

"Your Refrigerator Quacks!"

I had a friend come visit a few weeks ago, and upon opening our "refrigerator" she exclaimed, "Your refrigerator quacks like a duck!"

I said, "What you are hearing ARE ducks."

I once had a big two door, ice-making, top-of-the-line, commercial refrigerator. It plugged into that socket in the wall and hummed day-in and day-out, happy as a refrigerator could be. The noise was driving me crazy.

Joel read about other ways to keep food cool without a refrigerator. So, one day we sold our refrigerator and bought a galvanized metal trash can with a lid. We dug a hole outside the kitchen door and buried the trash can so that the lip was only about 3 inches out of the ground. We lowered our "perishables" into this can and put the lid on.

It worked just fine except for two things. First, no one wanted to go outside and reach down this hole for the butter. And secondly, after a few days, those little black sugar ants that have plagued us since the day we landed on this unclaimed land, found a way into the can to eat our "perishables."

Well, Joel, still not wanting to give up on this experience, I mean, experiment, made a fancy metal overhang that encircled the can near the top. Under this overhang, he put car grease to catch the ants and keep them from getting into our food.

It worked just fine except that it also caught everything else. After sand, dirt and leaves made a nice bridge for the ants, Joel admitted defeat, but not for long.

Soon, he came up with another idea. If we could use air blowing through wet swamp cooler pads into a insulated box, we could have a "Joel-made" refrigerator.

The box was beautifully made, and we had everything set up. But, as we tried to get the pads to wick up water, or have the water drip down through them, we were hit with the conflict between ideas and physical reality. "IT DOESN'T ALWAYS WORK THE WAY YOU THOUGHT IT WOULD!"

It didn't all go to waste though. The box spent many years as a work table in the shed and just a year ago, Joel turned it over and made a smoker box, for smoking meat in.

As defeat often comes with a kind of depression, we were kinda in a refrigerator depression after this, wondering if we had done the right thing by selling our "top-of-the-liner," and wondering if permaculture was some kind of big joke, and maybe we should both go get a "real" job.

While we were busy in self-loathing, time went by and before we knew

it, months upon months passed without having a refrigerator at all! While we were wondering to do next, we kept on living and after about four years, I learned something basic: We didn't NEED a refrigerator. Our "perishables" didn't perish as fast as refrigerator-believers would have you believing they do. Food in our house never sat unused inside some back shelf of some refrigerator. We ate what there was because it was still on the table or counter the next morning, right in our view.

Because we only bought raw unpasteurized milk, what the kids didn't drink, we turned into cheese. Eggs that aren't washed can last, unrefrigerated, for a month. Butter stayed soft, but I find it easier to use that way. And meat doesn't go bad overnight, or over two nights, and by then we've eaten it.

Refrigerators are a very new invention to this world, and this led me to wonder what did people do before refrigerators existed? It helped us to learn more about canning and drying foods to store.

After about seven years we decided to finish the kitchen cabinets. We had been camping and had bought ourselves an "IGLOO" (insulated ice-box) to carry food in the car. It wasn't very insulated and we had to keep it in the shade to keep it cool. We thought, "If only it was more insulated and sat in a cool spot all the time, it would work great." Then we thought of the kitchen cabinets (don't ask me how these two go together but they did).

We could insulate one of the compartments of the cabinets, and put two holes out the north side of this insulated box. These two holes would go through the north adobe wall of the house, right over the back pond where it stays cool! BINGO!

We did it, and it worked and still works. We don't have to crawl in a hole outside, fight ants, struggle with water hoses, and fancy gadgets. It's simple, easy to understand, looks good, and works. Plus, we got over our hang-up about NEEDING a refrigerator. So now, it's clearly a luxury, but a non-destructive one.

by Roxanne



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