

**Workshop Title: Living Off the Land: Producing All the Food We Consume**

**Speakers & their title(s): Robin and Rebecca LeBlanc**

**Executive Summary:**

Robin and Rebecca LeBlanc met in Moncton and later moved to Bathurst, where they have been homesteading since now joined with their 3 children. They offer insight of their experiences living off the land including the making of their cob oven, maintaining the green house and poultry, and mushroom logs. The LeBlanc's strive to balance both their careers as teachers and musicians, and as a result prefer to do large batches of their preserves and dairy in order to have quick access to their bounty year long. Every July they leave their homestead in the hands of a neighbor and are full time musicians for the month.

**Detailed Notes:**

Prior to moving to Bathurst, Robin and Rebecca had established an orchard of 30-40 fruit trees. They like to rely on exchanging and bartering with friends and neighbors for items their homestead does not provide. Heads of garlic are the only goods they sell from the homestead, everything else is kept for the family. In the past they have grown their own grains, including rye which was recommended as an easy grain. Eventually they purchased a thresher though found grains were too much of a time commitment and found a local grower in PEI.

*Slide show*

- When looking at properties in Bathurst they searched for a location that was in close proximity to work allowing them to commute by bike and only needing one vehicle for the family.
- Good soil and a house equipped with a working woodstove were top priorities for them as well when considering real estate.
- A well kept location also ensured they could concentrate their time gardening opposed to other high maintenance properties.
- Their new house included a barn, established garden and orchard and existing chicken coop.
- It was recommended to start setting aside funds for future down payments to avoid an access of debt early on.
- L'Art de Vivre au Temps Jadis (Back to Basics) was recommended as a great homesteading resource.
- Pictures of the property were shared including images of their attic where they dry garlic and onions, and their basement where homemade cheese is aged.
- They were featured in Rural Roots in 2000, have visited schools informing the student of their lifestyle and are filming with CBC/Radio-Canada.
- Pantry inventory lists were shared of preserves, jams (including techniques such as drying your apples and making apple jam later on in the year), ferments,

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dried & cured produce, and their freezer stock including a fresh juices that they prefer to freeze over canning to retain flavor.

- They have a dedicated fridge space just for storing milk prior to making a wide variety of cheeses.
- A journal Robin had started several years back while with Katimavik was passed around. It documented his notes on vegetables broken down alphabetically.
- Ground cherry season can easily be prolonged with row covers in the evening.
- A PITEBA oil press is used for making their oils such as camelina. For sunflower seeds the whole seed is ground and then submerged it in water. The seeds fall to the bottom where the hulls float for easy removal.

Q: Inquired about the accessibility, quality and source of the water.

A: They have 2 wells, one 250 ft well located by the house and the other by the barn. There is a drip irrigation system in their green house, and the water for their livestock strictly comes from rain barrels sourced from the barn and chicken coop roofs. They prefer to use food grade, black plastic for storing water, to prevent algae build up. Plans to change barrels again in 2 year's time.

*Ducks and chickens*

They have raised ducks in the past and will be again in the near future. Foie gras was done by hand. Their poultry free range in the summer and have access to the greenhouse in the fall and winter in order to eat what is left of summer's crop and offer protection for the weather.

After raising different chicken breeds they strictly maintain Chanteclers now, which are a great cold hardy breed. It was mentioned the combs and warts of other breeds such as Rhode Island Reds are prone to freezing, which is not an issue with Chanteclers. Chanteclers are also great foragers which helps cut down on supplementing with feed. They utilize their excrement for fertilizer. Oyster shells are used for calcium supplementation and are incorporated into their feed which is hand mixed. Their hand mixed feed includes Holis oats, sourced from Jean Guys of Grand Digue. One chicken was allowed to go broody this year and their flock of 5 increased by 8. There is timed light to that goes off at 9pm in the evening during the darker months.

Q: How big is your green house?

A: The green house is 20' x 20', made with trees sourced from their land for the base. Exhaust and plastic pipes were used for the remaining frame and structure.

They recently invested in a tractor for tilling and removed anything permanent around the green house in order to clear the snow around it during the winter for easy access.

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Q: How early do you start seeding in the green house?

A: Once the snow is established, mid-late winter. Plants such as shallots and spinach are first to be sowed. Plastic bucket cloches and cold frames made from wood and old windows are used for additional protection from the cold and hungry chickens.

The same plastic buckets, sourced from grocery stores, are handy for many uses around the farm including for when they are slaughtering livestock.

*Mushroom logs*

- Logs with staggered, drilled holes 4" apart are easily inoculated with a prepared spore plugs. Hardwood is preferred but you are able to use soft wood.
- Recommends shiitake and chanterelles mushrooms.
- Slow Food Cocagne Acadie and Bay of Fungi are two local contacts for spores.
- Suggests adding water to the pan when frying mushrooms to extract their water, they are then seasoned and frozen in ice cube trays.

The summer months do not allow much time for prepping and preserving their food, but they utilize the winter months for further preserving.

*Cob oven*

- They used reclaimed wood for the base with metal rods to secure the structure, that also act as a place to rest the oven top.
- Winter storage of the oven was recommended to preserve its longevity.
- Their vehicle was used to transport the rocks from the garden, that were used to fill the wooden frame.
- Be sure to use a fine sand and clay to prevent air bubbles and cracks.
- The clay was placed on a tarp the night prior and was mixed by foot the following day.
- The build started at 7:30am and with the help of 12 people the oven was completed by noon.
- The opening needs to be 2/3 the height of the dome, so the fire rolls oppose to burning straight up.
- The suggest leaving the coals in for baking pizzas, but for breads and biscuits remove them so that the smoky flavor is not overpowering.

Q: Inquired about their community in Bathurst and how they found the transition when moving there.

A: They have a great, supportive community. Since they have children and are both teachers they easily meet new people.

Q: You both work all year round, but still have time to run your homestead?

A: Yes the balance their careers and homestead, but did take 6 months off one year.