

Pip's World - Late Spring

As we approach summer my hardy veg are doing well. Potatoes, onions, shallots, and runner beans are all looking good. But the continuing cold snaps have held back my courgette and spinach plants. I'm still working on the salad boxes but it's a bit early to see any results yet. I have got some radishes up and just for fun I've planted some carrots in boxes.

Sadly I lost 6 of my chickens to Mr Fox, when on the fateful night I went to bed early and someone forgot to close the chicken run. (Not me) but the less said about that the better.

We have purchased two Bluebell hens from a very nice and reputable lady in Patching and within two weeks one of the hens we hatched last year went broody and we now have two baby chicks, one being a bluebell. It is sad that we lost most of our chickens particularly the ones we hatched last year but they did have a good free-range life and died in a way conducive to nature. Their legacy is that we have seen no slugs or snails so far this year and the only damage to our plants is the nibbling of some of the potatoes leaves by the new chickens.

My Cockerel Charlie has a cold. Yes believe it or not he is sneezing and has lost his crow. We have moved him into a warm box in the shed. My partner Linda, has been giving him special attention with cat food and rice (his favourites) But it seems the general advice we have been given is that cockerels have no value and we should dispatch him and get a new one. Well that went down like a lead balloon with the other half so we will continue to nurse Charlie as best we can and hope for a full recovery soon.

Last winter I opened up an old fireplace in our lounge and burnt logs instead of using the gas fire.

Over the winter I saved about £100 on my gas bill from the previous year and that is not counting the 30% increase in the cost of gas. I experimented with making paper logs and stuffing old toilet roll centres with shredded paper. The toilet rolls made reasonable kindling but the paper logs get about 4 out of 10 for efficiency on an open fire. However both are a form of re cycling, free, and environmentally friendly. I think the paper logs may be better in a wood burner. Finding enough free wood took some doing, as I had no idea how much I would need, and even now in late May I still light the fire some evenings.

I turned off my boiler and central heating at the end of April and with a few changes to my daily routine find this no problem. We use our electric showers and the dishwasher, which both use little water and are cost efficient. When washing up larger items I pour the hot water from cooking potatoes and the like into a washing up bowl and top up with cold water, or I boil the odd kettle.

At the coldest point of the winter Linda wanted to buy some coal, but having been a coal man in my earlier life I know that coal is a very dirty fuel. It not only soot's up the house and chimney but leaves a lot of clinker and un burnt material. In its time coal was cheap and burnt longer and hotter than wood but in today's world I believe it is negative in Co2 emissions and generally less environmentally friendly than wood.

When burnt wood gives off the same amount of CO2 as it absorbs in its life. It leaves only ash as a by-product, which can be used as fertiliser and leaves little or no soot.

The great thing about wood is that with a little effort you can get it free. I pick up wooden pallets from skips or business. Keep your eyes open and ask first but many people are happy for you to take them away. It takes me about 20 minutes to chop one up and it will make enough kindling for about 4 weeks.

Also wood working people always have piles of off cuts. If you don't have a vehicle that will move a pallet, make friends with a carpenter and you will have a never ending supply of kindling wood.

Logs take a little more effort. Once again ask before you take them but I found a massive pile of wood that had been coppiced by a local council. They were happy for me to take some and since February this year I have collected cut and chopped about 5 tons of logs. I do a few each day and use old builders sacks to store the wood in. I have had to obtain a small electric chain saw and an axe but the cost was minimal compared to gas or brought logs.

I guess I'm lucky that I have a reasonable sized garden, an estate car and trailer but the effort of collecting and chopping the wood is not a great one. At 52 years old, over weight and with diabetes I still manage easily by taking my time and preparing my winter logs through the spring and summer.

Through the Farmer's Market I have linked up with a project called "Better tomorrows". Funded by west Sussex County Council they come to our markets in Chichester on the 1st and 3rd Friday of each month to promote economic food use and they give away free, rice and spaghetti measurers along with many other commodity saving items. The other week I picked up a fridge thermometer and found that my fridge was too cold. I turned down the thermostat, which should save a little money. Also I have found the freezer bag clips they are giving away stop the many peas that seemed to fall out into the bottom of my freezer. Take a look at their web site www.bettertomorrows.org.uk

Crazy as it may sound I truly believe you can have fun saving money. It just takes a little lateral thinking and re arranging of your daily habits. I have come to realise that in my case I was spending so much time working to earn money to buy all the products and services I needed, and obtaining them in the quickest and easiest way. This cost me large amounts of money, which I had then to go to work more to earn.

Now I've opted out just a bit. I work part time and do all those little jobs around the house and garden myself. I have the

time now to save money by looking for the best deal or by re using free stuff.

Having changed my life ethic slightly I have achieved a more stress free and rewarding life style. I eat the best local and homegrown produce, and have made lots of new like-minded friends.

I do still have some boys toys like my Harley Davidson, Flat screen TV, and Star trek DVD's.

I do still treat myself to a Kentucky fried chicken meal (on rare occasions) when I'm not with Linda.

And I use the Internet every day.

To say I am working towards self sufficiency is an aim that can never be achieved but that does not mean we cant move towards it. By using old and simple methods and re focusing our workload I believe we can all end up with a better life style, which embraces modern technology, nature, and sustainable living.

Oh and don't forget "Random Acts Of kindness". I'll tell you about those next time.

Keep well and have fun helping others.

Pip Frederick