



# A Perfect PORKER

The woolly, low-maintenance Mangalitsa pig provides succulent meat for a small farm.

BY JESSICA JAINCHILL

**T**he Mangalitsa is a heritage pig breed, identifiable by its woolly coat. It seems to be the pig for small farmers who want to raise robust hogs for healthier and more succulent meat with a decent amount of fat. For Michigan homesteader and Mangalitsa pig farmer Mark Baker, the Mangalitsa stands out as one of his favorite animals to raise. Since 2008, he has been naturally raising Mangalitsa pigs and has come to love the curly haired pigs for their hardiness, foraging abilities, resistance to extreme temperatures and tasty pork.

Mark was also at the forefront of the Mangalitsa's growing popularity on U.S. farms and is one of the few people in the country who has a thorough and rounded knowledge in naturally raising Mangalitsa pigs for meat and profit. He believes that, as a homestead product, this pig is highly beneficial and easy to raise.

## PIG POINTERS

Mangalitsa pigs are a hardy breed, best shown off during harsh winters. "My pigs ... prefer to burrow into straw or a hay bale," Mark says. "Even on the coldest of nights, they don't have any shelter. It's even snowed on them a few times." He has a video explaining how he raises pigs in the winter on his YouTube channel: [bit.ly/3VksDcJ](https://bit.ly/3VksDcJ)

Excellent foragers, Mangalitsas supply much of their own feed if given adequate land to roam.



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Mark does provide huts on the pasture, as you can see in his video. Barbara Meyer zu Altenschildesche, breed advisor for Mangalitsa Breed Organization and Registry, recommends that farmers provide a simple shelter or pig hut where their livestock can stay dry.

“Even when they sometimes will prefer to sleep outside when it’s cold but dry, they should have the possibility to go into their warm nest/hut when it is cold and raining,” she says.

The opening should be turned away from whatever direction the wind mostly comes from and

placed on a spot that will stay dry when much rain falls. Provide straw in the colder months. “Pigs always leave the hut to do their toilet. Even 2-day-old piglets go out of their nest,” she says, “so cleaning the hut from dung won’t be needed.”

Mangalitsa pigs are already furry, and their fur increases in the winter, so they’re perfectly suited for extreme weather. Mark has more than once seen his pigs endure single-digit weather, with some sows even giving healthy births during Michigan snowstorms. A testament to the breed’s hardiness in cold climates, it’s not uncommon for sows to bundle their litters together and watch over the piglets as a team. This increases the piglets’ chances of survival, especially during winter months.

Barbara recommends that each sow be provided a hut in which to give birth. “A frame hut works well or a hut with a sidebar, which gives the piglets the ability to get away from mum when she rolls over to feed them,” she says.

Mangalitsa piglets don’t need heat lamps or such, but they can’t keep their body temperature up when it’s cold and raining.

“You could lose the whole litter in cold, wet weather without a hut, something nobody wants to experience,” Barbara says. “Use straw in your huts when it’s cold; don’t use hay, as the newborn wet piglets can get stuck in it.”

## Pigflation

Barbara Meyer zu Altenschildesche, breed advisor for Mangalitsa Breed Organization and Registry, offers some financial advice for new Mangalitsa farmers. She says that basic costs — such as water/feeding system, fencing, housing and such — aren’t very different from those of raising other heritage pig breeds. However, this breed is slower growing, taking almost double the time to get to slaughter weight when you want the mature meat, which means more labor and more feed.

“Also, costs depends on the amount of land someone has, the location, soil, climate, how far they would need to drive to buy feed, the local feed costs and how much time someone wants to put into caring for them,” she says. “It all adds up, and to be honest it’s mostly more than people calculate or think it would be.”

MARK BAKER/WWW.BAKERSGREENACRES.COM



Mark Baker raises Mangalitsas, poultry and other pasture-based livestock on his small, sustainable, family farm, Baker’s Green Acres, in lower Michigan.

## WOOD MIZER

## NOPEC



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### Getting Started

The Mangalitsa Breed Organization and Registry recommends to start small and grow slowly. Purchase two to three feeders, raise them out and write down your costs. Slaughter them and see if this is what you expected and if your locale has the market to sell this niche product.

If you succeed, look into buying good breeding stock. “[The Mangalitsa] is a beautiful pig breed with lots of amazing qualities, beautiful meat and healthy fat, but it must fit in your market when you want to make a little profit,” says Barbara Meyer zu Altenschildesche, the organization’s breed advisor.

Make sure you know the breed characteristics; not every pig with curly hair is a pure Mangalitsa. Even pure-looking ones can be crosses.

“They’re still beautiful pigs and good to eat but not pure of breed,” she says. When you gather breeding stock, ask the history of the pigs to avoid inbreeding. “There was only a limited number of imports of this breed since they came into the country in 2007,” Barbara says. “Distance does not mean unrelated, as these pigs travel often from one farm to many different states.”

