



Writer Pauline Hylton and her husband dive headfirst into country living, complete with 1920s farmhouse, tractor shopping, and hole digging

GOING GREEN IS NOTHING NEW to me. But attempting to grow green things, to farm, boggles my mind. Even so, going green is the burning desire of my husband, Tom, and me. We want to grow up to be organic farmers. This is quite a feat, considering that until college, I believed olives grew with the red things in them.

Our dream began when we inherited land in northwestern North Carolina. The property is just outside of Mount Airy, aka Mayberry. No joke—it's Andy Griffith's hometown. Staying in an original family farmhouse from 1920, complete with a bumpy wood floor and vines growing through an unusable fireplace, was an eye-opening start to our going-green dream.

We scoured the surrounding countryside, visiting every farmers' market within 100 miles. We asked intelligent questions like, "How the heck do you grow that?" Gomer Pyle's famously drawled "Golly" often punctuated our responses.

Nights at the farmhouse were the best. We ate like royalty—royalty who eat

on paper plates. Each day we purchased farm-fresh vegetables and grass-fed meat. Tom opened a bottle of red wine almost every night. We sat on rickety chairs while fireflies lit the surrounding forest. We stacked grilled vegetables on creamy goat cheese, piled high on crusty bread.

Silence was our welcome companion. One day, we ventured to area tractor stores. Cheery, middle-aged men with Southern drawls met us at each business. They extolled the power and ability of each brand and make of tractor. We explained both our ineptness and eagerness. Tom drooled as we went out to the tractor yard.

We gawked at the tractors like the Clampetts entering Beverly Hills for the first time. "You want to take her for a spin?" the salesman asked, handing us some sort of key.

In unison, Tom and I screamed, "No! Thank you!" Remember, I thought red things grew in olives. I didn't need to take a \$30,000 tractor for a spin.

After that shock, we decided to check in to apple trees. Word had it that a man "just up the road" sold several varieties of fruit trees. He met us inside one of many greenhouses. Dressed in the obligatory overalls, he moved his

toothpick from one side of his mouth to the other, amusement in his eyes.

I pressed forward with my questions. Knowing we would be at the farm only a short time, I wondered if we could plant the trees, get them started, and check on them on our next trip.

"So, we dig a hole?" I asked.
 "Yep. A big hole."
 "Then, we drop the tree in the hole."
 He waited for me to continue as I waited for him.

"Then, do we need to water it?"
 For just an instant, shock registered on his face as he shifted the toothpick again, this time faster. "Yes'm, you *do* have to water the trees." Obviously, we weren't ready for an orchard.

We retreated to the porch each evening. Citronella candles burned and fireflies floated by as we discussed the day. Silent trees, outlining the mountain sky, listened in on our conversations. A taste of heaven.

Before we knew it, our time at the farmhouse ended. But our dream of a simpler life, of working hard and sharing much, of growing our own food, serving our neighbors and, of course, eating well, continues.

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