

## All Saints' Day 2009

Leaves of orange, ochre and burnt sienna lie like so many jewels beneath the feet of the trees. Away in the orchard late-fall apples become Christmas baubles in the grass where only yesterday I saw glittering eyes and a host of prickles. So many fruits and berries stippling the quick thorn: sloe, elderberry, rosehip. So much to see this November morning of delicate, translucent colour.

The earth was likened by the Ancient Greeks to a living deity which according to the time of year was either outward or inward looking. Now it's winter the earth draws into itself. It breathes inward while those inhabiting the earth appear to do likewise. The animals grow languorous, some of them hibernate; the human race would sleep longer during starlit winter nights. All is caught up in the shared rhythm of the earth.

It's sometimes said that when a farmer ploughs a field at this time of year he 'puts it to bed'. I like this expression. Implicit in it is the recognition that the earth, like any other living thing, needs time to sleep. The tractor moves up and down the field, the stubble is ploughed under and buried by fresh soil. In the end the field is left neat and tidy in the furrow like a newly made bed. The earth rests.

Or does it?

There are some things of a horticultural nature which defy the great winter sleep. Purple sprouting broccoli, cabbages, mixed kales, Brussels sprouts. Mark and Peter have seldom been busier, the unseasonably mild weather having had the effect of prolonging the cauliflower and broccoli harvest. It's satisfying to see the neatly prepared pallets of produce all made up and ready for collection in the packhouse yard. We have just one problem: mealy aphid. For effective control of these insects we need rain, and frost.

After we'd finished lifting potatoes last week Adrian was able to cultivate the land and prepare a seedbed for the drilling of winter vetch (a green manure or 'eiderdown'). Most of the harvested fields have now been cultivated leaving just the winter cereals and beans left to drill. Barring a plot of celeriac and a few late carrots, the harvest crops are home.

Home... as the earth breathes in, in come the cattle to the warmth and glow of the great barn at Lammings. Just the heifers so far which have spent the summer grazing Overline Field. Last Thursday I hung over the gate and looked at them while they looked back at me with their deep moonstone eyes. Ruddy with health, sleek-coated and well grown they're a wonderful mob of which Bruce has reason to be proud.

And the turkeys? They're filling out fast and growing to maturity. During the summer the birds receive a homemade 'grower' ration based on wheat, beans and peas which in November is superseded by a 'finisher' or fattener ration containing a slightly higher protein.. The feed is self-serve so they eat as little or as much as they like. I like having the turkeys around so the approach of Christmas is a bitter-sweet time for me. Providing them with a quality of death, as well as of life, is the key.

On Wednesday I'm meeting Hugh Dorrington of Aveland Trees to finalize next year's hedge planting program. Several new stretches are planned, interspersed with indigenous trees: oak, sweet chestnut, birch, ash. Dreaming of colour. Gold leaves against a fenland sky.

## Market Garden News

As with the farm the market garden is settling down for the winter. Simon and the team have dismantled the runner bean wigwams and cleared the polytunnels of any remaining peppers and aubergines. The plots of bare ground in Daughtons have been drilled with winter vetch and the raspberry pruning is complete.

Harvest-wise, all the pink fir apple potatoes have been lifted by hand (given the shape of the tubers mechanical harvest is impossible). The lettuce, turnips and kohlrabi are over and soon we'll begin lifting Jerusalem artichokes. Meanwhile the spinach and chard have been wed, another job performed on our hands and knees!

## Biodynamic pilot project update

Our biodynamic spring cabbage in Chicken Holt received its special BD leaf tonic about a month ago and looks extremely promising. Roy, who was tractor hoeing the crop last week, remarked on this and I agree with him. The kales in Woodlands Front also appear healthy and clean (which may be due more to the weather??). Early days, but on the basis of our experience so far, these crops appear to be doing well under a biodynamic regime.

## OPEN DAY! OPEN DAY! SUNDAY 22<sup>ND</sup> NOVEMBER

*Free Admission*

**Food Stalls, crafts, all day barbecue, teas and cakes, mince pies and mulled wine, tractor and trailer rides, arts activities, see the animals, prize draw. Hope to see you...Come and see us!!**

## Beef, Lamb & Pork

**Individual cuts and boxes are now available to order. Please click on our Extras page at [www.woodlandsfarm.co.uk](http://www.woodlandsfarm.co.uk) or phone Rachel on 01205 724778.**

**Warm wishes, Andrew Dennis**

**Tel 01205 724778**

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