

Homestead Zones

When you begin to layout your homestead zones, keep your energy requirements in mind. Energy (both physical and non-physical, such as electricity) will be required at every homestead. The idea is to be as efficient with your precious resources as possible. Concentrate your energy “hogs” in as small an area as possible and as you go further from your energy hub, try to make these areas less dependent on your resources. Remember, your physical energy is rather constrained. We only have so many hours in a day and we are all limited by our “humanness”. We need time to rest, time to eat, time to enjoy our loved ones, and time to reflect. We are not robots running 24/7.

The same consideration should be made for non-physical energy (typically electricity), as well. While power might be available 24/7, it has a cost. If you are on-grid there is a monthly bill. If you are off-grid there is time and money involved in setting up and maintaining your off-grid system. Quite frankly, no energy is free, so manage it wisely.

Planning is key to having an effective homestead. Think of your homestead zones like a bullseye with the most intense energy needs centralized in the smallest space with gradually less intense zones circling outside the central area. Also, keep in mind areas that might be on your “wish list”. Will you be putting in an orchard in 5 years? Do you want to add sheep or goats someday? Think about where these activities will be placed. This is especially important and much easier if you are starting with a blank canvas of perfectly level fertile land.

However, for many, infrastructure will already be in place when you acquire a homestead. This makes your job challenging as you may need to retrofit buildings or reroute paths. Maybe you need to add fencing or new animal shelters? Maybe terrain is an issue? Maybe the “ideal” location for your kitchen garden is nothing but a rock pit? Do you want to invest time and resources into removing rocks and adding top soil or move the garden slightly further out to an area that would be worthy of vegetative growth? Remember that every additional step you must take daily is compounded by months, years, and decades. You don’t want to have to walk a half mile to pick fresh herbs to add to your dinner.

The following chart is meant to help in your journey and get you thinking about how you will layout your homestead. Maybe you don’t yet own a homestead but want to in the near future? That’s fine, too. By planning, you will be one step ahead when you go to purchase your homestead.

ZONE	ENERGY LEVEL	EXAMPLES
1	INTENSE	HOUSEHOLD ACTIVITIES (FOOD PREP & PRESERVATION, PERSONAL HYGIENE, FAMILY & PET CARE). ACTIVITIES REQUIRE HIGHEST PERSONAL ENERGY AND CAN INCLUDE OTHER ENERGY REQUIREMENTS SUCH AS HEAT, WATER, OR ELECTRIC.
2	VERY HIGH	ACTIVITIES CLOSEST TO THE HOME SUCH AS HERB GARDEN, FIREWOOD CURRENTLY BEING USED, TOOL SHED, COLD FRAMES, HOT BEDS, POTTING SHED, SOLAR SYSTEM/ALTERNATIVE ENERGY SYSTEM, ETC.
3	HIGH	DAILY OR MULTIPLE DAILY ACTIVITIES SUCH AS KITCHEN GARDEN, BERRY PATCHES, GRAPE VINES, WORK SHOP, SMALL ANIMAL HOUSES (RABBITS, SMALL GOATS, SMALL POULTRY FLOCKS)
4	MODERATE	DAILY TO WEEKLY ACTIVITIES OR LARGER LAND REQUIREMENT ACTIVITIES SUCH AS LARGE ANIMALS (CATTLE, HOGS, LARGER FLOCKS OR HERDS OF ANIMALS), GRAIN GROWING, COMMERCIAL OR FIELD CROPS, ORCHARDS, STORAGE BARN, WINDMILLS, FIREWOOD PROCESSING AREA, ETC.
5	LOW	WOODLAND, AREAS LEFT FOR WILDLIFE, BUFFER ZONES, CHALLENGING TOPOGRAPHY AREAS, LARGE WATERWAYS, WETLANDS, ETC.

Here's a great point about homesteading. Everyone that wants to homestead CAN homestead. It can be as big or small as you can manage, and you tailor your homestead to YOU! Don't like animals? Then, don't plan to have animals. Maybe you have a green thumb and can trade what you grow for eggs or meat. Don't like to split wood, but love to heat with wood? You probably have a different talent that you can trade for cords of split firewood. Maybe you are a great carpenter or seamstress and can trade your skills for what you don't like or cannot do for yourself.

