

The
DILETTANTE GARDENER®

Issue No 14..... July 2011

and incorporating

The Dilettante Cook



SOME SUMMER

Even in God's country there are times when we inhabitants can be disappointed. For a second year in a row the hours of sunshine that should have blessed the Highlands of Scotland have (up to now) been well below an acceptable standard.

Its not only local gardeners in Easter Ross but elsewhere throughout Scotland who tell me that their Strawberries are rotting and the Raspberries are not nearly so sweet this season.

Well, as we all know, there is not a lot one can do, other than emigrate to warmer climes. However the wet weather has some advantages as you can see in the images, our vegetables are soaring away, and, touch wood, pest free to date..

Already Morag and I have had considerable meals using our own home grown Duke of York early potatoes. I can not even begin to describe how wonderfully tasty and fluffy these spuds are when cooked. Sadly we are down to our last tub and a half of the 'earlies' but there are some main crop well in flower and should 'follow on'.



Last year the newly planted rosebushes were severely hampered by a virtual jungle of Chickweed that grew up between and over them. I was determined that that would not happen again. So before the bushes began to

show signs of growth Morag and I laid a close woven plastic membrane on the compost/soil in the raised bed and followed that with half a tonne of gravel. Our ploy has been a complete success and apart from a stragglng piece coming up under the board-

ing, nothing!

Have you noticed just how poor Creosote substitute really is? In less than a season the colour fades away. I have not been able to ascertain whether the preserving qualities are equally poor or not, as that takes time. I appreciate Creosote was bad for the environment etc. but it was good for preserving woodwork!

NO GARDEN IS COMPLETE WITHOUT BIRDS

One of the pleasures of having a somewhat untidy garden can be derived from the bird life it attracts. Seacrest has many resident and visiting birds. Each spring we have a pair of Swallows nesting somewhere on site. This year they chose to built their number one nest inside the garage. This entailed us leaving the side door open for weeks. The pair successfully fledge five youngsters, but before that was accomplished the adults began to construct a second nest, this time on the outside eaves of the building.

Unfortunately after their initial structure was set out the birds began to haul, what they must have thought was 'mud', from the beach. Every time these offerings dried out they turned to white sand and fell onto the concrete ramp. They are still doing it! As there are no eggs laid yet I am tempted to either reinforce the nest or to completely knock it down. I don't want baby birds falling from it after any eggs hatch.

Collard Doves first appeared in the north east during the early 1960s. Since then they have spread throughout the Highlands. Their incessant call provokes many folk but I don't mind it one little bit. Photo two.



Photo three shows a Speckled Wood Butterfly, *Pararge aegeria* despite the 'Some Summer' weather we are experiencing, these delicate flutterbyes are on the increase. As yet our 'Butterfly Bush' has not come into flower. That however does not affect the Speckled Wood at it has totally different feeding habitat.

Apparently the Government's 'Set Aside' scheme on arable land is being replaced so the habitat that that facility provided is coming to an end, thus reducing the area of rough and natural environment that was available to all wildlife, including the butterfly population.

Gardeners can help by leaving some rough untilled ground on the periphery of their cultivated beds, and if possible allow weeds, including nettles, to flourish there. Thus compensating to some degree the diminishing areas available to all forms of wildlife.

Lets not forget the possible long term threat that Dow Chemicals Herbicide *Forefront* poses to the wildlife habitat in our countryside. The herbicide is designed to kill off various unacceptable (to some) weeds, all in the name of efficient farming.

The Dilettante Cook

(With a vision towards self-sufficiency)

WE ALL MAKE MISTAKES

It may seem funny to some readers that I write about a 'Tea Pee' on the cookery pages, but persevere and you will see why.

For several summers Morag and I had a canvas gazebo raised on a decking platform. Eventually the canvas began to rot so we discarded the Gazebo. That left an expanse of top quality decking. I thought it would be a good idea a make a more permanent structure, hence the 'Tea Pee'. After many weeks of struggles and frustration the structure (wood wise) is completed.

