

# Peach Cobbler

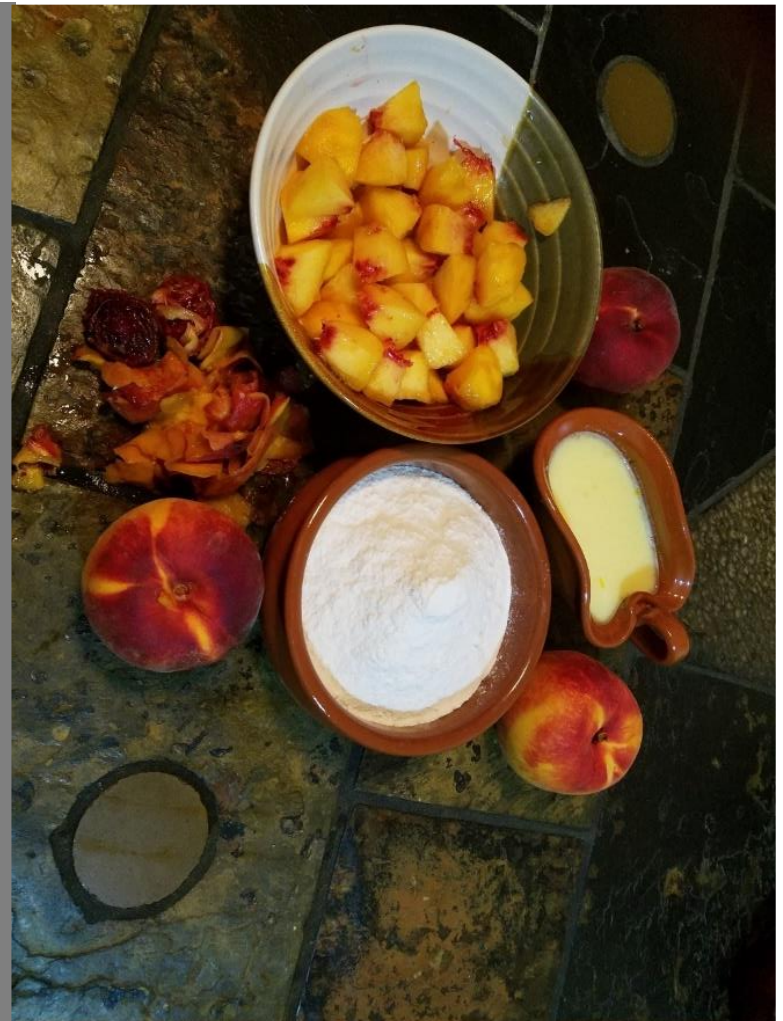


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## WINTER 2020

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## **FOREST STEWARDSHIP PLAN**

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### *Location*

On the north side of Herman Hauver Road,  
.1 miles north of MD Route 77  
Map 18 Parcel 34 Lot 1

77 30' 9" W 39 38' 16" N  
GPS Coordinates  
Upper Monocacy Watershed – 2140303

*In*

Frederick County

*On*

7.52 acres of forestland  
1.0 acre home site



## **Throwback Titbits - *Winter 2017***

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Our Forest Stewardship plan arrived end of November 2016. From what we remember, there wasn't much snow during the early part of 2016-2017 winter and we spent a lot of time clearing undergrowth in the septic area and main house area. We started getting used to driving the backhoe very slowly to help clear all the cuttings. We managed to walk around the land in areas with some clearing and finalized on the location of the test house and made rough demarcations for trails in the forest. It was a delight to discover parts of the stone wall - both along the land border and as a dividing wall between the main house area and the forest. When the weather got bad, we also drove around the neighboring towns of Thurmont and crossed the Mason Dixie line and checked out local libraries. We attended our first National Seed Swap event to listen to the talks and pick up some seeds for our future vegetable garden.





## Construction Corner

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The embankment has progressed well, and Alan managed to build a wooden framing for the bathtub. We also obtained a free shed from Nextdoor and assembled it on the land. We then decided to buy OSBs and 4x4s to build an additional storage shed. Our plan was to build a hinged bin; but ended up becoming another walk-in shed with an A-frame roof and shelving. For the test house itself, we retrofitted additional vertical supports and built a good amount of the bond beam over the L shaped cobb wall. We also reinforced the straw bale wall using wooden boards that screwed onto the verticals on the other side. We will have to wait for the weather to get warmer before we can reinstall the verticals along the straw bale wall and then connect the bond beam over it. As you can see in the photo below the overall framing of the house (verticals and bond beam) is coming along well.





