



■ Man at work – Chris Southall tends to his vegetables and, inset, cuts wood for heating and cooking

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We're living the good life – you can too

EVER fancied leaving the rat race and embarking on a life of self-sufficiency?

If you thought the days of Tom and Barbara in the Good Life were resigned to the past, think again.

With energy prices skyrocketing, producing your own energy and growing your own food doesn't sound like a bad idea.

According to Chris Southall, it not only brings satisfaction but also a better quality of life.

Four years ago he and his partner, Rosie Dodds, embarked on a project to turn a Thirties bungalow, with half an acre of land, into a well-oiled, hot bed of self-sufficiency.

The property, in Burrs Road, Clacton, named EcoDIY, has now been adapted to include two wood burners, one in the kitchen for cooking and one for the central heating, insulation throughout, a rain water harvesting system and solar panels on the roof.

The garden has been adapted

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to produce the maximum amount of food.

Chris says: "The house and garden was very much mine and Rosie's project."

"I started living self-sufficiently in my early twenties, when the Good Life was on TV and there were the books by John Seymour on the self-sufficiency movement, and have carried on ever since."

After a lot of hard work the pair have made great headway on their project.

Chris says: "The garden was just a square of grass when we moved in and the first thing we did was plant food for us to eat."

"Next, we adapted the house and, recently, we insulated the workshop and put solar panels on the roof."

The four-bedroom property has been chosen as part of the Permaculture Association's land learning network, which has prime examples of eco-friendly homes



■ Tuck in – French volunteer Charlotte Julian, Chris Southall and Rosie Dodds lunch on home-made bread, warmed on a wood burning stove, cheese, mushrooms, picked from nearby, and home-made jam and honey from the couple's own bee hive

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all over the country. Permaculture promotes living which has a minimal negative impact on the Earth's natural environment. Chris believes the way of life makes a lot of sense.

He says: "I started out wanting to live this way for ethical reasons, because I didn't believe in consumerism and capitalism, but it also makes sense in other ways for people."

"Energy prices are going up and people are considering other ways

to heat their homes. Our utility bills are around a quarter of most households."

Chris also believes self-reliance promotes happiness.

He laughs: "I am 66 and am still fit and do a lot of manual work myself. Use it or lose, I say."

"Working outside and doing something practical makes people happy and it also feels good to not be stuck in an office all day."

Chris and Rosie also manage eight and a half acres of woodland

at Glebe Wood in Tendering. The woodland, which they coppice each year, provides them with wood to burn and visitors can learn about permaculture or run workshops in exchange for labour.

Chris says: "It is not about exchanging money."

"It is about trading knowledge and experience, and learning about another way of life."

For more information, visit www.ecodiy.org or e-mail Chris at chris@ecodiy.org