

On Being a Farm Wife
(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



But I couldn't help it. They just begged to come home with me.

Those little faces were so adorable, so appealing, so irresistible. All my resolve melted away. So I walked back to the clerk at the register, paid up and returned to make the final, tough decision.

Now. Which to choose?

A petite, white one had a sort of stately look to its face. The orange one with the blackish whiskers was especially perky. And the red one was a real eye-catcher; so was the two-toned blue.

No, no, no, not kittens.

Pansies.

While I admit to numerous bad personal habits, impulse buying is not usually one of them. But it does rear its head, however, when faced with a retail layout devoted to seeds, plants, and gardening. Sometimes I justify it in farm lingo — an investment in "breeding stock," some plant which can easily be propagated into a dozen clones for sharing, gifting or brightening the outside landscape.

Pansies are not for breeding stock. They're for fun.

And pansies come on the market at the very point in the year when

we gardeners are most vulnerable. Not much else is blooming outside yet and the exquisite loveliness of colorful pansy faces offers bright color where there would otherwise be none.

New pastel shades bred into pansies in recent years make them even more attractive than before. The bright yellows and deep purples of classic pansies have been complemented with gentle shades of pink, pale blues and soft, blushing oranges.

But the fragile, delicate appearance of their beautiful blooming faces is a cover-up. Pansies are tough. Dandelions are also tough, but pansies have lots more personality.

They're ruggedly durable, too. Those blooms will hold up through being covered with a couple of inches of late snow, sort of shake themselves off when it starts to melt and put a "wasn't that refreshing!" smile on their faces.

In fact, if started in late summer from seed and planted out in the fall, pansies will poke up blossoms during winter's warmer spells. My mom picked a pair of pansy blooms from one of her more shel-

tered flower beds about two months ago.

I never seem to be that well organized in late summer to remember to start pansies. Or can't find seed if I do think of it then. Luckily, the professional greenhouse folks plan further ahead and have them ready for us now, when we desperately need to satisfy those urges to kneel and stir around in the dirt.

Pansies do well in all sorts of containers that can be moved around outside to wherever a little color is wanted. Last spring, I planted pansies in a couple of large flowerpots and an old, blue-granite

canning kettle that had developed holes from age and use, then grouped them on the semi-shaded patio where they could be seen from the kitchen. They bloomed for several months, until-mid-summer heat finally did them in.

But what color to choose? Faced with those wonderful colors of blooms, I just can't seem to make a decision.

Yeah, that was me, crawling around on my hands and knees through the pansy flats. Hunting the six-packs with six different colors in 'em.

Pansies are worth making a fool of yourself in public.

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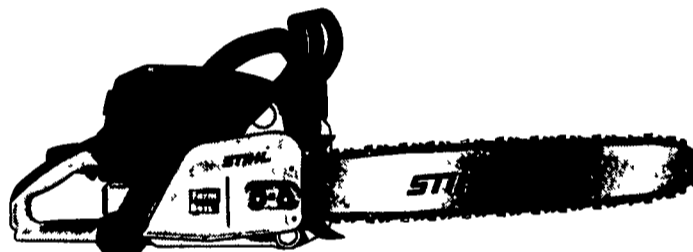
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