

PLAYHAVEN FARM LLC & GREEN BUILDING PROJECT



SUSTAINABLE LIVING : 2008 THRU 2015

PLEASE NOTE:

Everything included in "Sustainable Living : 2008 thru 2015" has been transposed directly from the website in alphabetical order. That includes references to the PlayHaven Farm LLC and Green Building Project (PHF&GBP) website pages, external websites, links to documents, etc. Because of how quickly things change on the internet, there are NO links from this document.

NATURAL KING-SIZE BED (MAY 2012)

We didn't think there would be a large purchase this spring since we got the HVAC system last fall... but, we were lucky! With the tax refund being much larger than we expected (due to the 30% Federal Tax Credit for the geothermal HVAC), we sat down and made a list of what to do with that money. My suggestion was to replace the bed which was an innerspring mattress (purchased to replace the previous waterbed when it sprung a leak that couldn't be fixed) over 15 years ago.

That innerspring mattress turned out to be so firm that I could not sleep on it as it was. I added mattress pad after mattress pad trying to get enough cushion and the bed ended up being two (2) heights... my side being about 4 inches higher than the hubby's side. Still, I would wake up with sore muscles and I learned all about the 'pressure points' the mattress ads use in their sales pitches. I also discovered I had to wake up to change positions through the night. All of these things caused me to get very poor sleep. I knew I always felt tired and sore, but I did not realize that 15 years had gone by. No wonder I get irritated so easily and spend so much time at the chiropractor's office.

Luckily, the hubby agreed that the bed is a high priority and so I started my usual research before committing to purchase anything.

Since the hubby likes a firmer bed and I need a softer one, I thought we should swing for a Sleep Number bed so we could both have restful nights. During the course of my research, I discovered how much those beds cost and decided if we were going to spend that much money, I was going to buy the natural bed that I would rather have anyway.

We're talking in the \$5,000 range for a King-size bed; which translates to \$6.85 per person per night for two (2) people for one (1) year OR an hourly rate of \$0.86. I think we are worth spending \$0.86 apiece, 8-hours a night for a year to get a good nights rest. (And the bed should easily last 10 years with proper maintenance.) Honestly, after having done the math, I can't believe we put off buying a great bed for so long!

I pulled out my latest copy of Natural Home & Garden Magazine (I had found bed companies in it before) and visited the websites of several companies that sell natural beds. AND I found that we could not only get a natural bed, it could also be set up so that the hubby's side is firm and my side is soft. WIN WIN situation.



One of the deciding factors of who we would purchase this bed from was the ability to experience the bed before purchasing it. The only company with a retail location in driving distance was Savvy Rest. They have a dealer in Lawrence Kansas; which is a little over an hour away from us. We went there at our first opportunity and had a wonderful experience learning about the beds and trying different configurations. Diane Gercke, the owner of Eagles' Rest Natural Home is very knowledgeable about her products and we were so impressed with her, with the store and the products that we decided to purchase the bed from her instead of going back on-line to order it direct.

We opted for their Serenity model with ALL Talalay Latex layers and an organic Wool Topper. We also purchased a platform frame which I decided to stain myself (probably should have let them do that... turns out I'm not very good at staining).

Everything arrived in a timely manner (it was shipped from Savvy Rest directly to our house). We kept the old bed and moved it into the guest room.

We put the new bed together when we got home from our vacation.

We are in the 'break-in' period currently and while the bed feels a bit more firm than the one we tested at the store (that one was already broken in and did not have linens on it), I am already more comfortable at night. No sore muscles in the morning... No aching pressure points... No waking up to turn over... I'm sleeping more soundly and I think I'm more pleasant to be around (LOL).

Savvy Rest allows 90 days from purchase to exchange layers (at no extra cost) until you get the bed exactly the way you want it.

All in all, I say again that putting in the geothermal (ground source) heat pump was the best decision we have made recently. With the tax credit affected refund, it was like getting our new natural, organic bed free!

The pictures show (from top to bottom)...

The platform frame ready for stain on the other sides.

The slats from underneath the frame. Since this is a king-size bed, there are extra supports to keep the mattress and slats from sagging.

The completed bed with the Wool Topper and Wool Mattress Cover. We opted for the 15 inch platform so we can use the area below it for storage. We are also used to a high pedestal bed, so we added another 7 inches using the natural wood lifts from Bed, Bath and Beyond. As you can see we had to get a set for the supports as well. We'll need to leave area for air flow because the natural latex requires it.

And lastly... all decorated (minus underbed storage, which I 'm still working on getting).



BROADBAND SERVICE (ALSO KNOWN AS 'INTERNET ACCESS')

AIRCARD (JULY 2008)

It is amazing, the things we take for granted. Being a city-girl, I just assumed there would be no trouble getting a high-speed connection for my computer (so that I would be able to continue working from my home office).

But such is not the case...

- the cable companies don't have lines out here (and don't want to put one in just so I can have a cable modem)
- the local telephone company doesn't even have DSL out here
- satellite service is designed for cheaply downloading from their service... uploading is a MUCH more expensive proposition.

I thought I was going to be stuck using dial-up or rent an office in the city. Until... I was speaking to a customer representative of one of the satellite service companies and he said the most unusual thing: "I'm not just here to sell you something, I'm here to help solve your problems. Have you considered using an aircard?" (The unusual part, if you didn't catch it, was "not just here to sell you something".)

So I looked into aircards. Basically, an aircard is a cell phone that is dedicated to data only, not voice. It lets your laptop be 'wireless' wherever you go... so long as there is a cell phone tower to connect through. The cost for the service was only \$5 more a month than my old cable modem had been and the speed, while slower than a cable modem when no one else is sharing it, would be just about what I was used to. So, I am able to keep working from my home office.

CELL ANTENNA (JULY 2008)

The next hurdle was getting a strong enough signal inside the house. We knew when we purchased PlayHaven West that we had a pretty good signal from Sprint outside. And when we switched our cell phone service to T-mobile, it was partly because the signal is good at PlayHaven West as well.

We had not used a land-line for several years and intended to continue using our cell phones as our primary phone service. The trouble arose when we purchased the house at PlayHaven East, because it has a radiant barrier on all the walls and it has a metal roof. So the cell signal inside was almost non-existent in all but the 2nd floor, south bedroom.

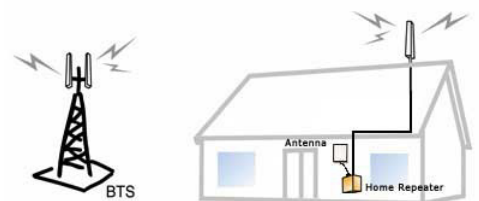
Every problem is an opportunity... so I researched boosting signal strength and the hubby found out about cell antennas (put an antenna on the roof, run a cable inside the house and amplify the signal inside the walls/roof).

