

*March 2013*

Hmmm. Dare I mention the weather? I'm sitting by the fire, Wellie on my feet, trying to keep warm. Outside there is a good layer of snow on the fields, drifts at the bottom of the hedgerows and on top of the Pegsdon Hills (I know this because Wellie and I had to wade through them at the weekend!) and icicles hanging from the trees. It is a beautiful scene I must say, but it really would be nice if spring arrived soon and we could have some warmer weather.

Not only are the spring crops not growing but the seed isn't all in the ground yet. We managed to get several fields drilled a few weeks ago but have ground to a halt and are now waiting impatiently for the sun to appear and dry out the soil. You will have noticed the lakes in the fields in and around the parish. They soak away after a while, only to reappear almost immediately with only the smallest amount of rain. This just shows how saturated the ground is.

We have planted 8 gorgeous fruit trees on the farm, replacing a leylandii hedge that we removed. I chose different types and varieties of fruits so that we can get creative when the fruit is ripe; eating apple and cooking apple, Victoria plum and greengage, two varieties of pear and finally an eating cherry and more sour, cooking cherry. I can't wait to get baking!

We have been looking into carbon neutralising our cold-pressed rapeseed oil production and it seems that tree planting is one way of doing this. It is still in its infancy so we're not sure yet of the figures but it could be an important part of the process. There is a small corner of a field that we have considered planting trees in before so this could be the opportunity. I will have to research which native species are the best to establish in this particular area, to help enhance the pretty and beneficial grass margin that runs alongside.

Whilst trying to find new suppliers and stockists for our oil I have come upon some fantastic delis, farm shops, farmers' markets and restaurants tucked away in our county and beyond. What with this and the recent horsemeat scandal, it has become even more obvious that buying British food and drink is so important. I have met some amazing people, championing local food and there is a huge emphasis on British food when you visit these places and I am now trying to stick to it as much as possible. I admit it is quite difficult, especially with a small child in tow, to go to individual shops rather than nipping into a supermarket, but it is very satisfying if you can manage it. I was furious last week when the only lamb on sale on the shelves in a local supermarket was from New Zealand and as a result bought a cracking joint of local meat from a farm shop instead. I now also buy my bread from an artisan baker nearby and try to stock up with vegetables at the local farmers' market. Somehow it all tastes better when you know it's from just down the road.

I can hardly remember where my poor, abandoned vegetable patch is. There are a few straggly leeks left to pull up and then there will be a lot of hard work...digging, weeding, fertilising etc. Then we'll have to decide what to plant. We seem to have an irritating, recurring pest that annually devastates our spuds (a horrible, orange, flat centipede type thing...any ideas on how to get rid of them?) so I think we might give them a miss this year. Courgettes grow like mad in our garden so we'll definitely have them again and Millie loves carrots, so that's a good reason to give them a go. I'm hoping that the swing, craftily placed right next to the vegetable patch, will keep Millie captive for a few minutes at a time, while I do some gardening. Unfortunately Wellie won't sit on the other swing seat so I'll still have to put up with her "helping".