

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



less than an addiction once you've gotten the habit into your blood. It's a need that periodically goes dormant, subdued by zero-degree wind chill factors, frozen manure spreaders, cold-chilled batteries, and crashing down onto one's backside on the ice while headed out to do morning chores.

But sure as the sun climbs even a little higher and warmer, the grass colors up a bit greener, and a balmy southern breeze melts the ice edging pond banks, that uncontrollable urge comes rushing back.

And nothing satisfies until we go dig in the dirt.

After this bizarre winter, with all the cold lumped into a few short weeks, interspersed with unseasonable previews of spring, the addiction has struck even earlier than usual. Frankly, we watch this early warmth with a healthy measure of suspicion and some concern, after a decade marked with the worst droughts in a half-century.

Still, pestered by the same itch that sends the men off readying

moldboards and chisel teeth, I headed for the garden last week.

"It's too early," part of me argued. "You know it's going to get cold again. You know stuff won't grow yet. Remember the year you planted in early March, and it turned cold and rainy for the next six weeks and some of the seeds rotted and you got a lousy germination rate and had to replant? Remember? Remember?"

I remembered - and grabbed the hoe and my favorite spade and headed for the garden anyway. If nothing else, I could at least tear up the remains of last year's mulch materials and clean off a residue from the fall grasses which choked last year's planting of asters, strawflowers, and statice.

One section, an awkward offset between the field road and electric pole, rises several inches above the rest of the patch. Because of the pole, this small section can't be tilled with the field equipment and thus never gets worked down

and leveled along with the rest. So since it requires hand digging, I instead mostly keep it mulched and weed-free with a sheet of heavy black plastic salvaged from the trench silo.

But the plastic was ragged after two years and needed replacement. Grabbing the corner of it, I yanked.

Soil in the rest of the garden, laying slightly lower, was still a little on the damp side. But the dark, soft ground under the plastic sheeting was perfect, absolutely perfect. Loose, with just the right amount of moisture. Fat earthworms pulled back into their burrows at the unexpected exposure to light. And the sharp corner of the hoe opened up a beautiful furrow.

This soil just cried out to be planted. Now.

While I struggled against an urge to run to the house for the garden seeds, the roar on an approaching tractor temporarily distracted. Stirring dust as he passed, our son maneuvered into an adjacent field, lowered the chisel and began recycling former corn stubble into alfalfa seedbed. Another generation giving in to the urge to stir up the soil.

Oh, what the heck.

Onions can stand a little child. And the pack of Swiss chard seed specifically instructs to plant while the soil is still cool.

Sure, it may rot, not germinate, need replanted. All things considered, though, a ninety-cent pack of seeds is cheap therapy for Spring Fever.

National Cooking Contest For Youth

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Secretary of Agriculture Boyd Wolff encourages Pennsylvania chefs ages 12 to 18 to submit entries in the first national Turkey Lovers' Recipe Contest. The contest, sponsored by the National Turkey Federation, has an April 15 deadline.

"Pennsylvania turkey producers raised a total of 7.9 million birds last year valued at \$69.5 million," said Wolff.

Recipes, using at least one pound of fresh or cooked turkey meat, will be judged by a panel of food professionals for taste, appearance, appeal, simplicity and two written essays. One essay should describe the recipe's nutritional quality and the second should describe the proper food handling techniques during preparation.

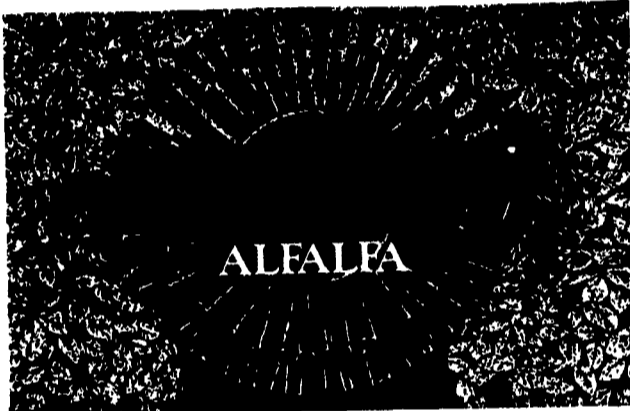
The winning teen-ager will receive \$1,000 and a two-day, all-expense paid trip to Washington, D.C. with a parent or guardian. In addition, the winner's school receives a new microwave oven for its home economics department. Other prizes included \$500 for second place recipe, \$400 for third, \$300 for fourth, and \$200 for fifth.

Recipes should serve 4-8 people. Students can enter more than one recipe, but each must be submitted separately. Essays, not to exceed 200 words, must be printed or typed on 8 1/2 x 11 inch paper and attached to the recipe.

Send entries to: Turkey Lovers' Recipe Contest, National Turkey Federation, 11319 Sunset Hills Road, Reston, VA 22090. All entries become the property of the contest. For a complete set of rules, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the same address.

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