Another very important thing for new Mangalitsa farmers to know is what body condition a pig should have. It’s not easy in the beginning with this breed as it has so much fur that you need to examine each pig by feeling its condition with your hands. “We see way too heavy sows and boars, which can lead to infertility,” Barbara says. “Or we see way too skinny Mangalitsas and poor growing animals, as people just do not feed them enough.”

Mangalitsa pigs should be in a score of 3 to 4. When you want more fat with slaughter, feed more and a 5 score would be what you are looking for. To learn more about body conditioning, check out this video from UConn Extension: [https://youtu.be/Blyv1PJ5H\\_0](https://youtu.be/Blyv1PJ5H_0).

For more information about Mangalitsas, try these resources:

[www.royal-mangalitsa.com](http://www.royal-mangalitsa.com)

[www.mboar.com](http://www.mboar.com)

[www.facebook.com/groups/mangalitsa](https://www.facebook.com/groups/mangalitsa)

[www.bakersgreenacres.com](http://www.bakersgreenacres.com)

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On top of their hardiness, Mangalitsas have the capacity to grow to 400 pounds. The big attraction to the pig as a meat animal is that their body weight is made up of 60% to 70% fat, a significant difference compared to the average pig’s 50% fat. This extra fat makes the meat exceptionally tender to the melt-in-your-mouth point, setting the Mangalitsa apart against the standard pig and even other naturally raised heritage pig breeds. “The big difference is the difference between standard pork and Mangalitsa pork,” Mark says.

Though Mangalitsas usually take about 18 months to reach their full weight, they’re worth it because they have intermuscular fat, which means the meat is a deeper red and the fat is snow-white when cooked. The dark-red color indicates higher nutrition and signals a better taste. The marbling increases with age, same as the color.

Mark even says that Mangalitsa meat has such an intense flavor that some cuts are comparable to the flavor of beef. “There’s still a stark difference between pork and beef,” he says, “but sometimes, when you have Mangalitsa, it has such a deep flavor you would think it was beef.”

### MOVABLE ENCLOSURES

Farmers raising Mangalitsas can build movable enclosures and employ a pasture rotation system. This method cuts down on feed costs and gives pigs the most natural and healthy environment in which to grow. Mangalitsas are decently sized pigs, so their enclosure will need to be decently strong. Mark uses a 100-by-100-foot enclosure built with woven wire and sturdy posts.

“We build enclosures with fence posts and stretch an [electric] wire really tight,” he says. The electric wire is placed 1 foot within the fence line, raised 1 foot off the ground and charged with a solar-powered energy source. Building these enclosures in close succession to each other makes it easy and efficient to rotate pigs into the next enclosure. Mark has

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## WORKSAVER

a helpful video on fencing on his YouTube channel: [bit.ly/41CYtUi](https://bit.ly/41CYtUi).

If you're on a budget, don't worry: These enclosures are relatively inexpensive to start. Including wire and fenceposts, Mark's enclosures can be built for around \$500. "What's nice about that is you can add on if you're able to develop a market for [your pigs]," Mark says.

### PASTURING A PIG

Once the enclosures are built, it's time to consider how you'll pasture your Mangalitsas. Most pigs aren't well-known for thriving almost entirely on pasture rotation. However, Mark has developed a feeding system called "the grow system." It creates a more natural environment for Mangalitsas to feed and grow in and lets him finish out a pig for only \$200.

Average Mangalitsa farmers, not using Mark's grow system, will spend around \$500 to \$600 from birth to finish. "These pigs might look like sheep, but they won't grow by eating grass and hay alone," Barbara says. "They need a balanced

healthy diet that suits a pig's needs with enough protein [16%], carbohydrates, minerals and vitamins. The piglets you will buy need a daily basic ration of hog feed to grow."

Mark enriches his rotation system's foliage by planting fast-growing vegetables in each enclosure, vegetables his pigs will forage for or dig up over time. Over the course of the summer, he can plant and feed his pigs multiple times with a variety of crops, such as corn, pumpkins and radishes.

Once the crops are planted and grown, he'll move the pigs into the enclosure. When the pigs have finished eating that pasture, he'll move the pigs to the next enclosure, which will be ripe with new vegetables.

"Say the pigs are on field two," Mark says. "I could be growing on field three. Then I can move the pigs to field three and groom field one."

With a "grow system," farmers don't have to worry about pesticides because the food isn't for human consumption. The pigs' go through each section and eat the vegetation.



Mangalitsas have an easy temperament and curly, woolly coats of red, black and, most commonly, blond.

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Mangalitsas will devour everything — the cob, the stalk, the roots. "It keeps them busy, and their bodies are able to process that forage," he says. This system leaves behind a well-furrowed and fertilized plot that is ready to be replanted for the next time the pigs are rotated.

