

The DILETTANTE GARDENER[®]

Issue No 16 October 2010

and incorporating
The Dilettante Cook



‘A TIME TO REAP AND A TIME TO SOW’

With the threat of winter in the air and the knowledge that before too long the ‘time will change’ and all that that brings Morag and ‘himself’ (as I am oft referred to) decided that we should start ‘laying down’ plans and preparations for the forthcoming spring. If we are blessed that is.

Since constructing our RBG a few years back we have been plagued with weeds growing in the Barrowways (That’s a nice wee word) between the individual beds.

But then last week out of the blue we got a telephone call from our coalman, who during the summer months turns his hand at tree felling, asking whether we would like a lorry load of chipped branches delivered for free? We all know the old saying ‘never look a gift horse etc.’ so without delay we accepted his kind offer.

We had planned to construct a surround around the base of the TeaPee using wooden edging, a plastic membrane and bark chippings, to curtail the grass growth that tends to permeate between the slats. But that was

scheduled for next spring.

However the ‘free offer’ brought the whole plan forward in a rush and the ordering of some thirty metres of black plastic membrane and suitable wood for edging to allow us complete the job before the onset of hard weather was undertaken.



Such was the amount of chippings that we decided to use a proportion of them as the final solution to the weed infested Barrowways. Strimming these weeds, giving the lower decking boards a coat of Creosote, laying the membrane and barrowing in the chippings took three afternoons to complete. I doubt if readers will forgive me for claiming that we ‘sowed’ the

wood chippings but it kind of matches part of adapted bible quote. (Reaping is on page 2.)

The drawback of our conquest against the weeds is that the floor level in the RBG is now raised some inches and as I had to stoop before to avoid hitting the crossbeams, its going to be even more difficult to keep that in mind.

REAPING THE BENEFIT

After we finished laying the chippings we then lifted the remaining vegetables from the raised beds and laid plans for turning the soil therein over, and then introducing barrow loads of one of nature's bounties that comes with the season, namely lovely fresh seaweed. As Seacrest is all but on the crest of the firth it is no real hardship to trundle a barrow load or two of Wrack from the tidemark up to the RBG. now and again.

Some people question as to whether the seaweed should be washed before it is introduced into the soil, I never do that nor do I ever see any adverse effects.

The image on this page shows a limited amount of our harvest, carrots, parsley, onions and parsnips. In the background a rather surprising pumpkin from a plant that was 'heeled in' on the compost heap in the spring. Potatoes, cabbage, neeps and green peas have all been eaten and enjoyed some time ago.

We are pleasantly surprised by the carrots Autumn King, as they were sowed quite a bit later than the norm but seems to have caught up. There are also a few others which were sown in a separate row. The Parsnips come from seed 'Hollow Crown' they look pleasing as there are no rust spots on them. The onions are Sutton and I have found that they do well in our soil and climate, both in the Poly Tunnel and out of doors. We did try growing red onions in the past but the yield was disappointing, so we gave them a bye this time.



Set aside for later in the winter or even Christmas we have carrots and parsnips 'still in the ground', these have been left in the raised beds inside the Polytunnel where the effects of Jack Frost is considerably lessened and even in the hardest of weather it is quite easy to lift the roots out as required.

This year the Parsley grew with abandon, possibly due to the wet conditions. Such is the harvest that we have been able to provide neighbours with large bunches of Parsley for freezing.

The method Morag uses when freezing Parsley for use in her homemade soups is quite simple. Rinse the Parsley under the cold tap

and while still damp chop up finely, pack into small poly bags and then pop them into the freezer. This enables Morag (or me at times) to remove small amounts as required. The dampness before freezing helps retain the fresh flavour and colour of the Parsley thus enhancing any dish, both in looks and taste.

A similar method for freezing fresh fish is also recommended. Preferably do not gut the fish. Lay the fish flat on a board of sorts then spray it with cold water. Pop into the freezer and from time to time over the next hour or so repeat the spray process without removing the fish from the freezer. Soon a film of ice forms sealing in all the lovely fresh fish taste and aroma. When you are satisfied that the whole fish is frozen through, wrap it, board and all in Clingfilm and store until that very special meal you have planned, arrives.

