May Moments Bring Us Joy

Another Wednesday at the Manor Farmers Market. I met quite a few wonderful people today! I always enjoy engaging conversations with others who are involved in similar projects and experiments at home. We were talking citrus and although I love this fruit dearly, it has been an ongoing challenge of mine to get our Meijer Lemon, Lime, and Tangerine to grow fruitfully in the past. I reluctantly gave up this winter only to find myself getting new varieties this spring and more literature. The fact that I didn't have a single book on the matter is quite silly since I am immersed in so many others that revolve around food and dirt. My most favorite reads this spring have definitely been carried around with me wherever I go, thinking I'll have a minute or two.

How to Grow More Vegetables **by John Jeavons, which John recommended (Natural Gardener). When I interviewed him in March I asked, if you could suggest one book, what would it be, and that was the one he promoted. I encourage you to get your hands on a copy. It incorporates biointensive growing methods, how many plants and calories you need to feed a certain number of people, and companion planting, ecosystem balance, charts, soil fertility, sustainability,composting, open-pollinated seeds, propagation, seed saving, and of course so much more that I can't go into detail.**

You'll just need to get a copy yourself Build that library, put stickers-the ones you get sent to you in the mail with your address on them, in your paper passions and share them with your neighbors and friends who could use to earn a little more. Currently also reading the $64 Tomato.

In that past month we've literally transformed our backyard haven with Davin adding gates to the gardens closest to the house to prevent our feathered friends from embarking on beans, peas, eggplant, and grapes. For some reason Davin thought it'd be funny to show them new things they could eat, before he built the fence, which meant flock sitting was necessary.

Our biggest accomplishment of the year in promoting sustainability is from our direct influence and education to our friends and neighbors on the importance of growing your own food, harvesting rainwater, repurposing materials, and alternative methods to grow plants, fruits, and vegetables. Right before we got the April/May issue of Mother Earth(ME) we sent a subscription to our neighbors the Calebs, since they had begun their conquest in transforming their backyard. Once we got that issue in the mail the letter from the Editor of ME asked readers to send a subscription to someone new, I was gleaming with joy knowing that I did this right before they told others to! The stars are aligned. When

affordability of growing a garden was brought up, I piped up, "you can't afford not to!" And thus their journey began. It has been extremely exciting watching them get enthralled in projects that procure Mother Earth. More importantly their children are also learning new skills too! We will be sharing pictures with you and the impressive strides they've made since February. The picture displayed is a picture with one of their girls helping Davin with beak trimming. When the Calebs started asking some basic gardening questions I decided they needed more than my blundering mind so I put together a small resource booklet for them of some of the things that were important. I included crop charts for the year, Ag Extension charts on crops that do well in our county, companion planting information, farmer's almanac info, basic gardening principles for handling drought and intense heat, seed companies to order from and gave them a stack of my Spring seed catalogs from various companies. I also advised them on local gardening centers, online resources and opportunities that might interest them. We've also opened up our green library to them which includes books and old issues of Mother Earth News. They sprung forward and have already learned the ever challenging journey that attaining a green thumb isn't always promising and definitely not easy. They take pride in the fact that they have joined just in time to learn from all of our mistakes. It makes Davin and I chuckle for sure. We have had years of

disappointment on growing certain crops here and are always researching this seasons insect challenges. We are very flattered that our methods of living have rubbed off on someone new, especially a family of six! We are thrilled to exchange ideas and lessons learned each week. Gardening humility keeps us humble and surely reminds me of what I'm here for and what my great grandmother taught me.

I got extensions on my two research projects at the University. I hope to finish them in the next month. I still have marketing surveys for seaweed compost and can email you one if you are interested, message me on Facebook or send me a message through our contact form. The sustainable agriculture project on agrivoltaic methods is more like farming in a third world country. I'm learning new skills that I didn't know I had, including learning how to balance extreme circumstances in the dirt, adversity against all odds, farming in the field alone.

Our spring projects combine different endeavors. Davin's been keeping busy learning about Hugulkultur, bee collecting, watching countless Wranglerstar youtube videos, searching for Morels in Texas and Missouri, and fishing Trout. He also went to Engineering school for work and has been actively building new projects most every weekend. This past weekend he made a Heat Hut-a place for animals to dwell in the shade in

the heat of the sun, three gates, and fenced in our greenhouse chicken coop, outdoor kitchen and shower, grapescape, long garden beds and clothesline lounge.

