

Stay free or buy a guide?

When Extension / YouTube is enough — and when a structured systems guide helps.

You can learn almost every backyard skill for free. Stay free when you need one project. Consider a paid map only when orphan tips are costing you rework.

Stay free when...

- You only need one weekend build (barrel, cold frame, nest box).
- Extension / Master Gardeners cover frost dates, soil tests, canning safety.
- You have not yet sketched sun, water, and what your household eats.
- Local HOA / coop / rain-barrel rules are still unchecked.
- You need licensed electrical, engineering, or veterinary protocols.
- You are shopping for reassurance, not a buildable sequence.

A structured guide helps when...

- You keep opening ten tabs and still cannot pick first: water, beds, or coop.
- Orphan videos keep assuming systems you do not have yet.
- You want layout → water → beds → season extension → animals → storage as one map.
- Diagrams you can sketch from beat another contradictory comment thread.
- Integration — not information scarcity — is the bottleneck.
- You will open the PDF, adapt to your zone, and use the refund window if it does not fit.

Practical decision rule (before you spend ~\$37)

1. One afternoon free: sun sketch, water source, what you eat, local rules for barrels / coops / structures.
2. One free project: soil jar test, a bed, or a single rain barrel — finish it.
3. Only then ask: do I need a fuller map of how these systems fit on THIS lot?

If step 3 is yes → a systems guide is a fair experiment. If you just need a better hinge video → stay free.



Scan for the full honest filter

Opens the free Vs Free page on @rootaltair's site

<https://zippy-pennant-724.harvis.page/vs-free.html>

The Self-Sufficient Backyard (Melchiorre) is a ~266-page project notebook — not a climate oracle, not a miracle. Soft CTA lives on the scanned page. Keep Extension for local truth. Keep YouTube for one-off builds.