

Spring Fever!

Here in Texas we've experienced spring weather for quite some time. You can really tell it's spring when all the plants are blooming like crazy and there is green growth everywhere!

My lemon balm is crazy right now! Thank goodness the chickens love it and it smells incredible. Lemon balm, or Melissa, is excellent to grow anywhere in your garden. It's great to promote beneficial insects and deter pests. It's in the mint family.

I wanted to update you on some of our latest projects and with pictures because there have been so many this past year that the website doesn't do our backyard justice! So bare with me, I'm on my one week vacation from school, thank goodness! However the week isn't ever long enough, because the intensive six weeks classes can sometimes be pretty brutal. Just being honest and from me, you get nothing less. I don't sugar coat it, I'm sorry if that's what you wanted. This website is based on honesty.

Moving right along. I will attempt to blog more often, in my defense, I'm engaged in lengthy discussions online with school, so I will continue to share some of those blogs because often times I've done a bit of research and you may find them a lot more interesting since they are very informative in the food movement. My next class is vegetables to table, 5050.

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

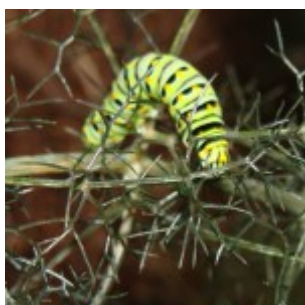
disappointment on growing certain crops here and are always researching this seasons insect challenges. We are very flattered that our methods of living have rubbed off on someone new, especially a family of six! We are thrilled to exchange ideas and lessons learned each week. Gardening humility keeps 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.



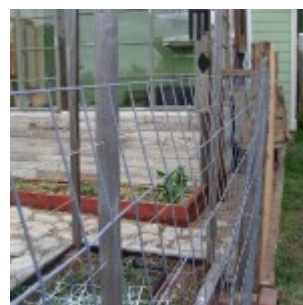
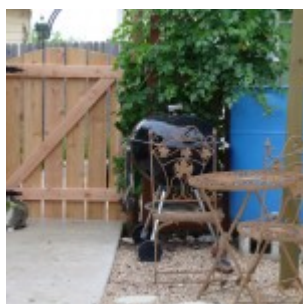
Papilio glaucus-
Eastern Tiger
Swallowtail



Herbs in the
garden designated
for beneficial
insects



Davin's May
Project 2014





Mic fenced in...



Herbs,
Blueberries, and
Table Grapes



Back Gate



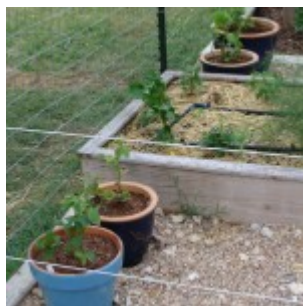
Cover for
Tomatoes



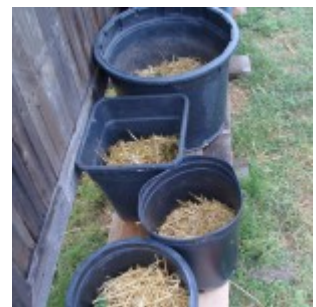
Tomatoes, Onions,
Garlic, Peppers,
Carrots,
Radishes, Beets,



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!



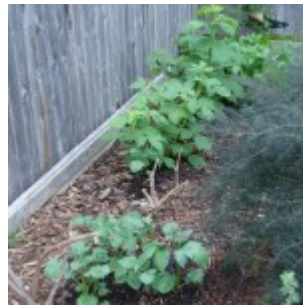
Easy to move free
range water
feeder



From the
underside



Eversweet and
Tristar
Strawberries



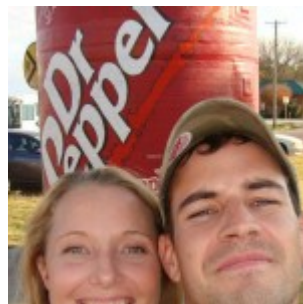
Herb Garden
experiments



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



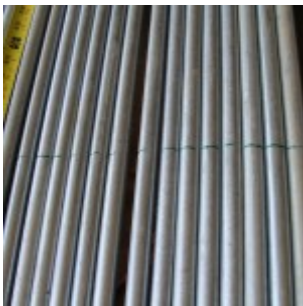
Ground I'm
growing in,
Kristin's Project
for Sustainable
Studies in
Graduate School
at Texas State
University



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.

