These people become part of the scenery, escaping our notice.

That's what you need to do. How? By looking so boring that nobody pays attention to you. The last thing you want to do is to stand out and look like you're prepared to survive the zombie apocalypse. Don't walk around in public with camouflage on. Don't carry a tricked out AR-15 on the streets. Don't turn your pickup truck into an armored car and drive it down the street. Don't be fat and happy, when everyone else is losing weight.

Downgrade your appearance, both personally and that of your home. Some dirty or torn clothes when you go out in public and a little bit of garbage sitting around your the front of your house will go a long way towards making it look like you're suffering as much as anyone else. Cover a window or two from the outside with cardboard, as if they were broken and you didn't have the money to
repair them. These little things will make a huge difference in the impression that others have of you.

The hardest part is that you'll need to lose weight... that is, unless you are already thin. Pretty much everyone around you will be on a forced diet, so they'll be losing weight. If you are overweight and stay overweight while they are losing weight, it will be a sure sign that you have food. You can hide this a little bit by wearing clothes that are too large for you, but that trick will only work for a little while. At some point, they'll see through that ruse.

Another area of hiding your affluence is in your use of electricity. If you have solar panels and can keep your home lighted, when nobody else has electrical power, everyone will instantly know that you're better off than they are. This is easily hidden by putting up blackout curtains, covering the windows from the inside, so that the light can't escape. Be sure to check it from the outside, to make sure there isn't a crack that light is getting out through.

The same can be said for water, heat, a cooking fire and pretty much everything else we depend upon. You'll need to hide all that, even while you are using it. If you are cooking outside, do so in such a way that people aren't going to be smelling it all around the neighborhood. Make sure that the wood in your fireplace is dry, so that it doesn't produce any smoke. Don't water your flower beds and mow your lawn. All of those things would give you away.

Where to Find Water in the City

We talked earlier about ways that you can harvest water, specifically rainwater collection systems and putting in a well. But not everyone is able to do those. If you can't, you'll need to have other sources for water. That may very well end up being your biggest challenge, surviving in the city.

The first thing to do is to find all the possible water sources around your home. These include:

- Ponds and lakes
- Streams and rivers
- Canals
- Public swimming pools
- Fountains
- Water towers (there is often a test spigot at the base)
- Water treatment plants

Use maps, satellite imagery and good old shoe leather to find these water sources and make sure that you have them all plotted on a map. Most of them will probably dry out as people use them, but you will be able to harvest some water out of them before that happens. Together with what you can get from rainwater capture, it will hopefully be enough.

You'll also need some means of moving this water, without using your car. Even if you have gasoline for your car, you don't want to use it, but rather save it for an emergency. Once again, using the car will tell everyone that you are better off than they are.

One good way of moving water is in food grade five gallon buckets. You're probably going to be using those for your food storage anyway, so just make sure you have some extras. You can use a
hand truck, cart, or child’s wagon to haul the buckets, providing a way of moving it without having to carry it. Obviously, you want to be able to move as much water as possible in each trip, so that you don’t have to take as many trips.

Don’t trust the water you get from any of these sources, even if it looks to be good water. Always be sure to purify any of it that you will be drinking, using to wash food or using to wash dishes. The cost of a mistake is too high to pay.

Turning Your Home into a Homestead

No matter how much food you stockpile, you’ll eventually run out. The question is whether the problem will run out first and things will return back to normal first or your supplies will run out. Of course, we don’t have an answer to that question and won’t until the time comes. Unfortunately, if a disaster comes which takes too long to recover from, we might find out that answer a bit too late.

The way many experienced preppers are dealing with this potential problem is to turn their home into a homestead. Before you say that you can’t do that, hear me out. The idea is to produce enough food on your own property, to feed your family. There are a number of cases of people who have done that successfully, with nothing more to work with than a backyard.

Homesteading is really about becoming self-sufficient. It is the idea of being able to take care of yourself and not have to depend upon society to take care of you. Isn’t that what prepping is all about? So, in reality, homesteading is just taking prepping to its logical conclusion.

Now, you may not be comfortable with the idea of growing your own food and you may not know how; that’s okay, I didn’t know how either. I’ve had to learn and to tell the truth, I’m still learning. But I figure that if I can learn, you can too.

Don’t wait until a crisis strikes to try turning your home into a homestead. I started working on my vegetable garden two years ago, and about all I’ve got to show for it is a good collection of herbs that I’ve grown and dried. Hopefully we’ll get something more out of it this year. It takes time to get a good garden growing, just like it takes time to get chickens to lay eggs. Start early, so that you can be ready by the time a disaster hits.

Gardening

The first thing you should try and do for homesteading is growing a vegetable garden. While I’m not into the idea of being a vegetarian, more of our daily calories come from plants than do so from animals. Starting with a vegetable garden will also help you with having food to give to your chickens, as they will eat anything. You can give them the scraps from your garden, and they’ll covert them to eggs for you.