## Horticultural Haven

Someone was giving away free quail and chicken coops on Craigslist. We brought one quail and one chicken coop to the land. The chicken coop had to be disassembled for transport and reassembled. We closed off some of the windows to convert it to a warm housing for a barn cat we had seen roaming the land. That cat never returned; but the food we put out did get eaten up. We found some nests of open pipe mud daubers when we took down our old storage shed. Other than that, there isn't much to report since the winter months have less activity.

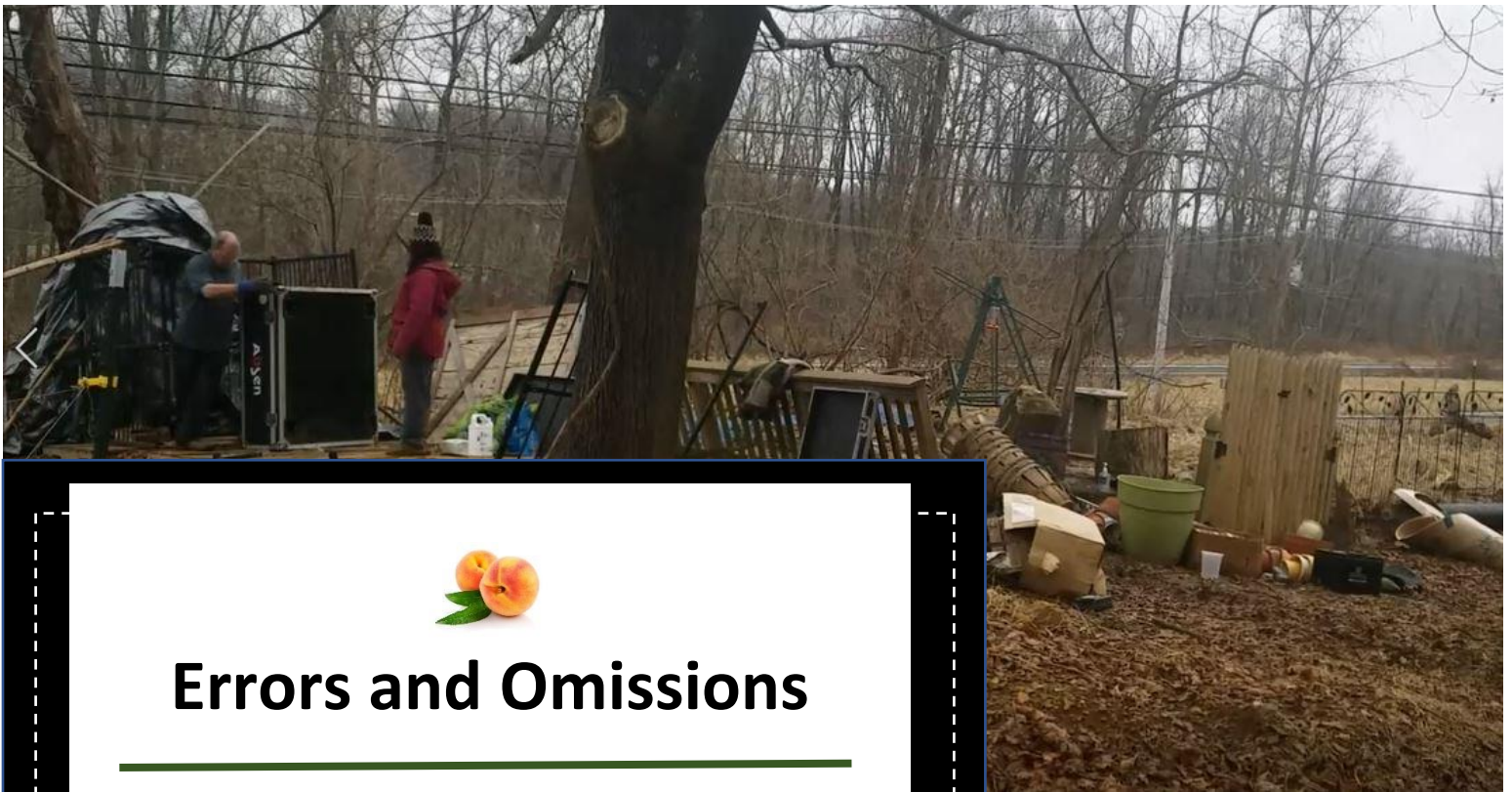




## Repair and Recovery

We had to redo some of the work we had done on the test house. The front stem wall of the test house had to be torn down to accommodate some work of the verticals and will need to be rebuilt. You can see the broken stone wall in the photo below with Patches sitting in the front door threshold. We also had to put back the protective tarps a few times since it kept flying off due to a few days with high winds. We also noticed that the verticals alone were not doing the job of holding the tall strawbale wall. So we had to reinforce with wooden slabs on one side and used 36" screws to connect it to the verticals on the other side; in effect straightening the bale wall. We installed 3 such reinforcing slabs and might have to install 2 more once we reinstall couple of loose verticals in spring.





