

Making Ripples

How to Plan for Going Off-Grid

by Amanda Bancroft

There are many ways to technically go “off-grid,” including complete social isolation, avoidance of banks, separation from our smartphones, refusal to use grocery stores or internet, and checking out from society to get away from the government. But there are also much more common ways the term “off-grid” is used, like switching to solar panels, or disconnecting from mainstream utilities like the electricity grid from which the term is derived.

My husband and I have been planning to go off-grid for exactly six years (six!) and that’s because a lot of thinking is involved. Well, plenty of people have gone off-grid without thinking much, but then some of them wind up receiving Darwin Awards. So it’s good to think things through as much as possible, to plan for the unexpected, and do your homework.

There are probably as many ways to go off-grid as there are people living off-grid, so first it helps to define your goals and reasons for wanting this lifestyle. For example, do you just want to add solar panels to your roof within the grid, or move houses and disconnect from the electric grid, or from all utilities?

It’s worth the time spent mentally going through every aspect of your day and envisioning what that would look like in your off-grid scenario of choice. Everything from using the bathroom to taking care of pets could be different. For example, there is a wide variety of composting toilets (some of which are approved by the Arkansas Department of Health) as well as doggie doo composters and compostable kitty litter. Pretty much every bodily function needs to be considered if you’re going to make big changes, and what’s legal or feasible is not always obvious at first glance.

There are lots of options. Some people want city water and a septic system, while others have a composting toilet, greywater filtration garden, cistern, and rainwater harvesting setup. Some people use satellite internet (which works far better than I expected), while others see internet as part of the grid and reject it entirely. You could cook in a solar oven, or with propane, or with solar hooked up to an induction electric range.

Have a list of your top priorities and things you feel you couldn’t live without (including life’s pleasures). Then try to find ways of getting that off-grid. For example, handheld video games use less electricity than large systems. Washer/dryer units consume both water and electricity, so if you’re ok with the laundromat, do what works for you.

Imagining a life of hardship? Hold on. If you don’t know what your options truly are, you can’t pick one yet. Most of all, don’t judge yourself if you can’t be perfect – go as far as you can to live the life you want to live, on or off-grid.

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid cottage for land conservation on Mt. Kessler. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer a solar-hosted online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: www.RipplesBlog.org.