

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



The value which we place on a given commodity is in direct proportion to its level of abundance.

In my garden, that's considered the "rotten tomato" theory.

A rotten tomato tossed away in August has practically no significance whatsoever. After all, in August those stalks are fat-stemmed, lush with leaves and hanging full with fruits ranging from red-ripe, fist-size to pin-head tomato embryos.

One, two, or even a half-dozen, overripe tomatoes are a mere squishy inconvenience. When the Farmer was a youngster and his family grew a couple of acres of tomatoes, overripe ones made handy target practice ammunition.

But now, with a couple of frosty-white mornings behind us and the prized stash of tomatoes dwindling, every rotting one that has to be pitched is a source of personal disappointment. One less for tomato salad, one less for topping tossed greens, one less for slicing in sandwiches.

And a few freeze-spared, orange-ripe tomatoes found under the tangled brown mass of shriveled stems and dead leaves are gently carried to the house like delicate treasure.

The diminishing returns from a frost-bitten vegetable patch enhance our appreciation of those few remaining, prized, fresh

pickin's.

Late-planted broccoli stalks for fall use matured extra quickly in the extended, sunny warmth of the season. Not only does my home-grown broccoli develop a strong, unpleasant taste in hot weather, it also quickly becomes infested with oodles of little green worms. Regular spraying would eliminate those, but barn and office chores take precedence over buggy vegetables.

So the wormy heads of broccoli were lopped off and recycled to soil. That encouraged the beheaded stalks to send out little side shoots. Cooler temperatures zapped the little green worms and mellowed the flavor of those tender, tasty, little shoots.

Plastic feed bags sheltered the two most productive bell pepper plants through the first hard frost. But the second white-morning cold snap caught me by surprise and pretty well halted pepper production. A few half-sized green fruits hiding under semi-scorched leaves will be the last to add their flavorful crunchiness to our dinner-time salads.

That repeat hit by Jack Frost also finished off this year's most pleasant garden surprise. Poor planning sent me scrounging around a local garden center in mid-summer, searching for string bean seeds to plant for a late crop.

The only bean seeds left were of the Roma variety, a wider, flatter type.

They germinated almost overnight in the warm (and hand-watered) soil and in just a couple of weeks were hanging full of blossoms. Their larger conformation yielded about twice the bean flesh of the round type, and with an excellent flavor. About eight feet of row produced all the fresh green beans we could eat -- and rendered me a Roma fan. Wish chilly, old Jack had left his frosty fingers off those.

Planted along with the broccoli in early August were a dozen cauliflower seedlings. They poked along, growing more slowly than the broccoli, and are finally yielding wide, white heads of delicious eating. With everything else in the vegetable patch reduced to frost-blackened history, these creamy cauliflower heads wrapped naturally in crisp, blue-green leaves are the last major payback for faithful mulching and jugs of water carried.

Depositing an armful of these tail-end garden treasures on the kitchen counter a few days ago, I suddenly realized this was the stuff of the classic cornucopia of November calendars. A few bright tomatoes, green pepper or two, lingering broccoli shoots, and a crisp cauliflower head tossed into a basket, along with maybe a handful of crisp, sweet, red and

yellow apples.

And the "rotten tomato" theory dictates a renewed appreciation

for these last delightful fresh things snatched away from Jack Frost's cold clutches.

Ice Cream Churning Contest

JONESTOWN (Lebanon Co.) — The Lebanon County Dairy Promotion Committee is sponsoring an ice cream churn-off at the Lebanon Valley Mall on Saturday, November 16, during the Farm City Week Mall Show.

The first 10 entries will compete to win the top prize of \$60 and a second prize of \$30. All non-winning entries will receive \$10. Following the contest, all entries will be available for spectators to taste and enjoy.

To enter, contestants must submit their names, address, phone number, and complete written copy of the recipe and mail to Sue Werner, RD #1, Box 2025, Jonestown, PA 17038. The recipes should include all ingredients, preparation instructions, and the amount of ice cream the recipe makes.

The entry must be postmarked by November 11. The contest is

open to Lebanon County residents and limited to one per family, 4-H group, FFA Chapter, or other organization. Teams are limited to no more than four members. All recipes must use Real dairy products.

At the churn-off, contestants will have to come prepared to churn their recipes for the judges. No preparation facilities will be available, but electricity will be provided for churning. Contestants must bring a container to set the freezer in to catch the saltwater while churning. Ice and salt will be provided or you may bring your own. The contest will begin at 7:30 p.m. with judging at 8:00.

Further information about the contest is available by calling 717-865-5727. Prize money is sponsored by the Lebanon County Dairy Promotion Committee and the Pennsylvania Dairy Promotion Program.

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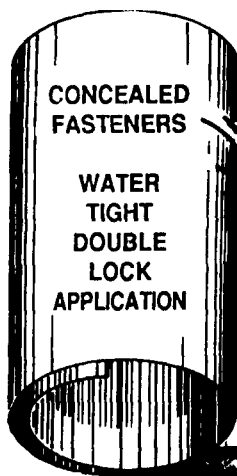
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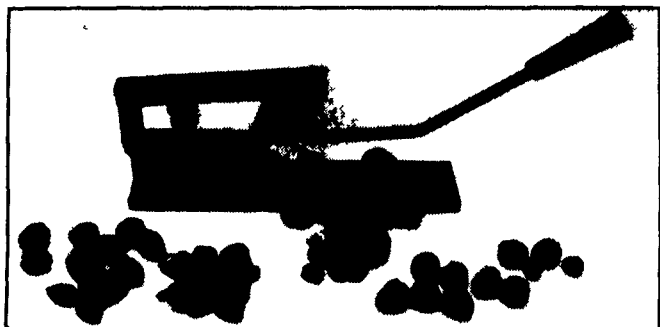
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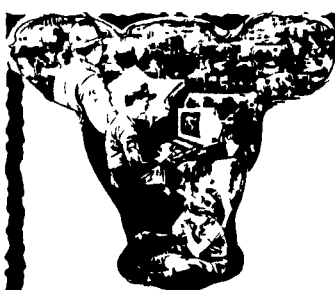


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