I was nervous about bringing the signal inside the house, but then I discovered that "The harder your phone has to work to get reception, the more radiation it emits." Read more in [Dr-Oz-Explains-Cell-Phone-Dangers-and-How-to-Avoid-Them](#) (click here for the link to the article as a PDF). So, it is actually better for us to use the cell antenna from a health point of view (in addition to the other suggestions).

I purchased our cell antenna from CellAntenna.com. The representative was amazingly helpful when it came to figuring out which model we needed for our situation.

They even let us try different interior antennas (at their shipping expense) to figure out what worked best here.

I HIGHLY RECOMMEND THIS COMPANY!



****Update: October 2011**** We stopped getting the great signal strength we had been used to about six months ago. And I finally called the customer service about it.

First, they told me that the nothing last forever and two years was not an unusual lifetime. OK, not what I want to year, but good to know.

They had me first check the power adapter to see if it had gone bad... nope, not the problem. Then we checked the cable from the exterior antenna to see if it had a short... nope, not the problem.

Then we sent the amplifier (the only other thing that could go bad) back to them at their expense so they could test it... yep, that's the problem. It no longer worked.

We had to purchase a new amplifier. Fortunately, I always ask about refurbished equipment because you can often get a perfectly good item at a reduced price (something that has been fixed or simply scratched, etc. that works fine). They had one and we saved \$80 by getting it that one.

The signal is back to where it was before. It's not great everywhere in the house, but you learn to make due with what you need to. STILL, I highly recommend CellAnnenna.com.

4G LTE REPEATER (SEPTEMBER 2013)

When we purchased the original cell antenna set-up, the 4G capability was not available anywhere and we figured when it DID come to pass, that this rural area would not get it for a long time. After all, why would any business spend a lot of time and money making something available to a small number of possible customers when there are SO many possible customers grouped together in the cities?

We had a moment of excitement early in 2013 when it appeared that the local telephone company advertised that DSL was available in our area. That excitement was short-lived because CENTURY LINK is a business (and I use that word loosely) where the left hand doesn't know what the right-hand is doing. After signing us up, they proceeded to tell us we are not in their area. They supposedly sent a person to our house to verify our location (this person never arrived at our house) and that we could not get service of any kind (even a land-line) -- but we still got a bill for the set-up and installation of both a landline and DSL. It took some doing, but THAT finally got resolved. FYI, the previous owner had a land-line and was a customer of Century Link. We will NEVER do business with Century Link for any reason ... ever... period. (End of rant.)

Anyway, in 2013, we both needed to update our cell phones. The hubby has had a 'smart phone' for a while because he uses it for work. I did not want to go there because I really just use my phone for talking. I don't text (tried it, don't like it) and while GPS would be nice, I can live without it. The thing I need is a good speaker because I HATE to hold the phone up to my ear. And the basic phones just don't have a good speaker anymore.

So, after looking at what was available, I spent a couple months telling myself I would be buying a computer with a phone application. It was the only way I could justify the price-tag. We ended up staying with T-Mobile and getting Samsung. I have a 'phablet' and the hubby got what he wanted. This means we can use the 4G LTE signal, but because of where we live, we hardly ever got that.

It is very frustrating to have an expensive phone and still not get your calls because of the signal. Especially in emergencies and we had one of those a couple months ago. It got us off our whining butts and the hubby started complaining to T-mobile. After a couple months of his complaints and their promises... it paid off! They gave us a credit for those months and now the cell tower in Oak Grove is 4G LTE and we can get that signal outside on the roof.

Inside was still bad and that told us the repeater needed to be upgraded. We bit the \$\$\$ bullet and found that much has become more standardized in this area of cell phone technology. You can actually shop around for the equipment that just a few years ago was hard to find anywhere!

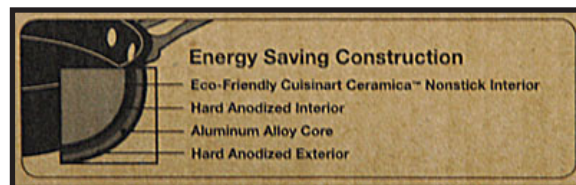
We went with mycellsignalbooster.com and (in addition to the Wilson repeater) added a 2nd antenna so that signal would be good throughout the house. Let me tell you how HAPPY I AM with Ryan and the crew at mycellsignalbooster.com! They sell a kit or you can buy components. We thought we needed components and so I emailed with Ryan about our particular needs since we already had the cellantenna.com products. It turns out we probably could have just replaced the whole thing because the cables and indoor antenna we figured we could reuse were not 'standard' sizes anymore. So the hubby ended up visiting his favorite electronics store several times to buy adapters. LOL Oh well. Thanks to Ryan, I saved some money and got the right components.

We got the whole thing installed this week and now we have 4G LTE at -75db (or so) throughout the house: basement, first floor and 2nd floor. Using a splitter we put an omni-directional antenna on the 2nd floor and reused the directional interior antenna on the 1st floor.

All in all, the cost upfront was still less expensive than one-year of satellite internet using the wi-fi for the phones. If we get two years out of the repeater, we will have saved even more!

The down side here is I'm spending too much time with my phablet in my face checking facebook and playing games. LOL! Ah well, I'm sure that I can control myself (in time).

ECO-FRIENDLY COOKWARE (DECEMBER 2008)



We decided that our gift to ourselves would be Eco-Friendly Cookware. It took me a bit of research to decide what to get... my decision was based on:

- having a healthy (not life-threatening) non-stick surface,
- rivetted handles,
- not too heavy,
- durability and
- company reputation and longevity.

I chose the Green Gourmet set from Cuisinart. Not only did it meet our criteria, it also was packaged in recycled (and recyclable) corrugated cardboard which was printed with soy-based inks. (I like the box so much that I gift-wrapped it and used it as a holiday decoration AND am storing it for use again.)

I purchased the set on-line from www.chefscatalog.com (great price, great service, quick turnaround).

****Update: May10, 2011**** I discovered a chip in the 10 inch frying pan about 6 months after getting the cookware. I contacted Cuisinart (excellent customer service, by the way) and sent it back under the warranty for them to either repair or replace it. I waited the 4 to 6 weeks they told me it would take and still there was no word or frying pan. So I contacted them again... they would replace it but it was

back ordered, do I mind waiting for it? No, not a problem. After another 2 months, I called again. SO SORRY, not sure when it will be off back order, can we send you the 15 inch fryer instead? Hmm, let's see replace it with a product worth twice as much? Ah, YES. A short time later I had my replacement.

Then, during the Holidays in 2010, I saw that Bed, Bath and Beyond had the 10 inch fryer for sale. I used my coupon to get a discount and purchased it.

