

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



With its usual ear-splitting "bang!" the engine of the riding mower became silent. After securing the wide doors of the woodshed from the inside, I picked my way through the darkness, across the tractor's rubber tires and mowing attachment, to exit the shed's smaller front entrance.

(Our mower rarely shuts off without a backfire, about three seconds after the engine switch is

turned. Inside the shed, the noise is deafening. But let me cover my ears in self-defense, and the dog-gone thing just sits there, innocently silent. Time after time after time.....)

A newly-mown lawn - especially after several inches of rain and a mowing interval of more than two weeks - equals instant gratification. Grass that was shaggy and scruffy-looking transforms to trimmed and neat. Flower borders

have edges again. And the littering maple leaves, chopped into tiny bits by the lethal slashing of whirling blades, have vanished into the clippings.

But, even when newly-trimmed, the lawn surrounding our farmhouse will never resemble those freshly-manicured, thick, lush, green lawns that look like a picture. Our lawn is lived in - and looks it.

A permanent path, worn to the bare earth, betrays the route we travel daily from the basement to the barn. It's the "inter-state" across maybe twenty-five yards of lawn, the shortest, most direct route to our business. On rainy days, the cats also conform to the route of the hard-packed barn path, where their paws find less soggy traveling.

Only slightly less barren of grass is the packed path under the laundry lines, stretched between two of the ancient maples. Laundry hung here long before our arrival a quarter-century ago, as the trees have actually grown around

the metal bars fastened to their old trunks. Clothes driers have lessened the traffic during bad weather, but the path still gets regular use year-round.

At least once each summer it seems a flat, shaded part of the back lawn sees temporary use as a rehabilitation center for an injured cow or heifer. Last year, it was for a heifer that became temporarily paralyzed due to calving difficulties. Just recently, the "patient" was a yearling that slipped and injured her back.

The lawn offers the most soft, cool spot on the farm, with excellent footing for an injured animal, struggling back onto its feet. The joy and satisfaction of their healing more than compensates for a lawn ornamented with residue of hay and manure, and feed and water tubs scattered across the grass.

Two square, barren patches currently mark the locations of the guineas' pens, before they became

roaming residents of the farmstead. Grass has mostly regrown over the patch of gravel washed into the lower lawn during a flooding cloudburst some 16 months ago.

And the bare patches under the bird feeders are merely a ground-level of feeders for a competing species. That's where the half-dozen remaining bantams scavenge fallen sunflower seeds, scratched off the feeding platform by the finches, jays and sparrows.

Our lawn looked even worse than usual before this last (of the season, maybe?) mowing session. Winds whipping through the maples as Hurricane Hugo dashed north, followed by the cold front which raced south a day later, shook loose hundreds of small twigs and branches.

Only one large limb tumbled, missing the corner of the greenhouse by mere inches. A growing pile of kindling now awaits the season's opening of the woodstove, maple droppings with a final purpose in life.

Still, our littered lawn was insignificant, compared to losses suffered by farm friends in the storm's path of devastation. Virginia friends woke to find every acre of their corn uprooted and flattened on the ground, before a single load had been cut for silo filling. Another, from North Carolina, had roofs torn from most of the farm buildings, a chimney ripped from the house, and fences shredded from falling trees and limbs.

Makes a scuffed, scarred and ragged lawn seem pretty unimportant, huh?



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