

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



February. Huuuumnnnn. Let me think.

There must be something good to say about February.

No, no, no! Just kidding! February is really a neat sort of month, an optimistic pause after the post-holiday, end-of-year-wrap-up-the-farm accounting, pay-up-the--annual-tax-estimates deadlines of January. And it's just too — pick one: early, muddy, frozen, wet, cold, snowy — to begin outside yard and garden work.

Besides, a month in which we pay tribute to fat, furry rodents whose key purpose in life is to not see their shadows, and a month in which we celebrate red hearts and love — is a month obviously aimed at good humor.

In this brief, little month we pause to appreciate special mid-winter pleasures. February, for instance is for enjoying the chickadees.

A pair of these diminutive, perky little forest birds has made themselves at home at our backyard birdfeeders this winter. In past years, the "chicks" only

arrived to dine on sunflower seeds when the weather turned snowy, but they've been regulars since November. Tiny as they are, the chicks seem to be some of the most durable of our feathered visitors, dining in even the most bitter, windy weather.

Their favorite feeder is the one our son crafted a few years ago of four-inch PVC drainage pipe. In an ongoing show of aerial acrobatics, the chicks have perfected flying through the baffles of smaller plastic pipe, snatching a black oil seed en route.

Feisty as they are, the chickadees keep a respectable distance when the red-bellied woodpeckers arrive. Equipped with long, lethal-looking bills, the pair of red-bellies tolerates no other bird near the feeder when they're eating. Their usual first choice is the ear of corn stuck on a spike up in the maple tree trunk.

February is for savoring the crispness of outdoors, I'll opt for cross-country skiing under a clear, star-speckled sky — provided, of course, Mother Nature cooperates

with a little snow. While it's tempting to snuggle up in the easy chair after chores, a brisk evening walk or glide makes us fitter critters. And helps counter that weakness for late-night snack attacks.

February is for smelling the flowers.

A half-dozen paperwhite narcissus bulbs planted in individual pots last fall provide this wonderful sensory pleasure. By moving the potted bulbs from cold storage to kitchen, one at a time, the heavenly fragrance given off by the successive clusters of tiny, white blooms can be stretched out for weeks.

February is for studying the seed catalogs. The first arrived long before Christmas, with others still trailing. They pile up until February, when the slightly longer afternoons of sunshine stir that inevitable urge to droll over the latest offerings of plants and seeds.

February is when my common sense annually gets suckered in by poetic promises of perfect gardens.

February is for the mountains. For years, we've set aside a weekend in February to spend at the hunting club cabin. Purpose is...to loaf. Again, preferably with snow to ski and sled on the snowmobile trails and gravel roads that crisscross the mountains around the cabin. Minus snow, we hike, take drives, read (seed catalogs) — and just enjoy sitting by the window watching the birds and squirrels.

February is for hot dogs roasted in the woodstove and hot chocolate from the microwave, for cleaning out junk drawers, reading

a novel, mending jeans. It's for homemade bread and popcorn, furry mittens around a snowball, and a bluejay screaming from the

pine tree.

February: one of those good things that comes in a small package.

Finalists Prepare For Pot Pie Cook Off

LANCASTER — Six non-professional cooks from Lancaster County have been chosen by Pennfield Farms to prepare their best chicken pot pie recipes while competing for cash prizes during the Pennfield Farms Chicken Pot Pie Cook-Off to be held Monday, February 15, at the Lancaster Host Resort, Rt. 30 East.

The first place winner will receive \$300. Second and third place winners will receive \$150 and \$75 respectively. All of the six finalists will receive coupons good for Pennfield Farms chicken products.

Finalists for the Pennfield Farms Chicken Pot Pie Cook-Off, which begins at 2:00 p.m., include: Mary Frey, Leola; Roberta Householder, Lancaster; Darlene Noll, Lancaster; Dolores Oberly, Ephrata; Thomas Standish, Lititz; and Ruth Wanner, Narvon.

These finalists will prepare their special chicken pot pie recipes before seven guest judges, the media and an eager general public. An awards presentation will be made by Pennfield Corporation following the judges' decision.

Guest judges include: Lancaster's Mayor Janice Stork; Betty Groff, nationally-acclaimed chef

and author; C.S. Keys, WGAL-TV on-air personality; Robert Fenninger, vice president and executive manager at The Log Cabin Restaurant; Sue Long, editor of Lancaster County Magazine; Lloyd Esh, kitchen manager at the Bird-in-Hand Family Restaurant; and Mindy Rotmund, home economist for Pennfield Farms.

Judges will choose the best pot pie based on flavor, ease of preparation, appearance, texture, and quality of ingredients.

The Pennfield Farms Chicken Pot Pie Cook-Off is the kickoff event for the Pennsylvania Dutch Food Festival held throughout Lancaster County from February 15-20. In addition to the Cook-Off, special events include tours of working farm bed & breakfast inns, lectures and demonstrations, PA Dutch specialties at area restaurants, tours of food processing plants and a community dinner at the Bird-in-Hand Fire Company to benefit the Fire Company and the Clinic for Special Children.

Free Pennsylvania Dutch Food Festival brochures are available at the Central Market (Spring Glen Fresh Foods stand) and at the Pennsylvania Dutch Convention & Visitors Bureau, 501 Greenfield Road, Lancaster or by calling the Bureau at (717) 299-8901.

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