Some of our updated project pictures are shown.We will try to upload them by projects to our Project section on our site including new pictures of the updated Greenhouse and Chicken Coop that Davin finished in April. Some of the projects you see are my Ag Research Project on Agrivoltaic Systems, Heat Hut, Outdoor Garden Fencing, Spring Landscaping Projects in the front yard, Gardening Methods, Beneficial Insects, Rainwater Drip System, and Free Range Waterer.



Papilio glaucus- Eastern Tiger Swallowtail



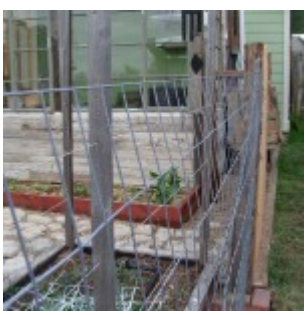
Herbs in the garden designated for beneficial insects



Davin’s May Project 2014









Mic fenced in…





Herbs, Blueberries, and Table Grapes



Back Gate



Cover for Tomatoes



Tomatoes, Onions, Garlic, Peppers, Carrots, Radishes, Beets,



Pergola Garden Bed May 2014



Misty, Jubilee, Sweetheart, Sharpblue Blueberries



Container Gardening with Potatoes



Davin stapling the burlap down to the frame





Let your free range animals find shade from the sun!



Rafe on the new heat hut.







Make your own free range feeder!





Easy to move free range water feeder



From the underside







Eversweet and Tristar Strawberries



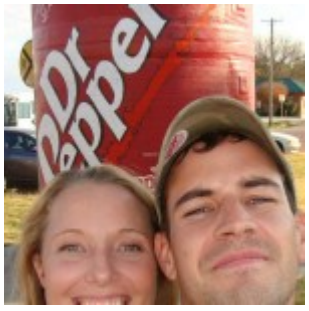
Herb Garden experiments



Cedar Hinged Door with lock for easy access.



Davin created this rainbarrel to collect rain from the Greenhouse coop which runs into the 4 drip feeders inside the coop.



Dublin, Texas in 2011



The ladies grazing



Prickly Pear Cactus, Cana Lily, Esperanza, Thyme, Marjoram, Bulbine



Transplants and Turf



Front Garden Bed



Kristin’s Spring 2014 project: front lawn



After working soil, still digging…



Spreading Dirt, KK’s project



New Front Spring Bed Near Curb March 2014



New Front Spring Corner Bed April 2014, Kristin’s Project



Garden Music



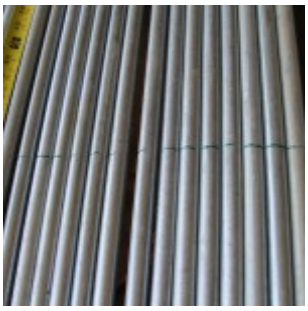
Ground I’m growing in, Kristin’s Project for Sustainable Studies in Graduate School at Texas State University



More dirty madness



Sharpening the stakes



Measure the poles



Prop up the pole before you cut it



Cutting the stake



Bucket of 6 foot stakes



Sustainable Agriculture Project Spring 2014





Control and Testing Site



Test site







Student Sustainable Farm Side Shade Paneling



Handpainted repurposed materials.

Spring Projects

Happy Spring!

For us spring=crazy projects outdoors. This is because it’s simply too hot in the summer to be

motivated outside and if we are working on projects when it's hot out, you'll find the shop lights on in the dark because it's relatively cooler. This year we aren't building any new garden beds for the first time ever however we are tweaking our current systems and have even converted a couple of our existing garden beds which reduces our radius for gardening. To make up for the loss we have relocated one of our raised garden beds to one that I had made out of pavers which gives us a little more height. But, our 1st garden bed became the Greenhouse Chicken Coop, and the other is going to be for rainwater collection.

So I've relocated the canas into more native land outback and near the compost pile. Those things spread like crazy and were taking over the herb garden. I'll be planting potatoes in their place and have also planted an artichoke and two raspberry bushes late winter. Texas weather has been strange as you can imagine; cold, warm, hot, cold, warm, spring weather with frosts still in February-March. I was able to clean up all of the beds, transplant existing plants to new locations to make space for other arrivals and such. I planted frost hardy perennials in the new bed I did by the street. I always try to perfect our landscaped native areas, which I don't think is one of my strong suits at all. None the less, I try. Maybe one day I'll be more skilled at it. Davin leaves this work to me. He does more of the building projects. Although I have to do my share

of digging of which I’m not a fan.

