

On being a farm wife - And other hazards Joyce Bupp



Mysterious little things poke out of the ground in April.

A lot of them turn out to be weeds. But others prove to be considerably more pleasant or productive surprises.

"I have green things coming up around the house," confides a dear friend, having just acquired her first home. "But I have no idea what they are."

As the blanket of snow eased away into meltdown, cheery green almost instantly pushed up in its place. Real growth became appa-

rent the morning The Farmer pointed out the window at part of the heifer herd on the meadow hillside. Black and white muzzles were all tight against the pasture grass.

Spring grazing had begun with the "girls" were busy nosing for the choicest, most tender new shoots. Probably garlic, if they can find it. Heifers favor a little flavoring in their food when they can find it, just like we do.

First signs of growth around the yard usually show in the bare soil

of a sheltered, sun-warmed corner near the basement porch. Slender, dark-green crocus foliage emerges early, often shoving the first blossom up through soggy patches of snow.

Enjoying the unexpected show of color there, I only vaguely recall sticking in crocus bulbs that had been unearthed from one of the borders while weeding. Their tiny blooms open wide to early April sunshine, snuggled close to the ground as if for warmth, but petals sprawled like bodies on a beach, "catching rays." One larger, more stately purple bloom seems out of place.

Flanking the crocus are clusters of lime-colored primrose leaves and lavender-green columbine foliage. And nearby, radish seeds sprout atop the dark, moist soil, my concession to an earlier, 70-degree afternoon when it became simply impossible not to plant something — anything! — in the ground.

Found poking up through the residue of dried grass that had overgrown part the asparagus patch was a row of hollyhock seedlings. Memory jogged, I did recall planting the pack of seeds there and tending the resulting infant perennials. These rugged, old-fashioned flowers, patron symbol of the Society of Farm

Women, hold a special place in my heart.

Single-bloom hollyhocks that grew at my childhood home were often denuded of their blossoms for the sake of dollmaking. A wide-open bloom forms the doll's wide skirt, while a tight bud, showing some color, is used for the head.

And on the day of our daughter's early July wedding five years ago, several maroon double hollyhock plants, shared by a friend as seedlings, had reached their peak of bloom. They added considerable color for the lawn reception we hosted and promptly earned

themselves a place in the floral scheme of things around here.

We recognize the sprouts of daffodils and daylilies, tulips, iris, peonies and various other perennials reappearing in the beds and borders, and wait with eagerness to see what mysterious newcomers turn up beside them.

And in the springs that have again opened up and trickle among the swampy mess that passes for a back yard, I fully expect to some morning find yet another volunteer green sprout poking through.

Skunk cabbage.

Canned Soup Substitution

Use this instead of cream soups in casserole recipes. It has about one-third the calories.

- 2 cups nonfat dry milk powder
- ¼ cup cornstarch
- ¼ cup instant reduced sodium chicken or beef bouillon
- ½ teaspoon dried crushed thyme
- ½ teaspoon dried crushed basil
- ¼ teaspoon pepper

Combine all ingredients using blender or food processor. Store in an airtight container.

To prepare as substitute for one can of condensed cream soup in recipes, stir together ½ cup dry mix and 1¼ cups water in a saucepan. Cook and stir until thickened.

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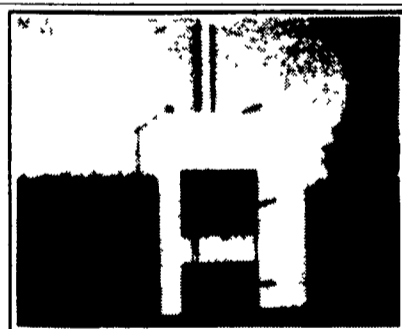
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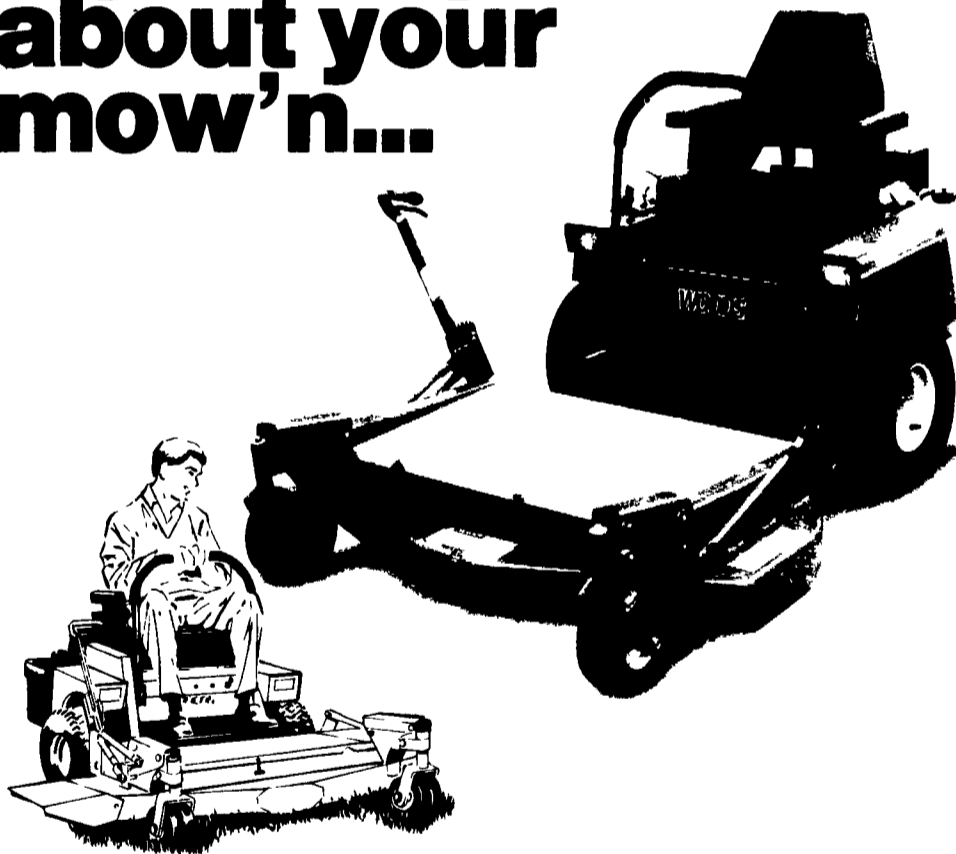
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