I am so happy to have it again. Did not realize how much I missed it until it was gone.

HEATER CEILING FAN (DECEMBER 2010)

The north bedroom on the 2nd floor stays pretty cool, which is great during the summer; but not so great during the winter. Since we don't want to increase the heat in the rest of the house just to accomodate that one room... we opted for a room heater. There are lots of options out there, but one that is relatively unknown: a ceiling fan with a heating unit. I've known about them for years because of my insane obsession with this sustainable building stuff. I was SO excited to be able to buy one!!

As usual, I did my research and discovered that while there are several different brands and models available on the market; the technology is owned by one company (as of 12/2010) and is manufactured by only a couple of businesses.

The fans come in a wide variety of prices and looks. We opted to go with the a less costly version and are already happy with the Hunter brand because we put two of their regular ceiling fans in the master bedroom and like them very much. At the time we purchased it, I could only find it on-line and we paid about \$250 for it.

It is the Hunter, 21894 52-inch Westover Heater Fan. It has 5 blades, a light and a remote control.



The hubby installed it in place of the ceiling light as close to the ceiling as is allowed. With our 8 ft. ceilings, he can just barely walk under it without hitting it (he is 6 feet tall). So, if I were designing a house and wanted to put them in, I'd want to have higher ceilings in those rooms.

For our purpose, it works great... the room is the hubby's office and our guest room. So it doesn't get used everyday and is only on when someone is in there and needs it. And, in the summer it's used for moving the air to cool. Win Win situation. Highly recommended!!

LIGHTING (JULY 2008)

My very first project after moving into the house at PlayHaven East was to count the number of incandescent light bulbs that were being used. I also noted what kind of fixture they where in (interior... recessed lighting, covered fixtures, 3-way switches, and exterior). Beyond that, I found there were several floodlights on the house and barn including a couple motion sensed fixtures.

I did that research so I would know how many CFL lightbulbs I would need and what types to replace all those incandescent (et al) bulbs. Once I had the count I headed to EFI (Energy Federation, Inc.) at www.efi.org to purchase what I needed.

****Update: June 2015**** I didn't comment originally that in 2008 it was difficult to find a variety of CFLs sizes and EFI was one of the few places to get 'odd' bulbs. I'm happy to say that in the last 7 years it is

easier to find not only CFL lightbulbs in a variety of sizes and styles, but LEDs have already outpaced CFLs. I believe this is because of the amazing versatility and flexibility of applications that LEDs are able to accomplish. All the while, saving even MORE money by using LESS electricity to do the same job, while doing it without heat gain.

No, I haven't done a complete change over from CFLs to LEDs because that would be a waste of those CFL bulbs. Instead, I am replacing the CFLs with LEDs as the CFLs go out. And I am disposing of those CFLs by taking them to places that recycle them... recovering the mercury so it doesn't pollute the landfills any more than they already are.

NITELITE™ (FEBRUARY 2012).

When my parents were here over Thanksgiving, they asked about a night light so they wouldn't have to leave the hall light on (for essential trips in the night, shall we say).

I realized that I did not have any and so went looking for something.

Viola! This nifty little set of lights is just the thing!

A light sensor so it turns off during the day...

LED...

and it swivels so you can direct the light.

As you can see, it's still in the package. That's just because we haven't needed to use it yet. When we do use it, I'll update the page and let you know how it works.

I found it at Bed, Bath and Beyond and it was under \$10.



RECYCLING AND REPURPOSING (JUNE 2012)

I can't believe I forgot to make a page about recycling!! It is one of the easiest ways to change your attitude about what is trash and what is no longer usable but is NOT trash.

There are SO many ways to repurpose stuff. When I see something amazing (at least I will think it's amazing), I'll add it to the section below called "Repurposing".

RECYCLING, A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

My first conscious effort to live a sustainable lifestyle was to recycle things and keep them from going into a landfill. Which brings to mind a couple of distinctions that might be helpful... to recycle something means that the material the thing is made from is broken down so that it can be remade into something else. Many people use the word 'recycling' when something is simply used again in its current form or altered for another purpose. A more appropriate word for re-using something is 'repurpose'. I bring this up because communication causes so many problems between people and there are so many very specific words to use and avoid miscommunication... why not use them?

The other distinction that comes to mind is the difference between recycling and hoarding. Until just recently, I didn't think anyone could confuse the one for the other. I was wrong. To explain what I mean, I have to tell a story...

I was talking with a fellow who was doing some work on my house. He was surprised to hear me say that I have a recycling area in my garage because he didn't see piles of stuff waiting to be recycled. He then told me about another person he had done some work for whose home was filled with piles and piles of things... that home owner described what he was doing as recycling. No, I said, that person

was not recycling, that person was hoarding. I think most everyone has seen the television shows about people who hoard. But, to be completely clear, the basic difference between hoarding and recycling is that stuff to be recycled is removed from the home and taken to a facility for recycling.

OK, so that being said, I can see where there can be a bit of confusion and overlap between recycling and hoarding if there is no curb-side pick up of recyclables. Without a scheduled pick up service, a person has to transport their recyclables to a local center themselves. I, for one, don't want to make that trip every week with a small bundle of things. I would rather accumulate a full load and make the trip then; which means storing those items until I get a full load. Hence the confusion: am I hoarding before recycling? Technically, yes, for short periods of time. But does that make me a 'hoarder'? No. If I intended to take in my recyclables and just never got around to it and they accumulated to the point of filling my home with piles and piles... then I would have crossed the line from recycling to hoarding. I hope that clears up the differences between recycling, repurposing and hoarding.

When I decided to recycle, there was no curb-side pick up service in my community; there wasn't even a local recycling center. I had to drive 20 miles to the closest recycling center. It was located in another city and I was concerned they would not want me using their facility since I wasn't paying taxes there. So I called (because that is the kind of person I am) and asked if it would be OK for me to bring my recyclables to their facility. Yes, it was OK.

I've been recycling for 20+ years and have moved from that small city to a farm five (5) miles from ANY city. I am still responsible for getting my recyclables to a facility. Luckily for me, there are more recycling centers around and I only have to drive 10 miles to get to the nearest of them.

Whether you have curb-side pick up or you have to do the transport yourself, recycling is a very easy thing to do. I started with four (4) baskets in the house; one each for glass, plastic, tin and aluminum. I soon found out I could sell the aluminum and help to pay for my fuel consumption. So I designated an old trash can for aluminum and decided to make my trip to the center correspond with my trip to the aluminum buyer. But that meant storing ALL my recyclables until that trip. Luckily, we were buying 40 lb bags of dog food at the time. Now, I don't know if you've seen those bags, but if not... let me tell you they work GREAT for storing and hauling recyclables because they have multiple layers to seal in moisture. I set aside a space in the garage and when my little baskets in the house got filled up, I transferred the contents to a dog food bag. This also meant I was saving dog food bags. In addition, I found I could recycle corrugated cardboard and paperboard; so I was stacking that in the garage as well.

