

AUTUMN INTO WINTER 09

August has gone leaving us wondering what happened to summer. We've had cold, windy days with grey skies, the odd few sunny warm days and even some very hot sunny days but not a summer that we could really call 'summer'. Maybe September will surprise us with some decent weather but I won't hold my breath.

Our vegetable growing is over for the year, the beans did ok, the spring onions were not a success as they did not grow at all well. The beetroot was not too good but I left them in to see if they can improve. The carrots didn't grow at all, as for the cabbages well they never grew as they should have done, there were plenty of leaves but they did not heart up. We blame it on the spot we were told to put our grow boxes, under the trees on the windy edge of the lawn. Our plants never really had a chance to get what sun there was and the plots dried up almost as soon as we watered them. The success stories are the potatoes grown in thick green bags by the side of the shed where they could get sunlight and any rain that was going plus our watering of course. They grew very well and we enjoyed several meals from them considering we only planted five seed potatoes in each bag, that's pretty good going or should I say growing. The strawberries have produced a good few berries and we are still picking one or two every few days. Our tomato plants have lots of small tomatoes on them which are ripening daily and we have had several cucumbers from our one plant so it was not all a waste of time. We have asked if we can change our growing spot and now await the verdict.

Looking out of our window we suddenly realised that the swallows have gone as have our other summer visitors, the swifts. They must have gone while we were away for the weekend, I miss them, I loved watching them flying around, swooping in the air skimming over buildings and the ground. Now we know autumn is here and not too far away is winter; time goes so swiftly whatever the weather. Looking around the garden we can see there is plenty of clearing up to do. The hanging baskets have given their best but the flowers are fading now. I have a couple of ivies and two boxes of winter pansies ready to re-do the baskets but I still need a couple more winter flowering plants hopefully we will get to the Garden Centre soon. Kath has given me some wallflower plants that need potting on or putting in the garden, that's another little job to do. I want them to grow bigger before I put them in the border ready for flowering in the spring.

Half way through September already and the last few days have been lovely, sunny and warm. I had a surprise the other day when I saw familiar shapes fly past our window. It was a small flock of swallows, they stayed just long enough to fill up on flies (of which there seems to be many at the moment) then as silently as they came they vanished. Good luck to all those migratory birds, I hope they make it.

Strangely though a day later we noticed one swallow has stayed behind, it dashes around collecting food then goes into the farmer's shed, it is in and out all day. Has it a mate in there? We can only wait and see. The weather is a lot cooler now but it still finds food. Guess what, now our errant swallow is two, they fly in and out of the tractor shed as if they are feeding young, it's very strange behaviour at this time of the year but they must have raised another brood. Let's hope they beat the coming winter.

October has arrived, grey skies again, always looking as if it will rain but doesn't. The temperature is slightly down and the daylight hours are getting shorter, we turn the clocks back near the end of the month. You would think our family of swallows would take the hint but they don't, they are all still merrily swooping across the building and around the houses all day long, although it's great to see the six of them we do wish they would set off back to Africa. I've re-done the two hanging baskets with ivy, pansies and cyclamen and very nice they look too even though I do say so myself. There is

still the small wooden wheel barrow to be re-planted but while it still looks good I'll leave well alone. In the border at our side of the building the geraniums have just begun to flower, they were very small plug plants when I bought them and have taken ages to get to the flowering stage. I must keep an eye on the weather forecast and cover them with fleece if we are going to get early frosts. I'd like to see them flowering in the garden a little longer before I dig them up and put them in pots to over winter them.

The weekend started with almost gale force winds and it was very unpleasant outside, it's a good job we held our Autumn Fair last Saturday in brilliant sunshine because holding it this Saturday would have been a dead loss. We were happy to have raised £556.00 which considering we planned and held it in less than five weeks we did very well. We are using the money to pay for our resident's annual Christmas meal at the New Inn, Limber, including transport and evening entertainment. There are various other things we need, such as a new set of outdoor Xmas lights for the tree the Earl of Yarborough sends us every year. It is not that our lights are not still good indeed they are almost new but unfortunately some of the bulbs have given up the ghost and with the change to `greener` light bulbs the ones we want are no longer available. I'm a bit miffed about it really as we paid a decent amount for them out of the money we raised from the fair we held the year before, no one said we would be unable to replace the bulbs when we bought the light sets.

The grey skies have given way to rain; the ground soon soaked it up but every little helps keep down the dust coming from the dry fields as the farmers plough and rake and then set seed. We drove the car past a field being worked a couple of days ago and ended up looking as if we had come through a brown sand storm. Good news at last our family of swallows have gone on their long journey back to warmer shores. It seems they will join others from various parts of the country that have been busy rearing a third family, strange weather affects most every creature it seems.

November has arrived bringing more strong winds and rain than we've had for quite a while, our water butts are already over-flowing and the ground is soggy in places. I checked the plots under the trees to see how the beetroot we left in was growing and low and behold found more spring onions coming up. I've decided to leave them to grow and see what happens to them. The beetroot are not good so they can come out. We are not moving to a different area until just before the spring. We will have to take up the grass before we can start on the new plot and want to re-lay it back over the place we are vacating. Then hopefully we won't have to buy grass seed for it. Finally the skies have cleared after days of low level cloud. We were lucky enough to be outside in bright sunshine when huge skeins of geese passed overhead. We believe they were from the far north, Norway and beyond, coming to our country to over-winter. I stood watching and listening to the noise they were making amazed at the sight of so many large birds passing overhead. As I watched I witnessed the leader changing places with a bird that came up from the middle of the flock effortlessly it seemed, it looked like a much practiced Red Arrows manoeuvre.

I've replaced the summer plants in the wooden barrow we bought with our former neighbours leaving gift of money. A large white Cyclamen has taken the place of the pink trailing geranium and a dozen assorted miniature tulips have been set around the other plants that are permanently living in the barrow. So with any luck it will look ok as winter comes to an end. We have been given a large wooden garden seat, it used to be in the garden of Tennyson House at Brigg but as the place is to be completely demolished and re-built the garden seat was going spare so it was delivered to us. Now we have to decide on a permanent spot in the garden for it. Several suggestions have been put forward so a decision will have to be made. It will probably end up in the front nearer to the first part of the building, handy I'm told for residents to sit on when some one burns the toast and the fire alarm sends us all outside to await the arrival of the fire engine.

Compost corner has been completely cleared thanks to our neighbour Danny. All the stuff that had been piled into it by our so called gardeners and never showed a sign of rotting down has gone into the green bins week by week, the council have facilities to chop the tough twigs, branches and any other compostable bits. We now have two good sized bins to use and room to get to them. The only thing now is to see the maintenance team does not ruin all Danny's hard work by chucking more stuff that won't break down easily. The plastic compost bin I've been using all year will now be emptied into the newly cleared ones and off we go again.

The farmers in our immediate area have been busy loading up the sugar beet and sending it to the factory to be processed. They start just after dawn, which is not that early at this time of the year and carry on all day. The rumble of beets filling the lorries and the rattle and squeaks of the elevators moving the beets can be heard quite a distance away. The fields that have been planted are all showing green again while those left fallow are sprouting a lot of weeds, or should I say wild plants, just to be politically correct. At least they look in good heart having been looked after well for the last three to four years while growing crops. I've noticed quite a lot of cereal in the fields around, though new fields of sugar beet are still the favourite planting. The weather is more seasonal now, frosts have started and the temperature is about right for the time of the year. I think I can say winter is truly on its way.

Audrey Goodwin.
