

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



Each time, I wonder the same thing.

"Will this be the last?"

Then a couple of sunny, warm days combine with the cool, damp evenings - and a quick glance out across the lawn says it wasn't the last time at all.

The lawn needs mowed. Again.

Actually, mowing the lawn has become a pleasure once more. Recent rains and nearly-ideal grass-growing conditions have resurrected the stunted greenery, after four months of bake-oven heat and drought.

Gone are the scruffy weeds. Rapidly vanishing are the once-widening patches of dead brown. Laid-to-rest are the mower-blade induced dust storms that dirtied my contact lenses with every pass over the grass - er, weed tops. Even the dusting-bed holes scratched out by Mama, Papa and baby chickens (down to five) are

shrinking as aggressive root systems fill formerly grassless voids.

Mother Nature is reclaiming her turf - and green, lush and velvety it is. Tall, too, since our backyard is one of the lowest-lying parts of the farmstead and holds moisture well.

So mowing takes a while, a flawless excuse to flee the desk and soak up a perfect October afternoon. Because the cuttings lay thick and must be removed, I mow the most dense growth first. It dries a bit while I finish the rest and can be blown into "windrows" like hay, cutting the raking and gathering labor.

Some lawn mowers are equipped with baggers for such jobs. We have a bagger. She also runs the mower, the rake, the wheelbarrow.....

While some folks get their bending and stretching exercise at the health spa, we keep our bagger

fit with lawn care aerobics. Reeach out with the rake, stretccchhh those muscles pulling the grass, beennndddd and pick it up.

A perfect accompaniment to the aerobics is jogging, behind a wheelbarrow piled with soft fragrant clippings, to mulch the roses or the vegetable garden. Bend and stretch, pile and gather, rake and push.

On this recent afternoon, the sun's warmth and a soft breeze make mowing most pleasurable. Puffy white clouds gather in bunches in the blue sky, and slowly drift toward the eastern horizon. Splotches of reddish and golden tints among the fencerows hint at the impending flashy foliage of fall.

The roses struggle to make a drought comeback, pushing out a scattering of late but lovely blossoms of yellow, scarlet and pink. Fat, brown cattail heads wave gently in a circle around the little pond, a few already disintegrating to seed-laden fluff drifting off toward the meadow.

Just a few more passes and the lawn will, at least for a day or two, be level and low, at least passably manicured.

Earlier, I'd thrown out of the mower's way a plastic truck canvas borrowed from the barn to cover my potted tomato plants against overnight frost threats. As the mower sweeps around that corner of the lawn, the whirling

blades snatch up a stray length of baler twine fastened to the canvas as a tiedown.

And in a split second the blades suck in a big corner of the blue plastic, stalling the machine before I can even hit the off switch.

"Stupid, stupid, stupid!" taunts a little voice in my head. Not only is the lawn decorated with colorful bits of blue canvas shreds, but all that thick grass is still spread over every inch of turf.

Raking three times the normal square yardage of turf helps disperse my frustration with me.

On an overall scale of equipment incidents we deal with daily, it ranks a mere minor irritation. By day's end, the lawn is clean, the canvas mess untangled and the mower returned intact to the shed.

But, anyone need a slightly used truck canvas? Aeration devices already installed.

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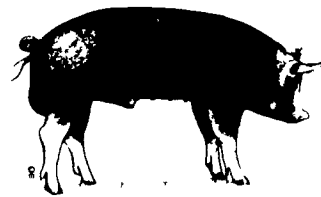
Groundwater Policy Education Project

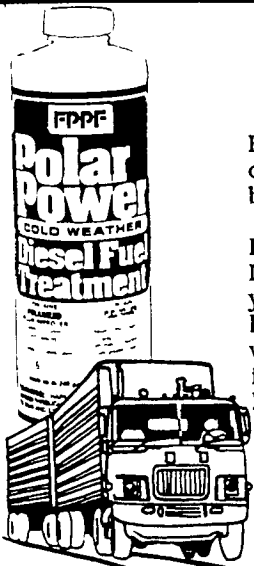
WEST CHESTER (Chester Co.) — Penn State Cooperative Extension, in cooperation with the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania/Citizen Education Fund, will sponsor "Groundwater Leadership: Because the Future of Groundwater Is in Our Hands," a regional conference to provide instruction in groundwater issues, leadership skills, and information on grants and technical resources available from the Pennsylvania Groundwater Policy Education Project.

Local government officials, members of environmental and community groups, planners, public water suppliers, business representatives, environmental consultants and others involved in or concerned about land and water

resource management and protection are encouraged to attend the conference on Saturday, November 2, 9 a.m.-3:15 p.m., at the Chester County Hospital School of Nursing, Rhoads Educational Building, 701 E. Marshall Street, West Chester. The registration fee of \$15.00 includes lunch and is due by October 21.

For registration information and program brochure, contact the Chester County Cooperative Extension at (215) 696-3500.





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