Can you see where I'm going with this? It was a miscommunication between me and my husband. I could see the difference between the recycling and the trash waiting to go out to the curb... he could not. I couldn't understand why he wasn't putting all the trash out and he thought anything that wasn't in trash cans was waiting to be recycled. We did not communicate ... we made assumptions. It took a long time for us to figure out why we argued so much about recycling. Please learn from my mistakes.

Now I keep a large woven basket (with handles) on top of the refrigerator and put all kinds of recyclables into it. Once it is full, I carry it out to the garage where my recycling center is. This is what my current recycling center looks like.

I have three (3) recycling bins that are perfect because they stack and are still accessible and hold a large amount. Two have a label, so it's easy to know which one holds glass, tin/aluminum, or paperboard (the one without a label). I also have two (2) large trash cans for plastics. I flatten all paperboard and corrugated cardboard and put the small



pieces into a bin and the large pieces are wedged between the bins/cans and the stairwell. I also have a small wastebasket by the bins for trash (tape, bottle caps, etc.). You might also see some Styrofoam and there are plastic trash bags under the stairs with small pieces of Styrofoam in them. In my vicinity, there is only one center that takes clean Styrofoam, so that is a special trip all of its own.

You may have noticed that I don't have a bin for office paper or newspaper. We don't accumulate very much of either product. What we do accumulate is used for starting fires in the burn barrel or the wood-stove insert. (I recently bought a device to make 'paper logs'... I'll let you know how it works when I figure it out. LOL) I also don't have a separate container for aluminum any more. We stopped buying soda/pop in cans and we like our beer from bottles... hardly anything else comes in it, so we just put it in with the tin and don't sell it back any longer.

Anyway, now you know my experience with recycling. Except for the trial and tribulations over the years with what the centers would accept and what they wouldn't. Times have changed and almost everything that is plastic, glass or paper can be recycled. What your center accepts is up to them and you should find out what they take. If they don't take something, they may know a place that does. If you aren't sure what I'm talking about here... there are numbers inside the recycling triangle on plastics that designate what kind of plastic it is. Numbers 1 and 2 are food grade that everyone accepts. The higher numbers contain different chemicals that may or may not be toxic. I won't get into the particulars of that here... the information is readily available through internet searches. Also, some things simply are not accepted... e.g. motor oil containers (even if they show a recycling number on the plastic).

General rules of thumb are also common sense and courtesy. Rinse out your cans, bottles, etc. Nobody wants smelly, moldy, rodent bait! I put my peanut butter jars through the dishwasher before leaving them in the recycling bin. Also, leave just your recyclables at the centers... don't make the volunteers who work there wade through the containers to remove your plastic trash bags and other trash.

Above all... take your recyclables in for recycling! Don't hoard them.... Yuck!

Oh, and one more thought about recycling: the only way recycling is really successful is if people buy the things made from the recyclables. The recycling triangle is one continuous line (made of arrowed segments) for that very reason. So check the things you buy and think about choosing the brand that advertises their container is made from recycled stock... especially, you want to look for a percentage (at least 35%) with the words "post-consumer".

I'd love to hear about your personal recycling center!

REPURPOSING

Saw these great chairs made from plastic barrels at Powell Gardens.

My concern was: How much weight would they hold? I can tell you for a fact that the blue chair easily withstood 250 lbs.

You can buy used barrels (like these) for around \$15.00 (in this area). I don't know how much the rivets they used cost, but probably not much. You'd also need a zig-saw (or something like it) to cut the barrel into the pieces needed.

I did a quick search and found this website that gives instructions to make the blue chair: <http://www.instructables.com/id/Recycled-55-Gallon-Barrel-Chair/>

Have Fun! Let me know what great projects you do.



HOLIDAY LIGHTS (DECEMBER 2008)

Several years ago we decided to use LED lights for holiday decorating. At first they weren't easy to find, but now just about everything can be done with LEDs.

Each year I look at the beginning of the season to see what's available, then I like to wait until the after-season sales to get great deals (like the spiral tree in the forefront of the picture). Lately, the LEDs have been more popular (YEAH) and there has been less deals to pick from (BOO). But that's OK, better that people are making the switch. To make up for that, I've added a line to the budget so that I can get something I like at the beginning of the season.

This year, I even found LED lights at Big Lots!

Home Depot had a special in November -- for each string of old holiday lights you brought in, you received a \$3 discount on new lights. So, we took in all of our old lights (10 strings... that was \$30 in savings for us) and decided to purchase the "giant light-bulb" LED strings arcing along the lower right of the picture. We used them to see the edge of the circling gravel driveway even when it snowed. They are great - they have a whole series of color changes and they work in sync with the entire length of multiple strings.

Granted this doesn't improve the structure of the house, so not really a renovation, but it sure is fun! Plus I get to decorate more and still save energy!

****Update: December 2011**** I keep telling myself that change is good. This season I pulled out the big lightbulb LED decorations (seen in the photo) and discovered at least one per box was cracked or broken. It was very dis-heartening. I thought they would last longer, but the plastic "bulbs" discolored and became very brittle. So, now I have another project for the winter: remove the plastic bulbs and figure out a way to put something else over the LED diode that will show the lights and their color change.

2012 FALL

I promised myself that once the south porch was sealed, I could decorate the outside for the Fall (and Halloween).

First, I picked up a couple bundles of (what look like) grain bouquets, some party-colored corn, pumpkins, a gourd and two wood bushel baskets.

Then I got to thinking about how bad the front (north) porch looks. It is 2nd on our list right now (right behind the drainage problem around the garage). I decided would pull the focus from the problems... but how? I popped in "Hocus Pocus" (fun movie) and paid attention to how people were decorating. See that little light bulb that just appeared over my head? LOL -- I got some ideas!

I decided to find some really inexpensive material to use as "skirting" around the base of the porch. Since it's so close to Halloween, there are TONS of sales going on for Fall decorations! And I lucked out because JoAnn's was also having a BIG sale on fabric!

So, here's what I ended up with:

- 10 yards of felt (and not just felt, but felt made from RECYCLED PLASTIC BOTTLES!! see the picture below... This is the end of the bolt for your information. I got it on sale for \$2.99 a yard.



I wasn't sure how much it would take since I wanted to drape it, so I bought the whole bolt (10 yards). It is 60 inches wide and I cut it in half to get 2 pieces each 30 inches wide by 10 yards long. I ended up with about 3 yards total to use for something else.

