

Peach Cobbler

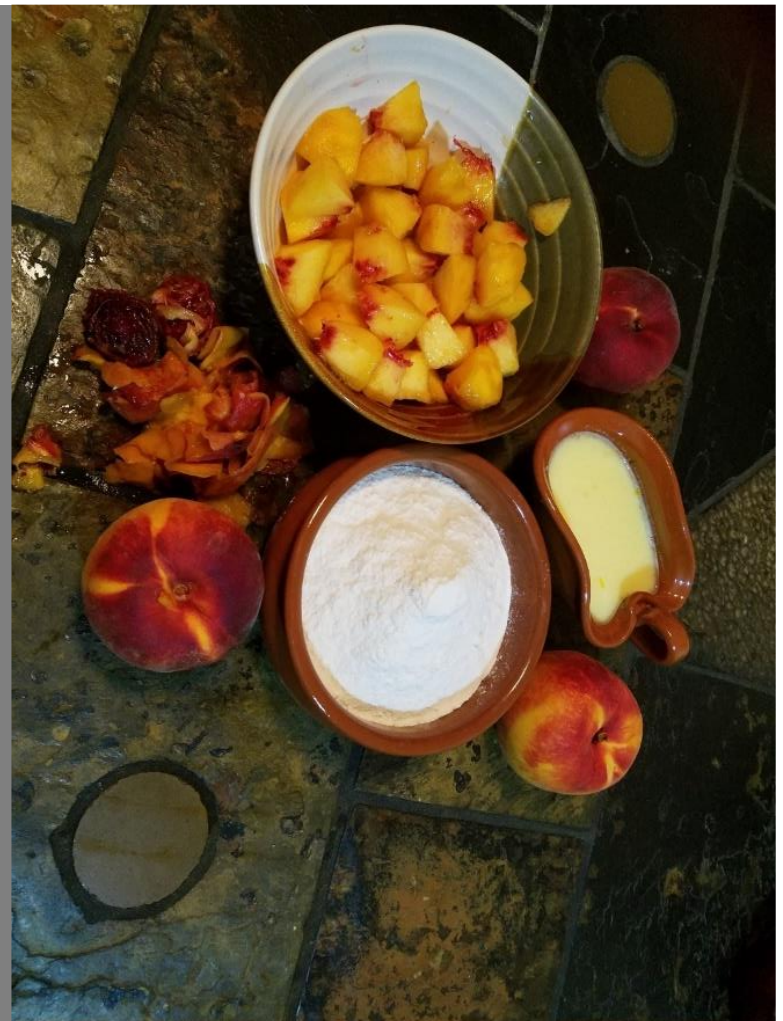


cottage@peachcobbler.com



FALL 2019

- Throwback Titbits
- Construction Corner
- Horticultural Haven
- Repair and Recovery
- Errors and Omissions
- Volunteers and Visitors
- Secondhand Scrounging
- Tracking with Tech





