

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



We've long had a love affair with the "beasts of the field."

Actually, we prefer that they be "beasts of the pasture," remaining on the inside of the grazing areas fences. Cows being cows, our bovine girls periodically become beasts of the field, in search of the proverbial greener grass on the wrong side of the fence.

This time of year, the greener grass is in the form of lush, succulent, young corn stalks, beloved by ornery heifers for munching on and flattening down as they split the pasture in pursuit of forbidden tastes of fresh field forage. Summertime thunderstorm showers and lightning strikes which short-out electric fences considerably

add to the problem.

And, in recent years, we've developed a real affinity for the "birds of the air." One rather tame cardinal pair now hangs around the farm year-round. The gorgeous, scarlet male has gotten about letting me know, loudly, when the sunflower seed stock has run out in the birdfeeder.

Even the "fish of the sea," - well, the pond, anyway - get regular attention, especially The Farmer's prized, finned "pets" that congregate near the pier for handouts. He wouldn't think of letting a worm-laced hook near these babies.

But what I've never gotten nearly as tolerant of, or find enjoy-

ment from, are the "bugs of the season." They just . . . well, bug me.

And some worse than others. Like hornets and wasps, for instance.

Picking raspberries one day last week, by the time I realized what the buzzing near my left ear was, it was too late. The hornet vented its anger in defense of its nest, leaving the bite site on my ear with a searing, stinging sensation.

Wet mud is a wonderful antidote to insect stings. With no mud in sight, I quickly manufactured some. A little saliva and dry dirt rubbed together on the ear rendered the same effect as Mother Nature's own mud. Within a minute or two, the stinging disappeared and left only a faint amount of swelling as a lingering effect for a few hours.

It was my own careless fault. I had seen the papery, six-inch-or-so-diameter nest, hidden there near the end of the row of thorny stalks, during the prior picking of the patch. And forgotten about it.

Less painful but far more predominant are the continuing

batches of common flies which hatch out in the hot, humidity of the season. Though we do almost daily battle with fly sprays, we only win a few squirmishes and expect a war of several months duration.

Japanese beetles have also begun putting in their chew-up-everything appearance, although they've never been a real serious problem here. Perhaps some of the feathered distant cousins of our sunflower-seed-feeders prefer the shiny, tough-bodied beetles for lunch.

Far more prominent are those ugly, prehistoric-looking bugs that suddenly arrive in early summer. Earwigs. With those wiry, wiggly bodies and nasty-looking rear-end pincers, their appearance is an repulsive as their behavior. Take down the laundry and there'll be earwigs crawling around in the

washbasket and the clothespin bag. Leave the barn sneakers out on the back porch overnight and they'll camp out in them. They hide under dog dishes and flowerpots, porch rugs and lawn furniture cushions.

Where did these bugs come from? And when? Neither The Farmer nor I recall having earwigs around when we were kids. Are they imports? Hybrids? Or some mutation gone bad? A least they don't carry devastating diseases, like an even uglier and infinitely more dangerous bug, the tick.

Ultimate cure for all these critters is not spray, not sticky fly paper, not scent traps, not even bug-eating birds and bats. Ultimate cure will be a good, hard frost. Which we don't want now.

Wouldn't it be pleasant if the bugs of the season would just . . . bug off 'til then?

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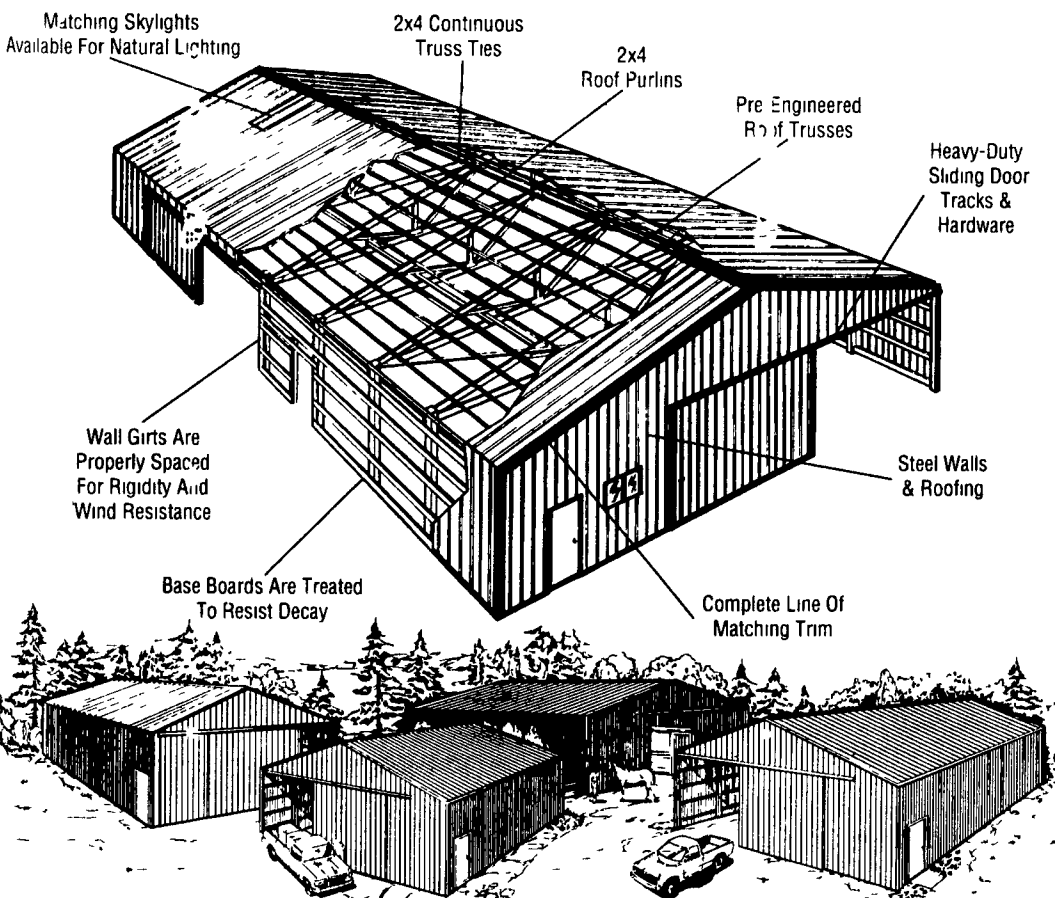
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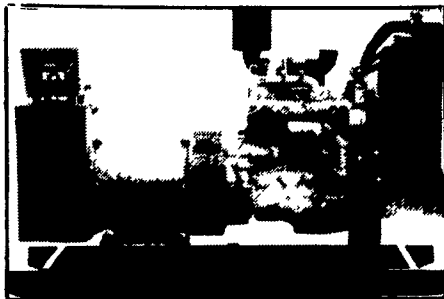


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