- 4 bales of wheat straw
- 4 'silk' flower bunches of green and purple hydrangeas
- 2 'silk' flower bunches of fall leaves
- 2 packages of Halloween 'trash bags'



I store decorations from year to year, so I had several other things to draw upon:

- large 'flag' with pumpkin, moon, bat and "Trick or Treat" on it
- 2 scarecrows
- scarecrow 'Welcome' wreath

And I like to look around my house and yard and find things that I already have that I can incorporate into the decorations:

- white pottery cat statue
- 3 painted metal chairs
- wicker box
- flexible plastic bushel baskets (which I use for farm work)
- Osage Orange fruit (also known as "Hedge Apples")



The end results.

Above, a panoramic view (which also shows the new fence and gate).

At Left, just the porch. I used EcoTwist (paper covered metal twist tie in a roll that you cut to size) to attach the corn and "bouquets".

A special little tip for you: I used mitten clips (you know, to attach mittens to coat sleeves) to attach the skirting around the porch.

The 'silk' flowers are separated using a wire cutter and stuck into the bales as desired.

There are Hedge Apples in the tipped baskets between the bales and I also used them to weigh down the plastic Halloween bags that are filled with newspaper (that we save to use to start the fireplace logs).

TELEVISION, FLAT SCREEN, LCD HDTV (DECEMBER 2009)

The hubby (and ‘the guy who earns the big bucks’) had been wanting to update our ‘entertainment system’ (which translates to our TV and stuff) for some time now and I kept putting it off with by pointing out other priorities. So when it came time for us to choose our Solstice gifts for each other, we decided on another joint gift (you may recall the eco-friendly cookware we chose last year) and purchased the Sony Bravia VE5 1080p Eco LCD HDTV.

There is lots of information at the Sony website. Basics are:

- 16:9 Full HD 1080p Resolution Panel (1920x1080)
- Dynamic Contrast
- LightSensor® Technology
- Motionflow™ 120Hz Technology
- Conserve Energy with Presence Sensor
- Dynamic Backlight Control
- High-efficiency HCFL Backlight
- Energy-saving Standby Power Switch (translation: the OFF switch) and a bunch more, of course.



As usual (hopefully this will change soon), we had to tell the salespeople how to sell the thing. Several stores had the Sony display showing how little electricity it uses when in its most energy-efficient settings... but there wasn't any other TV hooked up to show the DIFFERENCE. So if you didn't already know how much your current or prospective TV used, it was kinda pointless. Plus, the demo TV only played the demo video --- which of course was perfect for low energy use, but not great at showing the quality of the image for skin tones, action, etc. FYI: The image quality is superb! What you would expect from any Sony.

When the free TV signal went to digital, we had converters so we could watch TV. When we changed to the Bravia, that eliminated the need for a converter and when they totally eliminated the analog signal, it made the VCR useless. So we also updated to a DVR recorder that is also a DVD and VCR player. I had hoped to record all my VHS tapes to DVD, but am not gung-ho enough to figure out how to by-pass the anti-recording features on them. Guess I'll just have to hang on to those ancient VHS tapes. FYI: This item isn't 'green' on its own accord... but it did let us reduce our equipment by one item, so that's something.

And, it wouldn't be an entertainment system without extra speakers. So when Gary got one of those gift bonus things from work that had a Sony 5-speaker system in it. Well, I think you can guess the rest. We were able to replace the stereo (which we were only using for the radio and CDs anyway) with a small Sony sound system that also can play 4 CDs or DVDs in addition to being a radio.

What did we do with the old equipment? Gary set up the old TV etc. in the basement so I can use it to play my exercise tapes/DVDs.

Here is a link to a helpful site:

Green Peace Internationals "Guide to Greener Electronics" (<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/campaigns/toxics/electronics/how-the-companies-line-up>)

VEHICLE, DODGE GRAND CARAVAN SE WITH FLEXFUEL (AUGUST 2009)

We've been driving a 1992 Chevrolet Astro Van since 1995. It has been the perfect vehicle for our needs... hauling big, slobbery, hairy dogs and all kinds of equipment for doing water work and draft work. Not to mention hauling stone, wood, furniture, lumber... you name it, everything fit in that Astro Van!

So, it was with sadness that we learned from our wonderful mechanic (Dan Woods in Riverside MO) in July 2009 that Chevy was no longer supporting the Astro Van and had sold all the excess parts to a third party and that while he was able to get the part we needed for that repair, odds were that it would be harder and harder to find parts for the 17 year old Astro. We already knew that Chevy (in their questionable wisdom) had stopped making the Astro model many years before and had not replaced it with a comparable mini-van.

Therefore, we had to look for a replacement. Which is not to say that we haven't been doing that for many years... we just have not ever been able to find anything that fit our needs as well as that Astro Van.

Our choices were to move to a full-size van (no info on fuel efficiency because they are considered commercial vehicles... and commercial vehicles aren't held to the same standards as personal vehicles... did ya know that?) or a different mini-van (with less interior space). Well, obviously you know what we ended up with: a 2008 Dodge Grand Caravan.



I really wanted to get a diesel that I could make bio-diesel and use in it. But its not easy to find a diesel van that would work for us. What I had been drooling over for several years was the Dodge Sprinter. And so we immediately went looking at those. But we need rear A/C for the dogs and so that eliminated all the cargo vans... we'd need a passenger van and those are PRICEY. Of course, we were looking at used vehicles all along and that means waiting for the right one to come along and beat someone else to the seller. Ultimately, we discovered that the Sprinter is too high off the ground for me to be able to climb in and out of it. So I went back to the drawing board and did more research on mini-vans.

The Federal Program "Cash for Clunkers" was going on when we were buying, but the Astro did not qualify because it was a very fuel efficient vehicle (we got an average of 20 mpg) and besides we were looking for used, not new... we saved more money without the Program even without trading in the Astro.

There are more fuel efficient and better environmentally rated mini-vans than the 2008 Grand Caravan... so why didn't we choose one of those? Because nothing is perfect for every situation. Our situation is a bit unique because our 'family' (the Newfoundland Dogs) has big bulky 'luggage' (the cargo area HAS to be able to fit the crates we haul around), requires A/C in the rear and we still need to be able to have passengers from time to time. That being said, after all my research, going with the E85 Flexfuel Grand Caravan was the closest match we could get.

Here are some of the internet sites that were very helpful to me:

- www.fueleconomy.gov (find out about fuel efficiency, etc and compare vehicles)
- www.cars.com (to find exactly what you are looking for without driving all over town)

So... what to do with Astro Van? Why didn't we trade it in?

We didn't trade it in because I researched the value of it at www.edmunds.com (to figure out your fair market value) and discovered that it was not worth very much as a trade-in.