There are many ways to go about setting up a garden, but about the best is to use raised beds. There are several advantages to raised beds, such as being able to create a good potting soil, keep your garden separate from your lawn, plant with higher density, giving you greater yields and having the garden raised up where it is easier to work on.
If you can, I would also recommend putting underground irrigation into your garden, in the form of soaker hoses. They will allow you to irrigate your garden with the least amount of water, reducing waste through evaporation. They also make it so that you can set up watering on an automatic timer, eliminating one of the biggest hassles of gardening, that of watering. With your watering on an automatic timer, you never have to worry about forgetting to water.

If you live in the northern part of the country, where you have a longer winter and a shorter growing season, you might want to consider putting in a greenhouse for your garden. A greenhouse can be built fairly easily out of PVC pipe and clear plastic sheeting (drop cloth). This will allow you to extend the growing season, as the greenhouse acts like a passive solar home, absorbing heat to keep your plants from freezing. You can find countless designs for simple do-it-yourselfer greenhouses online and adapt them to your needs.

The most important part of any garden is the soil. If you have good soil you'll have a good harvest. But most backyards don't have good soil in them for gardening. Hence the need for the raised beds. There are a number of recipes you can find online for making your own potting soil, but I like this simple recipe:

- 1/3 compost
- 1/3 topsoil or peat moss
- 1/3 vermiculite or sand

If you don't already have a compost heap, check with your city. Many cities have composting facilities, where they compost people's tree branches, leaves and grass clippings. Use that for a start and then start your own compost heap for the next season.

When selecting what you are going to plant in your garden, be sure to check on the plants growing zone. The USDA has developed this system to identify the temperature zones across the country. As different plants grow better in different temperatures, checking the zone for the plants you are planning on planting in your garden helps you to determine what will grow well in your area.
It helps to plant your seeds in starter plugs in trays, especially if you have a short growing season. That way, you can make sure that they germinate before planting them into your garden beds. This helps eliminate wasted space, as well as wasted seeds. You only need to plant one or two seeds in each plug to ensure that you get enough that germinate. That’s much more efficient than scattering the seeds on the ground and then pulling up the extras after they germinate.

Once the plants have sprouted and are two to three inches tall, the entire plug they are planted in can be moved and planted into your raised beds. When you move the sprouts from the growing trays to the garden beds, check the proper spacing for that type of plant, as shown on the seed packet. Since you are working with raised beds, you don’t need to worry about having walkways in the garden, you have them between the beds. So, you can plant the seedlings as close together as the seed packet indicates, both in rows and columns. That eliminates a lot of wasted space.

An excellent way to improve the yield of your garden is to add mycorrhizal fungi to the soil. This naturally occurring fungi forms a symbiotic relationship with the plants, attaching itself to the roots. In doing so, it brings water and nutrients from the soil directly to the roots of the plants.

You will also need to fertilize a couple of times per year. There are a number of ways of going about this, but a good pattern is to top your garden beds with compost at the end of the year, after harvesting. Then, add fertilizer at planting time and then once again in the middle of the growing season. While commercial fertilizers are available, you can make your own from fish. This is actually one of the best fertilizers there is, even if it does stink.

To make fish fertilizer, save all the scraps from any fish you eat, including the parts you don’t cook. If you catch fish, save the guts when you clean them. Put them all in a container in the freezer, adding to them as you can. About a month before you need to need to use the fertilizer, it’s time to start making it. Thaw the frozen fish and cut it up into small pieces, the smaller the better. In fact, running
them through the blender is actually a good idea. Then, put it in a clear container with water and about a half cup of sugar. You'll need a ratio of about three parts of water to one part of fish. Set it in the sun and let it decompose. In about a month, it will be ready for use.

There are many other things you can use for fertilizers, some of which you are throwing away now. Coffee grounds, grass clippings, leaves and vegetable scraps can all be turned into compost. Urine can even be used as a fertilizer, but it needs to be mixed at a ratio of about 1:10 with water, so that the acid in the urine doesn't damage the plants.

If you used heirloom seeds, like I recommended in the chapter on what else you should stockpile, your produce will ripen in a staggered schedule. That will allow you to harvest it slowly, using some and canning the excess. You can also use it to barter with others for things that you don't have.

At the end of the season, be sure to remove all the plants that have finished producing food for you and put them in your compost pile for next year. If you are using mycorrhizal fungi in your garden, you do not want to turn the garden, as that will kill the fungi. Rather, allow the plant roots that remain to break down by natural means and top your garden beds with a fresh layer of compost. Then, let the worms and bugs work on it, getting it ready for spring planting.

**Raising Chickens**

For many new homesteaders, raising chickens is the next step after growing a vegetable garden. Chickens are very fast easy to grow, resilient to sickness, will eat literally anything (including leftover chicken) and an excellent source of protein. Other than seafood, chickens are probably the number one source of animal protein worldwide.

The first thing you need to do is decide if you are growing chickens for eggs or for cooking. Some breeds of chickens will lay more eggs and some will provide better meat. If you want both, then you need to count on having two separate chicken coops that are in separate enclosures, so that they can’t get to each other. Mature chickens will peck chicks to death. So if you have some layers and are trying to raise a batch of chicks to be fryers (meat chickens) the layers will most likely kill the chicks.

