

# On being a farm wife - And other hazards Joyce Bupp



My apologies if you were the person pushing the shopping cart behind me.

I didn't mean to create the mini-traffic-jam. Like most shoppers this time of year, I was prowling endless rows of aisles, bleary-eyed and slack-jawed, stalking a few last minor holiday items on my list.

Then a small display of appliances in the local large retail center stopped me dead in my tracks. Front and center in the display was a crockpot. Done in Holstein-cow, black-and-white-spot color.

A cow-spot crockpot. And a toaster, too. The giggle they brought brightened the moment of pushing through shopping crowds and sent me steering my cart toward the checkout with a grin on my face.

We've been accumulating "cow-lectibles" since The Farmer began milking cows here, 31 years ago as of December 1. Never before had I seen a cow crockpot. In fact in those early years, it was almost impossible to find anything artistically oriented to cows.

Occasionally, in a gift shop or

five-and-ten (we still called them that, then), I would pick up a small ceramic cow with calves, a cow and bull salt-and-pepper shaker shaker or maybe a cow-shaped creamer that delivered the milk out the cow's muzzle.

Then, when country decor became all the rage and brought a rebirth of interest in arts and crafts, suddenly cows were "in." And "out," as painted plywood cows became popular lawn ornaments—except at places like ours, where the real thing is too often roaming the back yard.

Naturally, as "cow-lectibles" became more abundant and increasingly creative, some found their way into our old farm house. Many came as gifts from friends, making them extra special to us. With all the farm mud, manure, corn, hay and feed stuff bits that show up on the floor, the cow accessories just help complete the barnyard effect—and distract the eye from the assorted cobwebs.

Many of our cow-lectibles make their home around the kitchen: mugs, glasses, hotpads, aprons, butter and candy dishes,

pitchers, place mats, trivets, cutting boards planters, suncatchers hung at the windows. A cow cookie cutter I purchased killing time while stranded for five hours in the Dayton, Ohio, airport stands muzzle-to-muzzle with a cow napkin-holder from a Holstein meeting.

The Farmer (and every other kid that comes through) often reaches his hand up to "ding" the metal cow wind chimes that hang by the kitchen/ office door.

Others cow-lect in the living room. A cross-stitched "We Love Cows" motif shares wall space with a hand-carved wooden picture of the five cow breeds, inset with realistic eyes. The treasured

antique reproduction of a cow pull-toy sits beside a cow-bucket lined with Holstein-spotted fabric. My beloved teddy bears repose on cow afghans thrown across the old rocking chair I salvaged from Daddy's chicken house.

And our black and white cat claims dibs on the fake fur cow blanket, blending right into the color when she curls up in its folds. Cowmaflauge, sort of.

Fabric stores slip through the cracks of my usually-practical-minded buying habits and an assortment of cow-print fabrics awaits the eventual "someday"

they'll be put to use. Yardage I stumbled onto in an outlet one day also yielded the stuffed cow doll, still missing one ear yet to be sewn on, that gazes down from the top of a cabinet.

Now, 'tis the season when the attic Christmas boxes bring forth a very special herd of treasured holiday ornaments. From the carved cow in the wooden manger scene to paper cow garland for the tree, we prepare to celebrate the season with our favorite animal.

Time to deck the halls with cows and holly...

## Christmas Tree Tips

**TOWANDA (Bradford Co.)** — When choosing a Christmas tree you should consider a number of different items. Of course most people have personal preferences for certain trees. Often times these preferences relate back to memories of happy Christmases or very beautiful trees. These preferences are important in choosing a tree as they add to the Christmas spirit.

One of the first items you should look for in a tree is freshness. Trees that come from long distances like Lake States Norway pine or Douglas fir grown in the west will likely not be as fresh as locally grown sources. The freshest tree is one you cut yourself.

If you purchase a cut tree, there are three tests you can use to check for freshness. Number one is the needle test. You should bend the needle and if it breaks and does not bend and spring back it is probably not fresh. The second test is the bump test. This is less reliable than the needle test but it can work.

Bump the trees' stem on the ground several times to see if needles fall. If a large number of needles fall the tree is probably not fresh. A problem with this test is that shaking may dislodge old needles that fell off naturally and were caught in the foliage. Number three is the sappy stem test. If the stem is sappy moist it is likely a fresh tree. If the stem is dry, the tree may not be fresh or it may have been bumped on the ground a lot already. To determine freshness you should use all three tests.

There are other things to consider in choosing a tree. Items like needle holding ability, fragrance and branch firmness are often considered when purchasing a tree.

Once you decide on and purchase a tree here are some tips on keeping your tree fresh. When you bring your tree home, stand it in a bucket of water outdoors or in a cool place indoors. If you leave the tree outside it must be protected from cold, drying winds and the

sun. Snow and rain will not harm the tree but heat will cause the needles of some species to dry quickly.

When you bring your tree in to decorate it, make a fresh cut across the butt at least one inch above the existing cut. The cut should be smooth and clean to insure the maximum amount of water absorption. Place the tree in a container of water or a stand that has a water reservoir. Keep the reservoir filled above the base of the stem. Check the reservoir often as trees will use a tremendous amount of water, sometimes two quarts per day. If the reservoir is allowed to go dry, it will inhibit the ability to absorb water even if the reservoir is refilled.

As you add water to the reservoir, check for spill or sweating from the container. Blot spill immediately with paper towels. Place thick padding of towels over any wet area and weight it down to allow moisture to be picked up into the toweling.

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