After more research and discussing whether we wanted to go through the headache of selling it outright or selling it for parts... we decided to donate it a charity and take the tax write-off.

That meant more research to find out how to do that and which charity to donate it to. I looked at several websites that will accept your vehicle, sell it and give the proceeds to a charity on their lists. I found out that all of them keep a portion of the money to cover their costs (at least). Some keep as much as 90% of the sales price... that bothered me a whole lot.

Ultimately, we decided on the charity first and contacted them (Wayside Waifs in Kansas City MO) to find out if they wanted it. They told us they use Cars4Charities.com because that company is a non-profit who only keep 10% to cover costs. (UPDATE - Nov2014 - this company no longer has a website at that address.)

Excellent news! So, we are now just waiting for that transaction to be finalized.

Another great site to help with checking out charities is www.charitynavigator.org (independent charity evaluator... to figure out if the charity does a good job with its money).

But wait, you may be saying, tell us more about E85 fuel! OK, well, that is a controversial subject. And I have a soapbox for it myself. So, let's see if I can keep this short and not too preachy...

E85 is an ethanol product. Basically, it is 15% gasoline (unleaded) and 85% ethanol. A FlexFuel engine uses computer programming to adjust the mixture of the fuel depending on whether you are using all gasoline or E85. There are instructions in the owners manual about making the switch from one to the other so you don't damage your engine.

You'll hear from people that the MPG (miles per gallon) is not as good with E85 as it is with gasoline. The problem with that statement isn't that its not true (it is)... the problem is that its not complete. When you use E85 you use less gasoline even though the MPG is lower BECAUSE you are only using 15% of the gasoline to do it (instead of 100% gasoline).

My problem with E85 (and many other people as well have this concern) is that ethanol is currently made from corn. Ethanol made from corn is BAD. Why do I think that? Here are my top three reasons:

1. Because growing corn for fuel instead of food removes that cropland from food production.
2. Because growing corn pulls nutrients (without returning them) and damages the structure of the soil..
3. Because studies show that it takes the equivalent of 1.5 gallons of gasoline to produce 1 gallon of ethanol.

Now that being said, not all ethanol is bad. It can be made from other sources... sustainable sources... not ruining the soil... not competing with food. And there are studies and research and experiments going on to move from corn ethanol to sustainable ethanol.

Right now, the E85 I can buy... I don't want to buy. So until I can get sustainable E85, I'll keep putting gasoline in the tank and drive conservatively and combine my trips into town and focus on my MPG.

Because I believe you have to do what you can... when you can... and be true to your convictions -- as much as possible -- in the process.

WATER CONSERVING AND ENERGY EFFICIENT WASHER AND DRYER (SEPTEMBER 2008)

Another unexpected upgrade happened the weekend that hurricane “Ike” hit Texas. (Which was just before the repairs were made to the chimney.) We had five (5) inches of rain the day before Ike from a different storm and several soaked towels from the basements seepage. I put them in the Equator washer/dryer and when I went back to take them out; I discovered that the Equator had broken again... doing the same thing it had done previously which was repaired by salvaging a computer part from another Equator washer/dryer. We already knew that there were no more replacement parts to be found for this machine so we had to upgrade to a new washer and dryer (much sooner than we had expected to).

I went on-line to do my research to find the most energy efficient washer I could within our price range and we decided upon the Frigidaire Affinity 3.5 cu ft I.E.C. King Size Capacity ENERGY STAR® Washer. Rated at 179 kwh per year which is quite good. Then, since there are no ENERGY STAR rated dryers, we opted to get the matching Frigidaire Affinity 5.8 cu ft Super Capacity Electric Dryer and added the matching 15 in. pedestal drawers for both. We purchased these from Sears on-line (they were having a great sale and there was an additional mail-in rebate on both appliances) and picked them up at the retail store closest to us (about 15 miles away)... it only took one trip because they all fit into our van. However, we had to make a second trip into town to get the correct electrical plug and venting for the dryer. Didn't realize the plug wouldn't be included - imagine that.

So, now I have to get used to doing large loads of laundry but still using very little water, electricity and soap. What a problem to have! Both appliances are MUCH more quiet than the Equator was and I am VERY happy with them.



This Frigidaire Affinity Washer and Dryer set (above left) replaces our Equator washer/dryer combo unit (above right) which broke down for the third time and we know that parts are nowhere to be found.

The particulars of the new set are (once again):

Frigidaire Affinity 3.5 cu ft I.E.C. King Size Capacity ENERGY STAR® Washer.
Rated at 179 kwh per year.

Frigidaire Affinity 5.8 cu ft Super Capacity Electric Dryer.

We opted for the matching 15 in. pedestal drawers for both.

We purchased the set on-line from Sears (they were having a great sale, plus a mail-in rebate offer) and picked it up at the closest retail store which is about 15 miles from our house.

LITHIUM BATTERY GRASS TRIMMER/EDGER (SEPTEMBER 2010)

For some time now, I have been wanting to be able to do more of the day-to-day maintenance in the yard. But, there has been a problem in that the tools we have are too heavy and unwieldy for me (being a dainty, feminine creature, that is).

So, when the hubby's birthday rolled around and I was deciding what to get him, a lightbulb (LED, of course) went on over my head! How about a yard tool that I can use to take some of the load off of his shoulders.

You may already know by now that I do not believe in coincidences... I turned on the TV and saw an infomercial of the WORX GT Grass Trimmer/Edger! Which is how I discovered that it is a lithium-battery powered tool that weighs about 6 lbs. Viola!

I did my due diligence and researched the company, the product and the complaint websites. Then, when I was sure that this was a good tool to add to this project, I approached the hubby about what he wanted for his birthday: he was totally agreeable to it. Luckily, by the time his birthday rolled around he had forgotten the conversation so the gift was a nice surprise.

I have had the chance to use the GT several times now and I LOVE IT! Here's my favorite things:

- There is NO gasoline used!
- It is QUIET!
- It is SO light-weight, yet it is VERY sturdy!
- It doesn't vibrate my hands off when I use it.
- It's really easy to change the angles and go from trimmer to edger.
- It's easy to clean (although there are some crevices that get loaded when used in damp grass - but a piece of wire works well to dislodge that).
- The battery does indeed give the GT full power until it is out of juice.
- And it has been lasting for about 45 minutes... but then I've been catching up on trimming, so it has been working harder than just day-to-day use. Even so, 45 minutes is just about right cuz at that point I need to take a break anyway. We'll probably invest in a second battery next spring.
- It only takes a few hours to recharge.

I highly recommend this product! Because I believe you have to do what you can... when you can... and be true to your convictions -- as much as possible -- in the process.

