

I was given one of those wine-making kits for my birthday and made surprisingly good wine. Not that I'm a great judge of these things. I can tell the difference between red and white, but that is my limit really. I do like a glass of wine, and this column would never appear if it wasn't for the glass by my side as I type away.

Anyway I must have been boasting of my success, because my father-in-law turned up a few weeks ago with what seemed like the contents of his loft. It seems that in his youth he was a bit of a wine maker and had amassed all the equipment. My apparent skill in the mysterious art had prompted him to pass on his collection of plastic buckets, demi-johns and a boxful of goodies.

To be honest, it was all a bit intimidating. The book he had kindly bought me listed all the things that could go wrong if I wasn't sufficiently sterile or balanced my tannins. I also found my father-in-law's record of what he had made, with dates, ingredients and tasting notes. It all seemed a far cry from emptying a bag of grape juice in the jar, and adding chemicals from numbered bags.

So it all sat in the house over the summer. Actually, it all sat in our bedroom which made my midnight wanderings a bit noisy when I stumbled into the demi-john display in the corner.

But in the last week or two, all has changed. It started when our beetroot began to suddenly ripen (do root vegetables ripen?). We aren't too good about thinning out our vegetables, and so always end up with a glut of something that all needs to be eaten within a week. I love beetroot (thankfully we all do) but when my pee turned pink, I decided it was time to find another use for the veg.

So wine making it was. I chopped up a load, poured in boiling water and some ginger and left it to do whatever it does for a week. Actually it turned out not to be as hard as I thought. All I had to do was poke it about a couple of times a day and then sieve the juice off. It is now bubbling away nicely in the corner. I think I am quite well suited to this particular hobby. It involves a lot of waiting which is always good.

Unfortunately I only used a few pounds of the vegetable so I started to give them out to unsuspecting neighbours. And what happened when I did this? I immediately got bags of plums, apples and soft fruit back. So now I have several types of wine on the go. I'm even planning a raid this weekend on someone's elderberries.

In these days of recycling, sourcing local food and community gardening, there is something really satisfying about making the most of the produce we all have. I am glad that my winemaking is making use of fruit and vegetables that otherwise might go to waste. Once the soaking process is over, the leftovers go to the hens or the compost heap and ultimately back into next year's beetroot.

I don't know about you, but it seems as though our town had a pretty productive summer this year, and I am reaping the benefits. I have promised a bottle of wine to each of the donors with no guarantee of quality. Some of them will not be ready for 18 months but there's going to be some party in the spring of 2011. I just hope it is palatable, although I suspect no-one will care too much.