

Great Depression Tips to Learn Before The Collapse

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GREAT DEPRESSION

**TIPS TO LEARN
BEFORE THE COLLAPSE**

 **COLLAPSE SURVIVAL SITE**

The Great Depression was a global, economic collapse that occurred across the 1930's and affected societies in every nation. The United States was no exception and the unemployment ranged from a low of 3 million people unemployed in 1929 to a high of 12 and a half million people out of work in the U.S. in 1932. More than one-fourth of families in the U.S. did not have a single wage earner.

The result was catastrophic poverty leading to homelessness, starvation and failing health. Few people had insurance, there was no such thing as affordable insurance or Medicare, and people often neglected seeing doctors or dentists because their financial priority was food, clothing and shelter.

By 1933 the average family income had decreased from a high of \$2,300 in 1929 to \$1,500 just 4 years later. And that was for those lucky enough to still have jobs. But even the employed faced hardships as most workers faced steep pay cuts and a reduction of the average work week to 60% of what it had averaged before the Depression.

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How People Survived

One of the observations that came out of the 1930's is that the first survival decision that many people made was to simply accept that they were now poor. It solved nothing but allowed people to at least accept the worst especially when so many around them shared the same fate.

The result was a forced frugality that made even the most basic things in life precious and worth keeping, fixing, repurposing or otherwise made useful.

Today we used words like "reduce, reuse, recycle, and upcycle," but in the 30's it was as basic as "waste not want

not.”

- [13 Forgotten Lessons from The Great Depression](#)

The Basic Survival Tactics

Some of the adjustments and adaptations people made involved growing their own gardens, a renewed interest in canning and preserving food, avoiding food waste at all costs, and regular repairs made to clothing and shoes. Most people still did their best to maintain a presentable appearance, and food was a daily point of conversation as every meal became a new challenge.

Housing was another challenge and many families moved in together in an effort to share the cost of rents or mortgages, and to at least keep family members without income sheltered and safe.

In spite of shared living arrangements, many people lived in improvised shacks across shanty towns typically referred to as “Hoovervilles,” or at worst lived in abandoned buildings, even caves and as always –tents.

Heat and electricity was always a challenge and scrap wood was a valuable commodity in cities especially in winter. The result was people would burn anything that burns from old furniture to improvised logs made from newspapers or other flammable materials.

The Specific Survival Tactics

It comes as a surprise to many, but many of the things we do today first emerged during the Great Depression. Our grandparents and great-grandparents can attest to that, but the next time you have a peanut butter and jelly sandwich –you can thank the Great Depression for its popularity.

Here are many of the other tactics and ideas that got people through a time of devastating economic collapse.

Survival Shelter

Before anyone could think about eating or drinking they needed to think about a place to live, sleep and basically find shelter from the weather. We already mentioned shared living arrangements but evictions were all too common and people often had to imitate the behavior of others to find some form of shelter short-term and eventually longer-term.

Improvised tents

The best tent is a manufactured tent and Wall tents were a luxury. Most people improvised tents from tarps, canvas and any other large swatches of fabric they could salvage. Tents were easily portable and as long as the weather was above freezing a tent provided at least some level of privacy and shelter.

Scrap Shacks

Any pieces of scrap wood, particularly in sheets were often assembled to create crude walls and roofs. Hardware was salvaged as much as possible and Hoovervilles were largely populated by long rows of shacks next to tents.

Abandoned buildings

Many businesses and other ventures simply went out of business and their locations rapidly emerged as the new apartments as families found corners, rooms and spaces to at least get out of the wind and rain and feel the small security of a "place." As families congregated meals were sometimes shared and prepared together.

Shared Living

Families often lived together in the same house crossing generations from kids and grandkids to aunts, uncles and cousins. If someone in the family still had a home or homestead, other family members were often invited in as foreclosures and evictions continued to grow.

- [8 Places To Seek Shelter When The SHTF](#)
- [3 Easy Survival Shelters Even Beginner's Can Make](#)
- [8 Easy Tarp Shelters for Survival](#)
- [Civil War Preparedness – Part 2: Finding Shelter](#)

Survival Foods

Across the Great Depression two food staples were always in short supply: meat and milk. Then again, just about everything was either too expensive or simply unavailable to many people. The result was a new way of looking at food from eating meat portions never considered before like pig's feet and beef shanks, to seeing leftovers as the primary ingredients for the next meal.

Here are many of the foods and recipes that emerged during the Great Depression that are still a part of our diets to this day.

