

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



Fresh. Delicate. Peaceful. And green. Above all, green.

The "green" of May makes it almost my favorite month — or at least a tie for tops with October. In fact, the month's loveliness suggests that the time of creation might have looked a lot like May in Pennsylvania, when everything is fresh, dewy - and green.

And yet, the green isn't all green. ("Make sense, Mom!" the youngest would be quick to instruct). But it isn't.

Some of the "green" is yellow, and some is chartreuse, and some has a grayish-blue tint. Some of the "green" is even a soft shade of red. The hickories green up in one hue, the oaks in another and the locusts in yet another. Swamp maples and willows and walnuts each add their own shadings to May's green color chart.

A couple of lawn mowings have evened the grass clumps of earlier spring to a neater expanse of green, while the perennial borders begin to fill and stretch to

define the boundaries of the yard. Root systems work overtime to poke and push new blades of grass, erasing the remains of last summer's drought-enhanced bare spots and worn patches.

Dense stands of cattail spikes have risen from the blackened stubble of old bullrushes burned from the pond banks. And, residue of flowers past, dried stems and stalks, disappear into the lush growth of weeds awakening to the seasonal challenge of trying to out-do more legitimate, cultivated foliage.

Chickweed thrives in the blessed dampness of this springtime. Maple seedlings with seemingly foot-long roots entangle themselves around the feet of the climbing roses. And, with gloved hands, I yank away portions of a persistent infestation of poison ivy on the border fence, its presence tattled on by still-tiny leaflets of three in the bright maroon shade of early growth.

But if May is the month of

green, it is likewise a month of striking color contrasts.

All that green enhances the pink and rose and white of flowering trees, cherry and apple and peach and the myriad of ornamentals covering themselves with blossoms. Yellow chips of daffodils are replaced by the bold, bright red of tulips, to give way later to stately iris hoisting pastel blooms high above sword-like foliage.

And lavender duels for attention with the green in plump, grape-like clusters of fragrant, old-fashioned lilacs. Dainty sweet violets color whole sections of the woodlot floor, with a few of the yellow dog's-tooth type scattered around for variety.

Newly painted cornfields lay exposed and temporarily barren, devoid of greenery in the brief interim between tillage and sprouting. Passage of the planter leaves a wake of pin-striped row markings, and the planted strips of corn resemble lengths of brown corduroy stretching between the contrasting velvety-green of mature alfalfa stands.

May's unsettled weather offers its own contrasts. We dig out shorts to wear while setting out early tomato plants on a sun-splashed, 90-degree afternoon. By the following evening, the wood-

stove is re-kindled, row covers go over the strawberries for frost protection, and the tomato plants win temporary shelter under inverted plastic ice cream containers.

And the front that wrought such dramatic change swept in cold rain, which hit the sun-warmed soil and sent wispy clouds of fog drifting across the meadow - but only from the plowed fields. An eerie effect jarring a May afternoon.

Even the cows seem to heartily enjoy May. Pasture grass is lush, long, tender and grows quickly. Both sunshine and breezes are reasonably moderate. No snow. No flies. Our matronly milkers almost dance to the meadow, then sprawl out on the grass like vacationers soaking up sun on a sandy beach.

Maybe we could re-do the calendar - and tuck in a few more May pages.

Food Label Alert

If you are an avid label reader because of health concerns you may be noticing that many of the new "FAT FREE" versions of products come with an increased sodium level. Check the sodium level differences between the regular version, the light version and the fat-free version. If you are shopping for someone with high blood pressure who is sodium sensitive, you may want to think about which version is really best. Probably the best compromise is the lower sodium level.

The good news is that more food producers are including nutrition labeling on products. They are getting ready for the changes in labeling requirements due next year. There are many new lowered fat and lowered sodium products. There are

increasing numbers of no-salt packed vegetables and they are available at the same price as regular salt added vegetables at some supermarkets. If the no-salt versions are still in the diet food section and cost much more where you shop, shop around. Good health does not need to cost you much more.

Remember to compare serving size when you are comparing two products. At the present time, serving sizes are not standardized and they vary considerably. Compare the stated package serving size with what you normally eat. Some cereal box servings are 1/4 cup. Do you know anyone who eats 1/4 cup cereal for breakfast? The new label regulations will standardize servings.

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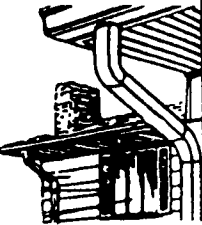
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