

So you're thinking about going country? It's time to abandon the frenzy of city life, drop the G from the end of your verbs and trade your Gucci for goats. You long to be in a place where business is done on a handshake, where your backyard is bountiful and where folks welcome you with warm apple pie and a smile. You want the simple life.

Over 1.6 million people moved to rural communities during the first five years of this decade. Several stayed. This migration continues reinforced by dozens of national and regional periodicals presenting sanitized country chic to millions of armchair rednecks. Having read a myriad of books and magazines about goin' country, you are convinced it is for you. Why not?

Editorials immerse you with prose of serenity found. You are infatuated by the ideal of carvin' your own nitch in the wilderness, collectin' the morning eggs and whittlin' on the porch swing each evening. Throughout the country, gentlemen greet women with the tip of a hat and a polite, Howdy Mam. You long to raise your children in a community where graciousness abounds while folks commune with nature in perfect harmony. With each flip of the page of County Cool Magazine you feel your stress level dip.

Before you lapse completely into a coma, bear a few things in mind. Full-page glossies of family reunions held beneath towering, shabby-chic barns make for better magazine copy than centerfolds of locals trying to avoid making eye contact with your U-Haul. Stylized black and whites of cowboys branding in the parched mid-day sun sell better than snapshots of the Mayors' dead horses being left to rot all summer long, directly in the center of town. Furthermore, triumphant tales of battling the elements flow better than ancient country septic lines. No one knows why the media doesn't glam-up peeing in your barn. It must just be a fickle public.

Fickle indeed. I for one moved my son from our life long home in San Diego to my birth state of South Dakota three times before it stuck. Each time I recoiled in under a year. Best friends, scores of humanities, the Pacific surf and Thai food are a lot to give up at one time. Harder still was the shattering of my rose colored glasses.

The secret to a successful relocation is knowing what to honestly expect so you can laugh cathartically when the inevitable bizarre scenarios emerge. Sudden disillusionment is rarely a knee-slapper. Nonetheless, once adjusted, country life is closer to Nirvana than most get here on Earth. Thus, while everyone else pumps pure country sunshine straight up your knickers, I consider it my obligation to provide balance to the Universe.

Almost daily I question my reasons for living in the hinterland. For these moments of apprehension, I maintain lists in my mind. My lists remind me both what drove me out of California and why I cannot abandon country life. A hardy dose of big city burn out definitely came into play. For starters, I realized I was so sick of commuting I'd rather endure seven months per year in an icebox with no sunlight than sit in another traffic jam. With that thought alone I was ready to pull up my roots. I also decided to move.

In fact, developing a loathing of the Urban Jungle was vital to my eventual success in relocating. In retrospect, my twig was definitely about to snap. Of course, so many city folk run around with fully bent twigs, we never realize the contorted conditions of our existence. That many people living in close proximity, under the confines of excessive regulations, is the proverbial pressure cooker.

Urbanites and recent country converts wondering if your view on life may be intensely contorted are welcome to refer to my lists. They provide perspective. For example: Signs of how screwed-up you may be would include the following.

You're having your morning coffee, a cow walks through the front yard. You don't own a cow. You freak out, hit 911 and sue the Meat Packers of America.

You believe shoes matching your nail polish is in any way a daily priority.

You dont recognize that it is morally bankrupt to apply for a permit from a homeowners association to put out a lawn ornament.

You carry more electronic gadgets on your person than Radio Shack inventories.

You drive to work past that same old group of homeless people.

You smile and say, Hi, to strangers only because you know it screws with their minds.

Your horse board expenses equal the Gross National Product of Guatemala

Youre convinced you are invisible and need two years of plastic surgery just so city gentlemen wont let the C-Store door spring back in your face.

You pitch a fit when your favorite salad bar serves cheese made with non-vegetarian rennet, then drive the kids to Burgers Burgers Burgers.

Your children spend more time in the TV den than in treetops and you think thats acceptable.

You get a building permit and three estimates to hang a painting.

Any chimes ringing? If so, remove yourself form Urbania immediately! Your twig is at maximum contortion! Give the country three years and you will stay. Transition is difficult, but once your up-tight attitude is vanquished, your twig unbends. These are the indicators you are settling in to the Simple Life.

Youre having your morning coffee. A cow walks through the front yard. You dont own a cow. You sit down and drink your coffee.

Shoes matching each other is low on the list of daily priorities.

Your outhouse is not just a chic lawn ornament.

You save getting the chickens drunk for when you have houseguests.

You have no idea where your cell phone went, but the Border Collie is wearing your pager.

You drive to work past that same old herd of buffalo.

Your bird feeder expenses are equivalent to the Gross National Product of Canada.

Elk mounts ordain the walls of your favorite salad bar.

Your children spend more time in the their tree house than in school.

Yes, these are definitely telltale signs, you have lost that city pace. Although you can never voluntarily raise your stress level back to match city slickers, you have not lost yourself completely. Search the little places. Vestiges of your past will appear. These are the traits of an American Hybrid.

While having your morning cappuccino, a cow walks through the front yard. You dont own a cow. You toss it a biscotti.

You cant decide whether to paint the walls of the outhouse in a contemporary or impressionistic motif.

You use the word motif in the same sentence with outhouse.

You actually make homemade preserves wild chokecherries with a boisterous zinfandel you picked up in Napa last season.

Mascara before milking.

You winter in the gulf of Siam. You summer in bib overalls.

You could never shoot a deer, but you can dress that sucker out in under two hours.

You fence in a sarong and thongs. (This one gets the neighbors [do choi tinh duc](#) talking.)

You frequently run to town for Hawaiian Tofu and Goat Chow.

You have a different pair of hiking boots for every occasion.

Egyptian cotton sheets and a commissioned replica of Picassos Woman with Three Breasts enclose the baby chickens being reared in your bedroom closet.

Its true, every day more and more of us are getting too screwed up to ever return to the city. Still, for all our differences country folk and city slickers posses one commonality. Neither group thinks twice about the US Governments Food Pyramid. I guess we have to start somewhere.