Becoming a Dairy Goat Shareholder

My husband and I considered joining a local small scale Dairy Goat Farm, small scale meaning it's basically a small heard that consists of five goats; Eve, Trisket, Abernathy, Misty, and Penny. We purchased a quarter share for \$7 and once a week we are able milk goats. We end up getting 5 quarts of goat

milk a month. We could have invested in a full share which is 5 gallons of goat milk a month and about \$35. (We didn't continue being shareholders after the first month however because we didn't agree with the animals living arrangements.)

I've always had a love for goats, ever since I helped take care of 27 on a farm that had 59 animals, many of which were different. My interest in them has grown as we develop our passion for buying a larger homestead property in which we will have a few acres or more. My need for goat milk has increased since I started making chevre goat cheese and paying an upwards of \$16 a gallon just to make 1 lb of cheese! After sourcing local farms and the farm that produced the milk I bought, from Wheatsville Coop; I knew that there had to be another way! I was fortunate to be able to speak with one of the owners of Watroak Farms, Mark, who was extremely helpful in my cottage production of cheese. Although I can not sell the cheese that I make from the milk that I get from City Farm Austin, I will be able to learn an entirely new skill set. I am new to the milking field and it was a bit challenging for me. I hope to get better as time rolls on. My husband picked up the skill rather quickly but then the Lord has blessed him with being very gifted with his hands so that doesn't surprise me.

So we add another skill to our list of things that we have learned how to do to become more self sufficient. Last winter Davin and I helped harvest 18 Muscovy ducks at a friends local Organic Duck Farm; Munkebo; boy was that a lesson, challenge, and experience. I can't say that I'm a fan of plucking molting ducks, it's probably the least favorite part of the job altogether, in due part because they were molting which meant extra presents secreting from their skin once plucked, disgusting. Not sure if I am able to post those pictures because they may be a little offensive but educational nonetheless. Also a great way to meet new people, learn new skills, and have a better understanding of where our food

comes from.

We have by far a lot more to understand and learn what to do to be able to be 100% independent and live off the grid, but since we brew our own beer; make our own cheese-I'm still just a beginner in this field and I'm still experimenting; grow our own food and preserve it using several different methods; harvest rainwater; learned to milk goats; learned how to process poultry; learned some basic permaculture practices; are getting our own chickens-we would like 3 to start since we do live in an HOA that doesn't allow us to have them but another family owns a rooster that crows every day and has for years and we live along the greenbelt and have created the perfect urban homestead with room to grow; we have been blessed that our endeavors have educated us in the field of sustainability prompting our response to learn more.

We fish freshwater and saltwater fish for our food supply. We enjoy hiking, exploring, backpacking, camping, and getting our hands dirty whatever way possible outside. If we can benefit from an activity in some way we have gained yet another priceless lesson in life. We have so much to learn from our ancestors, and neither one of us grew up on a farm although my father has been doing agriculture for years as a farmer who went to school for geology. I've learned a little from him but a lot more from all of the organic farms that I have worked on or volunteered for over the years. Also the continuing education class I took one summer at Austin Community College was extremely useful in becoming a better Texas gardener. I learned that I couldn't just throw a seed in the ground and expect it to grow like it does in Michigan. You laugh, I know, but people think they are "black thumbs" because they can't grow plants here but the reality is that plants only need 6 hours of sunlight in Central Texas. Whoa! It takes a completely different understanding of the land, water, soil, sun, and weather elements to be successful! It's no wonder your plants may be struggling which is why it's advantageous

to learn about alternative gardening methods, including wicking beds, shade screening, gardening with raised beds, berms and swales, etc. Also make sure to rotate your crops.

As for now, we are headed to Habitat for Humanity to get more supplies for our greenhouse that is being converted into a chicken coop and a more efficient outdoor growing room.