

## [Shuckin' Beans](#)

30 September 2009 Richard Copeland

Yep. I was shuckin' beans. Having taken Audrey's advice from yesterday I picked them. Actually better than that I yanked them up by the roots, less from fear of frost but more from the apparent growth of moulds on the lower plant parts due to, I guess, steady days of rain. Took 5 small trailer loads out of the garden (best crop ever I think) and on Audrey's suggestion delivered them to the first floor & placed them on newspaper.

Shuck is actually a real word. I checked the Canadian Oxford and there it was, and my use of it appropriate, although I need to acknowledge language abuse due to the dropping of the 'g'. Shucking can be mindful I suppose and almost meditative or mindless allowing multi-tasking. I chose multi-tasking with the TV & with mindlessness and even after several TV warnings regarding the need for my 'viewer discretion' quite enjoyed the experience. It was a long day with harvesting also the squash and placing it under a tarp for the nightly frost threat, harvesting most of the onions (great crop) due to a wet garden, a picking of more tomatoes and covering the key tomatoes for frost. The squash need to 'harden' (I think it means lay around outside while you protect them from frost) so they were separated from the mother ship and spread around the lawn. These squash - butternuts - were from our own seed and interestingly a few adopted a green colour. I have attached a photo of 2 of them side by side - 1 green & 1 yellow. Never know what you're going to get, unless you're Gregor Mendel I guess. A little hanky-panky with the zucchini last year perhaps? Taste test will be next - perhaps we have an exclusive variety. Or maybe something that tastes awful - zucchini not my favourite. The learning curve for trying to get a handle on sustainable living is a slow climb.

This year's garden has been one of our most productive - at least on a per plant basis. Recent history left us deciding to plant less and a summer of filled with activity took more time away from the garden. We did start out with great manure in terms of quality & volume and a summer of great rains. In many cases we were late getting things planted or started, and some plants, many near death, that were destined to be tossed were planted simply because we had the room. All things planted did well. The pigs ate one of the potato patches but the small one at the house has produced more than we had in the past with 3 patches planted. Weeds looked to have won the day but beans, tomatoes and onions thrived amid them. The garden has done well by ignoring it. I don't think that is the right lesson to learn, but it was taught well this particular year.

It is the end of the month and hurray - we did not run the generator for the month. The first half month was excellent for the sun, the second moved along as if the sun barely existed, but some supplemental wind and a few solar peek-a-boos got us through.

Yesterdays's jars of salsa all sealed - for those of you interested. I now notice a pervasive smell throughout the house. It smells like moist dampened earth or garden. Ah, the trailer loads of bean plants downstairs. We should be through them in about a month. Perhaps a plan 'B' is needed.

richard

Attachments:

 [YelGreenSquashBlog.jpg](#) [Yellow & Green Butternut Squash] 609 Kb

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[Back to It](#)

29 September 2009 Richard Copeland

I seem to be slacking on the frequency of blogs. It has to do with busy. Really! Okay who's going to believe that a retired guy is busy. I'm ready for the polygraph.

Audrey's away and the garden fruits, the canner beckons, the Highlander demands attention, a picture falls from the wall

(second one) during the night, I need new parts to complete the DHW changeover due to a better idea and have run out of pickling spice. Where are the five kids to look after me in old age? I've pickled hot peppers (more tomorrow), canned more tomato sauce and have a batch of salsa on the stove as I write (keyboard.) Audrey has called from St. Catharines due to the 'frost' rumour for Ottawa that is circulating around the Niagara Peninsula. Her family is comprised of weather watchers with opinions but not a meteorologist among them. All I need to do is cover some tomatoes, pick the beans, harvest the squash & tuck them under a ground sheet in a bunch and find a cure for cancer.

