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# Permaculture in Practice: Some nights before solstice

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Posted: Saturday, January 4, 2014 9:51 pm

By Nate Downey  
For The New Mexican

'Twas some nights before solstice when all through the beds. The creatures were

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Fresh winter food in a cold frame. Photo courtesy Nate Downey

... through the seas, the creatures were stirring. Some soon could lose heads!

Lettuce, cilantro, carrots, greens, peas,

Were hoping, and praying, I'd ward off the freeze.

I was out on the fake lawn, my brain in a scatter,

But said to my wife, "At least it won't matter.

If our garden grows, why, it will save cash,

And give us some nice, healthy food we can stash.

But right now, there's still ye ole Trader Joe

(Sure ... when in the 'hood, to the Co-op we go.),

And the farmers' market we hold so dear,

Will be there for us when we appear.

But if this freeze snaps our veggies right quick,

You know we'll soon plant much, much more that we'll pick."

More rapid than eagles, her orders they came,

"Yeah, honey," said she, "I'll call them by name.

Some kale please, some chard, and bok choi all mixed-in

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To our sometimes-successful cold-hardy garden.  
And when summer comes, I'll need grapes climbing walls!  
You know it, my dear, I want it all!"  
As dry leaves before the wild hurricane fly,  
I sprang to my work, for it meant do or die.  
Adjusting each translucent plastic-sheet cover,  
Above the white row-cloth set just-right—to hover  
Over those peas, carrots, greens—all alive!  
“And if they do die at least we'll have strived  
To sustain ourselves in our little way.”  
Then, in an instant, the sky went grey.  
After the deep cold came some heavy snow,  
(An insulator, that's darn good, as you know)  
But when it dipped lower to six, seven at night,  
We feared our sweet friends had then lost the fight.  
But finally when warmer days did emerge,  
I was able to build up some courage and splurge

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Enough karma to check, to peek, at our food,  
And when I did, things really looked good!  
I spoke not a word, but went straight to my work,  
Stood up from the bed, and turned with a jerk.  
Got my gloves, got my trowel, and then blew my nose.  
Lo, and behold! Nothing! Not one thing had froze!  
Our cold frames had done it! They paid off for us!  
Again, we'd have fresh cilantro and lettuce!  
Still, no peas were budding nor ready to fruit,  
But, somehow, some way, they sure did look cute.  
Now, flashback to that night when it snowed like Hell,  
(This part, believe me, I don't wish to tell)  
When coyote, or cougar, or neighborhood dog  
Came knocking for dinner cloaked in snow-fog.  
They gored up two chickens, and one was just missing.  
Was she a to-go meal? I'm only guessing.  
Well, in the morning, when this came to light,

It was gross and disgusting, but it was all right.

With the snow and the frost, to dig them a grave,

It wasn't easy. You had to be brave,

So I waited some days to bury the things,

Making compost and really good soil from their wings.

*Nate Downey is the author of Harvest the Rain (Sunstone Press, 2010) and the president of Santa Fe Permaculture, Inc. You can contact him through his new company website, [www.permadesign.com](http://www.permadesign.com).*

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