****Update: May 2011**** Well, what can I say? I had an unpleasant surprise in March (2011) when I retrieved my battery (and charger) from the shelf in the basement where I stored it over the winter. I put it in to charge before using it the first time and the light turned to green within an hour. I thought it must have been because I had charged it before storing it and WOW. But then I took it out and put it in the trimmer and the power lasted for about 4 minutes. OUCH.

OK, I thought, give it another chance, could be just a fluke. So I put it in to charge the next day and again the green light came on before an hour (this is a 3-5 hour charger). Hmm. Took it out and once again, 4 minutes of power. This was bad.

So, I called WORX and waited about 20 minutes on hold. The recording told me to go to the website and see if the answer was there, so I did that while I waited. But the URL they gave did not go



anywhere. So I searched the website and finally found a place to send an email via a form to get help. I had just sent it (with the information I provided above) when I was finally connected to a representative.

Long story shorter... they have had some defective batteries. Mine was obviously one of those. They sent me a replacement and asked me to return the bad one (no charge, no shipping charges either direction). They also said they have changed manufacturers of their batteries and this one should be superior to even the previous undefective ones.

The new one came about a week later and I have used it just about every day for the last month (or so). It is consistently providing power for at least 30 minutes. Once I get through the really heavy grass/weeds that grew up while I was waiting for the new battery; I think it will go back to the 45 minutes I was used to before.

Am I satisfied with the results? You Betcha! Congrats WORX, you made good! I'm even going to purchase a second battery so I can get a bit more done each day.

****Update, May 2013**** It's hard to believe that my last update on the trimmer was TWO (2) YEARS AGO! Wow, time does fly.

Anyway, good news. I have had no problems with either the replacement battery or the one I bought in 2011. They both hold the charge the way they should and last about 30 minutes each. I wish I had purchased a rapid charger when I bought the second battery though. It takes about 3 to 4 hours to recharge each one and sometimes I forget to switch them in and out of the charger after I've used both in one day.

A couple of days ago I ran out of 'string' and couldn't figure out where I'd put my supply of them... it turned out I'd used them all up... well duh! it had been 2 years! I need to get some more. Plus, the little cap that goes over the string is looking pretty beat up and could come apart any time now.

I went on-line and found that I could get their 'Spring Tune-Up Kit' that includes the string, a cap and a battery. That saved me a little money, so I bought it and also a rapid charger.

I STILL LOVE MY WORX TRIMMER! Love, love, LOVE it! I see they have new versions and have no desire to 'upgrade'.

****Update: August 2015**** This Spring I decided to get a couple more batteries because I am physically more fit and can handle a longer time working on the yard each session. BUT, when I went to the WORX website, I discovered they no longer support the 18V trimmer that I loved so well. Meaning they no longer sell batteries for it.

Shucks! So I did an internet search for batteries and an additional charger. I found some and bought two (2) batteries and the charger. Unfortunately, I think at least one of the batteries may have been from the defective batch (see that entry above), because it consistently only worked for about five minutes. Harrumph.

Then, in June, the motor on my trimmer burnt out. It was, after all, five (5) years old and it was well used. I already knew that WORX no longer was making the 18V model and so I HAD to upgrade. So much for the money I spent on batteries and charger... down the old tube-a-rooni.

I did some internet searches on other brands and kept coming back to WORX. After looking at the various models they make, I decided to get the 20V MaxLithium WORX GT 2.0 String Trimmer / Edger / Mini-Mower. Mainly, I did this because it was the closest thing to what I had and I already have the 20V JawSaw so I can share the batteries between the two devices. (I see I haven't noted the purchase of the JawSaw here -- that's because I have had it for a year and still haven't gotten around to using it yet. When I do, I'll tell you about my experiences, LOL.)

At least the new trimmer comes with two (2) batteries AND the batteries last a good 30 minutes each.

I'm not as in love with this model as I was with the 18V though. First, while the battery last longer and is more powerful to start, it loses some of that power sooner than the 18V did and it beats at the grass earlier (and therefore longer) than the 18V did. Second, the string is longer which is fine if you have the room for a bigger guard and string, but I find that I can't get around some things that I used to be able to get around. AND the guard is an extra inch bigger to accomodate being able to move the wheels to use it as "mini-mower"... agh. Third, I find that because the battery is less powerful after the initial boost, the string gets caught on things and/or breaks off more often; which means stopping to advance the string and/or taking off the cap to find the end and thread it back out.

Oh well, I'll have to deal with it because I'm stuck with it. Generally, it's fine. If I didn't have the previous experience with the 18V, I wouldn't be unhappy at all.

RATCHET PRUNERS (FEBRUARY 2012)

Most of the time, our pruning demands require me to use the 'loppers' -- the big pruners for tree limbs -- but winter is the time to trim back the fruit bushes and brambles. So I went looking for my hand pruner and found that the blade was broken. Then I remembered that the hubby had told me it broke the last time he used it. Luckily, the Metro Lawn & Garden Show was only a couple weeks away, so I decided to just take it with me and have a new blade put on.

I love these pruners! I've been using them for more than 5 years and will never buy another type. What is so special? They use a 'ratchet' technique that makes it easy for me to prune.

You cannot buy these things in a store. As far as I can determine, you can only buy them at these Lawn & Garden Shows or directly from them on-line. The company is Syndicate Sales Corp. at www.syndicate-sales.com. The link takes you directly to the "Pruning Center" of their product catalog.



Their sales literature claims that it "Uses 7 Times Less Hand Strength" and I believe every word!

After watching them at the Show a few times over the years and having ruined several store-bought pruners in the meantime; I decided to buy the works.

I use the loppers ALL THE TIME. My hubby uses the Tree Pole Pruner. And we both use the hand pruners.

Remember... you get what you pay for. And that is certainly true with these pruners! They cost more but they are worth every penny!

This time when the blade broke, all I had to buy was a new blade instead of a whole new pruner. I also decided to buy a second one so that now the hubby gets one of his own (he is rather rough on his tools -- so he gets the old one with the new blade).

What makes these pruners so amazing is the ratchet... here is what their literature says:

RATCHETING INSTRUCTIONS

- Ratcheting Loppers/Pruners work completely different than regular Loppers/Pruners.
- The ONLY time it is opened completely is to set the blades in the wood. Always put the limb as deeply into the jaws as possible, followed by closing the handles until you feel resistance.

- When ratcheting, hold one handle as still as possible and open the opposite handle **ONLY** until you hear a click or see that it has moved to the next notch on the ratchet mechanism.
- Opening the handles past that step resets the ratchet back to the beginning which will make it very difficult to finish the cut.
- Each time it has reset into the next ratcheting notch, close the handles tight until you feel resistance and then open one handle (**ONLY**), until it clicks or is set into the next ratchet notch. This should be continued as many times as there are notches to ratchet through.
- Remember, never open the handles wide after placing the jaws around the limb.
- At any time in the ratcheting process the handles are completely opened (resetting the ratchet) remove the Lopper/Pruner from the limb and start the process over.
- If at any time the process is not working, it means the limb is too thick. **NEVER** use so much force that you see the handles bending.
- **DO NOT** use to cut metal. (Use a bolt cutter for that.)
- Oil the moving parts on the Lopper/Pruner head with 3 and 1 oil occasionally.

