

Embrace Change this Spring

Alan Betts (<http://alanbetts.com/writings>)

When the Earth becomes vibrant again with life in spring, we welcome the change, and many feel a surge of joy and gratitude. The winter was so mild that daffodils bloomed in March in Pittsford, but it was too early, and the flowers were killed by the return of ten-degree temperatures one night.

When there is little snow to reflect the sunlight, winters are ten degrees warmer. This past winter set record new temperatures globally, and we can expect a much warmer world in coming decades as the climate changes. Globally, December was very warm, January broke that record, and then February broke the record again by such a huge margin that even climate scientists were surprised. It was so warm that in the Arctic night, the sea-ice extent stopped growing a month early at a new record low in February.

For a gardener, but not for skiers, the warm winter was satisfying. The ground in my garden in Pittsford was unfrozen for parts of January, February (for the first time) and almost all of March, so I was able to dig my cover crop of rye grass. Unprotected spinach survived the winter for the first time. Under glass, lettuce and spinach thrived, and started growing by the end of February, giving us lots of greens for our daily salads. At the beginning of April, I planted some hardy seeds, and now peas, beets, chard and radishes are growing well.

Can we embrace a changing climate, a changing Earth, with the same joy and gratitude as we welcome spring? This is not so easy. Because we fear change, many turn to denial. But we are an integral part of the interconnected life on Earth, so we must try, or we too will slip into denial, fear or even despair at the changes ahead. And that is much too bleak.

The political season is in full swing with a presidential election ahead, and for the first time one party is discussing climate change. The electorate is very angry with the failure of the federal government to address what they see as the real issues. But perceptions of reality differ widely, and accusations and blame are flying in many different directions. Yes, the political system works to further the interests of the rich and powerful at the expense of the poor and the Earth itself, and this must be challenged. But few look at the whole picture, where we all share responsibility for the future of the world we have created from our dreams and sense of entitlement.

But change is coming whether we like it or not – the Earth is so much more powerful than our civilization. Our dream of unlimited human power that came with the discovery of fossil fuels and then nuclear fission is a mirage. We have to make the giant shift to both the acceptance of our responsibility for the future; and the realization that we must create a sustainable path for our civilization that recognizes our integral, inseparable relation with the Earth itself. And for this to work, we must create and accept new paths with

gratitude and joy in the heart, rather than grudgingly regret that the dream has faded. Unfortunately the denial of climate change is a recipe for collapse rather than a source of hope.

So it is spring and easy to start working with the earth. Go out and plant seeds, watch them grow and realize that working with the earth and each other is a joyful process. Start to dream where we might go this year as communities cooperating with the soil, the sun, rain and wind and the natural world. Can we and our families come closer to the Earth and its renewable resources so we can embrace change? And do share what you grow and what you learn with your neighbors.

Dr. Alan Betts of Atmospheric Research in Pittsford, VT is a leading climate scientist. Browse his columns at alanbetts.com.



Figure 1. Courtesy VERMONT Fish & Wildlife. Moretown Elementary School first- and second-graders had an incredible opportunity to help Vermont Fish & Wildlife staff and volunteers stock the Winooski River in Waterbury with trophy brown and rainbow trout. The children made a bucket brigade from the hatchery truck in the parking lot to the edge of the river. They passed five gallon bucket after five-gallon bucket, filled with beautiful trout, down to the river's edge where the trout were released into the river. In preparation for the trip, the children learned about the life cycle of trout. Upon returning to the classroom, the children spent time writing poetry about the beautiful fish.