## Errors and Omissions

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Now that we have a couple of storage sheds near the well area, we were able to take down the storage that we had built using the dog kennel parts. We should have gone ahead and built a proper storage right in the beginning; so that we could have avoided the added work. The plaster that we had applied on the off-shoot wall also flaked and fell off. However, this happened only on one half of the off-shoot wall – the one we had worked on later when the weather was starting to dip below 40 degrees at night. We believe the low temperatures at night were the cause for the plaster flaking off. Our truck got towed by the police and it happened because someone reported the truck as abandoned – it probably attracted attention due to the ugly coop sitting in it. We managed to get the truck released from the lot; but will have to keep moving the truck in future to avoid a repeat of such a scenario.





## Volunteers and Visitors

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We didn't see any rat snakes; but do keep seeing an adult and baby mouse springing out of the backhoe whenever we start it up. A black cat showed up one day and kept following us around. It didn't have a collar and looked a bit skinny, but otherwise in good condition. It climbed into our truck voluntarily and we took it home for one night since it was going to be very cold. We brought it back the next day and left some bedding and food in the storage shed and left it on the land and figured it could serve as our barn cat. We eventually converted a chicken coop into a warm cat 'house'. But we never saw that black cat again. During the trail work that we undertook, we obtained a beautiful and fairly well-preserved skeleton of a deer's head. Kaushal was too busy and didn't show up to help us; but hopes to be back in summer.



# Secondhand Scrounging

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We got some really nice items for the test house from NextDoor, Craigslist and an auction in Frederick. This included a couple of beautiful wooden rocking chairs, a metal wall hanging, a 3 cannister set for the kitchen, a slow cooker with 2 small pots and a metal spice box set. Like we had mentioned earlier, we also got a couple of coops and a storage shed for free.

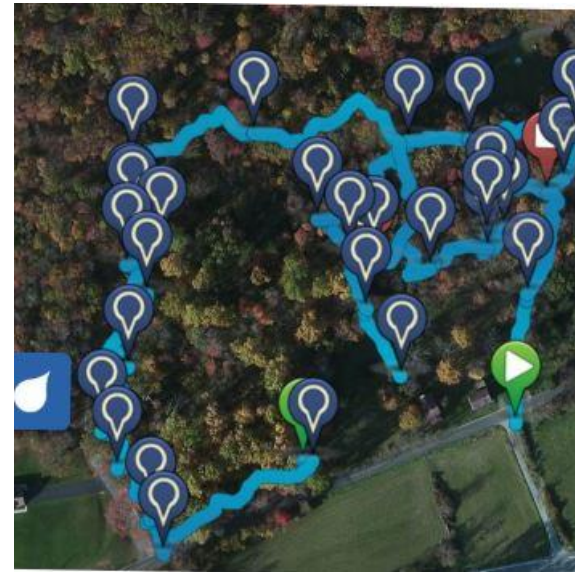






# Tracking with Tech

We purchased a trail camera from Amazon; but didn't have much luck since it died on us early during the testing phase. We had to return it and have purchased a better one and hope to share interesting photos/videos that we might capture. Our website has multiple pages and lots of information and is best viewed on the computer since the mobile version is difficult to navigate. The idea is to capture a lot of information via the website; so, we haven't concentrated on making it too mobile friendly. The main page has a short introduction to our project and a few other widgets that include the newsletters; a link to a word cloud and a feed from our twitter @peachcobblair. The word cloud is composed of tags that are assigned to each of our blogposts and built using WordArt. We have not been consistent with our tweeting and hope to improve on that; though our blog posts under the 'Building Update' page is up to date. A new blog post also results in an automatic tweet about it. You can also see how we charted our trails on the land using the Terrain Navigator app.



*We are not just building a Cob House.....*





*.....We are building a new Way of L*

*Hello and welcome to Alan and Girija's world of cobbing, baling, digging, r tilling, hiving; viz.; we are building a fairly self-sufficient homestead in the outskirts of the Washington DC metropolitan area.*


*When we first started toying with the idea of building something, it was a idea that involved leasing a bit of land on a farmer's backyard to do some composting, building methane digesters, having a few bee-hives and other*

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 A self sufficient homestead-building a cob-strawbale house with a vegetable garden, fruit orchard, bee hives, forest stewardship, solar panels & composting toilets.  
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