CHICKENS

We have received our 10 pullet organically raised chickens from Blue Star Ranch. We are pleased to tell you we have:

- **2 Ameraucanas(Easter egg layers-blue)**
- **4 Naked Neck(2 black, 2 golden-large brown eggs)**
- **2 Australorps(brown eggs)**
- **2 Plymouth Barred Rocks(brown eggs)**

We choose these varieties based on a few reasons. They are great foragers, dual breeds(great for egg laying and meat production), some are more heat tolerant and more resistant to disease(Naked Neck), relatively quiet, produce well, friendly. That being said, I know that each bird is unique. We had some pecking order issues after the first few days with one of the Naked Necks getting pecked in the tail but got right on it and used Peck-Me-Not that we got from TSC which helped right away. They are 9 weeks old; we got them at 8 weeks. They shouldn’t start laying for at least a couple more months. We also got some of the chicken compost with the chicken to transport into their current habitat to reduce environmental

concerns, and promote health. We also will continue to spray the coop with probiotics daily for another month at least and on a weekly basis thereafter. The use of probiotics encourages a healthier life for the chickens and the environment they live in.

Davin finished the pin just in time and has recently built a tractor for them while they free range in the yard. We've been able to feed them yellow clover which they love, btw, from our front lawn. Our non certified organic chickens diet consists of:

- **local organic pullet developer from Coyote Creek Farms**
- **rainwater with vinegar and probiotics**
- **fresh greens from our gardens**
- **bugs**
- **oyster shells**
- **yellow clover from our yard**
- **cleavers from our yard**
- **free range**

I go out every day in search for bugs for them for protein when they aren't free ranging. They play

football with junebugs, love the aphids on my brussel sprouts, fight over the grubs and pill bugs are like popcorn. I can't fathom sharing the earthworms with them unless they get them while foraging, and I hope they do. Unless we start our vermiculture farm and then there will be plenty for them to eat.

We hope to sell a few dozen eggs a week at the local Manor Farmers Market to offset the cost of raising them. Currently there is only one other member selling organic eggs an his are all Ameraucana (blue) so we would have the organic brown egg market. The other farmers sell blue, white, and duck eggs, some of which are free range. A 50lb bag of organic feed is about $32 at the Bastrop Feed Store on Hwy 95.

RAINWATER HARVESTING

This is what my husband is talking about. While doing more research in what's in our local water and trying a new approach to gardening this year with compost tea we are also furthering our research on other problems that may be impacting our food production. Word on the street is that if we continue having the drought issues like we've been having the past few years in Texas, then we will be short on water; meaning running out of it in just a couple years. We have had a couple 55 gallon rain barrels for a few years now but find ourselves collecting water in various other

containers. Davin's bound and determined to transform what was once a raised garden bed, into our new location for harvesting rainwater. The area is right behind the garage, next to the vertical chicken coop side of the greenhouse. I've been removing the remarkable dirt and placing it in new beds in the front yard for native plants. His goal is to get 4-275 gallon tanks, which would put us at 1100 gallons of water when full. That still isn't nearly enough because it will fill up relatively quickly during our spring and fall monsoons. According to the farmers almanac we are scheduled to get some rains until June and then it's supposed to be pretty dry, may not rain in July and August. So there is a demand to get it in now. I'm not entirely sure that we will have enough room and part of me is concerned that the birds will be looking at water bins but we plan to build a deck just over it which will also allow us to have easier access to the eggs(I currently have to stand on a step stool to get them since I'm so tall).

Davin has already set up eaves and a downspout, with another covered water bin to harvest rainwater for the chickens, on west side of our Greenhouse Chicken Coop. We currently have goldfish in the one by the house to help with mosquito prevention. The 2 goldfish in there survived the winter and several freezes.

We may also create a diversion from the front

downspout to harvest in the back since we lose a lot of water there and we can't have any rain barrels in sight per HOA regulations. I've been advised that the HOA laws have recently changed and Texas is supporting no turf lawns like they have out west. The downspout would run across the shower fence and adjoin to the garage.

HIGH TECH SPRINKLER SYSTEM (For Us)

Yes, this is my husbands latest endeavor. Last weekend he spent a few days trenching more clay in the yard, ripping out our outdoor faucet, and some of our past sprinkler systems. He jacked up his back and by the time he went back to work he couldn't get dressed without excruciating pain and moans. He is better now thank goodness. So, I really need to have him talk about what he ordered since I don't know exactly the specifics. What the goal is basically is that we have added a water filtration system and additional tank that we can add our compost tea, fish emulsion, seaweed extract, etc. too on a regular basis so that it'll be distributed throughout the drip system which we are also reinstalling in all of our garden beds, except for our herb garden.