Throwback Titbits-Fall 2016

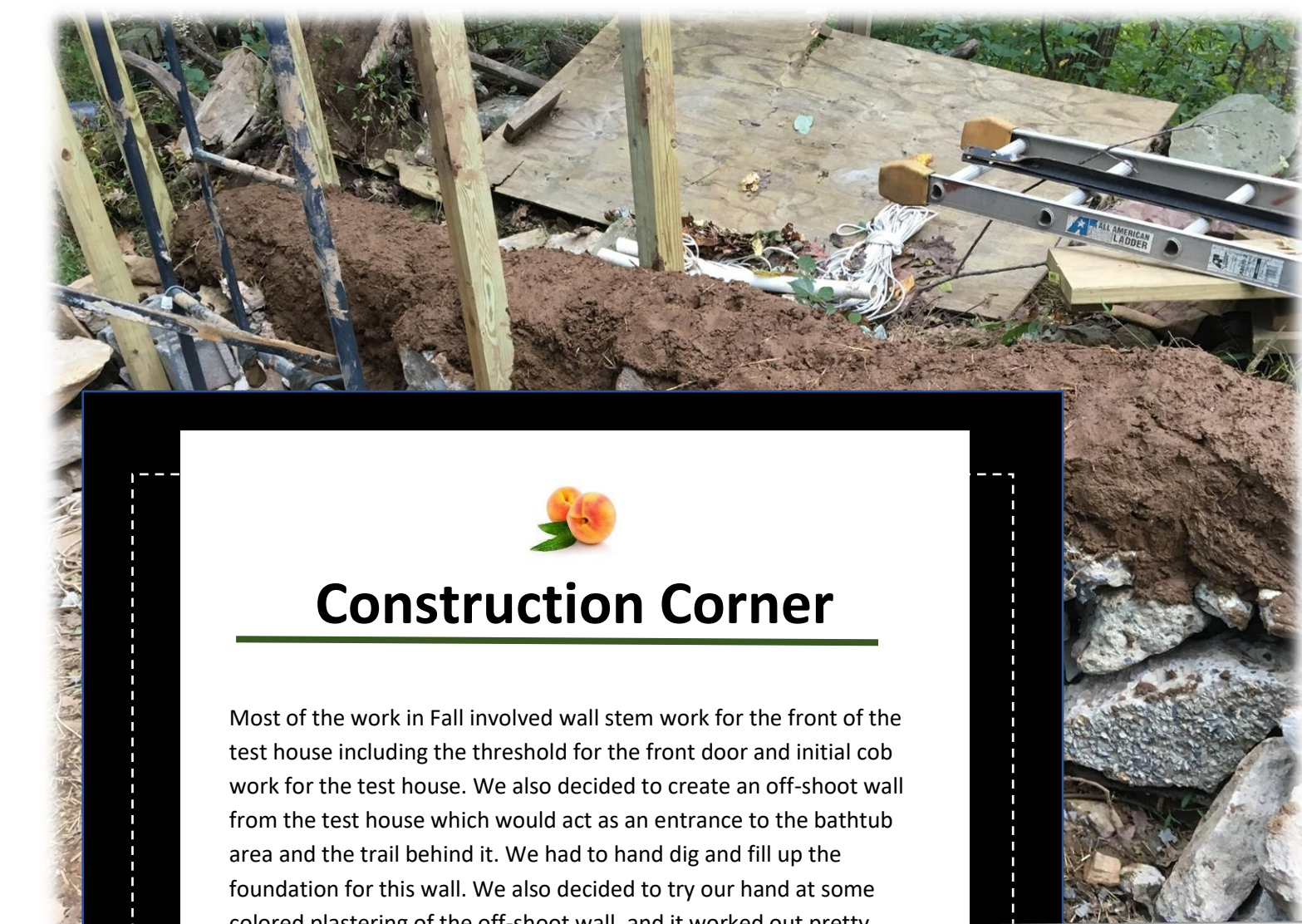
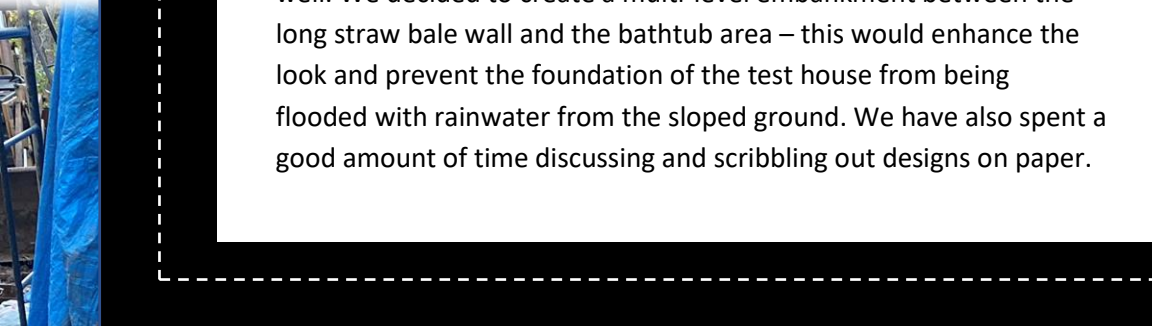
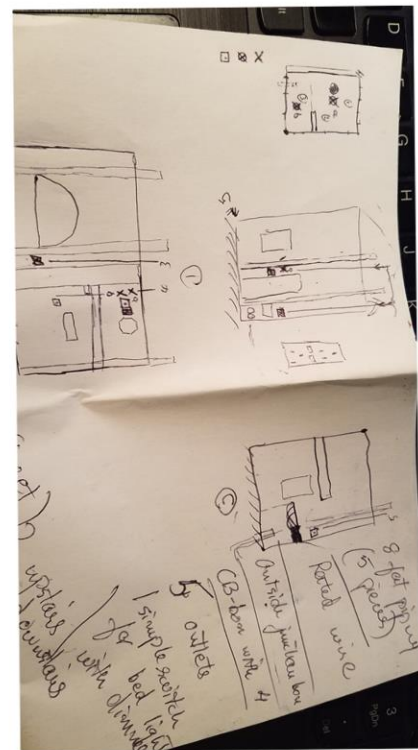
We can't believe it's been 3 years since we purchased the land. We had been looking for a land for 3 years and had just finished a wonderful vacation learning to build with cob at the Cob Cottage in Oregon. We got back from the trip in late August 2016, found the land in September and closed on the purchase on October 7th. We celebrated with a meal at Café Nola in Frederick. Our beloved backhoe was delivered the following weekend by the farmer we had purchased it from. In some ways it feels like we haven't achieved much in 3 years. However; there was a learning curve and we had to put a lot of basic infrastructure in place viz. well, solar dog fence, creating access paths, clearing a lot of invasive undergrowth and purchasing the right tools. Things achieved so far – fruit trees, berries, well and water supply, storage sheds, limited trail development in the forest, enrolling in the forestry conservation program, layout of the vegetable garden, foundation and starting build of the test house along with the outdoor bathtub area and access path.