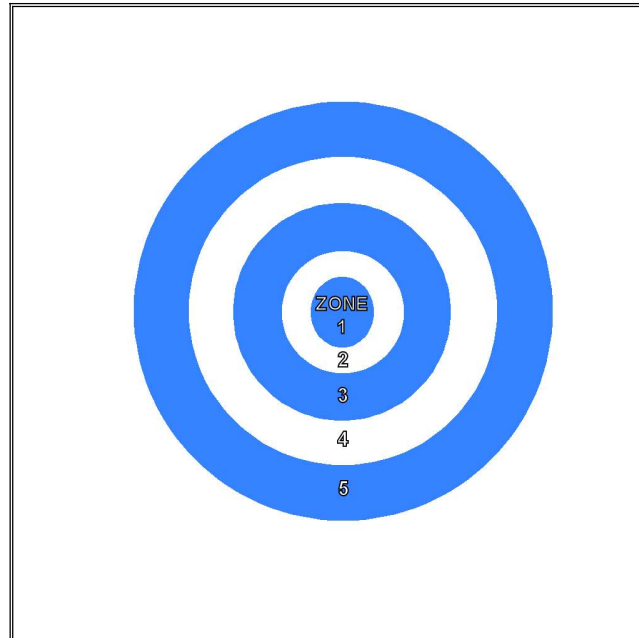
Here's another great point. Homesteaders, while very self sufficient will never be 100% self sufficient. We all need community. Having and knowing reliable people in your local community is also key to homesteading. So, if you lack in one area, find someone that you can trade your talents and skills for their goods and services. This might also eliminate some of the zones for you.

Here's some questions and a form to help you make a plan whether you already have a homestead, are buying a homestead, or are planning a homestead in the future.

Ask yourself these questions to help layout your zones:

1. What are my main activity centers (or desired activity centers) and how would I rate each activity on energy needs? Don't forget to add your future plans as well! Use the following chart to list your activities and perceived energy requirements.

2. Using the above information, layout a plan of how you can feasibly centralize your intense activities with concentric areas to accommodate the other activities outward from your centralized hub. Zone 1 is your most intense energy activities with zone 5 being your least. The following diagram is the ideal. However, the reality is this nearly never is the case. Everyone will have challenges and it varies based on your location, topography, infrastructure, accessibility, soil types, etc.



For reference, here's our layout that we based on an aerial map overlay. It doesn't even come close to a bullseye pattern. This will typically be the norm for most people so don't worry if your homestead doesn't look picture perfect.



Here's a quick tip. If you want an easy way to get an aerial, try looking up your property on Google maps. Print out your aerial and get some tracing paper to layout your spaces.

For those that don't yet have land, keep your list handy for when you go to make your purchase and remember what you want to do with the land you will buy. You may also be in a stage of life where all you have are Zone 1 and 2 activities. Perfect! This is your starting point. Figure out ways to make your zones efficient and effective. This will be helpful when you grow bigger.

One last point. None of this happens overnight and all of it is subject to change. It's a journey. Be in it for the marathon and not the sprint. Take time to learn your skills at your pace. More failures occur when foundations are not in place, so don't be discouraged that it's all "too much".

Personally, I can now do many tasks practically in my sleep. But, this just didn't happen overnight. This is a lifetime of experience and repetition, experimentation, problem solving, and seasons. Failures occurred throughout the way. Lessons were learned. You get kicked down once in a while. You also get to be rewarded with many successes. If you don't fail once in a while you're not doing anything. It's inevitable. And, I'm still learning. I will always be learning which means I will have to accept failures and be rewarded with successes in my future. Just don't be discouraged. I try to think of every set back as education. Education costs something (whether time, money, or other losses). Give yourself a break and every time something is a set back just keep saying "I'm getting smarter!".

Good luck "zoning" out. And....Make it a great day! - Bren