



## A Few Tips for a Simple Life

by Michael Guilfoil  
*The Spokesman-Review*

Organic farmer MaryJane Butters long ago embraced Thoreau's dictum to "simplify, simplify." As a Forest Service ranger in the 1970s, she spent two summers roaming Utah's Uinta Mountains with her home on her back. Later, she maintained the most remote wilderness ranger station in the Lower 48. Today, Butters and her family live eight miles outside Moscow, Idaho, on their farm, headquarters of her mail-order dry-foods business. But even e-commerce hasn't tempered Butters' enthusiasm for simplicity.

# MaryJane's

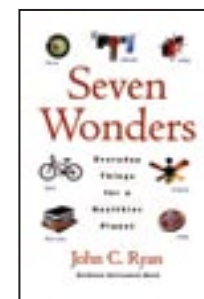
### 7 Ways to Revitalize with Simple Work

Sometimes the daily grind has a way of grinding us to a halt. With work, kids, and never-ending to-do lists, we're so busy that when we do get a precious moment of quiet, we often feel like we've forgotten how to embrace unbridled freedom. And so we tend to turn to technology for much-needed relaxation. Televisions, telephones, the Internet, and e-mail have become our "comfort" zones—the paths of least resistance. But, the truth is, technological time-outs can be more taxing than relaxing, leaving us unfulfilled and even more scattered. I'm no exception. My spare moments are few and far between, but when one surprises me, it's hard to stop my head from spinning. I've never been big on television, but it takes discipline to disconnect from my laptop! The trick I use to wind down and get grounded again is simple hands-on work. I credit my mother for teaching me this vital life skill. Back when the only blackberries we knew grew plump and purple on the bush, I remember watching Mom's steady hands as she knitted, folded, kneaded, and scrubbed. These were the tasks that needed doing in order to keep a home running smoothly, but she was rarely harried, and stress was just a kink that was worked out by hand.

Today, we can still unwind by unplugging and putting our hands to good use. There's something about completing straightforward tasks with concrete results that changes brain chemistry for the better. By dedicating full focus to detail and making each movement a meditation, women like me are discovering that we can stitch away stresses, mop up life's grit, and hang the hustle-and-bustle out to dry. So shut off the TV, the computer, and the chaos, and get ready to recharge. Here are some down-to-earth ideas from the women on my website chatroom ([www.maryjanesfarm.org/snitz](http://www.maryjanesfarm.org/snitz)) who are finding renewed vitality in life's simplest tasks.

# SimpleSolutions

for everyday ORGANIC™



In December 1999, a newspaper reporter from Washington called. He was writing a review of the book *Seven Wonders: Everyday Things for a Healthier Planet* by John C. Ryan. Michael Guilfoil of *The Spokesman-Review* newspaper asked me if I had my own "seven wonders." The story that ensued was headlined

"Simple Solutions." Here, then, is the continuation of that story. Each issue of *MaryJanesFarm* will feature in detail new solutions, and will give you all the information you need to make them your own.

Solutions from previous issues are available in the magazine section of my website:  
[www.maryjanesfarm.org/Recipes-Patterns-Instructions](http://www.maryjanesfarm.org/Recipes-Patterns-Instructions)

"You've got to get up every morning with determination if you're going to go to bed with satisfaction."  
— George Lorimer

### 1. Iron It Out

"I think there is nothing so relaxing as warming up the iron in the evening, putting on some mellow music, and just ironing. I like that I don't have to think; I can just let my mind wander as I make the same motions over and over, back and forth, back and forth ..."  
— Alison, Manitoba, Canada

### 2. Mend Loose Ends

"In this age of disposable everything, does anyone else still take the time to mend clothing? I do, and I find it very pleasurable and satisfying to bring something back to life, so to speak, to make it functional again."  
— Clare, Washington

### 3. Dirt Decompression

"I realize this is not for everybody, but when I am cranky or stressed, I like to get on the backhoe and 'hurt some dirt!' I swear I should rent that thing out by the hour!"  
— Lily, California

# seven wonders

### 4. Clean Up to Calm Down

"Organizing is therapeutic. It calms you down and reassures you that you have control over something. This has been so true for me. First, I organized my kitchen pantry. It gave me so much pleasure when I finished that I found myself visiting it just to look at my work! It was like I had one safe haven to come to where everything looked just right, and I felt calm and pleased with myself. Since then, I have made organization a regular practice. When I have a puzzle in life to figure out, I start taking drawers apart, throwing things out, and straightening up. It's a form of meditation for me."  
— Diane, Pennsylvania

### 5. Hang Hurry on the Line

"Hanging out laundry provides a wonderful time to meditate, listen to country sounds, smell the country smells, feel the breeze in my hair, and build a bridge backward in time to the women who worked our farm in ages past. I set my wicker laundry basket down on a small farm bench so I don't have to keep bending over to pull out the next thing to hang up. When I'm done, I take the bench over to an Adirondack chair under a nearby shade tree to serve as a place to set my lemonade for a well-deserved break."  
— Mara, Virginia

### 6. Sew Away Stress

"I am a seamstress, somewhat of a beginner, and I LOVE to sew clothing for women and children. It can be such a labor of love at times, but I find it so fun and therapeutic."  
— Julia, Washington

### 7. Build Energy

"I've learned to build my own chicken coop, put up my own fencing, put in my garden, replace torn screens and broken glass—the list is endless. I never would have thought I could do it myself, but necessity is, indeed, the mother of invention. I feel energized and liberated."  
— Susan, New York