



The AUUF Green Pages – March 2008

Living Green, Living Well!

(o o) ∨ *The Green Raven*

The Alabama legislature is now cooking up a potpourri of energy bills. Several of the proposals are to be praised by those who care about the future of life on planet Earth. Commercial buildings will have to conform to the latest International Energy Conservation Code. The state vehicle fleet is to meet higher fuel economy standards. We citizen consumers will be tempted to buy greener products by a one-week sales tax holiday in August on Energy Star rated items. And home solar power is promised a big boost – a 25 cents per kilowatt hour produced credit against our Alabama income taxes.

Less praiseworthy, since they probably don't save energy or reduce greenhouse gases, are supports for ethanol and biodiesel production. Worst of all are big tax breaks promised to utilities, like, you know, Alabama Power, to build huge new nuclear or coal gasification power plants.

The gasified coal is called "clean fossil fuel technology." But that obnoxious term is an oxymoron, worse than "jumbo shrimp" or "old novel." Supposedly the coal gets clean if you put it through a controlled combustion process that yields useful heat and volatile gases to generate electricity; but it produces CO₂. Capture that carbon left behind from the rapture of gasification, pressurize it into a liquid, and pipe it who knows how many miles to a place where we hope the geology is right to keep the bad stuff down, if we pump it deep enough into the Earth. If we can. If it sticks. If.



Sounds like real tribulation to me. My understanding is that coal gasification for electric power generation has not proven successful at any significant scale. It's too expensive to build the plants and operating costs are too high to make the electricity competitive. And that's before we get to the question of carbon capture and sequestration, a hugely expensive, technically unproven and potentially dangerous pipe dream. The truth is, WE DON'T KNOW HOW. And beyond that, it is expensive and everyone is going to say NIMBY, not in my back yard. It was simple CO₂, carbon dioxide, that burped out of a volcanic lake in Cameroon, West Africa in 1986 and killed more than 1700 people. And their livestock. CO₂ is odorless, colorless and not poisonous, but it is asphyxiating.

Let's not subsidize anyone to make more of it to see if sequestration will work. Lets not have another "spent fuel" like "spent" nuclear fuel (which is used up because it is too hot to handle, not because it has lost its punch), that no one is willing to accept, even buried, in their back yard. And which will represent a threat to untold future generations (if such there be).

The sad fact is that this package of energy legislation mostly misses the opportunity to support development of truly renewable energies – solar, wind, or biomass. And it doesn't bring Alabama anywhere close to other Southeastern states with tax exemptions, other tax credits/rebates, low-interest long-term financing, etc, to support improved energy efficiency and conservation. These would be the measures that would save enough energy to help Alabama avoid building any new power plants at all.

You can see comparisons with other states' provisions supporting energy efficiency and renewable energy at: www.dsireusa.org. To see the US Dept. of Energy estimates of renewable energy potentials in Alabama: www.eere.energy.gov/states/alternatives/resources_al.cfm. I think even wind power should be considered, although Alabama certainly doesn't have the wind potential of the Midwest. A British company has developed substantially improved "small wind" generators, pretty and very quiet

Long-time gardener Chip Busch shows off lettuce and parsley growing in a small planter box that she can move to get more or less sun and bring inside to protect against frosty nights. On the porch railing in yogurt or cottage cheese pots are small broccoli, cauliflower, Swiss chard and other veggie seedlings she will transplant into the garden when they and the weather agree. See "Marching to the Garden" on the next page for tips from Chip on how to do it all.

little structures that anyone would be delighted with in their back yard. One of the buttons on their website lets you hear its whisper: www.quietrevolution.co.uk.

As I'm writing this, it's not known what proposals in this energy package will actually be passed by our legislature. Or which of the promises, if passed, will actually stand up and not be undermined by the fine print and the administrative rules and regulations that always attend such legislative promises. Let's cheer the apparent progress made so far in meeting Alabama's energy and environmental needs; but not let our lawmakers think they have finished the job. We've only just begun!

– Chip Busch

Marching to the Garden

If you didn't get started in February, now is definitely the time to plant peas and beets, onion and cabbage starts (the little plants you buy bundled and bare rooted from Seed & Feed stores) You might wait a bit on cauliflower and broccoli starts, although by mid March it should be safe enough. I believe the baby plants are a tad more tender than their grown up kin. Soak the peas and beet seeds overnight before you plant them – and try to plant just before a few warm days are in the forecast to help them germinate. Once they are up they can take a bit of frost, although a long, cold March might discourage them.

If you are growing your own plants from seed, get brassicas (cabbage, collards, etc.) in the seed starting box as soon as possible. Plant the warmth loving things a bit more slowly, and provide extra heat if we get a cold snap – tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, artichoke. Lots of plants germinate best at about 70 degrees. Anything you grow from seed should be introduced to the outside in fits and starts. If plants are going from grow lights to sunshine, they need a partial exposure before they go out a full day. If they are going from warm to cool, they need protection, at least at night, for a spell. Be aware of the weather, too. A grey day is an easy introduction to the sun, and probably to the cool. A clear night is likely to be quite cold at this time of year.



When you are transplanting things to the garden, you can help them a good deal by providing them with "hats" to hold in the heat. My preferred hat is a translucent milk jug with the bottom cut out and

The large pretty plant is a red-leaf lettuce. Growing around it is oxalis (sorrell), a tasty tart-sour addition to salads.

the screw-top removed. For small transplants these hats can stay on for a week or more, until the plant pushes on them or grows through the top a bit. When you eventually un-hat your plants, do it on a gray day or a warm evening. I have been taking hats off of tomatoes in early April for a number of years, and having to put some sort of hat back on the tenderest vegetables about April 15 to protect against a late frost.

I have given up general tilling of my garden. The paths get cornstalks, okra stalks and a layer of pine straw to smother the weeds. The beds get the worst of the grasses and weeds turned under, and a layer of compost on top to smother the rest. It makes a largish garden that I can still mostly take care of.

You can grow your own lettuce in something as small as a quart yogurt or cottage cheese container. Just drill or poke holes in the bottom for drainage, fill it with a rich dirt and pop in a seed or two. The "mixed greens" packets will provide a variety, and you can ensure this by looking at the seeds: they are big and small, black, brown, and white; each will provide a different breed of lettuce. Put the leftovers, in their packet for identification, in a ziplock bag in the vegetable drawer of your refrigerator and re-plant when your first planted ones give out. Lettuce grows pretty happily in indirect light (on the porch), and can supply you with home grown salad until the tomatoes come in.

Do put in at least a bit of a veggie garden! The taste of really fresh tomatoes is legendary, although I think some of the greatest improvements over commercial veggies come in corn, peas, broccoli and greens. Veggies you grow at home will not be contaminated with *e. coli* from nearby cows or irrigation ditches, nor picked illegally, nor treated with poisons, nor doused with fertilizers. They'll be healthier for you and maybe even appealing to your kids.

– Chip Busch

Coming to AUUF in March –

March 16 – Sunday service will provide opportunity for all to share our "Joys – and Concerns – About Food."

March 25, 7 pm – The environmental movie will be "The Future of Food," an eye-opener on what's happening to, with and in our food.

Chip's quick-and-easy tomato rarebit!

1 can tomato soup (concentrate)

About 4 oz of shredded sharp aged cheddar cheese (if it isn't aged/sharp it will curdle in the soup.)

Heat the soup without diluting it. Stir in the cheddar.

Serve over whole wheat toast – or crackers, for that matter.

– Chip Busch