

The
DILETTANTE GARDENER®

Issue No 17...January 2012

and incorporating

The Dilettante Cook



BARBARAVILLE'S BARREN BEDS

The Barren Beds at Seacrest retards my memory clock by some six decades, to the time I was but a slender 19 year old on board the troop ship 'The Dunera Castle' heading for the Far East but docking at the Port of Aden on the way.

A barren place indeed yet quite appealing to a country chiel. We were not allowed shore leave so my impression has been forever one of barrenness and to some extent....poverty.

Britain entered into prolonged negotiations with the Sultan of Aden for the purpose of obtaining his consent to sell Aden or to admit Britain's possession of it. The talks failed. Britain invaded on January 19, 1839, and, after strong resistance by the local population, Aden was occupied and became the major link, for over a century, between Suez and Bombay.

Local terrorist groups were responsible for untoward acts of violence and eventually they took over the Crater district (briefly) in July 1967. It was retaken by British Army Lieutenant Colonel Colin Campbell Mitchell and the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders.

The Colonel ended up with the nickname 'Mad Mitch' and the campaign was recognised as the last Battle of the British Empire.

The restoration of the Barbaraville Barren Beds come the spring will definitely not generate such an accolade but to me an equally pleasing one.



BARBARAVILLE'S BARREN BEDS

Already Morag and I have ordered 24x75 kilo bags of top quality compost for replenishing the raised beds both outside in the RBG and so too in the Polytunnel.

Despite saying two years ago that we did not intend to use the RBG for growing a potato crop we have re-

planted and hope to plant some main crop spuds in the centre bed.

On the right hand side, almost invisible we have several Gooseberry bushes ready to sprout new growth as soon as there is a lull in the winter weather. Last year the dreaded Sawfly caterpillar all but devastated the young shoots, but we will be ready for them this time using lots of soapy water sprays. Dream of the past and live for the future could be a slogan for all amateur gardeners.

The Dilettante Cook

(With a vision towards self-sufficiency)

SOMETHING QUITE DIFFERENT

Many readers will be acquainted with my friendship with Bob who lives in Aberdeenshire. Its well over 20 years since we first came in contact and many a culinary treat we have shared although some 100 plus miles apart.

Yet another friend, along with his lady wife, both having similar tastes and attitudes to self sufficiency, like Morag and I have, live quite close by. Ronnie and Maggie first introduced us to Dry Cures by providing firstly a piece of pork and secondly a piece of Red Deer venison, both cured using the 'dry' method. Very tasty they were too.

Later when I telephoned Bob with the news he was enthused and offered to provide me with a Roe Deer carcass if I could cure a haunch for him. Eventually, due to weather conditions and the Christmas holidays I waited until New Year's Day for the carcass delivery.

Well I need not go into detail except to say I boned out both haunches and following the instructions for Dry Curing impatiently

awaited the prescribed time it takes for the Dry Cure to work. It worked beautifully.

Bob and I had agreed that Morag would cook one haunch and the other I would slice into steaks, vacuum pack and send 50% by weight along with a similar amount of the cooked venison to his home.

Well what can one say about perfection? Not anything else!

The first pix shows one of the haunches cured and rolled, the second was equally good.

For a change Morag steamed the rolled haunch, and it turned out bootiful. Unlike a cured joint, simmered in water, this haunch did not shrink. When totally cooled I cut the strings off and sliced the venison, thinly.

When the parcel eventually reached Bob he was 'over the moon' with the end

result. And we are also 'over the moon' as this delicacy adds yet another dimension to our home cooking/larder menu. Doubtless there are very few OAPs who dine on Dry Cured Venison, now-a-days. Ed.



Dry cured venison before cooking.



The finished article.

The Dilettante Cook

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CLAPSHOT

Recipe From Wonderful Orkney

Not to be confused with 'Grapeshot' that gunners of old rammed down their cannon muzzles before discharging the loaded canister at the approaching enemy. *Clapshot* is a favourite dish originated in the Orkney Islands some time ago and has since spread universally.

Morag and I were looking for something a little different to go with our dry Cured cold sliced Vension. We were not disappointed. The mixture of cooked vegetables with a knob of butter, salt and pepper titillated our pallets and is highly recommended.



We followed the original recipe in all ways other than to substitute the fresh Chives with home grown Parsley. (Our pot grown Chives did not survive the winter.) The end result was well worth the effort.

In addition to the cold sliced venison since the 14th of this month Morag and I have greatly enjoyed casseroles on two occasions made with the Dry Cured Venison steaks.

To try to ensure that we would not spoil the unique taste provided by the cured Venison we added button mushrooms and a sweet red pepper rather than onions. Morag thickened the gravy, before serving with floury mashed potatoes. Truly a feast for the most discerning of diners.

Herewith the Clapshot recipe.

Boil about a pound of peeled floury potatoes

About the same amount of chopped turnip

Lightly fry 1 large chopped onion

½ cup or thereby of chopped chives

A wee bit butter say 3 ounces

Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Boil the tatties until 'boneless'

Boil the neeps until tender

Lightly fry the chopped onion in butter

Mix together the cooked vegetables with the balance of the butter

Turn in the chives

Add seasoning.

Serve as you will, nice with Haggis and Oatcakes.

But even nicer with dry cured Vension. Ed.

Dilettante Gardening

Nature's Way

An All Time Favourite

January 15th 2005 by Euilleam

This I am afraid is quite an 'old' image but still one of my all time favourites. It was taken by the river in Strath Conon during some very hard frosty weather in January, several years ago.

It may be hard to visualise, but come the spring when the reed beds are flourishing and the reed warblers are nesting, just how many Cuckoos there are in the vicinity waiting to deposit parasitic eggs for hatching in the unsuspecting Warbler's nests.

The River Conon is famous for its Salmon and Seatrout fishing in the season and when I was much younger I too enjoyed fishing these waters.

Now we have a huge Grey and Common Seal population resident in the estuary and collectively they account for a great number of fish. In my dotage I have come to accept that there is room in nature for all of us, so Seals and Cormorants and the sly Heron is reluctantly acceptable.

Perhaps next time I am passing the far end of the firth I could stop and photograph some of the seals for GC viewers?

It would be quite wonderful if I could write and illustrate something extra special in January 2012 from the Seacrest 'plot', but unfortunately this is not possible as we are still in the throes of winter and although the various spring bulbs are showing they do not, as yet, inspire.



However for many amateur gardeners there are alternatives. One being the extra special web site www.gardenersclick.com therein one can find, and befriend, like minded growers.

Plus there are many very helpful tips and much

more from both amateurs and professional gardeners to read and enjoy.

Here's Wishing ALL our readers belated Greetings for the coming year, whatever the weather may throw at us. E & M.

Will all readers note images in the 'Dilettante' are all by me and are Copyright free, if you wish to make use of them. Ed.

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