

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



"You have a green thing in your hair."

With that warning, a fourth-grader in the Sunday School class I help teach reached up and plucked the object off the back of my head.

It wasn't the piece of hay I expected to see, though hay, straw and sawdust bits are an everyday part of my hairdo. Nor was it one of those little green worms you often find crawling somewhere on your clothes after a springtime walk through the woods.

No, this was maple tree residue, one of those tiny, yellow-green blossoms that dropped by the millions around the area in recent days. Seeing the unexpected hair ornament brought to mind a magazine article I'd read just days before listing the positive and negative characteristics of the most popular trees grown around here. After reading the list, with its critique of diseases, pests and dirt created by various shade and ornamental trees, I wondered why anyone would bother planting a tree at all.

Two of the worst offenders on the list were maples and willows.

Maples have massive and invasive root systems, poking into every bit of soil in their reach, slurping up moisture, clogging septic lines, preventing lawn growth beneath. Messy trees, they drop twigs, blossoms, seeds, leaves — something almost year 'round.

Willows are almost as bad in their usually short lifespans, with lots of twig dropout and problem root systems. As they get older, the large roots of willows will surface above the ground near the trunk, often gnarled and picturesque, but so shallow-rooted the trees easily uproot with heavy wind. And those protruding roots chew up lawn mower blades like crazy.

Guess what grows around our farmhouse?

You guessed it. Maples. And willows.

Nine towering old maples surround the house, beloved old trees with many decades of growing under their bark. Four willows of lesser age — the oldest is over 20 — also dot our landscape. A fifth one planted the same time as the oldest simply fell over last year, on a warm May afternoon with no breeze.

Everything the article says is true about both species. They are messy, depositing droppings on the lawn that need to be cleaned up on a regular basis. Both lose branches in heavy winds. Both create problems on the ground beneath their canopies of leaves. Still, we treasure each one and feel that they're a lot like having children — the rewards outweigh the work that comes with them.

Just as the sun beings to seasonally heat up, the maples unfurl shading leaves which help naturally cool our old stone and brick farmhouse. Birds galore build

nests in their wide-spreading branches, robins, sparrows, blackbirds, and an opportunist bluejay couple that set up housekeeping

directly above one maple's birdfeeder.

Our new squirrel family likewise chose to nest in a large, arching maple limb — also near the stash of sunflower seeds and corn. From the back porch and kitchen, we can watch as the five half-grown babies romp up and down the limbs, while mother stretches out on an adjacent branch, looking positively worn out.

Cardinals, red-winged blackbirds, song sparrows and an occasional sharp-shinned hawk hunting dinner favor the weeping willow by the pond. Its tiptop branch is often occupied by one of the noisy mockingbirds, belting out whatever song it fancies at the moment. A pair of gentle, mourning doves usually nests in the backyard willow.

Dirty trees? Yep. Problem trees? Yep. Beloved trees?

Absolutely. Pardon me while I go sweep all

these green things off the kitchen floor.

Chester County Plans Extension Workshops

WEST CHESTER (Chester Co.) — Penn State Cooperative Extension in Chester County announces its spring schedule of courses and workshops which includes: Inspecting the Home Electrical System on Tuesday, May 17, 7:30-9:30 p.m.; Better Kid Care for child care providers on Tuesday, May 24, 7:00-9:00 p.m.; Residential Property Management for Part-Time Landlords on Tuesdays, June 7, 14 and 21, 7:00-9:30 p.m.; Train the Trainers on Life Skills for agency personnel and volunteers on Wednesday,

June 8, 10-3; and three different sessions of the Certified Food Safety and Sanitation Course for those required to have a food sanitation manager on site. Newsletters and learn-at-home publications are also available through the Cooperative Extension.

Registration is necessary for courses, workshops and newsletter subscriptions, and some of the programs have registration fees. For a copy of the spring schedule, contact Becky Scotland at the Extension office at (610) 696-3500.

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