Construction Corner

Most of the work in Fall involved wall stem work for the front of the test house including the threshold for the front door and initial cob work for the test house. We also decided to create an off-shoot wall from the test house which would act as an entrance to the bathtub area and the trail behind it. We had to hand dig and fill up the foundation for this wall. We also decided to try our hand at some colored plastering of the off-shoot wall, and it worked out pretty well. We decided to create a multi-level embankment between the long straw bale wall and the bathtub area – this would enhance the look and prevent the foundation of the test house from being flooded with rainwater from the sloped ground. We have also spent a good amount of time discussing and scribbling out designs on paper.





Horticultural Haven

Our vegetable gardening has been limited and we don't expect to grow much for a few years whilst we are busy with building. However, we hope to gradually control the invasive weeds and improve the soil quality in the beds using a mixture of cow, rabbit manure and hay. One of our friends has a rabbit and has been diligently collecting the poop for us on a regular basis. We have purchased a backpack sprayer and plan to spray the garden path with vinegar over the summer of next year to see if we can get a handle on the weeds. We have also started putting down cardboard along the garden paths and will cover that with mulch next year. We managed to grow tomatoes, butternut squash, some corn and a single cucumber this year. There were a couple of apples and plums which we had to remove to encourage the growth of roots. The fungal infection on the apple plant had spread to some of the other stone fruit trees – looks like we will have to spray all the stone fruit next year. We saw quite a few grapes, blueberries, blackberries and gooseberries. However, they did not ripen well. The wild raspberries were tasty as always. We did see baby figs; but nothing worth harvesting.

