

LIVING OFF WHAT'S CLOSE BY

Canning a crucial part of family's routine



ALEXANDRA KOCIK | THE DAILY WORLD

Lisa Barton places a Mason jar full of cooked tomatoes into the boiling pressure cooker. This hot bath will seal the lid to keep the food from spoiling until the family uses it.

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The Daily World

Turning off Highway 12 and driving 40 minutes north of Montesano leads to an area still stuck in a time where what's put on the dinner table was raised or grown right outside the front door. There are no big box stores, cows are the only ones to look up at passing cars and the homes aren't cookie-cutter dwellings down a long, paved street.

A narrow dirt road leads down to Elk Valley Farm, a place Lisa Barton, her husband, Sean, daughter Aly and many animals call home. A large barn sits in the center of it all, often filled with the sounds of ducks, turkeys and chickens scurrying around in the hay along with tame rabbits during the day.

Pastures, cages and kennels fan out from the barn. A long trailer home serves as a temporary place until a house is built. Across from the temporary home is a long building for food storage and eventually a larger area for canning.

Until a propane stove is installed in the more spacious work room, Lisa uses the small kitchen in the trailer she currently calls home.

Lisa says she's looking forward to this addition because much of the family's food comes from the farm or just around the corner and they can, smoke and freeze meat, veggies and fruit to keep throughout the coming year.

STEP ONE: Boil and blanch the tomatoes to peel off skins

On a sunny Friday morning, it's all about tomatoes.

They will be used for spaghetti, soup or other recipes calling for crushed tomatoes. Earlier that week, Lisa called her "vegetable guy," a local farmer, named Nicholas Pouch, who lives just down the road. Pouch grows organic veggies the Bartons don't. Lisa says only potatoes and carrots have had a successful run in her garden.

This is the first time she has canned tomatoes and glances at notes she made in a large notebook after flipping past veterinary instructions for her injured dog, a polar-bear-like Great Pyrenees named Titus, and other recipes.

"I make lists for everything, it keeps me on track," she said.

The first step is to peel off the tomato skin.

The skins are taken out to the four large pigs. They don't often get fruit and veggie skins, as Lisa likes to keep them on her canned projects. Today, she decided to can half the tomatoes with the skin on, to check out which tastes best.

Canning has not always been a part of Lisa's schedule. It wasn't until her father-in-law, who often buys the family needed equipment for the holidays, brought a pressure cooker into her life that Lisa began learning.

Her first canning experience was with pears two years ago. The peeling took most of the time, which made her vow to keep the nutrient-rich skins on for future projects.

STEP TWO: Cook down tomatoes

Lisa enlists the help of her daughter Aly to mash and stir the tomatoes. The 10-year-old groans a bit at the prospect of stirring, but



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Aly Barton stirs and cooks down the tomatoes after her mother, Lisa, peels and cores them.



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The first set of canned tomatoes sits out to cool. Lisa Barton will then label and store them in the family's cold room.

begins to enjoy herself as she finds the right rhythm.

Barton said she has dreamed of owning a place like this since she was a little girl.

"I always wanted a farm, mostly for all the animals," she said. "It came to be because as an adult I wanted to know where my food came from and this is the best way to do it."

A large part of this is rais-

ing animals. The feeding, care and protection from wild predators, especially coyotes, takes up much of the family's time.

From spring into early fall, the Bartons are preparing for the colder seasons. For Lisa, this includes ensuring perishables stay fresh in the cool room set aside in the storage shed.

The ability to store so much is one big reason the



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Lisa Barton washes Roma tomatoes she purchased that morning from Nicholas Pouch's organic farm just down the road from her home.

Bartons ended up in Matlock. In 2009, the family was looking for a place similar to the piece of land Lisa's mother owns just a few miles away.

Lisa's family moved to Elma in 1990, when she was just 10. She grew up in the area, meeting her husband when she was 15 on a school field trip to a fish hatchery. They were later married in that very spot.

Lisa said she couldn't think of another place she'd rather live with her family. "I always said this is the

kind of place where I want to raise my daughter, I always knew that," she said. "It's just the perfect mix of community and the rural atmosphere. It's so much safer than in the bigger towns. I'd be surprised if no one stopped to see who's in my driveway. We all check up on each other and watch each other's backs."

She relays countless stories of neighbors stepping up to help others.

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