If you can't tell by now, let me be **VERY** clear... I highly recommend **ALL** of their ratcheting pruning products!!!

****Update: September 2015**** I have to replace my favorite pruning tool because the hubby accidentally dropped my ratchet lopper into the burn barrel while using them to cut down thorny trimmings. The non-metal portions of the handles melted before he could get it back out. (heavy sigh)

Well, silver lining, he owes me **BIG TIME** and I also get a new pair of loppers. I went to use the link on this website to get to the source for my favorite ratchet loppers and realized that I instinctively looked on **THIS** page for it while I had actually created a page about pruning under the Farm pages. You can read **ALL ABOUT** why I regard those above any lopper I have used.

If you just want to go to Syndicate Sales' Store: Lawn & Garden.

RECHARGEABLE MOWER, 36V, 19" SELF-PROPELLED (MAY 2013)

I had hoped that my next purchase would be an electric riding mower; but when I looked at where I mow and all the things I mow around... I found that it just isn't feasible. The hubby uses the tractor with the finishing mower to do the large areas and I do where it can't go. Besides, the more we become farmers, the less area we are mowing; because the large areas of pasture grass is **FOOD** for livestock and the small areas close to the house are transforming into permaculture plantings and raised vegetable beds.

A week or so ago, I was mowing and accidentally (if you believe in accidents, that is) hit a stump that bent the blade on my gas mower. I used that opportunity to comment how this would be a good time to purchase a cordless, electric mower and the hubby agreed before he realized that all the gas mower needed was a new blade. I jumped at that and did my research and had the thing ordered in light-speed (LOL).

I chose the Black & Decker, 19-inch, 36V, self-propelled, rechargeable, cordless mower. So, why?

First let me say that I was **SO** happy to find **MANY** rechargeable, cordless mowers from which to choose! The last time I researched them, the pickings were slim and the reviews were disappointing. But battery technology has advanced tremendously and **THAT** is what makes it possible for many companies to add an electric, cordless mower to their product list.

My parameters for a mower... It must:

- last a long time.
- be relatively easy to maintain.
- not be too heavy. (I'm such a dainty, little thing, you see. LOL)
- be wide enough to require fewer passes.
- be narrow enough to get into tight spots.
- be able to cut rough areas with tough grass.
- have a self-propelled feature.
- have a battery that holds enough charge to cut our backyard.
- have a mulching ability.
- have flexibility of cutting height. (Cuz I "cut it tall and let it fall".)



The Craftsman (Honda motor) gas-mower I use is a 19" and it does a good job for all of the above (except that it is not electric), so I set it as my standard in my search.

I really like my WORX trimmer, so their mower seemed like a good best bet... until I saw the price and read some reviews. I looked at several of the eco-friendly company versions and they all received pretty similar, pretty positive reviews, but I have had unpleasant experiences purchasing unusual brands when it comes to maintenance and finding replacement parts. Plus, their prices were higher than the 'name brand' mowers I was seeing.

I have always had good experiences with Black & Decker, so when I saw they offered a mower with everything I wanted AND Home Depot was having an on-line sale (I saved \$50 and they delivered it to my house!)... my choice was really easy.

My Review

Overall, I am quite pleased with this mower. The product was packaged so that you simply cut along their printed instruction located on the box, removed the packaging and rolled the mower out. No lifting required. The only assembly was putting the handle on with the two (2) provided bolts. It comes with a bagger but that will get stored and used very little (but it's nice to know I CAN bag the grass if I want).

I read the Instruction Manual a couple of times to be sure I knew what I was doing. There is definitely a learning curve when going from a gas mower to an electric mower. They tell you to charge it before trying to use it and it is a 20-hour charge cycle. My battery was fully charged, but I left it on the charger as they recommend.

That was 2-days ago and I used it for the first time today. As I already mentioned, there is definitely a learning curve! Which explains some of the negative reviews I saw about the cordless electric mowers out there. You have to give both yourself and the mower a chance! Just because it's different, doesn't make it bad.

OK. I like it alot. I'd say I love it, but after the first session I'm sure there are times when I will still have to rely on the gas mower... which is something I was trying to get away from.

For example, the manual says to avoid backing up with the mower; it has an "auto brake" feature and there is a flap to keep things from flying out at you... both of these features do make backing the mower a bit difficult. I discovered though, that all I have to do is be sure to disengage the self-propelled feature before I'm ready to stop (so the mower moves forward a little bit without it) before I start pulling backward; pushing it forward a little on my own power keeps the brake from engaging. The flap is just

a bit too wide and so does not readily roll when changing direction. SO, for small areas like corners and going around objects (like trees and ornamentation), it's kind of a pain.

I also have to get used to it being longer than my gas mower; which means it doesn't maneuver the same way... OH, and get used to rear wheel drive instead of front wheel drive. That was a surprise, I lifted the front wheels while the self-propel feature was engaged and it took off like a little 'wheelee', LOL. I did remember after the fact about the rear wheel drive.

Plus, with it being new, I don't want to 'man-handle' the thing... bumping into fence posts, etc... so I'll be keeping it out a little way from objects and using the trimmer a bit more. That's probably a good thing (after all, I WANT it to last).

I knew it would not be good for deep, tough grass already, (like the thick pasture grass that I need to keep down around the outside of the fenced yards) so I won't use that as a negative point.

Basically, this mower is going to do a fine job for me in the bigger, open areas that I mow because there is no way to get the tractor with the finishing mower into them. The self-propelled drive has variable speed, which I know I will like (once I get used to it). I have NO DOUBT that the battery will last long enough for me to mow what I need to mow before I have to stop due to my physical condition. In other words, I'll probably 'conk out' before it does, LOL.

For anyone who isn't 50 plus years old, overweight and out of shape... you'll probably want to invest in a second battery if you need to run it for more than 45 minutes a day (or so).

Again, overall, I'm quite pleased with this mower. The trickle charge uses a small amount of electricity to replace the gas I would have been using.

The saying "use the appropriate tool for the job" certainly applies here... now I only need to use the gas mower for the tough areas (poor gas mower... no more easy jobs, LOL). Of course, it's possible that as I get comfortable with it, I'll figure out how to use it for the tougher jobs... that would be very nice.

Here is the link to the Black and Decker website for this mower (<http://www.blackanddecker.com/outdoor/SPCM1936.aspx>).