

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



What a difference a rain makes. Just ask the thousands of folks in the Midwest who have spent their summer sandbagging, floating out, wading in, mucking up, hosing down — and wondering when it would all end. And why them?

Why anyone? After umpteem consecutive years of drought through the '80s, the feeling of "why us" on the short end of the weather stick is one farmers around these parts can identify with.

But has the weather really turned so much more weird in the last two decades? Or do we just keep better records dispersed more rapidly through today's instant communications systems, which keep us more abreast of weather aberrations?

The country seems to be suffering from the "Goldilocks" weather syndrome — it's too hot or too cold. Or too wet or too dry or too windy or too calm. It just isn't "normal." And, frankly, I've grown to suspect there is no such thing as "normal" weather.

Yet, we never cease to be amazed at how the "green stuff" of the world adapts — almost overnight — to weather aberrations.

Two weeks ago, many parts of York County were facing serious drought crop damage again. A "checkerboard" is how one soil specialist described conditions of moisture, with a little section here that got rain, and a little section there that looked Sahara-like. Next door to each other.

Leaning heavily on the dry side, our late corn, beans and hay showed little promise. 'Til Mother Nature blessed the region with a soaking rain and plants instantly perked up. Third-cutting alfalfa,

showing the grayish hue of distress, poked up shoots of lush green. Curled corn unfurled and spread long leaves wide to soak up sun with new enthusiasm from thirst-quenched root systems. The heifers once again found new shoots of grass to graze in the meadow.

And the weeds went bananas. Especially in the flower border; I walked by one evening and suddenly realized the old enemy had struck with vengeance. Though they'd been lurking there in the bushes and daylilies, two inches of rain sent them spiraling skyward.

Ragweed. Ragweed grows six or eight feet tall in the rich, moist soil of our low-lying lawn. You could almost build tree houses in the really big ones, which develop similarly impressive root systems. So, you don't just go along and yank these guys out by the roots.

And, every ragweed that goes to seed spawns the growth next season of a gazillion descendants. To say nothing of the pollen the stuff spews into the air for hay-fever sufferers, a real case of natural air pollution.

This was war. Out came the big guns. Or in this case, a powerful limb-lopper acquired through a sale a few years ago, a tool worth fighting for — a nipper that would cheerfully take your finger off should you be so careless.

Even with that, it took some muscling to pinch its curved jaws through the inch-plus thick "trunks" of the sequoia-like ragweeds. After an hour of ragweed lumberjacking and numerous loads lugged to the brush pile, it looked as though the enemy just might be curtailed for the rest of the season.

Still, the ragweed managed to

Food And Today's Lifestyle At Western Maryland Ag Field Day

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Gone are the days when people had the time to sit down and really plan their meals. The days when people ate without regard for nutritional information are obsolete too.

Today's consumer demands healthful food that can be obtained quickly without a lot of planning or preparation. The Home Economics Program at the Maryland Agricultural Experiment Station's (MAES) Western Maryland Ag Field Day on September 9 will highlight ways people can make nutritious meal choices without wasting time.

By May 8, 1994, more than 90 percent of packaged foods will be required by the FDA to wear "Nutrition Facts" labels containing true and exact nutrition information, according to Maxine Casey, area Extension nutrition agent. The new labels, which require companies to disclose more detailed information about fat, cholesterol and carbohydrates, base recommended daily values on a 2,000-calories-per-day diet. In a discussion called "The

New Food Label," Casey will teach people how to use these labels to their benefit.

"The new food labels will help us all to make healthier and more educated decisions about the foods we eat," Casey said. "After we learn how to use the new labels, it will become a lot easier for people to compare foods at the grocery store."

She added, "In the future, when a product says it is 'light,' it will have to meet certain standards. We'll really be able to trust the products we buy."

Because people today eat most of their meals away from home, another Home Economics Program discussion called "Nutrition on the Run" will feature tips and suggestions for quick and healthy eating. Jeanne-Marie Holly, Baltimore County Extension home economics agent, said the discussion will compare current attitudes and trends about nutrition with today's lifestyle.

"There really is a paradox today — people want to eat healthy but need to eat in a hurry, so they grab a quarter-pound burger and fries," Holly said, adding, "Our goal is to

teach people they can make wise, healthy decisions about food away from home."

In addition to the Home Economics Program, the 1993 Western Maryland Ag Field Day will offer other exciting and informative activities.

Concurrent wagon tours of MAES research will include topics such as: paulownia tree management; nutrient management and the Bay; high yield wheat management; crop residue management; weed control in corn; and pathogen and parasite control of leafhopper.

The Field Day will also include tillage and planting equipment demonstrations and agricultural equipment and farm service displays. Enjoy a hog roast featuring Maryland pork for a \$2 fee paid the day of the event. Reservations for lunch are required.

For more information on the Western Maryland Ag Field Day, contact your local Cooperative Extension Service agent or the Western Maryland Research and Education Center at (301) 791-2298.

get in a few licks of its own. Dumped onto the brush pile weeks ago — and long since forgotten — were trimmings of a nasty sort of briar. The trimmings had virtually disappeared. Until I found them by stepping squarely with both feet onto them while dumping ragweeds. Barefooted.

Tiptoeing around the next day, I conceded once again that you can never . . . never . . . never get one up on Mother Nature.

Sometimes she enlists rather painful ways of reminding us of that. Like floods. Droughts. And even briars.

Lebanon County Flower Club To Hold Show

LEBANON (Lebanon Co.) — The Lebanon County Flower Club will hold its 44th annual show August 25 and 26, at the Lebanon Valley Mall, Route 422 West, Lebanon.

Amateur flower growers are invited to participate. The public

may view the flower displays and gardening exhibits on Wednesday, August 25, from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m. and on Thursday, August 26, from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.

For more information, call Cathy Reist (717) 838-4730.



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