

On being a farm wife -And other hazards Joyce Bupp



"Mom? Hey, Mom! Can you make me lunch?"

A classic, child-to-mother question if there ever was one. How many children over the centuries, in multitudes of languages and dialects, do you suppose have come bursting into the family cooking area on an identical quest?

"How about a hunk of leftover sabre-toothed-tiger?" perhaps the Stone Age, skins-clad, parent may have suggested. "Maybe I can find some roots and berries out in the swamp. Just go out there first and chase off that pesty brontosaurus that hangs around down there."

"I'll slice you some cold porridge and pieces of roast wild boar," may have answered the domestic head of some Middle Age, Celtic household. Our own pioneer ancestral youngsters no doubt often carried for a midday snack dried venison and yesterday's cornbread.

Packing lunches has never, ever, been a favored chore of mine. School hot lunch programs have blessedly eliminated that early morning, schoolday hassle. And, a husband whose career choice puts him at the midday meal table most of the time similarly saved me battling the brown bagging syndrome.

However, during heavy tillage, planting and harvest periods, they occasionally sweep into the kitchen with that boggling request.

"Mom? Hey, Mom! Can you make me a lunch?"

Actually, the physical chore of putting together a spur-of-the-moment, tractor-seat meal isn't that much effort. Tough part lies in the creativity challenge: what to put together that's nutritious, appealing, and holds up in ninety-degree weather, when you haven't planned ahead.

With luck, you can go the ancestral route of leftovers -- some

nice, cold, sliced "roast beast," (as the kids used to call it). Or, a real winner is when they put in a brown bag order the morning after you baked a piece of ham.

More than likely, though, meditation at the opened refrigerator door results in the enlightened answer of bologna and cheese. Or, maybe, cheese and bologna. Rare is the day when these two staples cannot be found stocked in our chilled larder.

And, while still-frozen bread doesn't win any praises at the dinner table, it has its merits when packing a lunch. Frozen bread thaws before they're ready to pause at noon, while keeping the sandwich stuffings cool and fresh.

Pawing through refrigerator shelves might further enhance creativity in the form of pickles, onions, lettuce, even a tomato come mid-summer. And, there are almost always fresh apples on hand. If their timing is lucky, and you've just made a run to the supermarket, such lunchbox treats as potato chips, or cookies, might be available. Twenty-four hours after the shopping trip, forget it.

Watermelon has proved to be a lunchbox winner in the field hereabouts. Couple-inch-chunks of the juicy fruit can be eaten out of hand while unloading a bin or waiting for a replacement empty wagon. Plus, you can track their comings and goings by the drips on the floor.

What to put the lunch in to keep it cool, reasonably clean and which will adapt itself to field battering, is another challenge. Traditional brown bags just don't cut it bouncing around the toolbox through a morning of heavy duty tractor work.


This year, I sent to the field, with a feeling of having kissed it good-bye, our small but heavy-duty,

lunch-size Igloo cooler. Coolers, especially those favored half-gallon types for drinks, turn permanently grease-black and break out with dents, cracks, and missing pieces.

Though the treasured Igloo returned only slightly worse for wear (with thanks from the lunch consumer), a half-gallon lemonade jug was less fortunate. Slipping from a moving tractor, it tumbled beneath the heavy-tread tire and became bits and pieces of lunch-time memorabilia.

Which is why, when they come hunting field food and drink, I've learned to stick with this philosophy: pack 'em full, but buy 'em cheap.

I hope there's a half-gallon drink cooler sale somewhere this week.



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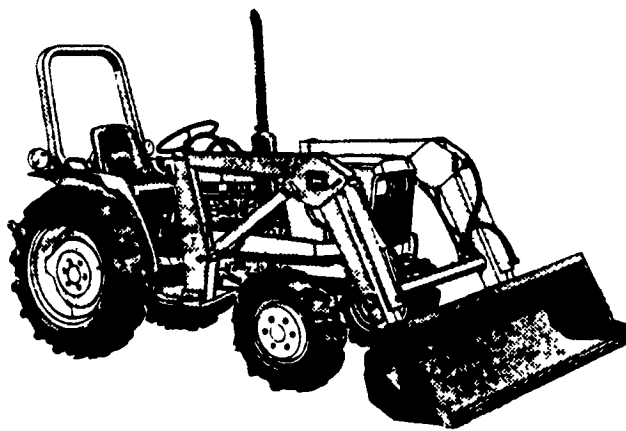
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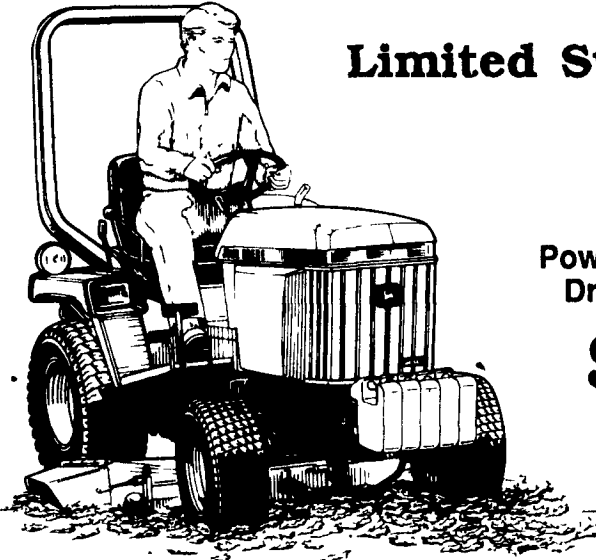
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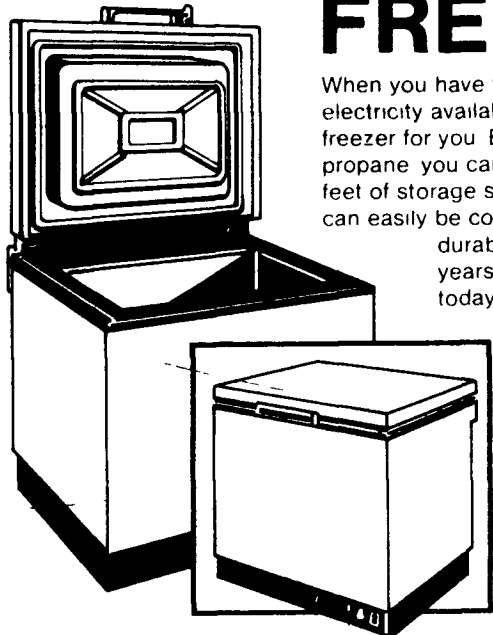
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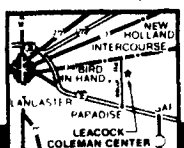
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