

# On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



Crisp, bright, sunny days. Chilly nights streaked with moonbeams and shadows. Frosty mornings with ever-so-light dustings of icy white sprinkled across the tops of the big hay bales stored in the lower fields.

It's the squirrel-ly season. No, not pre-election squirrel-iness. This is the real squirrel-ly season - as in store it, stash it, stick-it-away.

Actually, squirrel-ling things away begins much sooner, like in June. That's when we stash away in the freezer caches of strawberries and raspberries, or boil them up into thick, sweet jellies for spreading with peanut butter into sandwich snacks for milking-chores sustenance.

Containers of frozen peas, string beans and corn add to the layers squirrelled away in the freezer. Meanwhile, the basement shelves sag beneath the weight of quarts of thick, reddish, tomato sauce and dark, sweet grape juice.

Squirrel-ly season picks up as the evening light fades earlier and coolness settles in well ahead of the sunset. And the neighborhood potato harvest swings into high gear.

Though I painted nary of potato, there are more squirrelled away in the ground cellar than usual this year. Our good neighbors are generous in sharing their bounty. Plus, a couple of underground stores of potatoes still lie buried in the garden, where volunteers undug from the previous season

sprouted and raised their own families of offspring spuds.

When cold weather wilts and lush volunteer grass, I'll go a' diggin with my garden spade some sunny fall afternoon and unearth the waiting treasure.

Also squirrelled away is a falt of pale-colored tomatoes. The harvest of Long Keepers is my best yet of this storage tomato, though the yield still has plenty of room for improvement. Cool nights and cloudy days cut into potential larger pickings of storage tomatoes.

The stash of yellow, plus a few red, onions stored on the basement porch is diminishing rapidly. Periodic checking has turned up the softies that were not keeping and allowed for pitching them before they ruined the rest of the batch.

Squirreling the garden harvest away has always been a particular source of personal satisfaction - especially come mid-winter when the supply of fresh, canned and frozen homegrown becomes doubly precious. But, years ago, "putting by" food supplies was not a pleasurable hobby but a necessity if the family intended to eat through the winter months.

The potatoes, the carrots, the turnips, the pumpkins carefully stored from Fall's bounty provided diet mainstays of "fresh" food for the next half-year. No expansive and colorful supermarket produce section awaited to replace cabbages rotted in storage or a barrel of apples gone mushy

by early February.

Broccoli year-round unheard of (broccoli was almost unheard of, period), and lettuce and tomatoes were delicacies to be enjoyed in-season only. Grapes and melons shipped halfway around the world to be eaten as the snow fell was science fiction-stuff to our grandparents, who were thrilled if they received a single orange on Christmas morning.

Because I can "squirrel" food away as I choose, and not because my family's life depends on it, makes my strong away of potatoes and turnips and onions and apples an enjoyable pleasure, rather than a burdensome chore.

And, if I get too busy with other matters, stashing away cuttings of geraniums and impatiens and snapdragons and potting fall bulbs for the greenhouse, we'll still have plenty to eat anyway.

Sometimes, I forget to remember just how awesome a blessing that is.

# Farm Credit Supports 4-H

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Farm Credit of Pennsylvania and Farm Credit Bank of Baltimore have donated \$1,000 each to Pennsylvania Friends of 4-H. Funds will be used to help Pennsylvania delegates attend the National 4-H Conference in Washington, DC.

The National 4-H Conference provides a forum for more than 300 4-H members, volunteer leaders and Extension agents from across the nation and Canada to chart future directions for 4-H. Six to eight outstanding 4-H'ers from Pennsylvania will attend.

Farm Credit of Pennsylvania also donated \$600 to help the state 4-H dairy team attend the North American Invitational contest in Louisville, Kentucky.

Locally, Keystone Farm Credit of Avondale lends its support to the Chester County 4-H Prog-

ram's programs in dairy, livestock, Learn and Earn, and Youth Educational Programs Chester County.

Founded in 1980, Pennsylvania Friends of 4-H is committed to enhancing 4-H programming and opportunities across the state. Since its inception, the group has raised more than \$680,000 to sponsor 4-H youth at events such as National 4-H Congress and Capital Days to recognize and train youth leaders, to enhance or add educational programs and to publicize the full scope of 4-H programs.

For further information about Pennsylvania Friends of 4-H, contact Susan McLaughlin, 231 Agricultural Administration Building, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802-814-863-1168.

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