On Thursday of last week we got an eight pound fresh salmon a present, so there and then we decided that we would try to smoke it, in the 'Tee Pee'.

Following an established recipe we marinated the two fillets for the required time and slung them on a hammock made of new chicken net above the firepit. My original idea was to have a suspended metal chimney with a canopy above the firepit cum BBQ. However I recalled when I was just about 5 years old (1938) that there were two cottages in the village where the hearth was sited in the middle of the floor and the smoke escaped through a hole in the thatch.

Well the 'Tea Pee' has a fire in the middle of the floor and as yet no chimney is installed so I thought, 'perhaps its worth a go'. Duly we lit a fire and then introduced dried sawdust. Before too long we had a wealth of smoke billowing (mostly around we two) before finally escaping, 25% via the hole and 75% via the door.

After what seemed an eternity we decided that the fillets looked well smoked, and so did we, so we let the sawdust die out. Its comforting, I believe, to stink of wood smoke when one 'roughs it' and boy did we!

The end result was not to my liking but lots of people did like the smoked salmon. Rather than admit defeat the next day I made a pound or so of cottage cheese and then converted smoked salmon and cottage cheese 60%/40% plus a squirt of lemon juice into superb smoked salmon paté. The balance we put in the freezer.

Illustrated;- Vaccum packed smoked salmon from the Seacrest deep freeze

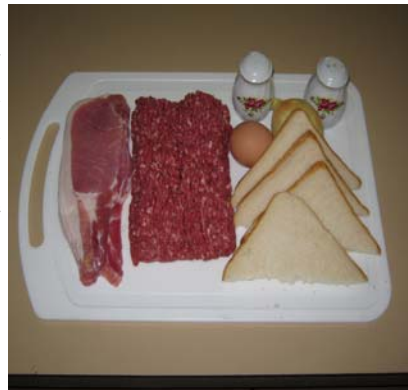


The Dilettante Cook

(With a vision towards self-sufficiency)

A SATISFYING BUDGET MEAL

I most sincerely hope that readers are not fed up of my 'dwelling in the past' scenario? Its quite difficult to equate the present day 'throwaway society' with the one I grew up in during the war years. Then housewives had to make ends meet the best way possible. Families needed to be fed and rationing was strict.



One of the favourite recipes, at least in our locale, was the ever popular Meat Loaf. Its not for me, much as I would like to do, to detail just what strapped mothers were prepared to include in the 'loaf' but suffice to say kids were appreciative.



Hence Morag's recipe for her Meat Loaf.

Recipe ingredients;- 1lb Beef mince (not steak mince). ½ lb Bacon. 1 Onion. ½ cupful fresh breadcrumbs. 1 egg. Salt and pepper to taste.

Mince or chop bacon and onion, grate breadcrumbs, add to the minced beef (in a large



bowl), mix together then add the egg and seasoning, mix again. Next place in a suitable bowl, cover with grease proof paper and tie securely with string. Boil water in a pan and then drop the bowl in, cook for 2 hours. Remove bowl and paper, turn up on a serving platter, slice and enjoy. Do not let the pan boil dry!

This dish can also be cooked in a hot oven, for one and a half hours, or thereabouts. Although I find it less moist when done in an oven.

Morag's recipe is a 'basic one', cooks trying her recipe can add herbs, spices and ingredients of their choice at will, knowing that the end result will still be pleasing.

A great advantage with this simple dish that it is equally tasty eaten hot, or cold with a salad of your choice plus various pickles or even deep fried chips.

Ed.

Published by Scottfab Osprey Publishing, 'Seacrest', Barbaraville, Ross-shire, Scotland.

Editor Euilleam Ross © waived unless stated otherwise. Copying Encouraged
Scottfab-Osprey Publications is a Voluntary Non Profit Making Scottish Organisation