

The DILETTANTE GARDENER.®

Issue No 1..... June 2010

and incorporating

The Dilettante Cook



THE REASON WHY

Some regular readers of my other publication *The Independent Highlander* will no doubt be amused by the difference between the content and the criticisms therein and that of the new *Dilettante Gardener & Dilettante Cook*.

Well I hold up my hands in supplication whilst hurrying on to explain the reason why. Last month I published (only on the web);- 'Spring...into growing your own' as an incentive for viewers/readers to grow and enjoy their own garden produce.

I was astounded by the number of folk who wanted to read or see, more of my horticultural efforts, in print as well as on line.

I think we are all acquainted with the old adage 'Necessity is the mother of invention'? My aged back (77 this month) was one of the reasons that turned my thoughts to easier ways of growing things. The other was that the natural soil at Seacrest is very sandy being so close to the beach and water retention for growing vegetables was always a problem.

Building a raised bed garden, (RBG) especially after seeing so many on TV gardening programmes showing just how advantageous such a method was, we decided to 'have a go.' However I felt that if we were going to the extent of constructing an RBG we would make it readily accessible for an OAPs.

So then Morag and I literally took raised bed

gardening to heart and constructed the beds high enough to sit on their edges alleviating the risk of more back problems for us by our bending over ground level vegetable plots.

In addition we excluded some pests and most birds by a covering of netting wire (see illustrations.) while we were building we added an underground watering system (home made and designed.)

Human nature being what it is and with Morag's support I got more ambitious at the end of the first RBG growing season and tried to realise one of my dreams.....a Polytunnel. Alas my attempts to buy second hand were futile due mostly to costs and the limited supply. So there was nothing for it, 'back to the drawing board' and so to sketch out a structure that was comparatively easy to make and also within a pensioner's budget.

The result is illustrated later in this publication. Using some second hand timber as well as new and utilising 'bog standard' builder's polythene as a cover, the finished Polytunnel costs were held to just over £200.

Established gardeners/Polytunnel users forecast doom and gloom over our choice of polythene, 'it will never last,' 'it won't let the light in properly' etc. how wrong can people get. Not only did the structure prove them all wrong but astounded the critics by standing up to one of the severest winters on record, (many professional built tunnels collapsed under the weight of snow) ours didn't. Enough about us and 'the reason why' so lets get growing. Euilleam.

ONCE UPON A TIME

(An old man had a dream)

All people dream and quite a few I believe dream of winning the National Lottery, giving them financial freedom and the opportunity to change their lifestyle.

In my youth it was the football pools that held the key to a fortune and then the dream of winning the Treble Chance was in every punters mind.

Father said that 'once upon a time' a gypsy told him he was very lucky, so every Saturday evening during the football season he would sit by the coal fire listening to the 'results' on the old battery operated Ultra wireless, recording them on the grid on back of the Daily Express. He never did get 24 pts.

I can't say the same thing about myself as on one occasion I actually got all 24 pts. That week there were eleven draws on the coupon so a fortune was not in the offing but I was hopeful of getting a couple of thousand pounds. Pool dividends in those far away days were declared in the press on Wednesdays. What a disappointment I got when I looked up the winners list,

for all it showed was £61.14 shillings. Evidently one tipster forecast all 11 draws on the day so a huge number of punters had the 24 pts.

the compost warming it up.

Illustration 3 Shows the

crop is harvested this will be rectified.

Enough of dwelling in the past lets come to the present and dream of the future.

Illustration 1 shows a view of the RBGs under construction with some of the in-fill already in place. On the left panes of plate glass laid over the compost warming it up. I think we were a bit optimistic as it took quite some time longer before we were ready to plant.

Illustration 2 A different view of the raised beds showing just what reflected heat we might expect from the white wall of the garage.

four way taps, colour coded for convenience. Mind you I still have to refer to my diary to establish just which hose goes where. Last year we added another bed to the development but it does not have an underground water supply yet, but hopefully after the onion



IN THE BEGINNING

(there was a dilapidated pigeon loft on the site)

Between the demolition of the old pigeon loft and clearing the site of debris and dung, the RBG took about five months to complete, the time lapse was aided and abetted by adverse weather conditions and financial constraints, but eventually we got there.

Designed to utilise the south facing wall of the garage and the retaining wall facing west the structure measures some

16 by 22 feet. Unfortunately my design lacked height as I was trying to economise on the amount of chicken wire I would need. The result now is should one forget to adopt a bowed stance when moving around inside, it can result in a severe headache for the victim. But its fine when you are sitting down or you are not too long in the leg!

Morag and I made quite a number of mistakes in the spring of '08. Firstly listening to and believing TV gardeners, who were advocating RBGs as the answer to growers problems whilst claiming that plants could be grown closer together therein. Growing plants closer together in a RBG as opposed to the open garden can end up providing quite a lot of problems.

Potatoes overran their bed as too did the strawberries. The strawberries were so pro-

lific that at least 50% of the fruit rotted rather than ripened, and that was despite the liberal 'strawing' between the rows. The parsnips were on the small side, cabbage, lettuce and green peas

however did well, as did beetroot and purple top turnip. The early potatoes we planted were the old favourite, Duke of York, and we were provided with a good crop of very tasty



spuds. Traditionally new potatoes and fresh butter was accepted as a meal in the Highlands and when given the chance I still practice the old habit.

All the raised beds were filled initially with well rotted horse manure, seaweed from the nearby shore plus a quantity of year old home produced compost followed by bags and bags of commercially produced compost, which proved very costly. In addition hundreds of earth worms were introduced and it is by their industry that the original mixture has been turned to a fine tilth. That however has not stopped us topping up each of the beds with additional compost annually. Due to the amount of space that the potato crop demanded we decided that we would not use our raised beds in the future for spuds but would grow them in containers. More about that project later.

