

On Being a Farm Wife
(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



It caught me by surprise. The early October frost.

C'mon, you say, you really ought to know better. After the cool, damp summer, simple logic says the fall chill--no, make that cold--would show up earlier than "normal." Whatever that is anymore.

But, see, I kept hoping. Hoping that the welcome, late-September visit of warm, sunny, dryness would hang around a few more days. That it would ripen up a few

more of those dwindling, last tomatoes. Nudge the fattening buds of the chrysanthemums into color. Redden a few more of the jalapeno peppers.

Even when I had crawled out of the cozy warmth of the car the evening before, returning home from a distant meeting, and was slapped in the face by the brisk night temperature, I really hadn't suspected it. That did send me hustling to close the greenhouse door, though, which had been left

standing wide open for ventilation from the day's earlier sunshine.

Even when I headed to the barn before daylight, having snuggled into my favorite downy vest over a couple of other layers, the frost possibility had eluded my brain. Weather forecasters were calling for it by nightfall, leaving some daytime hours to gather in, cover up, tuck away those tender plants.

But no. Returning to the house after helping to switch the milking string of cows, there it was. The early morning flood of sunlight over the distant trees sparked and danced off the white dusting, highlight it, showing it off. A white dusting across the dead grass of the lawn. Over the tops of the round bales lined up below the pond.

After calf chores, I made the rounds of the garden, assessing damages. Actually, there seemed to be few, but this dusting, this warning, would force facing the inevitable.

The tomatoes had peaked weeks ago, though stragglers on a steady basis were keeping us in sandwiches and salads. Now, at mid-morning, the top leaves of the tired stalks hung limp and slightly darkened. I gather several handfuls of orange and yellowish tomatoes, most of them of rather small size.

My pair of peppers plants had mostly escaped the light chilling. But the impending one predicted by nightfall would finish the job. Another couple of handfuls of green peppers went into the basket. The single plant of jalapenos hung heavy with both red-ripe and still-green hot peppers. While we didn't really need all those mouth burners, I couldn't bear to see them just hang on the stalk and be wasted.

Several more handfuls of garden salvage went into the basket.

Marigolds, tough as they are, had shrugged off their goosebumps and remained their perky, yellow-bloomed selves. But centers of the zinnias were already disfigured, their inner petals darkened and transparent-looking.

And the bright red, green, and white leaves of the row of caladiums hung limply to the ground.

I'd fitted the greenhouse with a new innerlining of plastic just days before, in anticipation of this day. So, back into shelter from their vacationing spots on porches went pots of assorted tender plants. Cacti, ferns, and the Norfolk Island pine that does double-duty during the Christmas season as our holiday tree. Hanging baskets of spider plant and Swedish ivy. Planters of impatiens covered with blooms. And probably some bugs along with it all.

All this done with an extra hustle in our step, due both to the urgency and trying to keep warm. And though we feel a little more prepared, I'm never quite mentally ready to part with the fruits and the greenery of the growing and gardening season. Good thing I'm not in charge of turning off the heat.

But, there's an up side to everything. Few things look better to a gardener than limp, black, dying weeds.

Farewell. And good riddance.



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Video Conference Looks At Tobacco Use

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Youth and tobacco issues affect all Pennsylvania communities and citizens. To help reduce the number of children and teen-agers addicted to nicotine, the Community Coalitions for Tobacco-Free Youth project is sponsoring a live satellite videoconference, which will originate at Penn State and will be broadcast in at least 19 counties across Pennsylvania.

The conference, titled "Reducing Youth Access to Tobacco in Your Community," will be broadcast on Wednesday, October 16 from 8:30

a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

The videoconference will demonstrate how community efforts can prevent nicotine addiction among children and teens. Participants will learn how to promote awareness of youth and tobacco issues, monitor tobacco vendors for compliance with the existing law and help retailers train their employees. The morning program will close with the conference participants developing action plans for their community.

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