## The Return of the Hunter Gatherer

Deep within all of our genes is the desire to return home from a trip into the world laden down with desirable goodies. If you are a man the secret fantasy probably includes an admiring appreciative family audience! Don't despair, work towards urban self reliance and you will be honing your eagle eyes to spot skips of useable wood, neglected wasteland fruit trees and websites bursting with free giveaways

There is a danger this process could get competitive especially given the pressures that grow as the economy declines. So, rule number one is; always ask. I have yet to be turned down after making a polite request for some discarded useful domestic item or building material. I have even formed relationships which have resulted in having piles of wood delivered to our door.

## Skips – now open on a street near you

*Picture 1*

Skips can be domestic – outside homes, commercial - outside shops, or industrial – outside factories, i.e. in industrial estates. So jump on your trusty (recycled!) bike and scout the streets around your house and see what you can spot. Be alert for homes having building work done. Skips at these spots might have timber, bricks, roof tiles, doors, kitchen units,

polycarbonate conservatory glazing sheets and more. If you summon your courage and ask, friendly strangers will even make piles of the things you are looking for to make it easier for you to collect later.

## Commercial skips

These are outside shops or food outlets and often round the back. They are large with lids and useually blue. You may find;

- Carpet for garden or home use.
- Cooking oil (for making bio diesel)
- Cardboard for garden mulch,
- Out of date but edible food if you are really adventurous
- Greens and bruised fruit for your chickens (market stalls are good for this as well)

### *Carpet*

Carpet for garden mulch should ideally be old good quality wool carpet with a hessian backing. Newer carpet might be treated with flame retardants which will end up in your soil. Rubber backed carpets and underlay disintegrate into the soil leaving you with a mess of grey rubber crumbs.

If you are looking for carpet for your home don't be put off by the thought that the carpet will be too manky. People throw away the most amazing quality of new looking goods – including carpet and there are always carpet cleaners you can hire.

### *Oil for biodiesel*

For those wanting to challenge themselves this way there are lots of how to websites on the internet. Be prepared for some expense for machinery and chemicals though.

### *Cardboard for garden mulch*

I find a stock of cardboard very useful in the garden (see building garden beds). Avoid cardboard with lots of plastic tape as it needs to be removed before using the cardboard. Cardboard without much printing is better and don't take glossy flashy boxes (they don't rot down easily).

### *Food for free*

Did you know that here in England two of our biggest supermarkets alone landfill 222,000 tons of perfectly good food every year? There are people (ie Freegans ) that live off this resource. If you want to try their way first locate a store or supermarket near you and check whether their waste skips are accessible after the store is closed (a bit of sneaking

around is involved here.) If you can get access to an unlocked skip then go rummage and go for sealed packages that are near their sell by date (sell by dates always allow a leeway before the food is stale). Bakers will often give away yesterdays bread and our local fishmonger will fill a bag of heads and bones (with lots of fish left on them for a soup or fish curry) We also pressure cook these for the chickens or bury them under the runner bean plants as fertiliser.

## Dustbin day (or Christmas come early!)

Tuesday here in Clacton is when people put their unwanted goods out on the curb for me to chose what is useful to us here at EcoDIY. Ok, they think they are putting their unwanted stuff out for the dustman to take but the result is the same; I can cruse and pick up carpet, blinds, plant pots etc etc and have the warm glow that I am reducing landfill in the process.

## People giving away stuff on the web.

There are a number of internet sites and email groups dedicated to helping people to give things to others. The one we use most is Freecycle (www.uk.freecycle.org). Freecycle is an email group with local lists and works by you emailing the list details of the things you

have to give away or are looking for. The list is circulated and folks email you if they want what you are offering – first come first served.

There is also a number of local and national re-use sites. Start looking on your council's website to find the local ones.

## Car boots, charity shops and jumble sales

Last but not least for those with a little money to spend is the growing number of second hand sales opportunities. Car boots are becoming commercialised these days but are still places to pick up a bargain and if you buy from charity shops you have the added satisfaction of supporting a worthwhile cause.

So in short – don't be shy, join the growing army of happy hunters and experience the warm glow of providing for yourself and family directly by your own initiative and creativity. In the process you will make a small contribution to saving the earth's resources and lower your own carbon footprint. Check our website at www.ecodiy.org for other self reliance ideas.