New cold frames have sprouted up near the garden and are now full of seeds. Like many new things on this farm, they look old. The window sashes are old, I got them real cheep at farm auctions. The design is old, too, I remember this style when I was a kid, and it is commonly depicted in old farming and gardening books. Sassafras boards were cut and nailed together to make eight rectangles three feet wide and seven to nine feet long. The backs are eight inches taller than the fronts. Three are deeper than the other five, all are at least a foot deep in the front.

We found a sunny spot in the front lawn and plowed it up. After arranging the boxes we started sifting soil, compost and sand. The sifter is 1/2” hardware cloth nailed to a two foot square frame laid over a wheelbarrow.

Leaf mold was laid in the bottoms and the sifted mix filled the frames about eight inches deep. Into this we added a little lime, kelp, crushed eggshells and colloidal phosphate. This is stirred in and then left alone.

After setting a few days I raked the soil around to disturb sprouting weeds, and proceeded to plant them. Shallow turrows were made about three inches apart and tiny tomato and pepper seeds were placed an inch apart in the rows. Small cedar stakes were labeled with the varieties and then I firmed the soil over the rows with the palm of my hand.

I watered them with rainwater. Rain falls down from the sky, and is different from spring water, which flows horizontally. Well water is brought upward from below. I’ve heard rainwater is best for plants, and it makes sense, but I’ve never done experiments using different kinds of water.

We mulched around the south-facing cold frames with wood chips, to keep weeds down. I think the grass and wood look better than a plastic hoop house. If we had dug them deeper and put a foot of horse manure in the bottoms, the composting manure would heat up and they’d be called hot beds.

They’ll be kept watered until our seeds sprout. Then we’ll have to keep a close eye on them, weeding and watering as necessary. In six to eight weeks we will have plenty of plants to transplant out in the garden.

Every year is a new garden, even when you grow things the old fashioned way. Every season is different, with new failures and new successes. Although organic, local food is now in the news, I consider it to be the good old way.