- [Top 10 Great Depression Recipes](#)
- [How People Got The Most Out Of Their Food During The Great Depression](#)
- [12 Things to Stockpile Before the Next Great Depression](#)

Soups and Stews

- **Potato Soup** was a regular part of many meals. In fact,

there were many occasions when potato soup was the only part of the meal. Not surprisingly, it had its roots with Irish immigrants and was essentially boiled and mashed potatoes in water seasoned with salt and pepper to a smooth consistency.

- [Hoover Stew](#) was another product of the Depression named after Herbert Hoover. It consisted of small pasta shapes, canned tomatoes and corn with beans and sliced hot dogs. Hot dogs were the most affordable meat products and their popularity soared during the Great Depression. Seasonings included salt, pepper, and Italian herbs and garlic if it was available.
- **Bean Soup** was very popular and for many people was their only source of protein. Any and all beans were tossed into salted water or a broth made from vegetables or meat bones. The beans could be dried, canned or fresh from the backyard garden. If any leftover meat bones were in the pot, the family had the benefit of a bone broth that also helped a lot of people survive the worst.
- **Rag Soup** was dominated by leafy greens like spinach, dandelions and any other edible greens that could be grown or foraged. The look of the wilted leaves in the soup created the impression of floating green rags leading to the name. Salt was the primary seasoning.
- [Egg Drop Soup](#) had its traditions in Asian cooking and the availability of eggs made this another way to add some protein to a meal when there was no meat in the house.

Casseroles

- [Casseroles](#) were a regular part of many meals. The fundamental recipe concept of a casserole allowed for the addition of just about anything edible including leftovers. Cheese or eggs (if they were available) were

often added as a binder to hold the casserole together. As a last resort, corn starch could be added to thicken the casserole and act as a binder.

Related: [How to Make Hamburger Casserole \(Depression-Era Recipe\)](#)

Depression Breads

- **Flour** was available and a variety of bread recipes accompanied almost every meal. Yeast was sometimes available but industrious cooks knew how to capture and grow wild yeast. The ability to sustain and maintain a sourdough starter made sourdough bread a very popular option. Flatbreads also accompanied many meals and were also a part of many immigrant traditions from pita bread to Na'an and tortillas.
- [Depression Bread](#) was the most basic bread recipe made from flour, yeast, salt and water. The dough was kneaded and allowed to rise and then baked at 350 degrees for about 35 minutes.
- **Biscuits** were another popular bread option mostly because they were easy to make and didn't require the elusive yeast. They found their way into every meal. Biscuits and gravy were very popular and were another breakfast favorite.

Related: [6 Flatbread Recipes From Around The World](#)

Sandwiches

Sandwiches emerged as another option at most every meal. They always started with a couple of slices of bread but what made the sandwich varied widely. One thing usually missing was meat but many substitutes found their way between the slices including:

- **Relish sandwiches** which featured nothing more than a relish of chopped pickles.
- **Butter and sugar sandwiches** were another improvised meal and was often the only thing for breakfast.
- **Tomato and onion sandwiches** were another popular favorite especially when the backyard garden was ready to harvest. Salt was the only garnish.
- **Peanut butter sandwiches** exploded in popularity as another way to put some protein back on the plate, and then someone had the crazy idea to top the peanut butter with jelly. We've never looked back since.
- **Ketchup sandwiches** were a regular part of many meals. Ketchup was an obscure product usually thought of as a weak tomato sauce but it emerged as a popular condiment for sandwiches during the Great Depression. The only difference then is that it was both the condiment and the only ingredient on the sandwich.
- **Leftover sandwiches** were an everyday occurrence as any leftovers found their way onto sliced bread. Even nuts like walnuts and chestnuts found their way into the mix to once again add a protein component. In a surprising and new combination, mustard joined ketchup as another condiment. Who'd a thunk it and is there such a thing as a hamburger or hot dog today without that combination?
- **One-Eyed Sam** was a piece of bread with a hole in the middle filled with an egg. The bread and egg were fried in a pan and the result was a one-eyed Sam.

When Milk was in the House

Milk was a luxury for many and when milk finally made it into the ice box it wasn't for drinking. Milk was a foundation for many meals across the day. Here are few of the favorites that filled Depression tables.

- **Cornbread in milk** was one of the most popular recipes.

- **Popcorn in milk with sugar** was the closest many families came to having cereal.
- **Noodles in hot milk** was another favorite at lunch and dinner.
- **Rice in milk** was another regular dish eaten at all times of day.