BATTEN DOWN THE HATCHES!

It seems just like last week when we amateur gardeners were preparing seed beds and looking out various garden aids for the forthcoming growing season. But now we are facing a 'change in time' and a serious change in the weather. Yet there is still a wee bit of heat in the sun, when we see it, and of course there is still a lot to be done before Jack Frost nips at our heels.

The past growing season, here in the Highlands, was hampered by a serious lack of sunshine, with soft fruits not being as sweet as they should be and greenhouse tomatoes largely a failure. (That is compared to other years). Root vegetables however benefited.

Morag and I last spring were offered some Dahlias from a neighbour, they were of the taller variety, our neighbour preferred the dwarf type! In addition we bought some rather bedraggled Begonia bulbs, in fact seeing them on sale we felt a wee bit sorry for them. Anyway we bought six and were rewarded with a wonderful display of colour.

Recently we lifted them from their raised beds and were quite surprised by the size of the tubers and the growth the bulbs have achieved. The raised beds were constructed for them quickly and only held about nine inches of compost, but what a reward.

Years and years ago I used to grow Begonias in the hothouse in pots, they usually were

successful and colourful but somehow I got out of the habit. Next year if we are blessed we hope to have an even bigger 'patch' growing just these two.



Battening down the hatches is, as we all know, a nautical term, from the days of sailing ships. The storms that we have experienced over the past few weeks certainly qualify for we landlubbers to follow suit.

Here at Seacrest we have far more mature trees than is advisable and of course the leaf harvest is horrendous, fallen leaves everywhere, a never ending chore, gathering leaves.

In addition the garden mowers and trimmers need to be serviced and stored away till the spring comes round again.

If you are anything like me your garage will house everything except the car. That's fine during the warmer weather but frost and snow makes for an undercover job.

Where does one put all those D.I.Y. pieces of timber? Never mind counting the various gadgets and tools that seem to accumulate every time there is another project to be undertaken.

When I scan what I have written it is almost believable that I am whinging. Far from it, challenges to do better next spring, spring to mind and I count my blessings. Ed.

The Dilettante Cook

(With a vision towards self-sufficiency)

ABUNDANCE

When we took into account the abundance of carrots that we have for our use over the forthcoming months Morag decided to make one of her special Carrot Sponges. Carrot Sponges or cakes along with Banana Cakes or loaves are some of my favourite 'treats'.

I try to keep out of the way when Morag bakes but that is not always possible and while pretending to read, I keep one eye on her methods.

So far I have not attempted to emulate her skills with oven baking, (mine is limited to producing Soda Bread). Baking on the cooker top however is a different story as I do enjoy making traditional Oatcakes or Pancakes and Girdle Scones.

For my sins recently I have purchased a new domain, where I intend to record dozens of traditional Scottish recipes and dishes, including pies and other goodies along with, where appropriate, photographs of them.

Many of these recipes and dishes have been published before now by Morag and I, but read-

ers will be able to freely download the various recipes and have a go at recreating food from Scottish and Highland kitchens of long ago. The site which is at present under construction comes under the fine heading of <http://www.pies-and-pies.com>



Colder weather tends to make one consider the real old time breakfast cereal, oatmeal. Porridge with sugar and milk is a favourite among many folk.

Some, unfortunately use a Microwave oven for rendering Porridge Oats into a mishmash for their breakfast. Traditionally 'real' Oatmeal was used and the Oatmeal was steeped in cold water overnight. This lessened the chance of lumps being encountered in the finished product.

Personally I have a much quicker method. Put the required scoopfuls of meal in a pan, add salt to taste. Pour in cold water to cover, then beat with a whisk.

Place on the hotplate and do not stop stirring until the mix comes to the boil. (About 5 minutes). Add boiling water if you need to thin the porridge down a wee bit, stir again and serve. Golden syrup or honey or sugar along with cream or milk can really 'set you up for the day.'

Morag's sponge was delicious!

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

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