I drove to Renfrew yesterday figuring that the crummy weather of the past two days was to continue for the next eight. I could acquire pickling spice, & a check valve needed to change over the DHW system today. I want to do the system when it can't turn on so nothing gets overheated, with the sun MIA everything would be cool if I did it during this period of dismal weather. On the other hand, no energy for the past 2 days would suggest the requirement for a dance from the spirit to the sun gods would be in order for energy survival. Well the batteries got their way today - sort of. This day was one of bright sun attacks of brief duration, but enough to prevent me from doing the Hot Water work. I suppose that really someone above was looking down on me, but after hearing Richard Dawkins on CBC I assume that it was an Air Canada pilot.

So the salsa got the attention, but not until a 4 pm start. Had to go to Griffith & Denbigh for the paper & ORI. It is 8:45 and I'm back to the keyboard. 5.5 Litres of salsa. I hope it isn't over cooked, I decided to hot pack in hot sterile jars. My recipe is really at its best fresh. We shall see.

Just like Kermit finds it hard being green (a jar just sealed - love that pop) it is also hard being sustainable. I know we're not, but with a good social network we probably could be, (2 more jars sealed) all of us.

richard

[Add your comment](#)

[Frost Maybe](#)

25 September 2009 Richard Copeland

I'm sure we have more beautiful days in September than we have had all summer. Another clear sky sunny day with even a bit of breeze to give pause to appreciate all sources from where it is that our energy comes.

Another threat of frost for the overnight, so I picked my hot peppers. Not much this year, the cause of that being starting too late in getting the seeds to germinate and consequently too late getting them in the ground as well. Normally I would have a massive second bloom, which would get harvested close to or in October. The lateness of planting and the lack of good solid sunny days in the summer have yielded very immature crops. No point in risking what I have for sure. As far as the peppers go I will pickle what I have (got a recipe - at least proportions - from my nephew's future relatives in Tilsonburg on the weekend) and am excited about that. I think we still have a fair bit of ground peppers from last year for the upcoming year - so no sweat there.

I covered the squash at our place and headed over to Ken & Jo's to have a look at the tomatoes there. Picked quite a few, and Adam had placed a large sun shade tarp over much of the crop. I took over 2 more tarps and covered more crops, while Jo did the same and put her enormous Hubbard squash under tarps as well. I've attached a photo of our coverings, from Ken & Jo's place.

richard

Attachments:

 [FrostCov1Blog.jpg](#) [Jo placing a tarp over the Hubbard squash] 225 Kb

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[Is this the Anthropocene?](#)

24 September 2009 Richard Copeland

But first the last day or two. Yesterday's rains were quite plentiful, all the rain barrels, including the big one at the side of the house were filled very quickly. The big one (275gal.US) was near empty from the watering activities of the past days. The pond though, did not grab and hold any extra water. Today's sun was outstanding, precipitating a laundry load and a morning visit to a newly built cottage that has gone solar. Since it is on an island it is also off-grid, the solar input being 2.1Kwp, slightly more than our solar component here and with panels occupying less square feet of roof. As new systems come on line the evidence of product improvements is everywhere. More output per unit area for panels. It would appear that equivalent sized panels to mine, which produce 120w each, now produce 185w each. Eight years difference. And I finally got to see, though not in enough detail, that Xantrex (formerly Trace) still exists with new product (chargers, inverters) and it is much quieter than mine. The overall system cost appears to be going down. If you're thinking about doing this, don't just dream about it, look into it very carefully. It's getting better all the time.

Oh yeah, the title. About ten years ago a chemist, Paul Crutzen, coined the term Anthropocene as the current name for our new geological epoch. It was used with a bit of an activist's hyperbole but more recently has received some serious consideration. The October 2009 Walrus Magazine in a great article on the Fix For Planet Earth, reports that in an article co-authored by members of the Stratigraphy Commission of the Geological Society of London, England, who are responsible for naming & dating geological time, the following was detailed : "Sufficient evidence has emerged of stratigraphically significant change (both elapsed & imminent) for recognition of the Anthropocene - currently a vivid yet informal metaphor of global environmental change - as a new geological epoch to be considered for formalization by international discussion." Whew!

