

**On Being a
Farm Wife
(and other
hazards)**
Joyce Bupp



Oh, nuts.

It's that time of the year, you know—nuts. Walnuts, hickory nuts, acorns. As these fruits of the hardwoods mature, they begin dropping to the ground, littering woodlot floors and sending squirrels in a made frenzy of harvest and planting.

Yes, planting. The reality of what squirrels do with the stuff they hustle about, gathering, became apparent in the lawn this past summer. Every mowing lopped off baby corn stalks, sprouting from the kernels buried in the lawn last winter by the squirrels. If we could train these

rodents, we could do away with our complanter.

This winter, I'd hoped to give the squirrels some planting diversity—as well as a further varied diet. I'd like to share some pumpkin seeds with our furry rodents, and anticipate where we might find pumpkin stalks next year. If I get any pumpkins at all.

Actually, there are plenty in the patch. We watch them nearly every day, willing them to turn golden before frost. For while our local growers and markets seems to have matured pumpkins, most of ours are still green as grass and merrily pushing out yellow

blossoms.

"Those pumpkins will still be blooming at Christmas," jokes The Farmer.

It's my fault.

When the cantaloupe and melon seeds were sprouting in the greenhouse in April, the pumpkin seeds should have been right beside them. Instead, along about early June, I suddenly remembered the seeds in small glass jars on a refrigerator shelf—past years' accumulation saved from assorted types of pumpkins and squash. It was time to do something with them.

So into the selected site they went, a steep-banked, no-man's-land between the old barn and the dairy barn. It's as unlikely a spot for a pumpkin patch as you could want, but is rich in unused soil composed mainly of well-rotted manure, accounting for the annual crop of super-weeds. One summer while our daughter was in 4-H gardening club, she stuck a few pumpkin seeds there to grow. One vine climbed completely in through an open window and brought forth a lovely neck pumpkin, which matured hanging on the inside of the dairy barn.

With all the rain, cloudiness and coolness of early summer, this year's already-late pumpkin patch was slow to develop. Then the heat and humidity of late July took over and we could barely outrun the vines' growth.

Pumpkin stalks have since threaded themselves up the outer-opening windows of the dairy barn and crept toward the roof. One is twisted around a window frame and dangles a large neck pumpkin three feet above the ground.

Late August, an ornery yearling heifer spent a couple of days demolishing the far end of the patch on her everyday forays outside the pen. She broke loose at least one fat, green pumpkin, may-

be more. Fact is, the leaves are so thick in the patch that it's hard to tell; a second crop of leaves has regrown where she stomped them down.

Every day when we put the cows in for milking, I eyeball the patch to try to spot orange through the canopy of green. There are a few almost-orange ones. And several may-turn-orange-if-the-weather-holds ones. Plus many not-a-ghost-of-a-change infant pumpkins which the frost will finish. And, before Christmas, I'd betcha.

Guess the squirrels will have to be content with their usual winter diet, minus many pumpkin seeds.

Oh, nuts.

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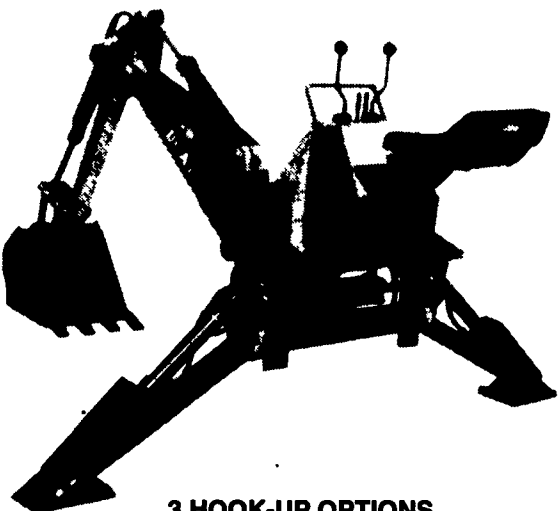
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