

An Unexpected Pleasure

By Janet Allen

Many years ago, I resolved to stop using my electric clothes dryer. Willing to sacrifice convenience to save energy and prevent further climate change, I approached this mission with the conviction of a martyr. Getting started was easy. First was a trip to buy a “solar clothes dryer”—the four-armed, umbrella style. I picked up a few packages of wooden clothespins, too. I was ready.

Early the next morning, I washed my first load of clothes destined for hanging. “Is this a good use of time for a modern woman?” I asked myself. But I was committed.

The load was ready shortly after breakfast. I was thankful it was a short trip to the clothesline because I felt foolish lugging that basket of wet clothes. But I did appreciate an excuse to be outdoors in the peaceful stillness of morning.

Developing a rhythm hanging the clothes, I soon finished the load. Who could blame me if I spent a few extra minutes watching birds in my yard?

That afternoon, I went to check the results. As I approached, I noticed the sunshiny scent the laundry had absorbed. I felt some towels. They were dry! Accustomed to needing energy-hungry appliances for household chores, this seemed an amazing feat.

I had worried that this solar method would take too much time. Yet when I folded the clothes, I realized it didn't take much longer than the conventional electric method. Straightening each piece as I pinned it up became the first step in folding it. When it was dry, I could quickly unpin it, finish folding it, and slip it into the basket. It took no more time or effort than folding a basket of laundry dragged from the electric dryer. Permanently leaving the clothespins on the line was another time-saver.

I wondered how we'd adjust to the towels, which dry crinkly-stiff. They soon lost much of that stiffness, though, and we grew to prefer them to those wimpy-soft towels of old. My towels now have character ... and that sunshiney fragrance no fabric softener can match.

I learned to favor windy days to wash permanent press. Wind irons shirts better than my previous method: trying to remember to remove them from the dryer soon enough to prevent wrinkling. Since I don't iron (now there's a time- and energy-waster!), I appreciate the wind's free service.

For a few years, I hung my laundry only in the warm months—April through October—yet after a while, using the electric dryer even half the year seemed wasteful. I looked for a way to hang laundry indoors.

None of the drying racks sold in local stores was satisfactory. Thin and wobbly, they were designed for occasional use and for a few clothes, not large loads. I expanded my search to the Internet and found a sturdy, easy-to-use model, with enough drying space for my needs. I ordered two.

Our large living room—isolated from the rest of our house and used only for company—makes a splendid drying room. I leave the racks up in the winter, putting them away only when we entertain.

Hanging laundry has been a successful lifestyle change, and I haven't used my old electric dryer for over a decade. Frugal by nature, I like saving money and energy. Troubled by the environmental and health problems fossil fuel energy creates, I'm gratified I'm not contributing to power plant pollution. The results I had hoped for!

But one outcome was unexpected: I've actually *enjoyed* hanging my laundry - summer and winter. An unexpected pleasure for this modern woman!