We humans are about to be recognized for all the hard work, irresponsibility, greed and outright foolishness with which we have blessed mother earth. These geological periods can last a long time. The irony of course with this one is that no one may be around as the next epoch arrives to acknowledge the Anthropocene's existence.

richard

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[Frosted](#)

22 September 2009 Richard Copeland

Back from a weekend blitz. Audrey was already in St Kitts when Rob (brother-in-law) & I joined her on Saturday to attend nephew Darren's engagement party which landed us in Tilsonburg on Sunday. Rob and I returned to Matawatchan yesterday. Since we had multiple people in our vehicle for important reasons I think we did okay on per capita CO2 emissions, but there is always that underlying feeling of guilt for firing up an internal combustion engine. But on my arrival, with no living here for a weekend - lots of energy & heat stored up.

Remember the frost I was concerned about? Friday night the lower field had frost but up top gardens were okay. Saturday night, while I was away, it frosted again, and just a bit heavier. Adam anticipated it and covered the squash with large tarps. The rest of the plants were left to fend for themselves. Well, just because they taste hot, they aren't. Hot peppers have no more heat energy than a tomato and both got whacked but not totalled. The Scotch peppers got it the worst, the Chiles next, the jalapenos and then the Thai peppers were actually unaffected. Only the tops of the tomato plants shriveled away so they are still in the game. As a result I spent a fair bit of time watering with what little rain water we have left in the tanks around the house. The cucumbers were decimated (they're not particularly hardy when it comes to frost) but they were about finished and so were we with pickling. So, all things considered - neither a total loss nor a disaster.

I also watered the hoophouse and picked a few tomatoes. Even though it is down the hill, plants in it were unaffected by the frost but they were very dry. The pond has dried up and we have one full tank of water (275Gal) left to water with. It will likely be enough, actually it will have to be - I'm not going down to the river with the pump at this stage of the season. The hoophouse has changed greatly with Adam loading it up with bales of hay. He & Ken have cutting & bailing - producing bales in the many hundreds. Since we have nothing to feed I'm anticipating that some cattle may visit, or the guys have 'lost it'.

Been following the climate change stuff in the news lately? Political folks are talking about it at a summit at the UN now & it would appear that the formerly so called 'uncooperative' Chinese are about to make us North Americans appear to be the enviro jerks that we truly are. I can't be totally surprised. When we were in Australia, the newspapers there and many people returning from China (close trading partners on that side of the world) spoke volumes about the large tracts of new housing and the very noticeable presence of Solar Domestic Hot water on every new home they saw. They are developing quickly, they are using coal but apparently not blindly and they are paying attention to the environment in the global perspective.

richard

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[Back to buying green . . .](#)

18 September 2009 Richard Copeland

. . bananas. Yes the little joke about impending doom and death was mine for the summer. Bereft of a family physician for decades, we finally got one and he ordered up tests by the score to see if we were as good as we looked (heh heh) and individually sustainable. I wasn't - flunked the first one - a stress test. No one really knew about this except for close family and the Matawatchan community (somehow). The medical advice of no exertion and taking aspirin while the investigations ensued was taken to heart and the terror was placed under control with intermittent success. The tests dribbled in - ECGs, blood, cholesterol, Echogram, CT Scan - and lo I am okay! Adam worked my firewood out of compassion during my medical dilemma and that was a neat deal - although there is some for me to finish. It is a relief.

But it is back to work. Yesterday included the annual chimney cleanings, downstairs stove, cookstove and shop stove. Both stoves in the house were barely worth the cleaning, particularly the downstairs unit. It is a Pacific Energy high efficiency stove and the chimney, a long one, has never really accumulated much if any creosote. It gets cleaned as a matter of discipline and a maintenance program. I also had to replace the firebrick in it this year - a 20 minute job. The cookstove chimney was very clean and it looks like we are getting better at managing its burn. Best year to date. There is a satisfaction in these annual preparations for creating our comfort down the wintry road. We look forward to the fires in the late fall - although we may feel differently by March.

