

TAKING TIME

by Rebecca Escott
Extension Home Economist



Lessons from the "Blizzard of '93"

Each night this past week, I've been venturing to my back yard to check on the progress of my daffodils, hyacinths and tulips. (And I smile at the snow drops that are already blooming.) I'm amazed that the "Blizzard of '93" happened less than a month ago. I'm also amazed at how our communities learned from the experience.

I suppose it takes a "storm of the century" to shake up our thinking and break our hurried routines. During the days of recovery from the storm I listened to people talking. From their comments I gleaned five lessons that all family members need to learn or re-learn. First, communities are stronger

when neighbors talk to neighbors. Many people met and talked with those around them for the first time as they tunneled through drifts to clear lanes and driveways. Four-wheel drive owners volunteered to transport others to work, doctors' appointments and grocery stores. People found it impossible to continue holding grudges against others who took the time to help them out the day before. For the first time in months, we had neighbors inviting us over for a cup of coffee just as a friendly gesture because we had spent the morning clearing snow together.

My household was fortunate not to lose power over the weekend, but we were still challenged to plan creative meals

using leftovers and the supplies that had been accumulating in the pantry. So often individuals forget how, in a time of shortage, they can make a little go a long way. I think many of us truly appreciated our next glass of milk because of the experience. (Thanks to those of you who bring that product to our tables!)

Between meals and plowing, many families ventured out into the hills for sledding or wandered down deserted roads just to look around. How quiet it was. I kept saying to my husband as we walked, "Listen! It's so quiet." That walk showed me that the silence could be refreshing and calming. We need to occasionally treat ourselves to silence. Don't wait until the next snow storm to take a break from the "noise" in your life.

One lesson that I wanted to reinforce was the fact that an extra effort to do a job well should be recognized. Unlike many other places in our area, we actually received a paper on Sunday morning. Of course, we live in a more developed area, but as far as I could see no one except the newspaper carrier had ventured out. We tipped him extra for his work on such an impossible delivery day.

We wanted to say, "We appreciate your work ethic." in a tangible way.

For our family and for many others, probably the best lesson from the blizzard was one that taught us the importance of family time. For the first time in weeks, families were forced to stay home and spend time together. And the surprise in it all...it was fun. Adults laughed and relaxed; children and parents played with each other instead of passing on the

road while racing to and from activities. I heard stories of people rediscovering the fun of playing board games together. Others talked and reminisced. One couple lit candles, played Christmas cards, and had an unexpected holiday together. Families recommitted themselves to taking time once each month to do things together. I hope this lesson, more than any of the others, is one that we will remember and act on until the next "storm of the century."

Wildflower Meadow?

"Wildflowers have great potential for saving time and money when compared to maintaining the same area in turf," says Susan Barton, University of Delaware Cooperative Extension horticulture specialist. "For people with large properties, in particular, a wildflower meadow can be a wonderful alternative to mowing several acres of grass."

Establishing a wildflower meadow can be fun, but it also takes planning.

"Don't expect your wildflower meadow to automatically look like the picture on the seed can," warns Extension horticulture agent Jo Mercer. "Like any other gardening project, it takes planning, persistence and aftercare."

Seed-to-soil contact is most important when planting wildflowers, Barton says. There are several ways to achieve this contact. One approach is to till the ground, but the problem with this is that weed seeds will be exposed.

Another alternative is to closely mow existing grass or weeds, then spread a growing medium lightly over the area to be seeded. The medium can be mushroom soil,

topsoil or a compost product such as Fairgrow.

"For smaller areas and steep slopes, wildflower sod is an appropriate alternative to seeding," Barton says. "Sod produced an immediate effect and dramatically reduces weed problems."

Wildflower sod hasn't caught on yet with home gardeners, Mercer says, but it is available locally, especially at the wholesale level. It makes an instant floral carpet. But even with sod, soil preparation, care in establishment and aftercare are essential to long-term success.

For homeowners eager to try growing wildflowers, Barton has a final piece of advice- use them appropriately. Despite their appeal, wildflowers aren't suitable for every site.

"People have to realize that a mass of wildflowers in a little patch by the front door may prove disappointing," she says. "Wildflowers give a loose, open, somewhat wild-looking type of landscape that's most effective when seen from a distance. Don't expect them to work well in a formal setting."

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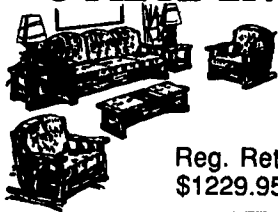
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