Chickens need a home, which is called the coop. There are countless designs for chicken coops online, many with free plans offered. The main thing the coop does is provide the chickens with a safe place to sleep and to lay their eggs. So, the coop needs to have some nesting boxes in it for laying eggs in, as well as some horizontally mounted poles for the chickens to roost on at night. It’s also a good idea to have a lockable door, so that raccoons and other predators don't get at your chickens.

Keep in mind that raccoons can open many types of simple latches. So make sure that the latch on the door is something that they can't get open or you'll have raccoons raiding the henhouse. A simple slide bolt isn't enough, you need something more complicated.

Some coop designs have a penned in area for the chickens, while others put their coop in a pen. Either works fine. Chickens need an area to walk around in, so that they get exercise. The only thing you have to realize is that nothing will grow in that area, as the chickens will eat it to the ground.
You can allow your chickens loose in your backyard and they will stay there if they understand it as being their home. However, they will eat everything they can. So in one way or another, either by penning in the chickens or by fencing in the garden, you've got to keep them away from your vegetable garden or you won't have one. Allowing your chickens the chance to free range occasionally is a great way to keep the bug population down in your backyard, as they will eat the bugs, which are a great source of protein for them.

About the only thing you have to provide the chickens with is food and water. However, you have to be smarter than the chickens. Chickens are stupid enough that they will poop in their own food and water. This can cause sickness, so you need to have feeders and waterers that allow them access to the food and water, without getting in or on them to mess up their food supplies.

Layers will start to produce eggs at about six months of age and will continue laying eggs for as long as ten years. One good way of getting layers is to buy them from an egg farm that is getting rid of them. They replace the chickens after two years, as their production drops off somewhat. Even then, they'll give you eggs three days out of four.

Fryers can be butchered as young as six weeks of age. Keeping them longer will allow some varieties to continue growing, but not all will add much weight after six weeks. You'll need to experiment a bit with the breed of chickens you are raising, to find the ideal butchering age. Many people do that in mass, which is easier than having to butcher them individually when you are ready to eat one. Of course, in a survival situation, you would only butcher them as you were ready to cook them.

**Raising Fish**

Another good option for raising protein is to raise fish. Fish can be raised in just about anything that will hold water. You can create an actual fish pond in your backyard, use a fish tank, use a plastic barrel or use one of the larger plastic chemical containers that are available for purchase. All the fish need is water, food and air.

One of the easiest breeds of fish to grow is tilapia. These popular fish can handle a wide range of temperatures, require little attention, grow fine in crowded conditions and will even help keep their tank or pond clean, as they will eat any algae that forms.

The two biggest concerns with growing fish is keeping the water clean and adding oxygen to it. As you know, fish extract oxygen from the water through their gills. Since they are extracting it, you have to keep adding it to the water, so that there is plenty of oxygen for them. There are several ways of doing this, such as using a bubbler, having a fountain in their pond or putting in a waterfall. Whatever system you use, you want to make sure that you have enough power to keep it going, even if the grid goes down.

The fish waste will eventually poison the water for the fish, if it is not eliminated. There are a couple of ways to do this. First of all, it's a good idea to have a couple of bottom feeders, like catfish, to clean the bottom of the tank or pond. In addition, you'll need to have some sort of filtering system. Most people combine their filtering system with their aerating system, so that they only need one pump. You can buy a variety of filtering system, rather inexpensively. Just make sure it is built to handle the volume of water you have in your tank.
Fish will die if put in tap water, as it has chlorine. However, if you put the water in the tank and allow it to sit for 24 hours, the chlorine will evaporate out. It will then be safe to add the fish to the tank. If you have a rainwater collection system, you can put the water from it directly into your fish pond.

Your fish will need to be fed as well. The easiest way to do that is to buy commercial feed. Of course, you’ll need to stockpile that as well, so that you have enough to keep your fish going. You can also raise mosquito larva, which the fish will eat. They are extremely easy to raise, as mosquitoes will lay eggs in almost any open water. The eggs will cluster together, allowing the larva to grow. Simply scoop them out of their growing tank and put them in the fish tank before they finish growing.

A good population of tilapia will be self-regenerating, keeping your in fish for years to come, just as long as you don't eat them all. Simply harvest the most mature fish, leaving the others to grow and reproduce.

Some people attach their fish tank to their garden in a process known as aquaponics. This is a combination of hydroponics (growing plants in water) and aquaculture (growing creatures in water). The basic idea is that bacteria convert the fish waste into nutrients for the plants. As the water from the fish tank is pumped through the hydroponics tank, the plants draw off those nutrients, filtering the water for the fish.

A well-balanced aquaponics system works extremely well. But the key is balancing the system. You have to have the right ratio of fish to plants and maintain that ratio as both grow. That’s a constant juggling act on a small system. It’s actually much easier to balance a large aquaponics system than it is to balance a small one.