More canning has been the passtime and the tomato has been the game. Against my preference but lacking sufficient time I caved into to simply canning tomatoes yesterday. 7 litres done & in the cold room. Today I took the time to simmer a sauce and only generated 3.5L this time exclusively from the Principe Borghese variety. They are a small tomato and the time to blanch & peel is torturous. It will be interesting to see if they will taste differently from the other varieties in a sauce. They are great off the vine and versatile in all food applications so far.

I've attached another photo, this one being the 'after' scenario for the cucumber photo of blog before. Like magic we see two pickle types and a relish created from the harvest of the day before.

A good day for energy, ran the dishwasher after the send off dinner for Ben last night. He is off to Thailand tomorrow and gone until July. Sad for us - great for him. Spotty sun and strong winds put together a pretty good day for electricity.

richard

Attachments:

 [pickleAudreyBlog1.jpg](#) [The after view of the harvest from the blog before] 491 Kb

[Add your comment](#)

[Canning Switch](#)

14 September 2009 Richard Copeland

The sun continues to be there for us. If you're in Ontario I don't need to tell you that the weather has been absolutely outstanding, and if you're off-grid the last thing on your to-do list is to check the battery storage. To keep up with what's happening in the life of an off-grid family is lot like watching paint dry. The electrical power is there, generally spring through fall and you just live out your life, with some good energy habits in place always but few concerns. Watch for me to moan in December.

We did 7 more liters of dills today, that brings our total to 56.5L. The cucumber patch, the smallest we've ever had, is the gift that keeps on giving. With a space of about 4 days between pickings the patch yielded another major & unexpected harvest, a picture of Audrey showing-off her pickles or relish to be is attached at the bottom of this blog page. So yes salted trays of relish and bread & butter pickles have set into the fridge as well today for canning tomorrow.

By now you have been asking yourself if these people intend to sustain themselves on pickles over the winter. If it appears that pickles are all we do, it is only because that is all we've done – at least until yesterday. Besides we are the central warehouse/storage for the rest of the family. The tomatoes, which have been a concern in ripening before frost, have begun to deliver near red fruit. We did five litres of tomato sauce yesterday, and have 20 plus litres of picked tomatoes ripening, in the front hall actually. Quite attractive. We make a sauce that can head for pasta, or pizza or whatever with a little additional seasoning allowed at the time of use. Most are basically a basil based seasoned sauce with garlic, onion & celery and oregano. We are about to get snowed under with tomatoes – great stuff, but busier times in the kitchen yet. Other stuff coming up – well, the potatoes are ready, have been for a while, but fine in the ground for now, best yield yet even after the pigs did their rooting in the lower field of potatoes; we picked garlic late, thinking it had succumbed to worms and let it go to seed. Should have picked it in July, it's actually okay but small bulbs– worst year for that crop; Tomatillos look great and keep nicely anywhere, hot peppers are coming along and usually dried and ground up into a powdery flake in January; Celery, egg plant, pineapple tomatoes and lots of other stuff are eat as you go. The dry beans should be a banner crop, likewise the onions. Carrots & beets will keep okay but we didn't plant enough this year. Lost too many in the first onslaught of weeds. Both carrots & beets usually keep well, stored in damp sawdust, in our cold room. Squash are looking good and keep well in the cold room as well.

It looks the sun and warmth is actually going to cause a fair bit of our crops to ripen. Frost is now the force to be dealt with.

richard

Attachments:

 [cucAudreyBlog1.jpg](#) [Audrey with cucumbers from the little patch that could] 371 Kb

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[More preserves](#)

11 September 2009 Richard Copeland

Today was the followup to yesterday. Completed some pickling of relish and bread & butter pickles. Sorted through the tomatoes and treated the pigs to the ones that weren't going to make it and separated the ripe from not quite ripe. We really do want them to be red, particularly for the sauces for the winter, otherwise they tend to look a little

yellowish. Took some of the red ones and made more salsa. Ran out of sweet peppers so I loaded the salsa with 4 jalepenoes - seeds removed. Made up some of the bulk with radishes and tomatilloes and extra tomatoes. A bit of a bite but not bad. Audrey added a teaspoon of maple syrup (who has the sweet tooth?) to the salsa and darned if wasn't a noticeable improvement! So I will have to add this to the recipe's variations and if you read this today you should do that too.