Here are some more ideas: [25 Weird Foods People Ate During The Great Depression](#)

Survival Clothing

It's not uncommon for some people today to simply discard a piece of clothing when it has a small rip, stain or even loses a button. That mindset was unheard of during the Great Depression. Clothes were meticulously maintained, re-sewn, even patched together or torn apart for the fabric and sewn back together to make something new.

And it went beyond clothes to shoes and boots as soles were repaired with rubber tires, cardboard or even stuffed with cotton to provide padding or insulation.

Knitting found a revitalized interest and quilting moved beyond the domain of Grandmas to everyone as any scrap of fabric became a source for a new patchwork quilt. Here are some of the specific things people did when new clothes were out of the question.

- **Sewing** became a new skill that most everyone mastered as daily clothes maintenance became as common as washing and drying. Buttons jars were on every kitchen counter and were always salvaged from any discarded clothing. But even then, the old clothing was cut into strips and patches to repair clothing or for a future quilt.
- **Knitting** emerged as another skill mastered by many as basics like socks, hats, blankets and sweaters were

patiently knitted by everyone on the family. Yarn was a valuable commodity and many people made their own yarn or salvaged fabrics and threaded to spin the scraps into new balls of yarn.

- **Layers of clothing** was the new fashion statement not only to increase insulation but it made any travel or relocation somewhat easier. Why carry it when you can wear it?
- **Laundry was often done by hand** and clotheslines defined the fields, streets and alleys of everywhere and anywhere.

Survival Heating and Cooling

It didn't matter where you lived, in winter the only solution to the cold was heat. Coal was often a primary heating fuel but you had to buy coal and buying anything was always a problem for many.

The result was that people would start to look at anything that burned in a whole new way. Wood burning stoves were common, but if you didn't have one you had to know how to construct one. The idea of furnaces fueled by gas and even oil were still somewhat rare and unique, so the everyday challenge in winter was finding what to burn to get through another day. Here are some of the solutions that were improvised to stay warm.

- **Bed sharing** was a common sleeping arrangement. The combination of warm bodies in the same bed helped everyone under the covers stay warm through a cold winter night.
- **Rolled newspapers**, magazines, cardboard and any other stray paper product served as makeshift logs in a fireplace or woodstove. Some were soaked in paraffin or lard to make them burn longer. Wire was used to keep the

paper logs together and the paper could even be pulped and formed into logs and left to dry in the sun.

- **Improvised heater** using candles, oil lamps and anything else that could safely burn were often used under clay pots or metal cans to provide at least a little more heat in freezing room.
- **Blankets, sweaters and hats** were often worn around the house all day and night to fight off the chill. It was common for some families to not only sleep in their clothes but while wearing coats and hats.

Related:

- [4 Things You Can Burn for Heat Besides Firewood](#)
- [3 Safest Ways to Heat Your Home in an Emergency](#)
- [3 DIY Emergency Heaters](#)

Survival Cooling

From winter to summer, the seasons always brought their challenges. Summer heat was another temperature extreme that found new solutions. Here are some of the ways people kept cool in summer during the Depression.

- **Wet sheets over doorways** cooled any breeze through basic evaporative cooling.
- **Fans** both electric and fanned by hand were common and often the only cooling possibility long before air-conditioning became common. Sometimes a wet towel was hung in front of a fan to chill the air.
- **Geothermal cooling** was an improvised and ancient solution using the cool air of the ground to circulate into a living space.
- **Hydration** was often the only solution and if and when ice was available, an icebox functioned as the only type

of refrigerator.

- **Shade** was another obvious solution and anything that could make shade was put in place on hot summer days.
- **Sleeping outside** became an obvious solution on hot summer nights and hammocks could be seen from tree to tree. Mosquitoes presented their own challenges but many natural repellents were also improvised from citronella grass.

Related:

- [How To Stay Cool Without Electricity](#)
- [11 Ways People Stored Food Before Refrigerators](#)
- [10 Ways People Kept Cool Before Air Conditioning Existed](#)
- [10 Ways to Stay Cool When You Don't Have an Air Conditioner](#)
- [11 Tips To Avoid Heat Stroke When Your AC Goes Down](#)

Survival Sanitation

Common products like soap, shampoo, toothpaste and even basic house cleaning supplies were either unavailable or a desperate purchase for people confronted with starvation or body odor. However, improvisation once again came to the rescue as people learned how to make their own soap, shampoo and found substitutes for products of the past.

