

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



It's almost winter.

Sure enough, cowering in the old hay rack was a teeny black ball of fluff, screeching its miniscule lungs out. That such a tiny being can squawk so loud always amazes me. And overhead, on a deep window sill in the old stone foundation built into the bank, a small black hen had her wings spread wide, verbally threatening me in a very fowl-mouthed manner.

"Just cool it," I grumbled back at her, swooping the two-inch-high chick from the floor and depositing it on the ledge in her direction, then retreating before she attacked my head. "Watch your kid better."

But there were several more eggs there, and I knew the feisty little hen had been torn between guarding the rest of the probably-hatching eggs and the precocious stray which had already taken the plunge off the side of the wall. No wonder she was in such a fowl mood.

This little black hen is one of my favorites from among the poultry eggs-plosion we've seen this year. Last spring, our chicken flock had just about fowled out, down to only two roosters and one little tan-colored hen. Her first

nest of hatchlings she failed to protect from the barn cats. With the second and third hatches, she'd gotten very protective, leaving us with a sudden weath of noisy, squabbling young roosters and about a half dozen dainty hens. The jet-black one was the prettiest.

Next morning, the inexperienced little hen still had only the tiny, charcoal-colored chick. Maybe that was all she had hatched; but, veteran barncat, Pepper, lurking ominously nearby, led me to suspect otherwise.

Not that we need any more roosters — or hens, for that matter. They chase each other around the yard, scratch the mulch off the flower beds, screech at you in the haymow when you climb up to thrown down bales, and raise a

noisy ruckus when the lights go on for after-dark heifer feeding.

But they're just fun to watch and the roosters are the most gorgeous colors: one old tan colored one with snappy-looking polka dots on his breast feathers, several in shades of orange and rust feathers that absolutely glow in the sunlight, and two, one from both early and late hatches, that The Farmer aptly describes as looking like ringneck pheasants.

Sooner or later, their fussing and fuming at me day after day will wear thin and then all but the very prettiest (selective breeding here) of the roosters will take a short trip.

The haymow will be emptier - and quieter.

And the freezer will be all fowled up.

Old-Fashioned Christmas

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — Featuring sounds of music boxes and carolers plus historical displays and aromas of yesteryear, the Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society will sponsor "An Old-Fashioned Christmas" for all ages at its headquarters, 2215 Millstream Road, Lancaster, PA 17602-1499, on Saturday, December 17, 7:00 p.m.

Leola; "Return of the Belsnickel," by Noah G. Good, Lancaster; "Holiday Time in the One-Room School," Mary Wenger Becker, Akron; and "O Tannenbaum," a slide-illustrated overview by Henry G. Benner of the Christmas tree tradition among some religious groups.

Other features include "What I Got for Christmas" by varied participants; reflections of significant religious traditions of Russian, Swiss-German, and Amish Mennonites; and a Christmas reading for children by Daniel L. Wenger, Lancaster.

David L. Sauder of Akron, Pennsylvania, will lead the group in Christmas songs, and selected singers will highlight the program with some German and English carols. The event will conclude with refreshments of the yuletide season plus fellowship and time to browse in the Society's book and gift shop.

A multi-faceted educational experience, the event is designed to illustrate memorable religious and secular traditions of the past. Because of limited seating, registrants must purchase tickets in advance on a first-come, first-served basis at \$3 per adult and \$1 for children aged 12 and under (Phone: (717) 393-9745, Lola M. Lehman).

Scenarios from varied time periods will include, for example, "Christmas in the New World" by the Norman Stoltzfoos family of



Save for the half-hour-long, Thanksgiving-eve mini-blizzard that roared through last week, Fall has blessed us with exceptionally fine weather.

Er, make that fowl weather. The brisk mornings and sun-splashed afternoons have stirred our poultry residents to take to the back yard and surrounding fields with renewed vigor, much like kids enjoying an extra long recess.

They start up early, the roosters vying to outdo one another in crowing to greet the lovely pink, orange, and purple sunrises. As day breaks, a couple of chickens

already have been rooting in the lawn under the bird feeder, scratching for sunflower seed breakfasts. Even the scolding squirrels, busy stuffing their mouths full of fallen maple leaves to haul high into the trees for nest insulation, fail to reroute the roosters off their usual path.

And this stretch of fowl weather has apparently stirred what might be a bit of unseasonable, uh, fowl play.

First alert was the high-pitched, insistent peeping I heard at the far corner of the old bank barn one morning last week. Chicks? Now?

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