A 100-by-100-foot pasture also makes it easy to raise a hefty group of pigs at one time. "We run the group of pigs as a sounder, which is about up to 10 sows and one boar," Mark says. "I have them on about 1/2 an acre, and if you're familiar with 1/2 an acre, it's pretty big. But it's plenty of room for 10 mother pigs, each with eight babies."

Pasturing Mangalitsas in their natural herding state also gives the pigs beneficial social interactions. Mark has observed that when he keeps his pigs in a sounder, younger sows will learn from the older sows when raising their litters. "It would seem quite congested, but it actually isn't," he says. "And 10 sows are a really good facet on your homestead."

Because Mark's enclosures and pasturing system give his Mangalitsas a natural environment and food source, the pigs' health and quality of life are also upgraded. In turn, the meat quality is above average and a better product for personal use and selling.

Barbara Meyer zu Altenschildesche is a founding member of Mangalitsa Breed Organization and Registry.

## ASPCA THE RIGHT HORSE



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Mangalitsas are pretty hardy but prefer a simple shelter or pig hut to stay dry (above).

Mangalitsa have intermuscular fat, producing a deeper red meat (above right) with fat that is snow-white when cooked.

## PROCESSING & SELLING

Mangalitsas can be made profitable in many ways. If you want to go the route of selling live pigs, the average piglet sells for about \$150, and a feeder (gilt or castrated male) or breeder pig can sell for up to \$500 each. “A person can get started for a reasonable amount of money, and if you’re selling 10 feeders a year, that’s pretty good money for a homestead,” Mark says.

## Toxic Plants

Mangalitsa pigs have a long snout and root way more than pigs with a shorter snout. And while they’ll eat most anything, some weeds are highly toxic to pigs, including the following, which should be eliminated from your property.

- aburnum
- bracken
- cocklebur
- deadly nightshade
- elder
- foxglove
- hemlock
- henbane
- ivy
- jimsonweed
- ragwort
- rhododendron



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However, prices also depend a lot on location and the current market.

The end product can be profitable for homesteaders who want good meat and fat for their own use. For Mangalitsa breeders and people that want to raise them to keep a bit for themselves and their family *and* be able to sell the meat to the public, they’ll need to build the market. That takes an average of 5 years, according to Barbara.

“The secret sauce is if you can butcher it yourself,” Mark says. Homesteaders should learn to butcher their own meat because butchering costs have risen and because homesteaders can get more meat out of butchering their own pigs. When it comes to pigs, many commercial butchers will often discard usable meat such as organs or head meat. This happens because pig butchering standards are set according to the health of factory-raised pigs, which are often raised in indoor environments that taint the meat.

For instance, the lungs of indoor-raised pigs are discarded because they have inhaled air pollutants from long-standing manure. Because the pollutants have settled into the lung meat, the meat is no longer edible for humans. However, Mark can use pig lungs as a soup meat because his pigs are raised outdoors and constantly rotated between different pastures to keep them in prime health. Because he naturally raises his pigs and does his own butchering, Mark also gets

the most meat and profit out of his pigs, using the heart, liver, kidneys and caul fat. “There’s not very much of the animal we don’t use,” Mark says. “This is why homesteaders really need to look at being their own processors. It gives them a huge advantage.”

Check state regulations regarding home slaughter, as each state is different and regulations depend on what you’re doing with the meat (consuming it yourself, giving it away, selling it, etc.)

In Indiana for example, all meat from livestock and poultry intended for human food must be slaughtered and processed in an establishment inspected by the state board of animal health or the USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service. However, there is a home-raised exception. “A person may slaughter and process his/her own livestock or poultry that he/she has raised. The owner of the animal must use the meat products exclusively in his/her household. The owner may use them for his/her nonpaying guests and employees but may not transfer (i.e., sell, donate, give) any product to another person.”

Fortunately, with the advent of the internet, it isn’t difficult for someone with any butchering experience to figure out how

to butcher a full-sized hog and make their Mangalitsas more profitable.

To help homesteaders wanting to become their own processors, Mark has started Homestead Hog Harvest, his own hog-butchering classes. His course starts students out with a live hog and finishes off with a beautiful meat product that can be used to supplement a family’s food stores or sold. (Learn more here: [bit.ly/3oIUUgI](https://bit.ly/3oIUUgI).) Another great butchering video is this one, from *Bon Appetit*: [bit.ly/43ToXlQ](https://bit.ly/43ToXlQ).

“Foster a can-do attitude,” Mark says. “It’s not brain surgery. It’s an art. But it’s good to be the best you can. You may not do so well, but you’ll still have a product at the end.”

**T**he Mangalitsa can be a significantly profitable animal to have on the farm. “They’re unique and quite docile,” Mark says. “They’re not a threat to my children or other children that come to my farm. I’m not saying it’s a silver bullet, but it’s a pretty good bullet to have on your farm.” **hf**

*Jessica Jainchill is a freelance writer and editor from Missouri. She and her family live on a 1-acre farm and enjoy planting gardens and raising small livestock.*



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