Managed to pick a bit of coriander today, slow go with those tiny seeds. In other years we grew cilantro outdoors and the birds got the seeds before we did. This time the hoop house was home to this versatile plant and we are getting the coriander. What we don't use over the winter can be planted for cilantro in the spring. An interesting visitor to the cilantro plant is a chrysalid from a monarch butterfly. I've been watching it, it would be pure luck to be camera ready and see it emerge. I'm debating bringing it indoors. I've attached a photo of it. It is interesting in that it has what looks like a gold thread near the top of it.

Lots of laundry done today, not a stellar solar day but the consistency of sunlight has been good for battery storage and we are back up to good levels.

I suppose another irony in the climate change race for improvements is the electric car. After decades of constructing noise walls in cities, creating anti noise bylaws, and complaining about sleep loss or intrusions of noise into our environment we are on the cusp of eliminating this deluge of decibels. But alas, the deaf cannot hear these new vehicles approaching and so now we are going to noise-them-up again. Can't we find another way to signal the deaf, and perhaps make location and speed more defined to them through technologies other than the production of all invasive noise? Something needs to be done absolutely, but how about a transponder and personal receiver of some kind.

richard

Attachments:

 [ChrysalidBlog1.jpg](#) [Monarch Butterfly Chrysalid in the cilantro] 286 Kb

[Add your comment](#)

[Work of Fall](#)

10 September 2009 Richard Copeland

I had declared fall's first day recklessly for the first of Sept. But nature conspires to support that position. The red in some of the maples has begun to gain more territory in the landscape with its striking colour, enhanced by the brilliance of continuing sunshine. And the bugs are going a little crazy, the flies finding their way into the gazebo with the hornets, who fly into your face or ear and laze about in great numbers. They all get into a screened area and I can't figure how they do it. The black flies of spring must be dumb, or didn't see the right Mission Impossible movie – they are unable to break into this safe zone, even with the advantage of their tiny bodies.

And the crops are coming in. This is the part of trying to live sustainably that is very satisfying, but also a creator of heavy duty fall work. The tomato crops, we actually have one crop planted at used-to-board-members Jo & Ken, who are fortunately also nearby neighbours. Ken turned over new ground at his place with the plow, and Adam & Fili, Ken & Jo & us planted tomatoes in the virgin ground with the hopes of avoiding blight and gaining the nutritional value of new ground. The idea was to mulch to keep down the weeds. Some of us mulched better than others. However, in all cases the crop is pretty good. Baring an early frost it could be a great harvest. And given that blight never got a hold (we have it only a bit) in the backyard planters – it could be dynamite on the supply side. Which brings us back to the work. I favour canning sauces or salsa, the things that are expensive at the grocery store and likely having ingredients we're not keen on. Canned tomatoes are not expensive and readily available year round. We'll see where we go on this. We actually sent off some quantities of tomato to Fili's dad in TO and will wait a bit for deeper ripening on what we have picked.

I have attached some photos of the garden and the 'green thumbers'. Joanne is pretty proud of her gigantic & growing

Hubbard squash & Audrey is picking tomatoes off the ground in the 'unstaked' area. Also have included a foto of Audrey & a celery, because we have never before actually grown a real looking celery here in Matawatchan!

But the cucumbers have been the task of the week, more dills yesterday, bread & butters into the fridge for their overnight and relish about to get the same fate about now.

The propane tank finally got filled yesterday to 50% (actually 49% but close enough). So I figure we used about 824L in 20 months. Have to figure how to cut that back next.

I can't help but see some of the ironies around climate change. Apparently McGill U is working on bringing to life or recreating a dinosaur. Just in time for the next mass extinction!

richard