

On Being a Farm Wife (and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



I won the skirmish again last night.

But I'm going to lose the battle. Eventually.

This is the fight we endure every year. Actually, it's sort of the D-Day of the season. And no matter how valiantly we stand our ground, the end will be predictable. And inevitable.

The War of the Garden will soon end.

We dug the trenches and fox-holes months ago. Into them went seeds and seedlings, bulbs, rhizomes and corms. We plowed and

tilled, took aim with fertilizer, lime and manure. We erected tents in early spring as shelters against the enemy fire of chilly April nights. We watered and weeded and did hand-to-hand combat with rakes and hoes. We fought with plastic and laid down mulch. And weeded some more.

The enemy brought in its big guns. Groundhogs. We stuffed fuel-soaked rags down their trenched burrows and shot giant rocks against the openings. Valiant battlers they were, who turned tail and exited distant, hidden

openings to return in guerilla raids on August nights in the late string-bean plantings.

For several months, it looked like we were winning. We reaped the spoils of the struggle despite too much rain, too little rain, too much humidity, too many bad bugs, too few good bugs, guineas taking dust baths in the middle of the battlefield and heifers with a penchant for exploring untried territories.

Strawberries and asparagus, peas and beans, peppers, tomatoes and corn. We pillaged and plundered vines and stalks, taking what was ripe in its own season.

With victory in striking distance, fresh battalions of squash bugs hatched out, thrived in heat-stroke conditions and zapped every vining crop in sight, just as the fruit ripened to near maturity. Even our organic-barbed-wire against bus, the marigolds scattered among the melons, failed to deter the waves of kamikaze insect attackers.

Whipped in the melon patch, we retreated to the unbugged safe-

ty of the jalapeno peppers. Jalapeno peppers are a garden land-mine to bugs.

And made our final stand in the tomato patch.

Not bugs, but weather, is the ultimate adversity of tomatoes. Ours thrived and grew thick in the heavy rainfall of early summer, set abundant blossoms and brought forth bushels of delicious, healthful yields in the baking heat and humidity that followed.

But now, the enemy is at hand.

After milking and feeding calves in recent evenings, this foot soldier plods through the chilling dark and damp grasses of the backyard to erect our final defense. Flimsy and white ("What IS that white stuff?," asks the Farmer II), the floating row covers offer but a temporary truce in these waning days of war.

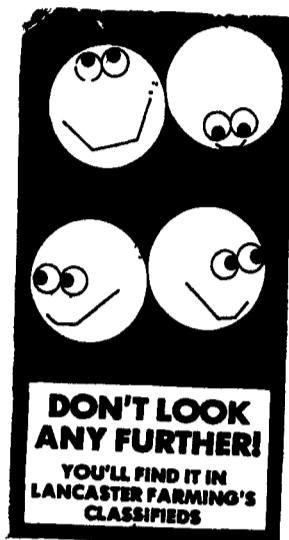
Already, several light frosts have gunned down tender plants not tucked beneath the lightweight field tents. Which means those few lingering orange-shaded tomatoes on the front lines are

snatched like precious jewels and hauled to safety on the basement porch.

And, sadly, as in any war, some won't make it, rotting before they ripen. Which makes the survivors taste even more delicious.

So all you gardening kindred spirits, please join me in one last final attack in defense of our annuals. Ready, with a rotten tomato in hand...aim, at the chilly, gray clouds bringing approaching 20-degree temperatures...and fire! at the unseen enemy of Winter.

It won't change a thing. But we'll feel better about it.



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