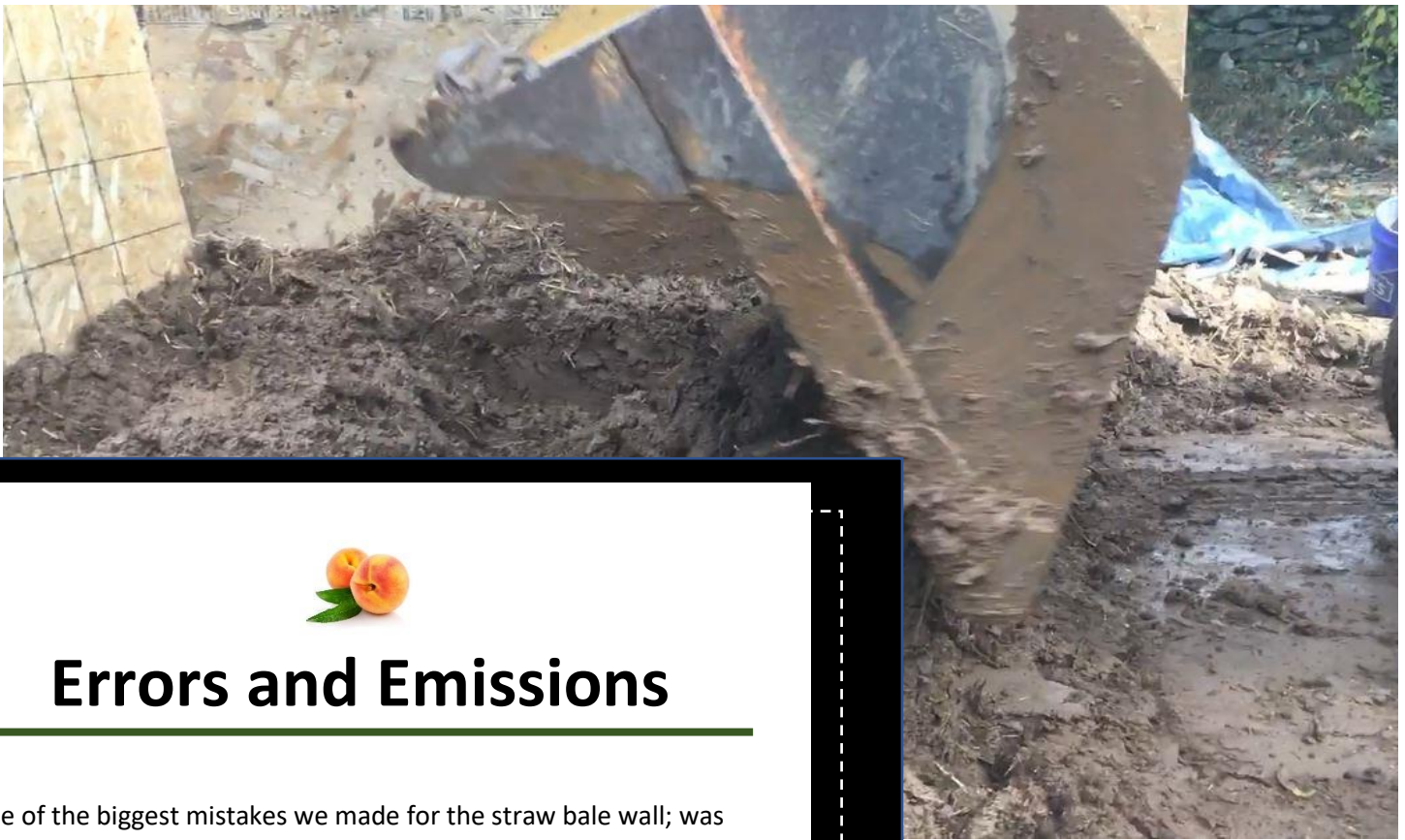




Repair and Recovery

Fixing and repairing things which breakdown is the reality of such an undertaking. Our biggest repair job was undertaken in March this year when we installed a new starter motor for the backhoe. Later we swapped out the ignition key for a new one. The generator being used for the well spluttered and stopped and we had to clear the carburetor by spraying a carb cleaner. Our gas hand-held trimmer stopped working and we couldn't fix that despite spending hours swapping out parts and cleaning debris. Lately our equipment has not been giving much trouble; but we had to redo some of the paving we had done for the bathtub area since we had not buttressed the edges well. We had to fix that before we poured setting sand. Even after that; some of the areas are loosening up. We will have to use more setting sand next year and fix the edging one final time. We also had an unwelcome visitor in the form of Mr. Bear who decided to trash our beehives. One beehive was already weak. This intrusion caused the bees to swarm away. Looks like we will be getting new bees next year!





Errors and Emissions

One of the biggest mistakes we made for the straw bale wall; was not installing wooden framing. We might have been able to get away without the framing for a shorter wall; but given that the test house is almost 11 feet tall; the wall started bending and buckling at the top. We had to retrofit vertical 4x4s to serve as supports. For some reason we thought we should insert rebars into the 4x4s and concrete the rebars to the ground. This not only made the supports too tall; they were less stable. We learnt our lesson and installed the verticals without rebars for the cob wall. But the straw bale wall verticals will have to be redone when we get a warm day. We are constantly refining the process of mixing and transferring cob using the backhoe. We sprayed water over a large area for the first mix which caused the backhoe wheels to slip. We are now careful about directing the water into the middle of the cob mix.





Volunteers and Visitors

Despite many friends and foes expressing intense interest in our project; only Kaushal has shown up willingly to volunteer his time for hard labor. Kaushal is Girija's brother-in-law who is based in Baltimore. If he wasn't so busy with his research and publications; he would probably be here more often. This fall Kaushal helped us with cobbing of our first long cob wall. He had visited earlier in the year and helped with sieving dirt for the plaster, clearing a trail in the forest and re-organizing our wood pile.

We have also had unwanted visitors like bears and deer. We have become pretty good at identifying bear, deer, wolf and rabbit scat.



Secondhand Scrounging

Our intention from the very beginning was to reuse secondhand materials for our project. Our main sources are Craigslist, NextDoor and Architectural Salvage stores. 'Second Chance' in Baltimore followed by 'Community Forklift' in Bladensburg are our favorite stores. We also lookup other secondhand stores and consignment stores for material. We recently found a few good consignment stores in Frederick and purchased a beautiful hardwood chest for the testhouse that will double up as seating. Attending a local auction bought us a 3 cannister set and a double crockpot for just \$4.00. The slate tiles and the bathtub that you see in the background were free items from Craigslist. The scaffold was a secondhand purchase from 'Ladders and Things'. The pavers for the bathtub area were salvaged from a dumping spot behind a local 7-eleven. We are getting better at filtering out quality material from all the noise because it is easy to get carried away and waste too much time buying and moving items. For the most part even machinery purchases have been great - like the backhoe, chainsaw and free walk-behind mower and cooking grill.



