

It's all go in our house. A wee bit of sunshine and like the rest of Ross-shire we went crazy. I managed to resist the shorts over Easter weekend, although I did flash a bit of leg in a cotton skirt. We had a lunchtime drink outside in the sun, and our first barbeque of the year (not counting the one on New Year's Day which I am still trying to wipe from my memory). The house is being re-painted, the curtains are being washed and the dog is limbering up for her annual trim.

We've spent the last week or so getting the garden back into order. How did so many weeds find their way into the vegetable patch in just a few months? How did the grass get so long? And what on earth did the frost do to Christopher, our naked cherub that holds the bird bath?

I took delivery of a duck house last weekend. I hope the chickens don't realise. It was given to me by someone through a wonderful website I have discovered called Freecycle, where people just give things away. I put up an advert asking if anyone had poultry housing and was given a fantastic house that had been lying about in someone's yard for a few months. He felt good about it going to a good home, and I saved a few hundred quid. Everyone's a winner.

Freecycle helped me find homes for our surplus furniture when we moved house and meant someone was happy to take all the books that I was never going to read again, but couldn't throw away. Normally I would take my surplus belongings to a charity shop, but this website allows you to find homes for the bigger things and electrical goods that the shops cannot take.

So the duck house is sitting at the back, waiting on a lick of paint, which in turn is waiting on us agreeing a colour scheme. I know, it's only for chickens, and as long as it is vermin and water proof then who cares what it looks like? Actually, I do. I think roses painted around the door are beyond my artistic abilities, but there's no

reason why it can't be painted a pretty (non-toxic) colour for my girls when they arrive.

We had a bit of a nightmare bringing it back on top of our tiny car, but I suppose that's what you get if you let two girls loose in a roof rack situation. I'd like to apologise to the car behind us a mile or so down the road who thought they were getting a duck house through their windscreen. And to the cars that turned into to the side road we stopped in who had to drive around us as we did running repairs to the ropes. And to the patron saint of knots that must have despaired of how we finally secured it. And to all those people stuck behind us when we set off again at 20 miles an hour.

Then we need to get the chicken wire up (kindly donated by a friend and neighbour this time), add some nesting boxes and a perch and then we'll be ready to fetch the hens. More decisions. Hybrid or pure breed? Bantam or heavy? Pretty or functional? Definitely not ex-battery though. Pathetic though these poor creatures are, I am not colluding with their previous owners in their cruel trade.

So spring has sprung, the rabbit is working on the lawn and the chickens are on their metaphorical way. The seed potatoes are chitting in the porch alongside the tomato seedlings. My winter coat has been sent to the dry-cleaners and I will be cutting off my vest any day now. Roll on summer.