- SprinklerWarehouse.com
- Filtersfast.com

HOOP HOUSE

We made our first temporary hoop house for our

pergola garden bed since I have this innate feeling that it’s going to frost a few more times until May and I must plant some of my tomatoes and tomatillos because they’ve outgrown their starter containers. The peppers, new seed starts, and flowers that couldn’t be directly seeded won’t get planted yet. What small plants are added to the garden will get devoured by pill bugs if I plant them too soon. I periodically move the seed trays outside when it gets too cold since most of the sunlight indoors can only be achieved in the morning and that isn’t the ideal temperatures for germination. I try. We’ll see. Since the greenhouse walls and counters aren’t finished yet I have to continue my old methods. I don’t want to loose trays in the winds this year however, last year, one blew away! Bummer right?!

ORGANIZATION

One problem with our multiple projects is that they always leave a mess. It’s the typical story, husband cleans up after the wife. But it gets to be a bit ridiculous since anytime Davin starts a new project he goes to an area where there’s room, sometimes there isn’t any and he usually only cleans up his power tools. That’s what he calls, “cleaning up his mess.” Needless to say, we are always short on space inside the home yet have a fairly large yard to mess up.

So last weekend I tried to clean up part of our

scrap clutter; wood, pottery, old picnic table workbench, window, wheelbarrows, tires, etc. We've deduced that we need to have another covered area to store some of these things. However it needs to look tasteful since we are in a HOA that cares about such things, we also pride ourselves in our creations. We acquired what appeared to be an old animal habitat for a snake maybe from a nearby farm and will use it as a cold frame on one side of the covered area. We have 3 wheel barrels; Davin parted a couple of them out, one came with the house, and our neighbor gave us another one. We also have a heavier duty cage one that works as well for other things. They all seem to amount to not that great which is why he has to fix them up occasionally. Then there's this giant cedar log, at least 12 ft long. We are going to make benches or wooden paths with it.

I relocated most of the scrap near the shed to farther back along the fence. I created an area for small wood scraps of various kinds, and long wood scraps underneath the picnic table and on the other side too. I placed all of the nice pots on top of the table in stacks so that half of the table is still functional. I placed all of the extra pavers neatly in piles or on the ground and extra plywood/particle board on the ground to prevent grass and weed growth and to encourage dirt development.

I reorganized our garden shed and found the mouse

and outside field rat habitats that were left over from winter. A tiny mouse that our cats hadn't caught made me shriek as it scurried away. We found excess pvc piping and other fencing materials that were neatly stacked among the other materials in the back yard.

Once we use the rest of the pea gravel we will try to reuse the container that it's stored in. Our recycling center is pretty well organized and should be the only thing left in front of the shed near our front gate. We still have Ford truck parts and marble slate in that area that need to go, ba-byee. Since we have a flooding problem we have also decided to get free mulch from the county and lay down around that area, also by the shed on the outside of the garden beds, to minimize lawn space for cheaper.

OTHER NEWS

Volunteering

I recently volunteered last week with Urban Roots at SXSW for the Music by the Slice event that Homeslice has done. It was a tone of fun and a great way to network with new people and meet fans throughout the world. This is the 5th year that they have done the event with Homeslice Pizza. Retail Me Not was also there.

Interviewing

A couple of weeks ago I interviewed and toured

Natural Gardener with the owner John Lee Dromgoole. What we discussed was his lifes work and lessons learned. Entrepreneurship tips of advice and an outstanding experience of a lifetime that I'm truly honored to have shared with the lady bug bloomer. I will post some of my interview feedback after I submit it for class.

Brewers on the Brink

Davin and I attended Circle Brewery's 3rd Anniversary Party a couple weeks ago after grabbing food at the Bque cook off at the Austin Rodeo. We attended the event for $15 per person which gave us 3 wooden drink chips each, free stout casking samples on tap, anniversary pint glasses, sticker, coffee samples and stickers from Briggo coffee, chance to hang out in the warehouse and a tour around brewing tanks.

Read more about what they are doing in Austin at their blog http://circlebrewing.com/blog/

Visit our site tabs to see updates on different topics and pictures on homesteading, brewing and permaculture projects. Our next beer to brew is a mock of the Organic Dark Chocolate Stout by Samuel Smith that we'd hoped to have for St. Paddy's Day but our other projects have gotten in the way.