- **Vinegar** emerged as the new cleaning solution and its antiseptic properties was often used to treat cuts, scrapes and burns. It could even be used in place of shampoo especially when combined with soap shavings. Many people made their own vinegar from fruits and grains.
- **Baking soda** became a commonly used sanitary agent for brushing teeth, general cleaning, first aid for stings

and burns, and could even be used to put out a grease fire.

- **Soap** recipes emerged from pioneer traditions and soap from fat and ashes was not only made for personal use, but as a product that could be sold in street markets.
- **Cleaning tools** were improvised from brooms to mops using straw and other shrubbery for broom heads, and strips of rags tied together into a mop.

Here are some more resources on this topic:

- [How to Maintain Personal Hygiene When Civilization Collapses](#)
- [How to Make White Vinegar at Home](#)
- [How to Make Apple Cider Vinegar](#)
- [18 Off Grid Uses For Apple Cider Vinegar](#)
- [How to Make Soap from Fat and Ashes](#)
- [Keep Your Entire Home Clean With Just 3 Things](#)

Survival Medicine

There were still doctors and hospitals but everyday medical care often resorted to old-world herbal remedies and treatments. Anyone with any degree of medical knowledge emerged as a valuable member of communities from neighborhoods to Hoovervilles, even dental remedies were often improvised from natural materials and plants.

- **Herbs** as poultices, infusions and teas were often the only medical solution for a range of illnesses and afflictions.
- **Physical injuries** were common and first aid treatments were often improvised from splints made from boards to bandages made from plants.
- **Aspirin** emerged as a common treatment for everything and

the ability to make an infusion from willow bark gave some people the only pain relief they could find.

More resources:

- [15 Medicinal Herbs You Can Grow Indoors Year Round](#)
- [Top 50 Medicinal Plants and How to Use Them](#)
- [20 Powerful Medicinal Herbs You Should Grow](#)
- [25 Medicinal Herbs to Look For in Your Backyard](#)
- [How To Make An Herbal Band-Aid](#)
- [Medicines That Will Be Priceless After the Healthcare System Breaks Down](#)
- [12 Most Important First Aid Skills To Learn](#)

Survival Salvage

A lot of people today see salvage as an activity limited to automobile junkyards for an odd spare part or a dumpster dive behind an electronics store for random computer parts. During the Great Depression salvage was a daily event and anything abandoned or even neglected or unattended was often “picked” to repair, replace or restore just about everything.

- [100 Things You Should Stop Buying and Start Making](#)
- [Supplies You Can Scavenge from Vehicles after the Collapse](#)
- [How To Turn A Car Battery Into A Power Bank](#)
- [25 Things You Can Scavenge from Old Vehicles](#)
- [65 Things You Should Stop Trashing And Start Reusing](#)
- [6 Things You Can Scavenge from Old Lawnmowers](#)

Survival Hunting, Fishing and

Foraging

Anywhere you could find fish or shellfish was fair game for fishing. Hunting using everything from slingshots to improvised weapons was common and animals like rabbits, squirrels and even rodents like rats and mice sometimes were hunted and cooked.

In the meantime, foraging happened all the time as even edible weeds in cities like dandelions and plantains found their way to the dinner table.

- [Wild Plants People Ate During The Great Depression](#)
- [How To Make A “Great Depression Pantry”](#)
- [How to Catch and Cook Mice and Rats](#)
- [Slingshots for Survival: How to Make and Use Them](#)
- [Fishing After SHTF: Your Survival Crash Course](#)
- [9 Improvised Hunting Weapons for Fish and Game in the Wild](#)

Survival Gardening

Finally, everyone who had the space had a garden. Seeds were harvested and succession-planting to squeeze one more crop out of the growing season was common. Canning, drying and other food preservation techniques were automatic and many things from the garden also found their way to the street markets for sale.

- [A Strategic Plan for Long-Term Gardening](#)
- [Why You Should Plant a Victory Garden](#)
- [Vertical Gardening: A Great Option for Urban Preppers](#)
- [Urban Survival Gardening: A Guide for Beginners](#)

It's All About Resourceful Resilience

The primary lessons from the Great Depression define the concepts of resourcefulness and resilience. When people have to do without the only alternative is to improvise. As more and more societies around the world confront the realities of collapse, their ability to find and improvised solutions is the only alternative to stark desperation.

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