D.I.Y. POLYTUNNEL

(Self design and build)

As you can see from the photo, construction of the PT started about the end of September and was completed February the following spring. Initially the timber lengths were bored on a jig ensuring that all the holes coincided with their neighbours, which bring me nicely to my next door neighbour who asked, when she saw the lengths of piping secured in the timber but lying flat on the ground, what I was doing?



Tongue in cheek I replied that I was building Jacob's ladder as I wanted to get closer to heaven, shaking her head she left me to get on with the job. Another person asked how I intended to bend the wood into shape. Ah well everyone to their own, as we say. Almost the same procedure that was used to fill the RBG beds was followed in the Polytunnel beds and they are approximately the same comfortable height for sitting on. Again I installed under soil watering, seaweed, horse manure, homemade compost as well as some good quality top soil before topping up with commercially made compost. The horse manure came from a nearby stable and was literally full of lovely small red worms, hundreds of them. I am sure they are multiplying in the year long warmth.



The structure is now in its third growing season and apart from four trusses being added to strengthen the rafters before introducing eight 16 inch hanging baskets growing strawberries, no alterations have been made or indeed needed

Morag and I often enjoy our morning coffee in the Polytunnel when the weather outside is blustery or even down right nasty and marvel at the warmth retained by

the double wrap builders polythene. This year however we are going to renew it as the sheets are getting a bit clouded by the number of spiders that have spun webs in the corners. I am 'jumping the gun' a bit but this spring we often witnessed a Queen Wasp buzzing about on the inside of the structure when we

were sipping our beverages. I was afraid that it intended to start building a byke on the beams but watching closely we soon realised that what she was doing was chewing slivers of wood to convert into paper for byke building elsewhere, so we

left her to it. Later we were rewarded when we saw her flit from strawberry blossom to blossom. Whether her visitations were the reason for a bumper crop of early strawberries this year or not, for that is what we have, we're not complaining.

The Dilettante Cook

(Great pleasure can be found, by preparing your own produce)

Not only does one gain great pleasure from, skills on T.V. lets say boiling their very first pan full of new potatoes, or a nice green cabbage, it also gives a body a real sense of achievement, into the bargain.

If I may, I would like to turn the clock back to the 1940s when the Second World War was at its height and food was scarce and as a growing boy I never seemed to have enough to eat.

The Government of the day invented various slogans such as 'Walls have ears,' 'Is your journey really necessary?' and the one that has stuck most in my mind 'Dig for Victory.' I recall just how amazing the public's response was to the call, everywhere you looked people cultivated patches of what was once waste ground, or often in fact the house midden, into thriving vegetable beds.

Suddenly today in the 21st century, we have a Renaissance in 'growing our own'. The demand for allotments and the conversion of patios into growing areas holding containers of edible plants plus the use of 'shady' garden corners for growing vegetables,

must be down to the influence of the many gardening experts who demonstrate their well as describing how to prepare recipes that are almost forgotten.

What has this got to do with cooking I hear you ask? Not a lot I suppose, so perhaps I had better shorten my jib and set sail for the kitchen.



There again the kitchen can host a multitude of opportunities for us to practice our culinary skills, or the lack thereof, in. And its not for me to lecture you, the reader, or even your granny, 'how to boil an egg'.



Even in the smallest or most basic of kitchens its possible to crack out a smashing dish that will surprise and delight your family, (pardon the pun).



As well as used for cooking, the kitchen (ours measures 8X12 feet approx.) is a good place for manufacture of say Soda Bread, pickled/pressed ox tongue or very tasty potted meat, and even provide a repast, to name but a few.



Being as old as I am French or Italian cuisine is not my forte, so I stick to what I know from days gone by, without shame.

In later issues of the 'Dilettante' I will enlarge on the methods used as

The Dilettante Cook

(With a vision for the 'Good Life')

For most of us 'The Good Life' was an appealing and entertaining TV programme. Starring Felicity Kendal, Penelope Keith, Paul Eddington, Richard Briers and Reginald Marsh, it brought yearning to our souls. The want to cast off our daily chores and start living the way the programme portrayed raised strong feelings in many breasts.

Self efficiency is not easily obtained and has to be worked at continuously if one is to succeed. I am not talking from experience but rather from what can be gleaned in the media from families who have done just that.

However for the rest of us 'part self-sufficiency' can be very satisfying. This can take many forms from 'growing your own vegetables' to rearing your own livestock.

A report in the national press tells us that at least one major supermarket sells chicken coops whilst a subsidiary garden centre sells laying hens for people who have a few spare yards of space.

This can be a very expensive way of buying

laying hens but for some, convenience outweighs costs. Whatever way would-be 'goodlifers' take their first on the road to self-sufficiency is their choice.

In addition to or instead off, Japanese Quail can be an alternative. These small birds each lay some 300 quality eggs per year if properly attended to, and take up less space and less feeding than 'chickens'.

Hard boiled quail eggs are a great extra for all salad dishes or eaten on their own, cooked

in various ways.

Japanese Quail start laying at about 42 days old and continue until their first moult. Oh dear here I am trying after all to 'teach granny to boil an egg.'

The illustration shows my two handsome cockerels. Unless you live in the country it is ill advisable to keep a rooster as he can be very noisy and is NOT required to encourage your hens into the 'lay'. Egg production is mostly down to environment and the length of daylight the birds get.

Ed.



We welcome comments and queries from our readers, which we will endeavour to respond to through this publication. Your anonymity is guaranteed, and we look forward to hearing from you via email to dilettantegardener@gmail.com

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